

## **Introduction**

Plymouth State University's Academic Integrity policy currently holds all members of its community responsible for dedication to "the pursuit of knowledge in an honest, responsible, respectful, and ethical manner"

(<https://www.plymouth.edu/undergraduate/files/2010/11/Academic-Integrity-Policy.pdf>). Examples of violations of this policy are listed in the above URL and may be classified as intentional or unintentional, but may also be considered acts of plagiarism.

Turnitin is a software detection program currently in a "pilot phase" at Plymouth State University. To be clear, Turnitin "does not identify plagiarism per se. It merely matches material present in a specific document uploaded to the Turnitin website to material present on the internet" (Walker, 2010, p. 3). The responsibility therein lies with the student and/or the instructor to determine how to use the software from that point forward. The remainder of this document will present a statement of the problem as well as a review of the literature, albeit narrow in scope, to provide more information.

## **Statement of the Problem**

Research suggests careful definition of "plagiarism" can reduce the incidence of its occurrence (Brown & Howell, 2001), yet further studies suggest students are unclear of exactly what constitutes plagiarism (Savage, 2004). Despite a lack of knowledge of the definition of plagiarism, a startling 75% of students indicate academic dishonestly (Eagle & Hunt, 2005), with one study finding business students more likely to engage in plagiarism than other students (Smyth & Davis, 2004). As technology advances, even 10 years ago research found that 38% of students were plagiarizing information from traditional sources, with 40% of plagiarized information from the internet (Hansen, 2003). Self-reported plagiarizers indicated 32% of their non-original material was a direct copy-and-paste from the internet (Underwood, 2004).

## **Review of the Literature**

The use of the Turnitin software is dependent up on the submission's use of either web-based sources or that the source has been used from sources already in the repository, meaning it is using a previously submitted student paper. This means that Turnitin will not detect text matching textbooks or other traditional sources unless those sources are available on the internet. For the purpose of this review of the literature, empirical studies were reviewed looking at studies examining the nature of the software on student and educators' perspectives and/or pedagogical practices.

## **Student Perspectives**

Based on the limited review of literature, the studies reviewed suggest conflicting information from the available studies. While some studies found students were fearful of accusation of plagiarism (Dahl, 2007), others found it easy to use, trusted it, and developed an awareness of plagiarism (Ledwin & Risquez, 2008), while students in another study found it was "useful but limiting" (Savage, 2004, p. 1).

Savage's (2004) study of four classes of junior and senior level students included self-reported misunderstandings of plagiarism in terms of breadth and depth, with students defining plagiarism as not citing appropriately rather than submitting the work of another. Further, shared they felt "under suspicion" and expressed concern about unintentional plagiarism, assumption of guilt, and technical issues of the program versus the use of human assessment.

While not about student perspectives, previous studies have characterized "typical plagiarizers" according to Walker (2010), however his more recent study of 569 students did not support that males are more likely to plagiarize compared to females. This study did confirm that international students were more likely to plagiarize than domestic students (note the study took place in New Zealand), but did not confirm that inexperienced students were more likely to submit plagiarized work compared with more experienced students (Walker, 2010). His study did not find that use of the software was a deterrent for students, as one-third of the students who submitted a first paper with evidence of plagiarism submitted a second assignment found to do the same (Walker, 2010).

### **Educator Perspectives**

Educator perspectives also varied, with some studies indicating favorable responses among faculty (Savage, 2004), with others indicating less favorable (Goddard & Rudzki, 2005), and others simply mixed (Sutherland-Smith & Carr, 2005).

Among 1,123 assignments in seven business courses, an 18.3% increase in "flagged" assignments was noted when the business department participated in an independent trial using Turnitin (Goddard & Rudzki, 2005). Faculty noted not only an extra workload with the software, but also the psychological impact of students when identified. Some of the student concerns noted by Savage (2004) were anticipated by educators, who saw the software as a deterrent to plagiarism, but also as educational opportunity. Further, educators indicated the software might raise standards among students, while also decreasing workload when faced with large numbers of papers (Savage, 2004).

A smaller study of educators presented with the use of the software initially indicated satisfaction with its use (Sutherland-Smith & Carr, 2005). Initial interviews at onset of its use suggested the software would take the onus of identification of cases of "plagiarism" away from faculty, however at the midpoint and end of the study, interviews found faculty needed to review the way in which the software was being used and found it useful for students to check their own work or to educate students about academic integrity.

When taken into account as a whole, the above information suggests that more can be done to educate students about the definition of plagiarism and expectations within courses, regardless of how plagiarism is detected within the scope of those courses.

## References

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