

Friday @ the Center: December 1, 2006

The P-Word: Plagiarism

Unfortunately this is the time of year in which plagiarism raises its ugly head more prominently than usual. High profile cases of plagiarism continue to haunt education news, including that of Southern Illinois University, which plagiarized its master plan, and Harvard undergraduate Kaavya Viswanathan, whose publishers withdrew her first novel after discovering rampant plagiarism. Research by McCade, Trevino, and Butterfield shows that student cheating and plagiarism have also increased significantly in the last ten years. Internet plagiarism is a particular problem. The most recent issue of the *Journal of Higher Education* reports that faculty members often are reluctant to make significant efforts to prevent and deal with plagiarism. One reason may be because they believe that it doesn't occur very often. The study demonstrated that faculty members "who underestimate the frequency of misconduct very rarely take action to challenge students' misconduct." The authors conclude, "We believe it is important for students to understand that faculty members take misconduct seriously, and that means faculty members need to send that message to students through prevention and detection efforts" (Hard, Conway, & Moran, 2006). We'll talk more about preventing plagiarism in the January issues of *Friday @ the Center*, but at this time of year, it's important to practice "constant vigilance"!

Got Plagiarism?

When you do encounter a case of plagiarism, it is important to follow the university policies, for consistence and accountability. These policies were revised last year and presented at Faculty Senate, but just in case you have forgotten what to do, here's a handy summary (these instructions are also available on the Center's website):

1. Meet with the student to discuss the incident and clarify any issues.
2. If you conclude that plagiarism has occurred and that there is a probable grade ramification, **notify your chair and dean**. You may choose to consult with the chair and dean for guidance about sanctions, but ultimately the penalty for this course is your decision. Such penalties typically range from loss of credit for the work in question to loss of credit for the entire course.
3. Meet with the student again. Explain the student's rights and option for appeal. Explain the grade penalty that you have decided upon based upon this particular incident. Inform the student that the case is also being considered by the dean and that further penalties may be imposed either by the dean or the Chief Judicial Officer, or Dean of Student, depending on whether the student has a history of academic integrity problems or conduct problems.
4. Put your decision in writing, make three copies, each of which is signed by you and the student. One copy is for your records; the second is for the student; the third should be sent to your dean. Include any supporting evidence (copies of the source material, account of conversation with students, etc.) with your records and what you send to the dean.
5. The dean and the AVPAA will review the case for instances of repeated academic misconduct and will decide 1) whether this incident will be placed in the student's permanent record, and 2) whether to recommend possible additional sanctions for this particular case.

Constructing Good Multiple Choice Questions

Want some advice on writing good multiple choice questions that provide a reliable assessment of whether or not a student knows the material? Check out Jonathan Mueller's website at <http://jonathan.mueller.faculty.noctrl.edu/toolbox/tests.htm>, which provides twenty guidelines for writing questions that reduce the cognitive load and reduce the chance that students might guess the correct answer. Mueller is a professor of psychology at North Central College. And for those of you who, like me, tend to use c) for the correct answer when you write multiple choice questions, there is an easy-to-use random number generator available at <http://randomizer.org> (Thanks to Bill Nagy, School of Education, for this tip!)

Course Evaluations Alert

Don't forget to remind, urge, plead, beg, advise, insist on, recommend, counsel, propose, commend, suggest, put forward, extol, entrust, or advocate that your students complete the course evaluations in your class, as well as all their other classes. Tell them that it only takes a documented average of nine minutes to complete.

Happy Exam week!

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