

Lessons Learnt from Running a Plagiarism Awareness Campaign

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Abstract

Plagiarism is an issue of considerable significance to the academic community as a result, in part, of an increase in recorded incidences, greater availability of information through the internet (and internet search engines), and changes within the higher education sector. This has made it necessary for educational institutions to take steps to tackle plagiarism, employing a combination of preventative action, detection strategies, and policies for dealing with the varied forms and degrees of plagiarism that occur.

At City University, the detection and prevention of plagiarism has generally been dealt with at school level. City is a traditionally structured institution, which devolves a substantial amount of autonomy and independence to schools. Although general policies exist, which are included in all programme handbooks, how students are educated as to what plagiarism is, or how it will be dealt with, is usually a school matter in the first instance. However, a number of central services became aware that schools were wishing to share their plagiarism concerns and seek more central support. To meet this need, a number of services (Academic Development and Services, the Educational Development Centre, and E-Learning Services) began to work together towards a larger scale event at the University. The main objectives were: to raise awareness of plagiarism; link it to broader issues such as assessment

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strategies, use of the internet, and referencing; and emphasise the importance of preventative action. A series of workshops, sessions and other events were planned. Sessions were hosted by several external experts, as well as staff based in the aforementioned departments of the University.

The purposes of this paper are to: first, draw attention to some of the literature on plagiarism and assessment that has informed our understanding of this issue; describe how the events of Plagiarism Awareness Week were organised and implemented; discuss its benefits and achievements (accounting for feedback received), and note possible areas for development. It is hoped that the paper will contribute to raising awareness about plagiarism issues within the higher education sector, provide colleagues with insights about plagiarism prevention, and help generate ideas for their own strategies. The paper also attempts to reveal the practical complexities of organising an institution-wide event of this sort. Overall then, the intention is to share the lessons learnt from City University's Plagiarism Awareness Week, with a wider range of colleagues and peers who face similar challenges.

Introduction

Plagiarism is an issue of considerable significance to the academic community as a result, in part, of an increase in recorded incidences, greater availability of information through the internet (and internet search engines), and changes within the Higher Education sector. This has made it necessary for educational institutions to take steps to tackle plagiarism, employing a combination of preventative action, detection strategies, and policies for dealing with the varied forms and degrees of plagiarism that occur.

At City University, the detection and prevention of plagiarism has generally been dealt with at school level. City is a traditionally structured institution, which devolves a substantial amount of autonomy and independence to schools. Although general policies exist, which are included in all programme handbooks, how students are educated as to what plagiarism is, or how it will be dealt with, is usually a school matter in the first instance. However, a number of central services became aware that schools were wishing to share their plagiarism concerns and seek more central support. To meet this need, a number of services (Academic Development and Services, the Educational Development Centre, and E-Learning Services) began to work together towards a larger scale event at the University. The main objectives were: to raise awareness of plagiarism; link it to broader issues such as assessment strategies, use of the internet, and referencing; and emphasise the importance of preventative action. A series of workshops, sessions and other events were planned. Sessions were hosted by several external experts, as well as staff based in the aforementioned departments of the University. The purposes of this paper are to: first, draw attention to some of the literature on plagiarism and assessment that has informed our understanding of this issue; describe how the events of Plagiarism Awareness Week were organised and implemented; discuss its benefits and achievements (accounting for feedback received), and note possible areas for development. It is hoped that the paper will contribute to raising awareness about plagiarism issues within the Higher Education sector, provide colleagues with insights about plagiarism prevention, and help generate ideas for their own strategies. The paper also attempts to reveal the practical complexities of organising an institution-wide event of this sort.

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Literature Review

Understanding the link between assessment and plagiarism

'Plagiarism often shows students responding intelligently to teachers' slack assessment practices' (Knight, 2001, p. 21). In recent years, interest in assessment issues has greatly increased, in terms of research activity, and at policy level. Although some areas remain under-researched, literature on assessment now covers a wide range of issues: what its underlying purposes should be; the importance of aligning assessment with other features of a programme; formative and summative assessment; models of assessment; validity and reliability issues; assessment design; assessment techniques. Whilst it is not appropriate to discuss these issues here, this does indicate that assessment potentially affects every aspect of the teaching and learning process.

There is a close relationship between assessment and plagiarism issues too. According to Stefani and Carroll (2001): 'It is possible to cite a number of things that academics do quite unwittingly and unintentionally that make plagiarism seem a pragmatic option for the student. Why *not* cheat when offered essays that ask them to gather and present information that they know is just sitting there on the Web?' Stefani and Carroll (2001, p. 9). Conversely, there is broad agreement in the literature that the use of an appropriate range of assessment methods, which are periodically reviewed and

updated, provides an effective deterrent against plagiarism. There are of course other preventative actions that can be taken. For example, Brown (2001) points to the need to ensure that students understand what plagiarism means, and that they gain experience in skills including paraphrasing, summarising, and referencing.

Nevertheless, opportunities for plagiarism can largely be 'designed out' through a reconsideration of assessment methods. Thus, Stefani and Carroll (2001) argue that academic staff should be encouraged to review the links between plagiarism, assessment and classroom actions.

Assessment strategies for plagiarism prevention

A good number of authors have discussed assessment strategies that might help deter plagiarism, such that there appears to be some consensus about this issue in the research. Knight (2001) identifies five methods: a preference for formative assessment, as compared to summative techniques; benefits to be gained from the use of time-constrained individual assessments; avoidance of the same assessment tasks for repeated cohorts; use of distinctive tasks (for example, comparing two recent papers or articles); advising students of what checks for plagiarism are undertaken following submission of their work. Brown (2001) notes that there are advantages in involving students in the design of assessment tasks and the setting of assessment criteria. He also examines the potential value of the lecturer modelling the assessment process – this latter technique ensures students receive guidance on the appropriate approach they should employ in

undertaking their work. He is amongst those who explain that the overuse of one method (such as essays) increases the opportunities for plagiarism.

Elsewhere, benefits of approaches such as the ‘meta-learning’ essay have been described (CAP, 2004): this comprises an in-class assignment that follows up on the completion of a project. Carroll (2005) identifies the usefulness of being more specific in assessment requirements, where it is possible to do so; for example, requesting provision of primary data; inclusion of personal experience as part of the work; application to a specific or local context. In addition, she emphasises the benefits of assessing the process by which the work was undertaken – rather than only the end-result. She advocates that we avoid the use of ‘show you know’ assignments, ‘single-solution assignments’, or ‘already-been-solved problems’ (Carroll, 2006). Stefani and Carroll (2001) explain: ‘We might ask students to seek out resources, assemble relevant information then analyse and evaluate it. This would make full use of students’ ability to plunder the Web and the library, and develop key skills such as organisation, judgment and selecting evidence’. Stefani and Carroll (2001, p. 9)

This section has – very briefly – attempted to demonstrate that there is consistent evidence concerning the relationship between assessment techniques and plagiarism deterrence. It is worth adding that this discussion links closely to the topic of innovative assessment methods, of which many have been described in the literature. A good example can be found in a chapter written by Phil Race, entitled ‘Why Assess Innovatively?’ (in Brown and Glasner, 2003).

Specific applications

There is also no shortage of examples of assessment strategies and tools that have been implemented in specific contexts. Walden & Peacock (2004) discuss the implementation and results of the *i-map* (information map), used at the Faculty of Art and Design, at the University of Hertfordshire. The *i-map*: ‘... structures, plans and records the ‘research’ phase of an essay, report, conference paper or presentation, content-led web pages or similar activity’. (Plagiarism: Prevention, Practice and Policies 2005, p. 238) The *i-map* has proved to be a useful accompaniment to the essay, reducing opportunities for plagiarism, and enhancing the student’s information handling skills. Irons (2005) documents the introduction of portfolios as a means of summative assessment to reduce the opportunities for plagiarism, in a department at Northumbria University. One of the main findings was that by providing students with ownership of the work, offering help and formative feedback, and asking students to discuss their findings, they were instilled with a sense of personal responsibility, meaning, and pride.

Institutional change

Whilst inevitably there needs to be changes to individual academic practice in terms of assessment design and student support to ‘design-out’ plagiarism, one of the key aspects to successfully dealing with plagiarism is to develop a University culture that promotes high academic standards and integrity and regards plagiarism as unacceptable. This may appear obvious, but it is often not explicitly stated by institutions or institutions are not clearly demonstrating a drive towards changing and improving current practice. Often concern that an institution will be ear-marked as having a particular plagiarism ‘problem’

can make institutions reluctant to adopt a very public stance on plagiarism prevention and detection.

As Carroll and Duggan (2005) argue ‘plagiarism is a complex issue that requires a complex response’ (p.2) – in other words, it is not enough to encourage individual lecturers to tackle the problem alone, but active support and promotion by senior management is vital to ensuring the promotion of high academic standards across the institution. Carroll and Duggan advocate an ‘holistic change’ which encompasses a variety of activities from ensuring regular evaluation and monitoring, utilising detection software, ensuring ownership across the institution and supporting ‘enthusiasts’ (p.10).

It is all too easy to implement innovations in isolation, for example new technologies, such as those dealing with plagiarism detection, may be introduced without actually changing the practices or policies of the institution. The potential impact of such developments will then be severely limited. However, attempting to manage a more wide-reaching and ‘holistic’ approach to change can be challenging. As Diana Laurillard observes, ‘Higher Education cannot change easily’, yet, she concedes that it is being ‘forced to change’ (2002, p.3). Many Higher Education institutions are resistant to change for a variety of reasons but changes in the educational climate, of which increased cases of plagiarism is an example, is making change a necessity.

Jane Seale (2003) argues ‘in most accounts of institutional change there is a recognition that successful institutional implementation [...] depends on key individual stakeholders’ (p11). Carroll and Duggan support this, noting that you often need to capitalise on individual enthusiasts in the first instance before you can begin to implement more wide-scale change (p.10).

Implementation

It was with this set of complexities in mind – from assessment design to a reconsideration of the University culture – that City University embarked on its Plagiarism Awareness Week held in January 2006. A number of events addressed the relationship between plagiarism and assessment design. Specifically, two workshops were organised, at which an opportunity was provided for participants to discuss how to ‘design out’ plagiarism through the incorporation of a more diverse range of assessment techniques. In particular, a series of ten ‘tips’ were offered, based on the literature, which participants were asked to consider in the context of a module that they are responsible for. Further workshops also brought in the notions of standardising practice and working in a more coherent manner to address policy across the institution.

As a University with a diverse range of students, programmes and sites, the publicity needed to be appropriate and effective for the week to be a success. A large proportion of the budget was utilised to create the publicity around the University, and the Plagiarism Awareness Week also featured in *The Times Higher Education Supplement* the following week. Publicity for the week began in the autumn term, before the programme had been finalised, with a slogan competition for staff and students to raise awareness of, and interest in, the week. The winning slogans were “credit where credit’s due” and “make your work as unique as you are”. These were used on all the publicity material which went out across the University. A number of different media were chosen to publicise the event internally, in view of the fact that both staff and students needed to be targeted, across a variety of different sites and disciplines. The slogans and some brief information

on the week, including a website address where full details of the programme could be found, were used on posters around all the University sites.

Bookmarks advertising the website were placed in all the libraries and given out to students whenever they borrowed books during the weeks running up to Plagiarism Awareness Week. Mousemats with the website on were used in the majority of the University's computer rooms for two weeks before the event. In the preceding week, and during the event itself, students were recruited to hand out pens and fliers with the full programme on to staff and students at all the University's sites. In addition to this publicity, the University's e-bulletin was used to ensure that every staff member and student had the opportunity to find out more about the week's events. The website incorporated a full programme of events and further information on all the sessions throughout the week. It included one section entitled 'for staff' and another one 'for students' as well as useful links to University and external resources. The intention was to create a website which people would continue to use as a resource after the event had taken place. The University and schools' committees were also used to garner support at a more local level and to raise awareness to their own staff and students. Support and publicity also came from the highest level, with the Vice Chancellor and the Pro Vice Chancellor for Teaching and Learning supporting the initiative publicly.

The week was launched with 'Articulated Laurie' by Professor Laurie Taylor, best known for his Radio 4 programmes and his column in *The Times Higher Education Supplement*. He amended his talk to focus on a plagiarism theme. *The Times Higher Education Supplement* then sponsored a reception after the event, and covered the launch and the week in the next edition of the paper. Although the entire week was aimed at both

staff and students, different issues were addressed. For students, the focus was on improving study skills and raising awareness of what constitutes plagiarism and the University's own regulations. For staff, there were some workshops focusing on the detection of plagiarism and others on assessment design and how it can be used to deter plagiarism.

Two sessions were run by JISC Plagiarism Advisory Service for students which included information on the TurnitinUK software as well as practical advice on how to reference and paraphrase correctly. The University's Learning Support Team and English Language Support ran a series of workshops throughout the week on what plagiarism actually *is*, how to avoid it and how to write bibliographies and cite references. All the student sessions held during the week were highly interactive, giving students opportunities to practice and receive expert advice in an informal setting.

JISC Plagiarism Advisory Service also offered workshops enabling staff to familiarise themselves with the plagiarism detection software tool, Turnitin, which is currently being introduced across the University as a tool to assist staff in detecting plagiarism. Jude Carroll, based at Oxford Brookes University and well published in plagiarism issues, led two sessions for staff, covering prevention, detection and suggested ways of dealing with plagiarism at a school and University level. Two further sessions were run by academics from City University and addressed related issues, such as how to deter plagiarism through assessment and good referencing practices. These sessions used City specific module specifications and assessment examples brought to the group by the participants.

As City is a multi-site University, this was an additional issue taken into consideration at the organisation stage. The University wanted to ensure maximum participation from all the schools and sites, and so the sessions were spread across the sites to encourage this. Time was also spent liaising with staff within the different schools to obtain maximum buy-in and to ensure the publicity was spread throughout the University and not limited to the main site. Due to a reliance on the week being publicised and supported at a local level, as well as centrally, we found varying degrees of cooperation and enthusiasm across the different schools and disciplines. With almost half City's students undertaking postgraduate programmes and a major focus across the institution on programmes for the professions, individual programmes and schools needed to emphasise to their own staff and students the benefits of attending the sessions laid on during Plagiarism Awareness Week, as needs and expectations differ greatly between the schools. However the sessions laid on were of a general nature and with a highly interactive focus and were intended to be of benefit to staff and students of all disciplines and level of study.

Lessons Learnt

This was the first event of its kind to take place at the institution and although it was a successful event a number of key lessons have been learnt which will influence the development of any events in the future. These can be grouped into the following categories:

- Staff development and engagement
- Student support and guidance

□ Institutional policies and practice

□ Publicity and dissemination

Staff development and engagement

In principle, staff were keen to engage with the week's activities and it was agreed that it was a priority for the institution. When discussions about the week's events were held at committees relating to learning and teaching everyone agreed that the format of the events and structure of the activities was appropriate. However, unfortunately in practice staff were less engaged. Despite a high profile publicity campaign some events were poorly attended. The events on assessment design, in particular, drew lower numbers which was disappointing when staff from City had given up time to prepare sessions. Events with external speakers were better attended, particularly those that made plagiarism the focus of existing, established committees, for example the Programme Directors forum focused on plagiarism and this drew a larger audience than usual. Ironically the multi-site focus also did not seem to be a barrier to engagement – there were some sessions where the entire session was attended by staff from another site but no one attended from the site where the session was located!

Staff that did attend the sessions found them very useful and gave extremely positive feedback, which was encouraging, but the organisation team was left with the problem of how to ensure wider staff engagement in the future. One solution to this problem was the approach adopted by one school whose staff attended the majority of sessions. This School actively promoted the week internally and made it an item for discussion at a number of internal school committees in the run up to the event. Staff

were encouraged to report back to these same committees how activities and information from the event could be used within their own teaching and learning in the future. The organisation team agreed that in the future it was not enough to rely on committees and publicity campaigns but that each School needed to actively 'buy-in' to the week by ensuring staff attended and tying it into existing School activities.

In addition, a further concern was raised around the title to the week. Some staff felt that they did not understand the purpose of the week and so did not regard it as applicable to them. This will be addressed in the future by renaming the week and ensuring that publicity materials provide more information on what staff can gain from each event.

Student support and guidance

Similar problems with attendance occurred with the student focused sessions. Again, students who attended gave extremely positive feedback and regarded the sessions as beneficial in terms of improving their study and information literacy skills. However, the sessions with students served to highlight some lack of clarity between different schools about what plagiarism actually meant and how each school would deal with cases of plagiarism. It was felt that this was an area that needed to be addressed across the University by a review of current policy and practice.

Other feedback from students again centred on the terminology of the week. Many students felt that by attending they were in some indicating that they already

plagiarised or were thinking of doing so. In addition some students were not clear about what the sessions would provide them with and so avoided attending any of them.

As well as renaming the week, the organisation team also felt that separating out the student and staff activities would be beneficial in the future and providing more clarity around the purpose of the week for both groups. In addition, more involvement will be sought from the students' union in planning the week so that they can promote the activities to students.

Institutional policies and practices

One of the key messages that came from Jude Carroll's presentations were that the University needed to consider plagiarism prevention and detection at a policy level. Although there would need to be some individual differentiation between schools due to professional body restrictions a clearer steer from the centre was needed in terms of definitions of plagiarism and appropriate penalties.

These concerns were raised at the University's Academic Practice, Programmes and Standards Committee, which had overseen the organisation of the week, with a view to more work being undertaken to standardise policies across schools and consider how plagiarism is defined across the institution. Furthermore, although there is a standard University plagiarism policy which is included in all programme handbooks it was felt that this needed to be drawn out more fully from the 'procedural' information contained in the handbooks and separated into a section on research skills. Work on this is already underway for autumn 2006.

The University is undertaking considerable work in the area of assessment and it was agreed that plagiarism should be considered as part of this activity. Although detection is obviously a high profile area, since Plagiarism Awareness Week the University has started to work to engage more models of good practice in terms of assessment design and case studies of how academics have dealt with plagiarism to publicise positive models. This work also ties in with projects run as part of the University's E-Learning Services to promote good practice with online assessment. A review of existing practice and policy has been regarded as a positive step for the institution and one that would benefit the running of this week in the future.

Publicity and dissemination

As previously mentioned, various methods of publicity were used to disseminate information about the event centrally, but this did not always reach the appropriate audiences in schools. The approach of one school in engaging staff members is now regarded as a model of good practice and something that shall be used to ensure more publicity within schools next time the event is run.

In addition, the web site needs considerable work to keep it updated and relevant to staff and students. Posting of case studies and examples of good assessment design to avoid plagiarism is one method of ensuring that staff find positive models of practice. For students, the emphasis will be on study skills and promoting good academic practice.

Discussions since the event in various committees have agreed that capitalising on existing events or tying the week into existing meeting structures is a good way forward. To this end the University's Educational Development Centre will run a seminar series

promoting good assessment design during 2006-2007 and e-Learning Services will focus on how e-learning can be used to create more innovative assessments which make plagiarism more difficult. The information literacy sessions run by the library will feature plagiarism awareness by focusing on good referencing and research skills; and the University's student support services will continue to work with schools to ensure that policies are well understood with students. Although it is likely the event will become a regular occurrence, by tying it into existing structures its relevance will be more apparent to both staff and students.

All these key lessons have been used to formulate future plans for the continuation of the event in the future.

Conclusion

Plagiarism Awareness Week at City highlighted a number of key issues in the way that individuals within the University regarded plagiarism, both from a staff and a student perspective. It covered a variety of issues from how individual students could improve their academic writing skills, through to how academics could improve their practice with groups of students, and into the wider realm of the University as a whole in terms of addressing institutional culture and practice. As the literature demonstrates these are common themes across the sector and City is not alone in attempting to tackle them. Plagiarism Awareness Week met its objectives to highlight plagiarism from a variety of angles, but poor turnout in some of the sessions meant that its impact was lessened.

However, what it has been is a catalyst for promoting future ideas and debate. Discussions on plagiarism often address the heart of what it means to promote and support learning, teaching and research within a university environment – questions concerning our expectations of our students and their expectations of us are key to appropriate assessment design and learning support. Since Plagiarism Awareness Week there has been a more open and transparent conversation between different aspects of the institution about what can be done to address both plagiarism detection and prevention. Although there is not always a consensus on the way forward, there is a greater awareness amongst senior management that central service departments working together with schools can be a successful approach. Plagiarism Awareness Week also succeeded in promoting collaboration between a diverse set of central service departments, cutting across traditional institutional structures between educational development, e-learning, academic administration and student support. As a result of Plagiarism Awareness Week the University has prioritised assessment design and management in its new learning and teaching strategy and developed an action plan on how to apply the lessons learnt into future practice. We are at the beginning of a cultural, ‘holistic’ change in this area and Plagiarism Awareness Week provided the vital means of initiating this change process.

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