

Limiting the Dishonest Use of Study Sites

Question:

Has anyone had any experience preventing dishonest use of study sites such as Koofers.com and StudyBlue.com? Do you monitor the use of such sites in any way? Have you tried to limit access to tests or assignments, or have you tried to have institution-specific material removed?

Thanks for any input,

- Deone Zell, Ph.D., Associate Vice President, Academic Technology, California State University, Northridge
-

Answers:

With so many devices and access points available to students, it's virtually impossible to limit students' use of such sites. Instead, you need to adopt policies that make such use less helpful and/or risky. Here are some things that StraighterLine does:

- Develop and frequently update your own assessments (rather than relying on insecure test banks).
- Have enough items in your assessments such that you aren't delivering the same assessment every time.
- Make sure these assessments are delivered in a proctored environment. This ensures that your test items aren't easily stolen and shared
- Multiple assessment points
- Clear and enforceable academic honesty policy

Another idea that I really like (but we haven't implemented yet) is "disinformation." Since most of these sites rely on user generated content, a school could upload their own, false content to these sites. Let students know that their content from these sites may or may not reflect actual test items.

- Burck Smith, CEO, StraighterLine
-



QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Limiting the Dishonest Use of Study Sites

We have not run into problems with the mentioned sites, but we have had problems with similar sites such as coursehero.com, antiessay.com, studymode.com and papercamp.com. We monitor the sites on a regular basis and issue conduct and/or academic integrity violations as a result. We have found the best way to have the content removed is to require the students to remove the content. Students who do not remove the content in a specified time run the risk of a second conduct violation.

- Tessa Holst, Assistant Dean of Students, College of Social and Behavioral Sciences, Kaplan
-

At Ashford University, a wholly online institution, we run into this problem with regularity. We don't monitor these sites for students who upload papers to them because it is their own work and we feel they have a right to publish it if they are so inclined. However, we also have language in our catalog that says that if students are caught copying these papers from these websites then it's a violation of our policy against academic dishonesty.

Another thing our legal department is doing is trying to scour the internet for sites that are specifically trying to sell Ashford paperwork. They hired a company that seeks out domains with our name attached to it and send cease and desist letters to those involved to help discourage the outright providing of paperwork.

We've added some specific catalog language that may or may not look like yours: <http://www.ashford.edu/student-rights-and-responsibilities.htm#catalog11130>. The specific excerpt is below.

Acts of plagiarism include, but are not limited to:

- Copying text from printed materials, which include books, magazines, encyclopedias, newspapers, online sources, etc., without proper citation;
- The modification of text with the intent of changing phrases, changing words, or interspacing the student's work into the plagiarized work;
- "Copy and paste" plagiarism, which involves copying and pasting materials from Internet sources and presenting them as one's original work;
- The use of another student's work, even if the student has the permission of the other student. The use of another's work constitutes an act of collusion, which constitutes an act of plagiarism;
- The use of materials purchased from Internet or elsewhere; or
- Recycling a previously submitted assignment for a current course, but representing the assignment as original work.
- Paraphrasing or summarizing another's work without giving appropriate credit.

- Dolan William, J.D., Student Community Standards Specialist, Ashford University
-



The root problem is poorly designed writing assignments. The solution is simple. Build in unique requirements: (1) narrow the range of possible thesis statements, (2) require quotes from selected readings, (3) require quotes from peers in class discussions, and (4) require inclusion of specific terms, analytical procedures, or subtopics.

In short, don't leave the assignment requirements so wide open that students are able to turn to vast resources of downloadable papers.

Narrowing the scope of the emphasis (thesis) in a paper automatically reduces the pool of downloadable papers. The more specific and unique the range, the smaller the pool.

Requiring quotes from selected readings and classmates forces students to insert elements into downloaded papers. Finding a way to seamlessly work these quotes into the paper requires effort and skill that most cheaters don't have. As the instructor, you'll quickly spot the poor fit (anomaly), the awkward change in style, the abrupt transitions.

Requiring the inclusion of key terminology, specific analytical strategies, and selected subject matter will make it difficult for students to find a matching downloadable paper.

Work peer review into your writing process. Schedule time for students to share preliminary drafts. To guide this review, include a checklist that includes the unique requirements. Drafts that are missing some or most of the requirements will be red flagged. In addition, include in the checklist a criterion for incorporating quotes. Awkward or inappropriate integration of quotes is another red flag. This activity will discourage plagiarism.

The added benefit of these plagiarism detection strategies is that they also strengthen student writing skills.

Finally, as instructors, we all have a built-in radar to match a student with her/his "voice" in informal writing. Require or encourage email exchanges, discussion posts, and peer reviews. We'll naturally absorb each student's stylistic quirks. This imprint will set off an alarm when there's an apparent mismatch.

The idea is to do as much as we can to prevent plagiarism by designing assignments and writing process activities that discourage cheating.

— James Shimabukuro, Associate Professor, Language Arts, Kapi'olani Community College, University of Hawaii

Additional Notes:

Funny you should mention this. Some colleagues and I published a best practices article on this topic



in the Journal of Accounting Education—Ghostwriters in the Cloud, you can access at <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0748575115000688>.

- Elizabeth A. Fisher, PhD, Interim Executive Director, Division of eLearning and Professional Studies, University of Alabama at Birmingham

.....

In light of this discussion, I thought you all would appreciate this article that came across my twitter feed yesterday - How the Sharing Economy is Creating a Marketplace for Cheating. The founders of StudyPool, one of these platforms, assert their good intentions of bringing online tutors and students who need help together. They recognize cheating happens and say they take down the user account if it is reported but they do not actively monitor for it. This quote from the CEO is telling:

“Very relevant to a school setting, people in the past have just copied and pasted information from Wikipedia,” says Werbe. “Ultimately, Wikipedia can’t really stop that. But they can take steps; the schools can take steps. There have been tools created to monitor if students are doing that, but at the end of the day, I think accountability lies with the students and the school itself. It’s not something we support, if they do use [Studypool] for mal intent, and we will take it down if it’s reported.”

- Cali Morrison, Director, Alternative Learning, American Public University System

About:

The WCET Q&As are created from member discussions that have high interest and participation rates on the WCETdiscuss email list. The email list is only accessible to people at [WCET member institutions](#). If you are at a member institution and would like to pose an educational technology or higher education related question to our members, send your question to WCETdiscuss@wcet.wiche.edu.

All information provided by users (including, but not limited to: e-mails, postings to email lists, wikis, and blog entries) may be used by WCET within the limitations of the Fair Information Practice policies without restriction or compensation.

WCET - WICHE Cooperative for Educational Technologies
wcet.wiche.edu | 303.541.0231

 Except when otherwise noted, this work is licensed under <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0>