

OXFORD BROOKES UNIVERSITY Human Resources

Using course design and assessment to deter plagiarism

Jude Carroll
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Oxford Centre for Staff and Learning Development

Deterring, not preventing

Complex issues need complex responses – there are dangers with 'just do x' thinking.....

It's not helpful to adopt a *blame* or *outrage* stance
blame the student or
blame the lecturer or
blame the institution

It is about taking a holistic, nuanced approach to deterring plagiarism
synergy of combining a range of interventions
keeping learning at the centre

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Arguments for using course-design strategies:

1. Teaching and learning positives
2. Within lecturer's remit / authority
3. Best use of academic time
4. Some issues arise from lecturers' decisions

arguments against??

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Deterring via assessment means

- Having **fair, effective assessment** practices in place
- Ensuring students have the **skills** they need to comply with academic regulations and conventions
- Ensuring everyone – staff and students – have a **shared understanding of**
what is expected; what is valued
what we mean by plagiarism, collusion, duplication
how the 'rules of the game' are applied

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Fair and effective assessment practices

- ✓ Clear, transparent briefs
- ✓ Appropriate, relevant tasks linked to what students need to learn
- ✓ Appropriate level of difficulty & progression
- ✓ Criteria-based judgments
- ✓ Attention to reliability and validity
- ✓ Timely, relevant and helpful feedback

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Skills development

- ✓ Built into programme design
- ✓ Taught, practiced and assessed
- ✓ a wide range – *it's not just about referencing!*

Yes: explicit teaching, practice and feedback
NO: ignoring, hoping and implying
confusing knowing 'what' with knowing 'how'

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Examples of implicit teaching strategies

- Writing "ref?" 4 times in the margin then giving a good mark
- Marking only to the word limit if the work is too long
- Deducting 5 marks for poor referencing in a Year 2 essay
- Deciding 2 students colluded so giving each half the marks
- Telling students at induction "You must not plagiarise"

'Academic apprenticeship': design it in

- early diagnostic activities with targeted feedback on academic rules
- peer feedback, perhaps linked to course requirements
- whole group feedback after sampling
- assessing the student's use of feedback in the final grade

Excellent written support and guidance

Activities to build shared understanding of academic conventions and values

Detering via assessment means (revisited)

- ... fair, effective assessment practices
-skills
- **Ensuring everyone – staff and students – have a shared understanding of**
 - what is expected; what is valued**
 - what we mean by *plagiarism, collusion, duplication***
 - how the 'rules of the game' are applied**

Leeds definition of plagiarism

"Plagiarism is defined as presenting someone else's work as your own. Work means any intellectual output, and typically includes text, data, images, sound and performance".

So

- Students are not following the rules because they don't know they exist
- Students are not following the rules because they are confused about how to comply (and it's hard to do).
- Students are not following the rules because they are cheating / deliberately breaking them

and every variation in between these positions.....

Best use of 3 hours to deter students' rule-breaking?

redesign a course	? 750
6 x 30-minute induction sessions	? 1000+ ? 0
a workshop on writing skills	? 30 - 50
compile the evidence for one serious plagiarism case	
<i>number deterred directly:</i>	0
<i>number deterred indirectly:</i>	probably 0

Course design to deter plagiarism

- **Novelty** –
- **Set requirements**
- **Avoid ‘show you know’** questions
- **Application:**
- **Assess the process**
- Design in **authentication** e.g. an exam, viva or meta-exercise

Novelty: issues and suggestions

new each time

significant changes, not just tweaking
can re-use but on a loooooong cycle
often can keep the same task but new format

unusual format

poster, dialogue, patient information leaflet, marketing
campaign, play, video.....

Set specific requirements

Include something specific in the brief
e.g. primary data,

use of a specific text, theory, case study, situation

the student's personal experience or personal characteristics

layout or format

Avoid ‘show you know’

Information-based questions are the most likely to be on the Web
("What are the causes of the Great War?" "How must you treat a patient with emphysema?" "What is social policy?")

go for comparisons, evaluation, application, synthesis.....

"Compare how the UK and Germany conducted themselves during the last few months before the Great War. Choose three actions that can be said to have led one or the other side to have primary responsibility for....."

"Identify from your own practice two patients with emphysema. Which more closely approximates to optimum care and why."

Go for

Local

Recent

Specific

Not "What is good urban design ?" but ".....
[suggestions, please....]"

Assess the process

[This is one of my favourite ideas.....]

Students need warning – what to save, what to keep – and explanation of the purpose

Teachers need to specify how the process will be recorded: minutes of meetings, individual logs, observed activity, on line threaded discussions, progress reports, effective 1:1 supervision etc

Teachers need to check that the process is recorded contemporaneously.....
Not simulated the night before submission!

Authentication

How can you check that it is the student's own work? e.g.

an exam,
a viva
a 'meta-exercise' under observed conditions
such as an evaluative essay

Last words: assessment to deter plagiarism

- If the students know the rules and have the skills to comply
- If fair, appropriate assessment is being used
- Based on encouraging students to think
'How can I make that?'
and NOT
'How can I find that?'

A final word

Students will follow the rules if they know what they are,
have the skills to do so, can see no other way to meet
the requirements, and

IF YOU DEFEND AND PROTECT THE RULES and are
seen to be doing so..... so back to holistic approaches!