Addressing plagiarism at a New Zealand tertiary institution

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Abstract

The growth in international student numbers in New Zealand in the last decade has brought to the forefront the topic of plagiarism. Attitudes to plagiarism may differ in the students' home country from New Zealand, for traditional, cultural reasons. As a result, some students have problems adapting to western viewpoints on plagiarism. This study examines the past trends in the rates of plagiarism at Auckland Institute of Studies (AIS) and the strategies utilised to address these, in particular compulsory workshops and a test, which have virtually eliminated the problem.

Introduction

The increase in the number of international students studying in New Zealand in the last decade has brought about challenges, particularly adapting to, and adhering to, the academic conventions of a western system of education. One such challenge is plagiarism.

Because students come from diverse educational backgrounds, to accuse them of what western academics view as unethical behaviour may be considered unfair. However, what needs to be addressed is the transition process from their educational culture to the New Zealand one, instead of these students proving their innocence regarding the ethical practices of a new and foreign education system. Moreover, institutions need to re-assess their current practices and pedagogy to amply support and guide students through this transition process and find ways to avoid plagiarism.

Auckland Institute of Studies (AIS) is one of the largest private tertiary institutions in New Zealand and has an average of 1,000 students. The postgraduate Master of Business

Administration (MBA) programme, with an embedded Post Graduate Diploma in Business Administration (PGDBA), represents about 50% of all enrolled students. AIS has four undergraduate programmes: Business, Tourism Management, Hospitality Management, and Information Technology. Of the total student body, approximately 90% are international students, with China and the Indian subcontinent as the largest regions of origin, but students from many other countries too. Domestic students tend to be mainly migrants who have become citizens or permanent residents recently. This study examines the past trends in the rates of plagiarism at Auckland Institute of Studies (AIS) and the strategies utilised to address this problem.

Literature review

The growth in international education in New Zealand has seen an increase in non-English speaking background students (NESB), especially Asian students coming to acquire western academic qualifications. There were about 116,000 full fee-paying students in New Zealand in 2015, a 26% increase from 2012 of 91,700. The largest group of these students were enrolled in private training establishments (PTEs), about 42,000 or 36% of the total international students. China (including Hong Kong) still has the largest student numbers with 27%, followed by India with 25% (*The Economic Impact of International Education 2015/2016*, 2016).

This increase, with its benefits, has also created some major challenges, both for the educational institutions as well as the students. One of these is developing policies that accommodate cultural diversity (Burns, 1991), especially those on plagiarism (Pennycook, 1994). Students from different educational and cultural backgrounds cannot be expected to immediately adopt the western academic conventions. They require explicit instruction and support in the new system of education in which they are engaged. Without support, it can be very difficult for overseas students to cope with the demands of a new education system, hence the need for universities and other tertiary providers such as PTEs to review their policies (Cordeiro, 1995; Croxford 2001) and re-formulate them to accommodate cultural diversity.

International students find it challenging to comprehend the western notion of academic integrity. Plagiarism is a complex issue (Hallett, Woodley & Dixon, 2003; Hamilton, Hinton & Hawkins, 2003) not easily understood by many students (Ashworth, Freewood & Macdonald,

2003). However, there is a tendency to suggest that these students lack academic integrity because they plagiarise. The irony is that international students caught plagiarising need to plead their innocence based on the morals and values of an unfamiliar education system. These students require explicit academic skill orientation to make the transition from their prior academic culture to a western one.

Moreover, it is important to remember that plagiarism is a western concept that initiated from "growth of the notion of human right" (freedom of speech) and the "stress on individual property" or copyright (Duff, Rogers & Harris, 2006, p. 675). Not all cultures subscribe to this, particularly Southeast Asian countries. In these cultures, replicating rather than creating is considered an acceptable social practice (Angélil-Carter, 2000; Burns, 1991; Handa & Power, 2005; Pennycook, 1996). For example, Hayes and Introna (2005) found that Indian students who replicated information from their textbooks and class notes got much higher grades compared with those who paraphrased. Furthermore, for them, to rework information written perfectly was completely unnecessary. Similarly, in countries such as China and India, students' assessments are based on the content of the textbook rather than on a critical analysis of information.

Additionally, Scollon (1999) stated that students coming from Confucian philosophy backgrounds, such as China, Japan, and Korea, have huge reverence for the source of their information and this respect is demonstrated by their lack of acknowledgment. This is contrary to western values where respect is shown by citing sources (Duff, Rogers & Harris, 2006). Hence, the concept of plagiarism is new and foreign to these learners and they need guidance and support to understand.

When considering why students plagiarise, many studies have indicated that it is because they do not understand plagiarism. Carroll (2002) argued that many students plagiarise inadvertently because of their uncertainty over what constitutes plagiarism. Additionally, studies have also indicated that many students are unable to recognise examples of plagiarism, and they do not understand how to adequately paraphrase and cite sources (Marshall & Garry, 2006; Pecorari, 2003; Yeo, 2007).

Overseas students mainly come from educational systems focused on exam-based assessments and a move to coursework and group-based assessments in a western system places added pressure on them both to succeed and attain good grades (Mackinnon & Manathunga,

2003; Carroll, 2002) thus leading them to plagiarise in some cases. Moreover, universities and other tertiary providers do not always have clear policies and guidelines on what constitutes plagiarism (Angélil-Carter, 2000). There are also irregularities in what instructors regard as plagiarism and adequate paraphrasing (Bennett, Behrendt, & Boothby, 2011; Flint, Clegg, & Macdonald, 2006) and in the way institutions enforce and detect plagiarism (Biggs, 1994; Ryan, 2000; Scollon, 1995).

There are factors such as excessive loss of face and a family's reputation resulting from poor academic performance, particularly for Asian cultures (Burns, 1991; Walker, 1998), and inadequate English language skills (Bretag, Horrocks & Smith, 2002; Carroll, 2002). International students, when studying overseas, also need to sustain themselves financially and as a result a number engage in part-time work. This contributes to less time being dedicated to studies and assignment preparation (Bamford, Marr, Pheiffer, & Weber-Newth, 2002). Errey (2002) claimed that lack of time management and ability to cope with simultaneous deadlines are also underlying factors that lead to a decrease in students' interest and motivation, which further results in plagiaristic activities. McCabe (2003) pointed out that plagiarism is also a result of situational factors. For instance, students who have seen their peers succeed by cheating tend to plagiarise as well (McCabe, Trevino & Butterfield, 2001). Finally, access to web-based information that is easy to copy-and-paste is seen as a major contributing factor (Park, 2003).

It is evident from the above research that plagiarism is a complex matter and, with other forms of academic dishonesty, a huge concern for many educational establishments. Bertram Gallant and Kalichman (2011) pointed out that "individual misconduct or ethical agency is actually a systemic issue, shaped by individual, organisational, educational/academic, and other societal factors" (p. 36). Moreover, Evering and Moorman (2012) have emphasised that it is important to consider effective measures for preventing plagiarism, rather than take action once it has occurred.

There is a need to change from instilling fear in learners and focus more on designing students' assessments that cannot be easily plagiarised (Carroll, 2002). These tasks should also take into consideration the educational backgrounds and learning experiences of students from diverse cultures and nationalities (Briggs, 2003; Leask, 2006; Ryan, 2000; Volet, 2003). Educational institutions need to recognise that the issue of plagiarism requires a holistic and

institution-wide approach to fostering ethical academic practices. Institutions therefore need to promote a culture of integrity that goes beyond deterrence, detection and penalising students. The major focus should be on proper induction, skills orientation, training and support that enables international students to cope better with the academic expectations of the new learning environment.

Student trends

Total student numbers at AIS, and the countries they come from, vary from year to year because of internal factors, such as newly introduced programmes, and external factors including visa and migration policies.

The total number of students at AIS taking National Qualifications Framework level 5 to 9 qualifications, for the years 2012 to 2016, is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. *Total number of students at AIS*

Year	Chinese	Indian	Southeast Asian	Maori & Pacific Islander	Others	Total
2012	356	660	213	380	220	1829
2013	381	754	222	364	230	1951
2014	296	1068	345	312	250	2271
2015	263	1614	429	288	420	3014
2016	238	1392	495	324	645	3094

It can be seen that, while the total has increased, this trend is not uniform for all national categories. The number of Chinese has decreased, the number of Maori and Pacific Islanders has remained roughly level, and the number of Southeast Asian and Other students has risen. In all years, Indian students were the largest group and, in 2016, comprised almost half of all students (45%). The Indian category covers the Indian subcontinent: India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Nepal.

Over this period, plagiarism cases at AIS also rose, for two reasons: a rise in student numbers generally and from the Indian subcontinent in particular. This conclusion is based on two factors. Firstly, over 90% of plagiarism cases in these years have involved Indian students.

Al-Shamaa, S., Brown, A., & Pranish, T. (2017). Addressing plagiarism at a New Zealand tertiary institute. *ATLAANZ Journal 2*(2): 16-33.

Secondly, lax attitudes towards plagiarism in India are well-known. Juyal, Thawani and Thaledi (2015, p. 542) give an "individual's professional growth, academic promotions, and pay cheques" as reasons for Indian academics resorting to plagiarism, calling such practices "morally and ethically repugnant and … intellectually deceitful." Padma (2016) and Pandey (2016) report that attention is now being paid to plagiarism in India, for both students and lecturers. This is important for Indian students if they intend to travel overseas for higher study, and for academic staff if they intend to publish in international journals.

In short, the sharply increasing numbers of students generally, and the fact that nearly half of them were from the Indian subcontinent, produced a spate of plagiarism cases at AIS.

Anti-plagiarism measures

As a result, various anti-plagiarism measures have been undertaken at AIS. All of them have contributed to the current situation of low plagiarism rates. Three will be described here: Turnitin, compulsory workshops, and a test.

Like many tertiary institutions around the world, AIS uses Turnitin. Established in 1998 by four university students as a peer review application, Turnitin has grown to offer several products, the main one being similarity measurement software. According to its website (Turnitin, n.d.), it is used by over 15,000 institutions comprising over 30 million students in over 150 countries. Student assignments are submitted electronically to Turnitin (automatically via the AIS Moodle system), which then does two things. Firstly, it compares the assignment with its own databases and other academic databases. In total, these databases comprise over 60 billion webpages, and over 154 million journal articles, periodicals and books. Secondly, Turnitin adds any submitted assignment to its database. It therefore currently has over 600 million student papers.

Turnitin was first used at AIS in 2008 and workshops (of between one and two hours) were introduced for students. This measure ensured that instances of copying and pasting without reference, and over-referencing, would be detected. It was also made clear that submitted assignments would be added to the database, inclusing assignments by former students on the course. In this way, copying (parts of) a former student's work would be uncovered.

Recycling, that is, the use of material in two different assignments by the same student (also called self-plagiarism) would also be identified.

Workshops on plagiarism, including Turnitin, and American Psychological Association (APA) referencing, the format prescribed at AIS, were eventually made compulsory for new intake students. Previously, they had been quasi-compulsory, and some students, because of arriving late or other reasons, had "slipped though the administrative cracks" and not taken the workshops. Now they were made compulsory, along with various other workshops (on academic writing skills, note-taking skills, presentation skills, for example) that were considered important for various groups of students, as a foundation-style grounding. Attendance was taken, and non-attendees reminded of their obligation.

In 2014, with steady increases in the numbers of students coming from the Indian subcontinent, there was a corresponding increase in the number of cases appearing before the Student Disciplinary Committee (SDC). This committee considers all breaches of AIS regulations. Academic matters before the committee are of two main types: firstly, cheating in examinations and tests, for example, by having cheat notes; and secondly, academic dishonesty in assignments, overwhelmingly plagiarism. SDC panel meetings comprise the Academic Director or Director of Research, with two other senior staff.

In order to tackle this increase in disciplinary cases, which was occupying a large amount of senior staff time, two measures were put in place. Firstly, a system of "fast-tracking" was set up in late 2015. Where the Turnitin report for a student's assignment had a high similarity index (often over 50%), and chunks copied word-for-word (as shown by bold type in the report) or nearly word-for-word, there seemed little purpose in having a full formal SDC panel meeting, usually taking at least ten minutes per student. Clear cases of plagiarism were confirmed by the Chair after examining the report. If there was any possible doubt, the student would be called to a panel meeting; otherwise, a fast-tracked standard penalty would be applied and the student would be informed of this, along with a copy of the Turnitin report. Nevertheless, in the spirit of being fair, transparent and applying natural justice, AIS has an appeal process requiring the student to submit a written appeal. This is normally carried out by the Reviews and Appeals Committee, which comprises senior staff (but none who had been on the original panel), who examine the process carried out in the original panel meeting. However, since in fast-tracked

Al-Shamaa, S., Brown, A., & Pranish, T. (2017). Addressing plagiarism at a New Zealand tertiary institute. *ATLAANZ Journal 2*(2): 16-33.

cases an SDC panel meeting had not actually taken place, the opportunity to request a panel meeting was offered. This led to many frivolous appeals, and consequently a panel meeting was only agreed to if the student could produce new, relevant evidence, that is, information that was not apparent from the Turnitin report.

Secondly, a test was instituted in May 2016. This was called the "Good Referencing" test (GRT), in order to sound less negative than an "Anti-plagiarism" test. To sit the test, students had to have attended both the Avoiding Plagiarism and APA Referencing workshops. Since the test covered the contents of the workshops, the students paid greater attention during these sessions. Previously, it had seemed that students attended the workshops but many paid little attention and continued their previous habits, including uninhibited copying-and-pasting. Students then had to take and pass the GRT. The enforcement of this requirement is that, until students pass the test, as shown by a field in the Student Management System, they are unable to submit assignments and other work online. Again, this forced students to take the workshops and the test seriously.

The test consists of 20 questions randomised from a bank of questions, such that no two students get the same 20 questions. The questions are also in sections: true/false; drag-and-drop; "Is this correct referencing?"; etc. The questions in the bank were written using inspiration from various plagiarism tests found online (eg Bailey, 2017; Cornell University, 2005; Penn State University, 2014; Writecheck, n.d.). A pass threshold of at least 16 right out of 20 is set. Students are allowed to sit the test as many times as it takes for them to pass. However, until they pass, they cannot submit work online.

The workshops and test are scheduled at the beginning of the students' first semester. This helps students comprehend the notion of referencing right from the onset, and provides the support and guidance needed to fulfill the academic requirements of this new learning environment, before their first written assignment needs to be written and submitted. It is thus the fence at the top of the cliff rather than the ambulance at the bottom.

The test is thus regarded as a rubicon. Once students pass the test, this is taken as an indication that they understand what plagiarism is, what they can and cannot do, and what the penalties are. This has simplified SDC matters considerably, and led to fewer frivolous appeals.

The standard penalty for plagiarism is a zero mark for the assignment, and a demerit mark (with three demerits normally leading to expulsion). Students who have passed the GRT, but continued to copy-and-paste liberally and without acknowledgement, are generally required to retake the workshops and test.

Advice to lecturers regarding assignments

It is the students who plagiarise by copying without acknowledgement from books, articles, the internet, etc, and from other students and from themselves (recycling). Similarly, it is the students who display poor performance by over-copying material, with acknowledgement. Nevertheless, some of the responsibility for the situation can be attributed to the lecturers, and the assignments that they set. This section details some reminders of institutional policies that may not have been adhered to by lecturers, or that have been instituted because of plagiarism.

Firstly, lecturers have been reminded that assignments should not be recycled. That is, they cannot set the same, or very similar, assignment topics run after run. While this may be tempting for lecturers in that it saves work devising new assignments, it leads to temptation for students when they realise that their colleagues who took the course in the previous run completed the same, or virtually the same, assignment. The temptation is too great for some students, who copy from their colleagues. In some cases, it even seems that a template is circulated among the students, which can be adapted to take account of any slight changes in the precise topic of the present assignment.

Group assignments have proven problematical. The drawbacks of group assignments are well known. Some members may be "freeloaders", leaving the work to the others. Some may become incommunicado. One member of the group may have a domineering personality. Some members work fast, while others work slowly, having implications for meeting the final deadline. There may be little overall standardisation, so that the assignment looks like four mini-assignments taped together, rather than one unified assignment. In terms of plagiarism, the issue is that, while all members are required to accept joint responsibility for the whole of the final assignment, they cannot know if one of the other members has plagiarised. Large amounts of time at SDC meetings have therefore often been taken up by establishing which member did which part, where the plagiarism lies, whether the other members were aware of it, etc. As a

Al-Shamaa, S., Brown, A., & Pranish, T. (2017). Addressing plagiarism at a New Zealand tertiary institute. *ATLAANZ Journal 2*(2): 16-33.

result, group assignments have been curtailed unless a clear link with course or programme learning outputs is demonstrated. A strict distinction has been maintained between group work and group assignments. Assignments that are set now often involve group work, but the assignment is completed on an individual basis. In this way, there is no doubt who is responsible for any plagiarism.

Take-home assignments are valuable in that they allow students to carry out a substantial piece of work, with background reading and original research (e.g. a questionnaire). However, lecturers can never be 100% certain that a student has not received outside help, for instance from a friend who has studied the subject before, or who has better language skills. In contrast, in an examination, the lecturer can be certain that it is the student writing the answers, unaided. In the postgraduate Business Administration programme there is a move to a final examination counting at least 40% towards the final overall mark for a module.

One easy way to ensure that students remember correct referencing in their assignments is to award marks for it in the marking rubric. However, correct referencing should be a given in that students must have passed the GRT, so the amount of marks should not have a significant weighting, for example not more than 10% of the marks available.

Finally, instances of plagiarism create great inconvenience, in that the lecturer has to look at the Turnitin report, determine that plagiarism seems to have occurred, and then forward the assignment to the SDC via their Head of Programme. Nevertheless, it is inconvenience that can be fruitful, in that the student becomes aware (again, after the GRT) that plagiarism is not tolerated, and hopefully stops plagiarising in the future. It is therefore important that lecturers do not overlook instances of plagiarism, but maintain a consistent approach.

Findings

The effect of the introduction of the compulsory workshops and especially the GRT test is very encouraging in that they have almost eradicated the problem. Table 2 shows the number of plagiarism cases appearing before the SDC, either as fast-tracked cases, or from panel sessions, per month of the calendar year 2016.

Table 2. *Student Disciplinary Committee cases per month of 2016*

Month (2016)	Plagiarism cases	Students penalised for plagiarism
Jan	1	1
Feb	17	14
Mar	15	18
Apr	15	15
May	17	16
Jun	9	10
Jul	20	17
Aug	3	2
Sep	3	2
Oct	0	0
Nov	2	2
Dec	0	0
Total for the year	102	97

The number of students penalised in any particular month may exceed the number of cases because of group assessments (where, for example, in one group of four students, all four are penalised) and collusion (where one student knowingly allowed their assignment to be read and copied by another, in which case both students are penalised).

Two conclusions are clear from this. Firstly, almost all students referred to the SDC for plagiarism were penalised. This is not surprising, as they usually involved Turnitin scores of 30% or more. Secondly, the GRT was started in May 2016. While there are still SDC cases for May, June and July, the plagiarism may not have occurred in May, June and July; it may take a little while for assignments to be marked, and plagiarism detected. There is also the "grapevine" effect; namely, that it takes a little while for the seriousness and consequences of the new test to filter down among the student population.

The problem virtually disappeared in August. Using statistical analysis, the t- test for two independent samples (unequal variance) shows a highly significant difference between the average number of students penalised between January and July, and between August and

December 2016:

> P(T<=t) one-tailed: 0.000642
>
> P(T<=t) two-tailed; 0.001283
>
> (Highly significant P value is less than 0.05.)

There were very few cases in January, because no undergraduate courses had started, few postgraduate modules had been conducted, and there is always a time lag between assessments and appearance before the SDC.

Students penalised after the institution of the GRT are not only given a zero mark, and a demerit (three demerits leading to expulsion), but are also required to take the two compulsory workshops and the test again. This requirement is intended to reinforce the plagiarism message, and also to be inconvenience enough to convince the student of the seriousness of the case.

Conclusion

There are many reasons why students plagiarise. The most complex is some initial intransigence to adapt to western academic standards. For undergraduate students coming from secondary schools in their country, the topic of plagiarism may never have been broached, and is thus new. On the other hand, for postgraduate students, who have completed a degree usually in their own country, there may be a difference in attitudes to copying in their country and in New Zealand. These cultural differences must be addressed early in the students' postgraduate study programme.

It seems that the problem of plagiarism at AIS has largely been solved. The introduction of the GRT has resulted in a reduction of SDC cases from unacceptable levels to virtually zero. There will always be some students who ignore warnings and hope they can get away with plagiarism, for a variety of reasons: poor time management (running out of time before the deadline and resorting to copying), avoidable technical problems ("My computer crashed" and the student did not make a back-up copy of work), even hope that lecturers will turn a blind eye to plagiarism in assessments on the final component of their qualification, etc.

The primary motivation for establishing the above measures was the observation that students were not taking workshops on plagiarism seriously, and that plagiarism cases were

occupying a large amount of the time of senior staff. The measures seem to have worked in both these respects. Nevertheless, it is also incumbent on lecturers to ensure that the assignments they set do not contain features that allow or tempt students to plagiarise.

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