Reducing plagiarism through assessment design

Opportunities for students to plagiarise can be reduced by designing assessments that cannot be fulfilled by the incorporation of plagiarised content or work produced by another student. Whilst the redesign of existing assessment may initially seem an onerous task, the benefits for both students and lecturers will be realised not only in reduced instances of plagiarism, but also in other areas of academic and student practice.

When redesigning assessments the following should be taken into account;

Assess the process - Asking students to submit work-in-progress reports, review notes, drafts or revisions are all strategies that will help students to manage their time more effectively and avoid any last minute panics that might lead to plagiarism.

Personalise the assessment - Adding context to an assignment by inviting students to draw on their own experience or select a personally relevant research topic within a theme, or specific framework will encourage original work.

Harness the research process – Requiring students to provide written reviews or photocopied extracts of the sources used "is helpful in showing students what plagiarism means and how to use sources properly." (Brown & McDowell, revd Duggan 2003)

Emphasise the value of analysis - Design assessments that move beyond asking students to find the 'right answer' to requiring them to analyse, evaluate and synthesise the work of others.

Use peer assessment - "There is no mileage in cheating or plagiarism when it is your peers who are monitoring your performance and you have little chance of pulling the wool over your peers' eyes!" (Brown & McDowell, revd Duggan 2003)

Create a supportive environment - Use formative assessment tasks to provide regular feedback and help students understand that learning from their mistakes is a valuable part of their academic experience.

Discourage the use of pre-written assignments - Changing elements of the assessment task each year or specifying particular types of resources that must be included in the analysis reduce the possibility of submission of a paper downloaded from an essay bank.

References:

Brown, S. & McDowell, L revd. Duggan, F. (2003) *Assessing students: cheating and plagiarism MARCET Red Guide 10* Northumbria University.

For examples of some of the approaches outlined above see papers in:

Peden Smith, A. & Duggan, F. (Eds) (2004)
Plagiarism: prevention, practice and policy conference 28 – 30 June; Proceedings. Northumbria University Press.
Available at: http://www.jiscpas.ac.uk/2004papers.php (Accessed: 12 November 2007)

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