**Best Teaching Practices for Maintaining Academic Integrity**

As most college instructors know, the presence of digital technology and the Internet in our daily lives has created new challenges for maintaining academic integrity in higher education. The problem is twofold: not only are there limitless digital materials that can be easily copied and pasted, but the culture of Internet sharing has also changed students’ understanding of authorship. As an academic integrity officer at Clemson University states, “We have a whole generation of students who’ve grown up with information that just seems to be hanging out there in cyberspace and doesn’t seem to have an author. It’s possible to believe this information is just out there for anyone to take.” (qtd. in Gabriel “Plagiarism Lines”) To complicate matters further, many NYCCT students enter college ill equipped to conduct college-level research and writing. They have not learned the process of synthesizing their own ideas with the words and ideas of others.

Consequently, there is a growing need for college instructors to design assignments that encourage original thinking and writing. The onus is on students *and* instructors to find ways of avoiding cheating and plagiarism. This guide provides methods of identifying violations of academic integrity while proposing preventative measures for avoiding violations in the first place. We hope this information is useful. Please feel free to contact the current chairperson or members of the Academic Integrity Committee with questions, comments, or suggestions.

***Definition of plagiarism***

The CUNY Academic Integrity Policy defines plagiarism as “The act of presenting another person’s ideas, research, or writing as your own.” *The Council of Writing Program Administrators* offers a similar definition: “In an instructional setting, plagiarism occurs when a writer deliberately uses someone else’s language, ideas, or other original (not common-knowledge) material without acknowledging its source.” (“WPA Statement”) It is perhaps helpful to remember that “presenting” and “using” can occur in writing and oral presentations, as well as other in contexts, including creative works and computer code. Students may not understand that paraphrasing requires attribution. In extreme cases, students may submit entire papers or other assignments that were purchased, borrowed, or reused. This practice also constitutes plagiarism. Also, memorizingpassages of text that are not one’s own and repeating them verbatim in an in-class exam or graded presentation are also forms of plagiarism.

***Reasons why students plagiarize***

Most newly-enrolled NYCCT students have not acquired the skills for proper attribution, including references and in-text citation. The vast range of abilities and experiences among our diverse, international body of students presents unique challenges. Standard practices can be established as part of the curriculum and priorto the completion of a written assignment. Although it is not always clear if plagiarism is intentional, many problems that come up in the grading process can be avoided if students are given the tools and the guidance to produce honest work.

Students who claim others’ ideas and words as their own often do so because of a lack of confidence in their writing, poor time-management skills, or an inability to follow assignment instructions. Such students may also not understand how to paraphrase correctly and cite the source paraphrased. Intentional plagiarism can be avoided if instructors take stock of the challenges students face and create pedagogies that mitigate anxieties, anticipate poor time-management skills, and facilitate a strong understanding of the goals of a written assignment. In the end, instructors will save time and avoid conflicts by creating learning environments that guide students down the path to success, which in this case would be, the production of honest, appropriately cited academic work. Preventing plagiarism is a shared responsibility of all the members of our community.

***How to prevent careless or inadequate citation when borrowing ideas and words***

According to the *Council of Writing Program Administrators*, “Students are not guilty of plagiarism when they try in good faith to acknowledge others’ work but fail to do so accurately or fully.” In other words, if a student makes a formatting error in the citation to quoted material, or omits some a part of the citation, this is a sign of sloppiness or lack of proper academic preparation and should not be marked for plagiarism. The general rule of thumb to follow is that if a student has made some attempt to credit an outside source, then there is no violation of academic integrity. In such cases, instructors should use the opportunity to instruct a well-meaning student about the proper methods of attribution.

* Review the citation and bibliography conventions of your discipline at the start of each semester.
* Refer students to citation guides and bibliographic tools (including online citation managers and generators) prior to assigning written work. See, “Citation and Formatting Guides,” *Ursula C. Schwerin Library*:<http://libguides.citytech.cuny.edu/citations>
* Remind students that the creators of creative works including images, music, and videos must also be given proper credit. Encourage students to use Creative Commons and other resources that allow reuse and remixing without copyright violation. If using Creative Commons-licensed works, follow standard attribution guidelines, if needed. See <https://wiki.creativecommons.org/wiki/Best_practices_for_attribution>
* Teach careful note-taking skills as part of research methodologies. Impress upon students the need to record bibliographic information during the reading and research process, and to put quotation marks around borrowed language.
* Create assignments on Blackboard using Turnitin so that students can identify potential problems with plagiarism and/or citation. Students can use this tool *prior* to the submission of written work. They can then refer to the report generated by Turnitin in order to fix problems on their own. NYCCT Technology Services offers workshops in Blackboard: <http://it.citytech.cuny.edu/faculty-staff-workshops.aspx>.[[1]](#footnote-1)

***How to prevent deliberate copying of words and ideas***

* Explain the value of adhering to the ethical standard of the institution and written work in general. These values can be appreciated at the level of the community (protection of educational standards) and the individual (protection of copyrights).
* Clearly explicate the particular guidelines and rules for written work in your syllabus. It is difficult for the Academic Integrity Committee to adjudicate student appeals to violation reports if those rules have not been stated clearly in syllabuses.
* Warn students about the penalties for academic dishonestly. Explain the processes of reporting and documenting violations of plagiarism as outlined in the NYCCT Guide to Academic Integrity. <http://www.citytech.cuny.edu/academics/docs/academic_integrity_policy.pdf>
* Create scaffolded writing assignments. Allow students to develop their own ideas in low-stakes, informal writing assignments prior to the research phase of a project. The CUNY Writing Across the Curriculum program at NYCCT offers guidelines for best practices and workshops for Writing Intensive Certification: <https://openlab.citytech.cuny.edu/writingacrossthecurriculum/best-practices/>
* Assign and provide feedback to multiple drafts. Do not attach a low grade to an initial draft for ungrammatical writing alone. Rather, respond to the content of the writing. Does the draft respond to the writing prompt? Are the ideas original and insightful? Does the draft engage with concepts and terms from the class?
* Give detailed written explanations of assignments and reiterate these guidelines orally during class time.
* Provide a grading rubric that clearly delineates areas of evaluation (originality, use of legitimate sources, organization, grammar, etc.)
* Establish deadlines in the syllabus from the very first class meeting. Remind students about due-dates weeks in advance.
* Design writing assignments that inspire original thinking. Avoid formulaic assignments and overly-broad instructions. Make your assignments specific to the work of the course and to your own teaching.
* Offer office hours for reading drafts and providing feedback.
* Refer students to college support services:
  + Tutoring Center: <http://www.citytech.cuny.edu/current-student/tutoring-schedule.aspx>
  + Library Services: <https://library.citytech.cuny.edu/services/student/index.php>
  + Learning Center: <http://www.citytech.cuny.edu/current-student/>

***How to prevent cheating during in-class exams***

* Discuss Academic Integrity policies on the course syllabus on the first day of class.
* Prior to exams, remind students of your exam policies by projecting these policies on the screen. Explain the repercussions for violating exam policies.
* Instruct students to turn off and put away all digital/electronic devices before distributing the exam.
* Instruct students wearing smart watches to put their watches in their pockets.
* Forbid the answering of phone calls or texts for any reason.
* Do not permit students to wear headphones, ear buds or similar devices during an exam.
* Check for writing on and near desks before you start an exam.
* Do not let students keep textbooks, notebooks, water bottles, pencil cases, etc. (anything where answers can be written) on or near their desks during exams.
* Do not permit students to leave the classroom for any reason during an exam.
* Seat students as far apart from one another as possible and in a random manner, to break up groups of students and friends.
* When possible, design exams that require students to demonstrate critical thinking skills and the integration of knowledge and terminology in full sentence form.
* In multiple choice exams, do not permit students to write on the exam itself; they should only mark Scantrons or answer sheets (tiny markings are more difficult for students sitting nearby to see and copy).
* Administer multiple scrambled versions of a single exam to prevent copying.
* Avoid administering the same exam in different sections or in consecutive semesters.
* Frequently walk around the room to show students that you are watching them. Be on the alert for students that frequently look at *you* – very often this is an indication that the student is waiting for you to look away.
* Do not let students take the exam home. This prevents the circulation of the exam around the college.
* Mark or stamp exam bluebooks so you know students have turned in bluebooks that were distributed at the start of the period.
* Do not let students leave with an unused exam book and do not leave blank exam books in the classroom.
* Dispose of unused or old exam sheets properly (e.g., by shredding).

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1. Turnitin is the most widely used plagiarism detection software in the United States. However, the use of the software in classrooms is not without controversy, as it raises questions about accuracy and ethics. See Zimmerman (2018)and Abrahamson and Mann (2018). Turnitin should be employed in combination with targeted assignment design and good teaching practices, which are still the most effective means of plagiarism prevention. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)