

## NOTES ON LEARNING & TEACHING WORKSHOP (19.10.04) ON PLAGIARISM – CAUSES & PREVENTION

**Presentations** were given on

- why students plagiarise (Digby Warren, CAPD) – **see appendix 1**
- case study of plagiarism among international students (Jan Bamford and Katerina Sergiou, BSSM) – **see appendix 2**
- teaching strategies to address plagiarism (Helen Peters, International Programmes Coordinator) – in a course geared to international students, attention is given to:
  - clarifying a definition of plagiarism
  - tell-tale signs of plagiarism in student work
  - why referencing is required
  - when and how to reference and use quotations
  - phrases for introducing references
  - exercises in paraphrasing

During discussion, ideas for **teaching strategies** to tackle plagiarism included:

- tasks that require students to engage with the logic and conventions of in-text referencing (e.g. footnotes or author-date) as well as bibliographies
- getting students to correct sample work (anonymised) of previous students
- using peer assessment as a formative opportunity to explore plagiarism issues
- modelling good practice in the subject area (e.g. showing students how referencing applies to writing Law case reports)
- setting coursework which cannot be plagiarised, e.g. having to create and then interpret graphs using raw data; having to design a pamphlet to promote some cultural/social/economic activity

**Key issues** identified were:

- we need to model what is expected in assessments by using exemplars to show students when and how to reference
- referencing should be seen and presented not as merely a technical skill but as integral aspect of constructing arguments and writing (producing knowledge) in the discipline
- there should be opportunities for formative feedback on referencing/plagiarism *at all levels*, and especially at Certificate (first-year) level, as it takes time to master the art and subtleties of referencing and paraphrasing
- formative feedback should carry through to subsequent tasks so that students can learn from it (e.g. shorter, linked tasks or drafts that lead towards a final product)
- there should be more consistency about plagiarism issues among staff within and across departments (for example: how strictly to deal with references without quotation marks)
- this is related to another systemic issue – the matter of marking loads and how these affect the time staff have to give detailed attention to aspects of plagiarism or feedback to students
- the developmental approach and greater consistency argued for above requires mapping how referencing is addressed throughout a course (from first to third year), especially in core modules
- plagiarism could be minimised by designing assessment tasks that place emphasis on the application (rather than reproduction) of knowledge
- groupwork presents the additional challenge of collusion or plagiarising from other members of the group, so may require grading schemes that identify and reward individual contributions

### NOTE:

Concern was expressed that the University had decided not to sign up to the **JISC plagiarism detection software** (available free to HEIs for a trial period), as a possible tool for students to use before submitting their coursework. Further inquiry revealed that the decision was made on the grounds of data protection – even though the software would have been employed simply for piloting it, JISC would have access to user data.

## **APPENDIX 1: WHY DO STUDENTS PLAGIARISE?**

A survey of current educational literature  
Digby Warren (CAPD)

### **Intentional plagiarism**

Recent UK survey (by the Plagiarism Advisory Service, June 2004) - quarter of students have plagiarised (9% once, 16% more often) - main reasons:

- too much pressure (time/workload)
- easier to plagiarise than do the work

Other factors identified in the literature

- overassessment
- poor time management
- pressures to succeed
- lack of language proficiency
- fear of failure
- laziness
- temptation due to internet (but few use essay services)
- peer complicity
- competitiveness
- belief that will not be caught
- perception that offence/consequences not serious
- indifference to the course or topic (unmotivated)

### **Unintentional plagiarism**

- poor understanding/ignorance of referencing and plagiarism
- "surface" conceptions of learning as reproduction of knowledge
- failure to understand role of academic tasks in preparing them for future professional work
- carelessness (in note taking)
- prior education (schooling does not address attribution)
- cultural background
- working in a "second" language

### **Bennett model (2004)\*\***

Plagiaristic behaviour explained in terms of:

- individual attitudes (about cheating, fear of failure/punishment)
- personal traits (goals, academic integration)
- situational variables (finances, academic performance, enforcement of anti-plagiarism rules)

\*\* Roger Bennett (2004), 'Factors Associated with Student Plagiarism in a post-1992 University', paper presented at the BEST conference (to be published in "Research in Post-Compulsory Education")

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**APPENDIX 2:** extract from forthcoming article in "Investigations" vol 2 no. 2 (autumn 2004)

### **International students and plagiarism: an analysis of the reasons for plagiarism among international foundation students.**

Jan Bamford, London Metropolitan University  
Katerina Sergiou, London Metropolitan University

### **Unintentional plagiarism**

Whilst the majority of students questioned appear to understand the moral and academic implications of plagiarism, some, simply do not. Martin (1994) discovered that many students simply do not understand proper acknowledgement in practice. Therefore, it is true to say that in some cases, the plagiarism was unintentional. Whilst the notion of unintentional plagiarism is a debatable issue, it clearly presented itself, particularly whilst conducting the focus groups. Out of

the eight students interviewed in focus group one, three actually admitted that their knowledge on plagiarism was 'hazy' and that they had probably plagiarised at some point throughout the past year, but actually not intentionally. Perry (2001) explains that confusion between plagiarism and paraphrasing will always exist, he found that some students believe that if you copy from several different sources, and then combine them, its not actually plagiarism but research. The second focus group expressed identical concerns about plagiarism but also expressed their lack of understanding of what they regarded as an obsessive attitude towards what they perceived as something not terribly serious. This further underlines a deep chasm that appears to exist between the acceptable academic norm and the student's perception and or acceptance of the university standard. In fact it is clear that international students have not grasped the finer points of acknowledgement and referencing when it comes to academic pieces of work and cannot therefore be viewed as having plagiarised intentionally.

The studies of Alberta University (2001) also found that 60% of students interviewed could not distinguish between paraphrased and plagiarised text. In March of 2002 the Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC) also discovered that the main cause of minor plagiarism is a lack of understanding of how to cite material from other sources.

Being allowed to 'copy' from textbooks at school or college also proves problematic as for the students it is very difficult to break routine habits. Alberta University (2001) also discovered that for many Asian students, proper acknowledgement of the language and ideas of others is a very difficult concept to understand. Both focus groups confirmed that copying from textbooks was not prohibited, but copying from each other was. McKenzie (yr. unknown) discovered that students from other cultures may be prone to plagiarism because they actually believe that copying another's work is not cheating, it is a compliment.

Whilst plagiarism cannot be justified, it is clear that in some cases, it is not done with knowledge or with any deliberate intention, "we've all done it, at some point or other, without meaning to", Piety (2002 p1)

## **Conclusion**

The results of this small study present a picture that plagiarism is prevalent amongst international students and it was clear from the responses in the questionnaires that the main reasons for acknowledged plagiarism were external pressures to succeed or time pressure. The picture with regard to unintentional plagiarism is more complex and it is clear that cultural issues seem to have a role to play in the reasons for plagiarism whether intentional or unintentional. It is very difficult to break routine habits amongst students. It is argued in some cases a cultural reorientation is required in order to aid students to master the skill of proper attribution.

It is also clear from the research that students from different cultures cannot always understand the UK position with regard to plagiarism. The focus group research findings demonstrated that many of the students had actually plagiarised unintentionally.

Unfortunately, there is no simple strategy to break this routine amongst international students, but McKenzie (yr. unknown) states that in this case, it is useful for every lecturer on every module to prepare a handout that explains to the students the nature of plagiarism. The idea behind this strategy is to 'drum it in to their heads' from every angle. Further to this, it is also an idea to test the students on the topic of plagiarism to ensure they fully understand it.

It is also worthwhile remembering that plagiarism takes many forms, and as Piety (2002 p1) theorises, "plagiarism is subjective....what is plagiarism to one person is not necessarily plagiarism to another".