Information for faculty……

**Indicators of Plagiarism: What to Look for in Written Work**
By Susan Guiher-Huff, Ashland University Writing Center Director

Always look at syntax and diction. Is this paper too good to be true? If the vocabulary doesn't seem to fit the student's usual rhetoric, or if the information reads like a textbook or appears more astute than the student's ability, you have every right to question authorship. If you cannot find where the writer has gotten the suspicious material, ask the student to discuss the information in the paper (of course, without looking at the paper). Have the student replicate the paper by writing or by reciting its content. **It is up to the student to prove authorship.**

**Ways to plagiarize**

1. **Internet papers**
   Along with evaluating syntax and diction, look for relevant and thoughtful integration of resources and course knowledge. If the paper lacks this kind of integration and is mostly recycled information or is not properly cited, you should do an Internet search. Use Google and search for specific phrases or phrases without citations or page numbers. If your department has a license for the online plagiarism detection program, Turnitin, you may want to use that to trace suspected Internet plagiarism. Papers are submitted electronic directly to Turnitin with results provided within minutes; it highlights copied material and provides Internet addresses. {You can require students to submit their own papers, or you can ask for electronic copies of their papers and do your own check.}

2. **Ghostwriter**
   Again, look for syntax and match caliber. If you suspect that the student is not the true author of the written material, you don't have to accept it. It is difficult to prove someone else has written it, but it is up to the student to prove that he or she **did** write it.

3. **Paper writing services**
   Some students who don't take writing assignments seriously or who put off working on an assignment may find it easier to download a paper, or even pay for one, from a “paper mill.” Use Turnitin or Google to search for online papers. **To help students avoid the temptation, do draft checks early into the assignment and have students attach drafts to final copies, or keep a file of in-class writing, for comparison of writing skills and critical explication.**

4. **Fabricating**
   Check references. **Content should match references.** Sometimes a student will simply copy or paraphrase from one or two major sources, but cite several sources and list them on the works cited page so it appears as though significant research was done. Also, look for inaccurate information, including page numbers, and check data for correctness.

5. **Paper sharing**
   Look for **similarities in classmates' papers.** Some students "help each other" by sharing sources, answers, and even entire papers. This is especially easy to do for short answer essays or homework. Both parties should be reported.
6. Loose paraphrasing

**Look for inadequately cited content, or lack of citations.** Challenge the writer to discuss and support the ideas expressed in the paper that appear to be his or her own. Ask for documentation and research notes. Provide examples of papers from your discipline that show students how to engage cited information in academic and creative ways.

**General plagiarism alerts:**

- Do page numbers match? **Can the student prove reference sources?**
- Does diction (word choice), sentence length, variety, structure or overall writing skill seem not to "fit" the student's ability? What are the student's levels of reading and writing?
- Is documentation done correctly, and does it seem appropriate for what is being quoted or paraphrased?
- Do the writer's ideas (or summary) too closely mirror the documented research? This is called **"all-but quoting"** and is considered plagiarism.
- Do you think that all, or part, of a paper may have been written or significantly edited by another student (instructor, tutor, or relative)?
- Do the student's own words/ideas seem to be mixed in with what appears to be unacknowledged words/ideas from a "higher" authority? This is called **"mosaic plagiarism."**

**Suggestions:**

- Include a strong statement about plagiarism and academic honesty in each syllabus.
- Take a sample. Ask students to write something significant in class. Give them a problem, an issue, or quotation to analyze or interpret in a short writing. Keep these papers so you have a point of comparison, if needed.
- Try not to give open-ended assignments that invite plagiarism, ghost writing, and Internet copying. If you allow students to choose an unspecified topic/person to research, chances are you will get “Internet papers.” The Council of Writing Program Administrators (wpacouncil.org) advises that "research questions and assignment topics should be based on principles of inquiry and on the genuine need to discover something about the topic, and the paper should be written in the form of an exploration or an argument, not simply a report.”
- Provide opportunities for students to discuss their research and sources; have a draft check or conference once or twice during the writing process.
- Make students accountable for all phases of the writing process (prewriting, notes, working bibliographies, drafts, and revisions).
- If a paper seems to demonstrate better skills than what you think might be the student's ability, check the student's ACT English score through Academic Advising Office.
- If you think a student has plagiarized, but can't prove it, don't accept the paper. Ask for a paper on another topic, or ask the student to recreate the introduction to the paper, including the thesis statement, as a timed writing.

I hope these indicators and suggestions have made you more aware of ways students plagiarize. It is time consuming to search the Internet for downloaded information, it diverts us from spending time with students and preparing lectures, and it is often futile. Nevertheless, because information is so easy to access, we must be alert. Share your suspicions with colleagues, your department chair, or with me, and do not treat misrepresentation and plagiarism lightly. It is up to us to explain plagiarism, to support our university's policies, to look for indicators of plagiarism and cheating, and to report cases to appropriate administrators. Contact the office of Academic
Counseling for information on the reporting procedure. Contact me for information about how the Writing Center helps students to understand and to use styles of documentation and how we work with writing assignments across the curriculum. Students may schedule time for Writing Center appointments by coming to 104 Bixler and selecting a time. Please review the AUWC web page for more information about the campus writing centers and how to help students learn about (and avoid) plagiarism.

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See AU’s Writing Centers and links at:
http://www3.ashland.edu/centers/writingintro.html

WC Information for Faculty and Students (note the Power Point presentations on APA & MLA & academic writing):
http://www3.ashland.edu/centers/writing/wcent.html