

Assessing Plagiarism:

Unit assessment for the HWC English, Speech, Theater, & Journalism Department

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Introduction

This report encompasses activities undertaken from the summer 2021 through the spring 2022 semesters.

Summer 2021

The tool that was designed in spring, 2021 was piloted in 4 English classes. Results were not statistically significant since only 43 students participated; however, it was concerning that over 60% of students identified the passage that represented synonym substitution as “not plagiarized.” In consultation with some members of the executive committee as well as colleagues, it was decided that two writing samples should be included. If the issue was related to student perception of the first sample, a second sample with similarly overt plagiarism may help identify whether students are accurately assessing academic integrity (or lack thereof). The survey was redesigned with some new wording, an additional writing sample, and additional options for short answer/”other” responses.

Fall 2021

The full assessment was presented to the department.

Spring 2022

The results of the assessment were considered by the Assessment Committee data analyst, and shared with the department.

Department buy-in and outcome definition

It would be difficult to find a member of the English, Speech, Theater, and Journalism department who doesn't consider plagiarism an issue faced in evaluating student work. It has become a more urgent conversation as synchronous remote classes have taken root, with evaluations necessarily being completed without the benefit of a faculty proctor. Conversations about overt cheating and increased concerns about plagiarism have been a consequence of pandemic teaching. Therefore, assessing student knowledge of unintentional or less overt plagiarism was not a difficult sell.

More adjunct faculty participated in disseminating the survey than previous assessments, and I noted both the early, frequent, and enthusiastic responses from part time colleagues. At a time when attendance and participation in department meetings and committees is notably down among full time faculty, this was both welcome and necessary.

The expected outcome was to find out where students fell on the spectrum of understanding the nuances and practices of plagiarism, ranging from intentional cheating to unintentional errors in attribution. It was hypothesized that students who had completed the composition sequence and/or Speech 101 should have a significantly greater understanding of the rules surrounding plagiarism.



Assessment research and design

The tool was designed after several rounds of faculty feedback, and a pilot was administered in the spring and summer of 2021, resulting in substantial revision of one question, formatting revision, and the addition of a writing sample-based question.

The design required students to answer multiple choice and true/false questions about plagiarism rules, then to demonstrate whether they could apply those rules to three student writing samples. The intention was to determine whether, despite knowing it was wrong based on their answers to the quiz-like questions, students could recognize plagiarism (particularly in the form of synonym substitution) when they saw it.

Assessment tools and processes

The assessment tool (Appendix) consists of an opening statement and consent, ID collection, four multiple choice questions, three student writing samples, and a demographic question regarding where the student is in the composition sequence and/or in what departmental course they are currently enrolled.

The tool was sent to the whole department, with two group follow ups and many individual follow ups. In total, 151 students from across the department answered the survey. This number was disappointing, but it was considered a statistically significant sample.

Data analysis

Of the 151 students who participated in the survey, 69.5% recognized synonym substitution as a form of plagiarism; 91% recognized all the named varieties of intentional and unintentional plagiarism, including both synonym substitution and the use of a paraphrase tool. However, when asked to identify whether a student writing sample with obvious synonym substitution contained evidence of plagiarism, just 73.5% of respondents noted plagiarism in the first (more obvious) sample, and only 42.6% identified plagiarism in the second sample.

Both writing samples contained evidence of plagiarism; the first sample was more overt, with parallel lines of synonym substitution visible on the assessment. The second sample was also entirely plagiarized via synonym substitution, but the original text and writing sample were not lined up in parallel fashion, and the writing sample switched the order of two phrases.

There was not a statistically significant difference in terms of correct answers overall, due to the closeness in scores and the number of samples. However, among students at various levels of the English composition sequence, there was a strong correlation (0.857) between the highest English class and the student's score.. Correct answers increased parallel to successful completion of each level of English (96, 101, 102), with the highest scores achieved by students who had completed English 102. This is predictable and reassuring; however, the fact remains that over half of the respondents were not able to correctly identify plagiarism in practice. It is rare that student plagiarism would be as overt as the first

writing sample, so the scores on the second writing sample, where it was more embedded and more typical of plagiarized student work, is concerning.

There is a possibility that some students were not reading closely since correct answers were not linked to a course grade, or an even more remote possibility that the presence of two writing samples in a row that were both indicative of plagiarism may have resulted in a bias toward balancing the responses (one yes, one no).

Statistical breakdown by level of English composition completion:

	I have successfully completed both English 101 (or the equivalent) and English 102.	I have successfully completed English 101 (or the equivalent), and I am currently enrolled in English 102.	I have successfully completed English 101 (or the equivalent), but I have not enrolled in English 102.	I am currently enrolled in English 101, English 101/97, or English 101/126.	I have not completed any composition courses.	None of these apply to me
Mean Questions Correct	63.79%	60.95%	59.18%	61.64%	40.00%	48.57%
N	43	30	14	54	5	5

Supporting Evidence-Based Change

The English composition sequence, as well as journalism and speech courses, directly address plagiarism; all of the departmental courses emphasize the importance of original work and academic integrity in writing assignments. Even so, we see both anecdotally and from this assessment that unintentional plagiarism or plagiarism committed by patchwork, mosaic, or synonym writing is an increasing problem as students have more electronic resources and less in-person proctoring. As a department, this is an issue we must continue to address.

Repeatedly showing students the difference between truly original paraphrase and summary writing vs. plagiarized writing via writing samples and in-class demonstrations can provide an important visual and practical way for students to clearly see the process and end result of this form of plagiarism. It is probably not enough to tell students what not to do, or merely to demonstrate the correct form; we may also need to include hands-on demonstrations of the various types of synonym substitution and paraphrase tools so that students clearly see and understand what not to do, as well as what to do, to ensure academic integrity.



Program assessment update in discipline

The English, Speech, Theater, and Journalism department does not have a program.

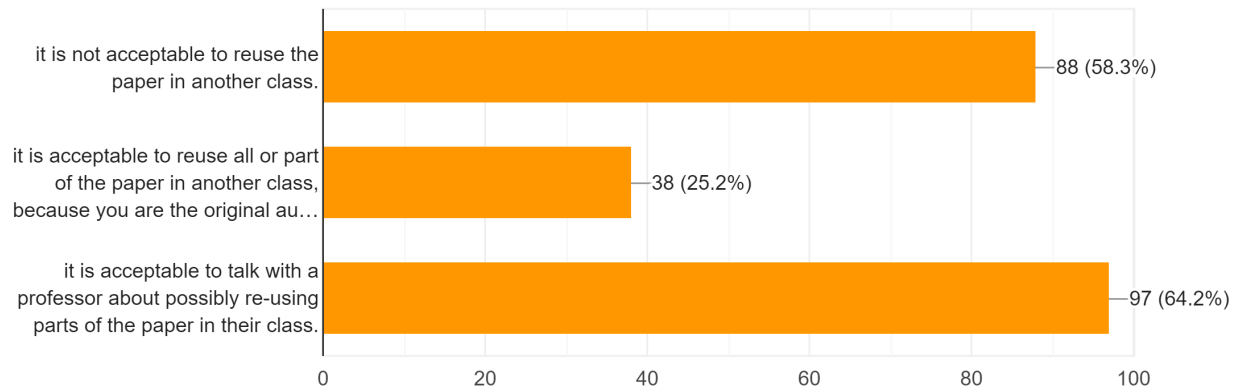
Conclusion

Plagiarism is often an issue related to lack of knowledge rather than intentional deceit. This assessment demonstrated that even when students are able to identify the boundaries of academic integrity in theory, they are less likely to be able to recognize it in practice. Future work in assessing plagiarism might center on prior knowledge or effective methods for teaching students how to avoid plagiarism in practice. It is hoped that active, ongoing efforts toward closing this loop will be considered at the department level and beyond.

Appendix: Plagiarism Tool Results

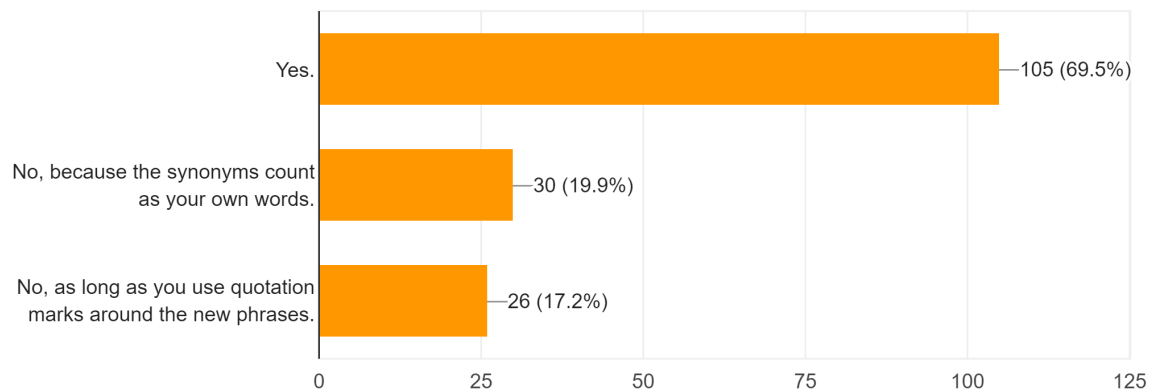
1. If you are the original author of a research paper or essay: (check all that apply)

151 responses



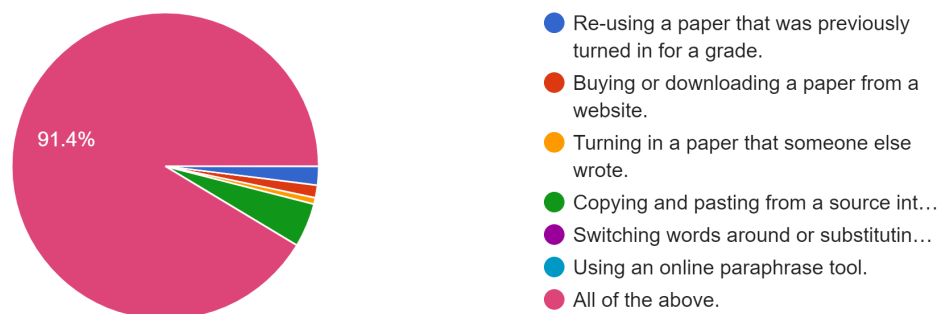
2. If you substitute synonyms (similar words) in place of the original text, is this a form of plagiarism?

151 responses



3. Which of these would be considered plagiarism at college level?

151 responses



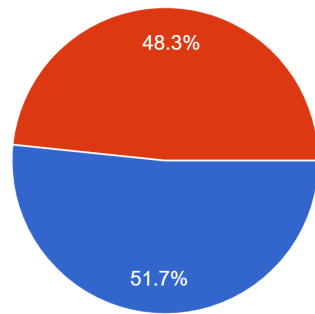
4. It is necessary to cite sources

151 responses



5. Following is a student writing sample. Please review the original text and determine if the student needs to add a citation.

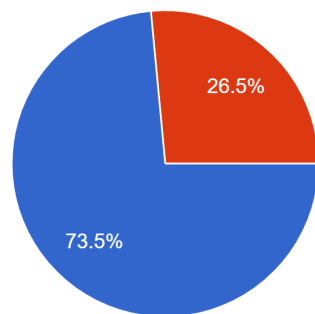
151 responses



- No, because there are no direct quotations in the student paper.
- Yes, because the student used information from the source.

Following is a student writing sample. Please review the original text and determine if the student has plagiarized.

151 responses



- The student paper contains evidence of plagiarism.
- The student paper does not contain evidence of plagiarism.

7. Please select the answer that applies to you in relation to English composition courses. (Please complete this question even if you are currently enr...such as speech, literature, journalism, or theater.)

151 responses

