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## Preventing Plagiarism and Fostering Academic Integrity: A Practical Approach

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### ABSTRACT

Although plagiarism, cheating and academic integrity receive increased attention, literature provides little practical advice or strategies on how to approach these topics with students. In this paper we describe a case study in relation to an intervention we have developed to help our students prevent plagiarism and to foster academic integrity amongst our studentship. In the two hour workshop students are supported in gaining a deeper understanding of what plagiarism is and provides them with practical examples of how plagiarism can be avoided. In the context of the workshop plagiarism is discussed in its many forms of the intentional and unintentional stealing or appropriating of ideas that are not credited accordingly (Helgesson & Eriksson, 2015). The intervention also encompasses discussions around academic integrity and what academic integrity means in theory and in practice. The six steps in our intervention are a sorting activity (what is plagiarism?), the presentation of real cases (what is the impact of plagiarism?), practising to synthesise ideas (how can I prevent plagiarism), the role of plagiarism-detection software such as Turnitin (how can I check for plagiarism?), the formulation of an integrity code and a summary of the content covered in the session (what do I know now?). The intervention draws upon research and practical experiences and is designed in such a way that with adaptations it can be delivered to all levels of students and courses. Following the presentation of the individual elements of the workshop the article concludes with a brief outline of a research project in relation to our workshop, which will be used to inform our further development of the intervention but also to provide a more formal evaluation of its effectiveness.

**Keywords:** plagiarism prevention; academic integrity; plagiarism; ethics

### Introduction

In today's globally connected work media and social media increasingly focus and report on cases of plagiarism and contract cheating. In 2016 incidents relating to Melania Trump having plagiarised Michelle Obama's speech remained in the spotlight and under public scrutiny for several weeks. Scholarly work regarding plagiarism and academic integrity also continues to intensify. A simple Google Scholar search demonstrates the increased interest. Using the search term "plagiarism" within Google Scholar led to about 25,800 results for the period from 2000 to 2005, whilst there are 41,600 results for the period from 2010 to 2015 ten years later. In the first half of the year 2016 approximately 14,900 publications relate to "plagiarism", nearly as many as for the five year period from 1995 to 2000, which yielded 15,200 results. Despite this increased scholarly and public interest many institutes continue to struggle to prevent plagiarism and cheating amongst their studentship.

We work as job-sharing programme leaders for a secondary teacher education programme, a programme that is jointly delivered by the UCL Institute of Education and the Institute of Ismaili Studies. Soon after stepping into our roles as programme leaders we discovered that like other institutes we faced plagiarism challenges. Within three months of starting in the programme leadership position we were asked to attend two panels investigating plagiarism cases. Following the experiences at the panels we felt that significant changes would be required, which led to our development of an intervention.

### The background to the intervention

#### What is plagiarism?

By the 1990s little research had been published on students' views until Ashworth et al.'s (1997) work offered a first glimpse into the perceptions of plagiarism and cheating. The authors considered students' attitudes towards cheating in general terms, but also investigated plagiarism. As far as cheating is concerned the researchers report that students' ethical and moral views are influential on their behaviours in relation to their institute's guidelines and rules. With stricter rules and ethical guidelines in force, cheating behaviours could therefore be deterred. However, in some circumstances students would by-pass and ignore institute rules and admit to cheating if this would mean to help a friend pass an examination or assignment for example. According to Ashworth et al. (1997) plagiarism is a different matter in that for many students the concept was new at the time and so students were unsure of the level of acceptable paraphrasing or types of plagiarism. The results show that students do not fully understand the relevance of good

referencing practice other than pleasing academic staff and avoiding punishment. Whilst some students acknowledge potential issues of intellectual property and theft students largely relate referencing to academic etiquette more than to the wider picture of contributions to scholarly work. More recently, Fish and Hura (2013) considered the perceptions of students and staff in relation to types of plagiarism. Their findings also show that students are unaware of the wider academic achievement of developing ideas and therefore view borrowing others' ideas as less problematic than copying sections of text. In their investigations regarding investigated specific types of plagiarism Halupa and Bolliger (2015) and Childers and Bruton (2016) highlight that students do not view self-plagiarism or the borrowing of ideas from others as serious offenses.

One concern in research is the definition of what constitutes plagiarism. Plagiarism in the sense of stealing ideas from literature may date back to the 15<sup>th</sup> century (Wager, 2014), but whether borrowing an idea is plagiarism in the same way as copying some or perhaps many words from other publications remains unanswered. For Wager (2014) plagiarism needs to be related to several factors, which she lists as "extent, originality of copied material, position/context, referencing/attribution, intention, author seniority and language" (Wager, 2014, p. 35). While researchers like Wager (2014) and Sutherland-Smith (2005) focus on elements leading to plagiarism Helgesson and Eriksson (2015) discuss the topic in greater detail and conclude that plagiarism is constituted if on "(1) appropriate[s] the work of someone else and (2) pass[es] it off as one's own by not giving proper credit" (p. 92). In view of these approaches and definitions plagiarism is often equated to theft and fraud (Fishman, 2009). While this appears to be the most commonly understood definition, it is not sufficient, as collaboration or translation could also be linked to unethical, dishonest and deceitful practices. Selwyn (2008), Lancaster and Clarke (2007), Culwin and Lancaster (2001) refer to online plagiarism, cyber-cheating, contract cheating, ghost-writers and essay mills as academic malpractice. The general consensus being that contract-cheating is a commercialised form of fraud, where essay writers earn money in order to write essays for others (Draper, Ibezim, & Newton, 2017). Once students submit the work written for them as their own this constitutes plagiarism. Cheating and plagiarism are therefore closely linked with those supplying work and those using the work as their own behaving equally irresponsibly on a moral, ethical and academic level. The debates around cheating behaviours demonstrate that plagiarism cannot be considered in isolation but needs to be contextualised. So in the next section we consider how plagiarism can thrive.

### How can plagiarism thrive?

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Amongst the body of publications on plagiarism there seems to be a consensus on why plagiarism happens.

Students lack awareness of writing and developing ideas and publishing and therefore do not perceive borrowing as offenses (Ashworth et al., 1997; Fish & Hura, 2013; Halupa & Bolliger, 2015; Childers & Bruton, 2016).

Another key aspect discussed in literature is that students tend to downplay their cheating behaviour and plagiarism itself (Park, 2003; Hayes & Introna, 2005). Martin (1994) indicates that this may be due to societal behaviours and developments where ghostwriting and buying essays are part of the everyday political establishment, as could be observed in the case of Melania Trump mentioned in the introduction, too.

The learning environment at individual institutions is crucial. In some courses large classes and the lack of direct contact with academic staff (Ashworth et al., 1997) mean that students are more likely to resort to cheating behaviours. Lang (2013) contends that students will not cheat if students cope with the subject content and if the learning of that content matters to them. Also, students need to be educated regarding plagiarism, which they may not be in some cases. For example, Halupa and Bolliger (2015) report that residential students are less likely to be taught about self-plagiarism than those taking online courses. This would mean that self-plagiarism may be likely in that the severity and level of the offenses have not been explained accordingly.

Educating students is crucial as on many courses students at higher education level nowadays are asked to collaborate closely with one another, which in itself bears the risk that students plagiarise each other's work (Ashworth et al., 1997). Universities actually expect students to collaborate in order to deepen their understanding and advance their learning more quickly and so the line between collaboration and collusion is becoming thinner. And if Western students find it difficult to decide what is legitimate and what is not, international students, it must be acknowledged, will struggle the more so. Hayes and Introna (2005) and Leask (2006) focus on the students' cultural backgrounds, as often international students are considered the main culprits within the plagiarism debate. The findings show that whilst some international students may plagiarise inadvertently due to their linguistic weaknesses, emotions and feelings also contribute to increases in plagiarism cases (Hayes & Introna, 2005). Within the scope of these debates around motives researchers attempt to identify the characteristics of students who most typically resort to cheating behaviours. While such generalisations must be considered carefully literature from a variety of disciplines (Bamford & Sergiou, 2005; Duff, Rogers, & Harris, 2006; Abasi & Graves, 2008; Gu & Brooks, 2008; Amsberry, 2009; Heitman & Litewka, 2011) suggests that international students are more likely to be caught up in plagiarism or academic integrity issues. As stated above it is important to acknowledge that plagiarism may occur due to students' literacy issues, which international students may struggle with more than non-international students. Additionally, international students enter Universities with values other than those they are expected to work within. Amsberry (2009) and Duff et al. (2006) in particular refer to the cultural influences and contexts within which students are brought up and enter academia. The concern that Duff et al. (2006) raise is that academic integrity, cheating behaviours and plagiarism are measured against Western benchmarks, which students may not necessarily be aware of.

Students' perception of fairness and relevance of assessments, their sense of estrangement and their ability to cope with the demands are all factors to be considered. These factors apply to national and international students, although the sense of estrangement and difficulty to cope with linguistic demands may be more influential amongst international students (Park, 2003; Hayes & Introna,

2005). Students' perception of fairness and relevance of assignments and tasks is what Lang (2013) refers to when he states that the learning material must matter to students.

Within the scope of this article, we cannot do full justice to the complexity of plagiarism nor can we provide a detailed comparison of the behaviours and perceptions between national and international students. Suffice it to say, that in a European study into plagiarism "the profile of the UK students differed from that of other countries with 51% of UK student respondents from outside the EU" (Glendinning, 2014, p. 8). This demonstrates that across the countries of the European Union, UK holds the largest proportion of international students. It is therefore not surprising that much work in higher education institutes within the UK focuses on supporting and providing guidance for international students. There may be a need for more nuanced research in order to explore the differences and similarities between national and international students in greater depth.

Ultimately, however, it is recognised that the motives for any students to resort to unfair measures when it comes to completing an assignment are complex. Park's (2003) synthesis of Stevens and Stevens (1987), Davis et al. (1992), Love and Simmons (1998) and Straw (2002) is probably the best indication of the range of reasons for plagiarism occurrences.

**Table 1:** Simplified list of motives for plagiarising according to Park (2003, p. 479)

1. Lack of understanding
2. Efficiency gain
3. Time management
4. Personal values/attitudes
5. Defiance
6. Students' attitudes towards teachers and class
7. Denial or neutralisation
8. Temptation and opportunity
9. Lack of deterrence

Given the complexity of the issue and the relevance of students' perceptions and attitudes it is not surprising that plagiarism detection and deterrence are complicated, too. So how can we prevent plagiarism?

### How to prevent plagiarism?

Many studies on plagiarism provide ideas and frameworks within which to operate in relation to the prevention of plagiarism cases. Leask (2006) highlights that the prevention of plagiarism must not be seen as a war between academic staff and students, but as an opportunity for intercultural interactions and growth. Preventing plagiarism therefore needs to be based on "the principles of good teaching" (Leask, 2006, p. 197). Furthermore, if plagiarism is to be prevented successfully, a clear, structured approach is required (Carroll & Oxford Centre for Staff Development, 2002; Park, 2003; Park, 2004; Scanlon, 2003). Park (2004) describes an approach according to which several stakeholders within an institute take responsibility and get involved in the plagiarism detection process. This approach largely relies on clear rules regarding the process of recording and reporting plagiarism cases and punishing the perpetrators in accordance with their offense. So a first offense leads to less drastic consequences than a second, third or fourth infringement. Simultaneously, students learn about referencing conventions and practical strategies to prevent plagiarism in a supportive, more developmental environment. Similarly, Scanlon (2003) suggests a framework that considers students' attitudes and values, that includes consequences and sanctions, that is based on a clear policy, which is consistently referred to and enforced. Landau, Druen and Arcuri (2002) and Carroll and Oxford Centre for Staff Development (2002) emphasise the importance of teaching academic writing skills and the art of paraphrasing so that students become more aware of their practices and where they may be plagiarising.

### Plagiarism and academic integrity

Blum (2010) describes how institutions adopt two main approaches to student plagiarism: regarding it as morally wrong or treating it as a crime. Confirming present day students' lack of awareness concerning the notion of academic integrity, she comes up with an alternative: that of treating it as a set of skills to be taught and learned. This 'third way' was very much at the heart of our own workshop (see below) which developed from the premise that plagiarism can only be avoided if students are fully aware of the different types it takes (including self-plagiarism and collusion), how and crucially why it may be committed (Anderson & Murdock, 2007), and what the consequences are. We therefore aimed to teach the necessity for and rules of good referencing, while informing students exactly how to test their own work before submission.

### Preventing plagiarism: a practical approach

Despite the large body of research available regarding plagiarism we did not find any practical suggestions of how to establish a plagiarism prevention approach within a classroom environment rather than at an institutional level. The research project by Landau, Druen and Arcuri (2002) provides some information regarding an intervention using "two versions of the PKS [plagiarism

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knowledge survey] (Roig, 1997), a paraphrasing exercise, and a postexperiment questionnaire” (p. 113). The study’s result proves that this intervention has great impact regarding the students’ levels of awareness of plagiarism and therefore aids deterrence.

This was the starting point for our workshop, too. However, we felt that a paraphrasing exercise and the plagiarism knowledge survey would not be sufficient to communicate the severity and potential consequences of offenses or the wider picture of academic integrity. Based on our extensive experience on the secondary teacher education programme and the context of our students, we decided to create an interactive workshop. Through the range of activities we would ensure that all students’ backgrounds and their different previous knowledge would be catered for. Some informal conversations with programme graduates and students from previous cohorts identified the particular topic areas we would need to cover. And so we developed a six-stage process for our intervention:

1. What is plagiarism? – sorting activity
2. What is the impact of plagiarism? – real cases
3. How can I prevent plagiarism? – synthesising
4. How can I check for plagiarism? – using Turnitin
5. Integrity code
6. What do I know now? - summary sheet

### What is plagiarism? – sorting activity

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One of the key issues of our students is that they are often not aware what constitutes plagiarism. As a matter of fact the line between what constitutes plagiarism and what does not is thin. For some, working with a friend on an assignment may be collaboration and learning from each other, for others, this would be considered collusion, a form of plagiarism. The sorting activity therefore aims at teaching the different types of plagiarism. Students receive a number of terms and descriptions and have to find a way to sort these into a structure that is meaningful for them. With this activity students realise that plagiarism is more than cutting and pasting and can happen inadvertently. The sorting activity is based upon the principle of student-centred learning in small groups. Students therefore explore the topic plagiarism at their own pace and using any resources they have available, including the internet. Although students try to find the correct answers, the ultimate aim is to raise awareness that all kinds of plagiarism are inappropriate and will be followed up (Hayes & Introna, 2005).

### What is the impact of plagiarism? – real cases

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The second pillar of our approach is the demonstration of the impact of plagiarism and to outline briefly the institutional framework within which we operate (Carroll & Oxford Centre for Staff Development, 2002; Park, 2003; Park, 2004; Scanlon, 2003). By looking at real-life examples from their specific programme students realise that plagiarism does happen on their programme too and can no longer downplay plagiarism (Park, 2003). The cases are carefully chosen and demonstrate clearly that the detection software is an aid in the plagiarism work but is not ultimately responsible for deciding whether or not high similarity constitutes a case to be followed up. One case we present shows a similarity of 47% and refers to a student who was found guilty, whereas another case with a similarity of 67% was found to be no case at all. Finally, the outcome of a real-life plagiarism case, thus the real impact of academic misconduct is shared with the students. The fact that this specific student was not allowed to complete the degree but only be awarded a lesser degree is shocking for our students. A guided discussion around the use of plagiarism detection software and the experiences from panels rounds off this phase of the intervention.

### How can I prevent plagiarism? – synthesising

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Our third pillar to promote academic integrity is to provide students with the essential opportunity to practise synthesising their ideas. Handing out a one-page handout about UCL’s Jeremy Bentham and his auto-icon, we allow them ten minutes to paraphrase this passage while avoiding plagiarism. For the ensuing 2016 workshop the handout was changed to one about the Noor Inayat Khan Memorial Trust (<http://www.noormemorial.org/aboutus.php>). The rationale is that the workshop takes place on the back of academic writing skills sessions. That in 2016 had been held in the gardens of Gordon Square which houses a statue of World War 2 resistance heroine Noor Inayat Khan (1914-1944) and the students had been taken to view this at the end of the class. We are here cognisant of Knowles’s (1984) theory of andragogy, one of the six assumptions of which is that adults learn by experience.

During the ensuing whole group workshop plenaries, an American student powerfully described her synthesising technique of turning the text upside-down and then rewriting it entirely in her own words. There was also a lively student prompted discussion on the good practice of learning to synthesise only the important essentials, to leave plenty of room for one’s own critical voice. Following both exercises the students were encouraged to become more versatile meta-learners by engaging in Watkins, Carnell, Lodge, Wagner, & Whalley (2002) ‘learning about learning’ cycle: by viewing the Bentham auto-icon in 2015, and, in 2016, by listening to a short student presentation on the life of Noor Inayat Khan.



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Such writing skills are reinforced throughout the academic year, and we encourage students to learn referencing skills without resorting to software (such as World Cat <https://www.worldcat.org/>) to detect issues and problems. We further provide them with resources for reading systematically and a template for notetaking.

### How can I check for plagiarism? – using Turnitin

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In this fourth phase of the workshop students are introduced to using Turnitin for checking their similarity reports before submitting their assignments. For many students the workshop increases awareness around inadvertent and unintentional plagiarism that they become worried about their work. We therefore make students aware of a testing area within the student pages of the virtual learning environment where they can submit a draft version to verify the similarities. This is particularly important in relation to the international students we work with, as many of them are not used to plagiarism detection software and become unnaturally anxious about the potential outcome of the software. By providing students with the opportunity to work with the plagiarism detection software the process becomes demystified and less daunting.

### Integrity codes

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Having followed the topical case of Harvard students writing their own personal response to an honour code (Coughlan, 2015), our fifth workshop activity tasks the students with the formulation of a pledge based around reasons for not plagiarising. The rationale is that this is much more meaningful than signing “I have not plagiarised” on a coversheet, with prolific experts McCabe, Trevino, & Butterfield (2002) confirming that plagiarism is lower at institutions with strong academic honour codes.

During the ensuing plenary, students read out what transpired to be their moving community faith-based statements; a tutee has given us blanket permission to quote from the following code:

*I speak now in accordance with the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad, may peace be upon him: I pledge that I will not disrespect the work of others by failing them and crediting another. I will not work in a team and borrow their ideas as my own. I will build knowledge by crediting the original thinkers ... in an appropriate manner so that the source can be identified. It is my duty to humanity and to myself as a member of civil society to uphold the shared values that build trust amongst us. It is my duty to model this to serve as an example to the future and my community.*

This conforms to the research of O’Neill and Pfeiffer (2012) that, in order to be effective, an honour code must be embraced by the (college) community. This implies that the negotiation of such honour codes is equally applicable to communities outside specific faith-based contexts.

The author of the above code assisted us at our one-hour workshop slot at UCL’s Teaching and Learning Conference in April 2016. Having read out the code, he detailed its subsequent impact on his academic integrity. Colleagues thereupon presented us with strategic feedback: we should reword ‘honour codes’ because of negative connotations with ‘honour killings’. Their helpful brainstorming resulted in the much improved (and less American) ‘integrity codes’; we immediately changed the name.

Re-running this activity a year later in September 2016, it was interesting that the sixty students present on this occasion chose to write highly personal, rather than community-based integrity codes. However, there was a general consensus that a tangible example should be published within the programme handbook. Fortunately, this still proved possible, the example in question being chosen since, when read out during the session, it had been greeted with a round of applause. It was strategically placed in the ‘submissions must include’ section as an adjunct to the plagiarism statement coversheet (see above) as follows:

plagiarism statement page. Students must further adhere to their individual integrity codes, as formulated at the STEP Plagiarism Workshop on the 25th September 2016, for example: *I will not plagiarise because I want to be proud of my own academic achievements. Plagiarising will not give me that sense of being proud of myself.* (Reproduced with kind permission of Umriniso.)

### What do I know now? – summary sheet

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The final phase of the intervention is a brief summary, where students are asked to decide on whether specific statements in relation to plagiarism are true or false. Initially, students complete the sheets individually in silence. Thereby students reflect on their learning throughout the workshop and try to apply the theoretical input to the practical cases. We then ask students to discuss their answers with their immediate neighbour for a few minutes before we discuss the outcomes in a plenary. The move from individual reflection to discussions in pairs and then in a plenary is crucial, as some of the statements are not entirely unambiguous and warrant more detailed explorations. With the help of this final summary sheet we remind students of the individual activities and offer an overview over their learning in that workshop. At the same time the statements sheet allows for deeper reflections and discussions.

### Effectiveness and impact of the intervention

Since the introduction of the intervention the number of confirmed plagiarism cases on our programme has been drastically reduced. In the most recent submissions rounds in the summer and autumn of 2016 there have not been any confirmed plagiarism cases at all. From informal evaluations we know that students have better understanding of what constitutes academic misconduct and feel more confident in using appropriate strategies to avoid plagiarism. As part of the dissemination of our workshop we delivered a training module about this specific workshop in several fora within UCL, such as a conference and staff training events for individual departments as well as in cross-faculty settings. The positive reception of the intervention and the training module demonstrates that plagiarism and academic integrity are topical for academics across the disciplines. We are therefore seeking to expand on the current format of the workshop in order to include topics such as contract cheating, essay banks and essay mills. In a new research project we are exploring the effectiveness and impact of the intervention within our own programme and within other courses, where our workshop has been delivered. The proposed qualitative research uses interviews with students and academic staff and the analysis of submissions data from relevant courses to answer the research questions: what are students' perceptions in relation to plagiarism and contract cheating?, how do lecturers and academics view plagiarism and contract cheating? and how do staff and students view the effects, impact and effectiveness of the plagiarism intervention workshop?. Every time we have delivered our workshop we asked participants, staff and students, to provide feedback on the workshop and to make suggestions for further improvements. These evaluations and the initial conversations with focus groups demonstrate the necessity of such a workshop, but also the importance of making particular aspects of the workshop relevant to specific courses. For example, some colleagues highlighted that some individual statements in relation to collaborative work and cooperation on our summary sheet would be seen as too restrictive in their particular contexts. In some instances we have been able to advise peers and explore ways of rephrasing such statements, so that ultimately, the purpose of concluding the workshop could still be maintained. Similarly, we developed the workshop for our specific educational context, and so the faith-component of the integrity code activity is particularly designed with our students' backgrounds in mind. However, by and large colleagues across a range of disciplines acknowledge the relevance of teaching academic integrity and therefore including a component of such an integrity code even within non-faith-based curricula. Our research will provide the framework for evaluating our intervention more formally, but more so it will lead to the identification of specific practical approaches and tools to foster academic integrity and to prevent plagiarism.

#### Biographies

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