Who wanted to be Sherlock Holmes?

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Abstract
Academics are expected and encouraged to detect and deal with the issues of plagiarism. Detecting student plagiarism is a mind-numbing, slow, boring and time-consuming task. Dealing with the detected cases is not only painful and frustrating, but takes an enormous amount of time and energy. When faced with class sizes in the hundreds, an academic can be hard pressed to detect and deal with plagiarism effectively.

This paper deals with an ethical approach to plagiarism issues facing academics. The paper begins by attempting to describe the reality of plagiarism in universities today. Conflicts and problems encountered by students, academics and institutions are then examined.

The paper then identifies the option taken by the Department of Information Systems at the University of Cape Town. The department attempts to educate students about plagiarism and the consequences thereof. All student submissions include a signed declaration in which students acknowledge that they understand what plagiarism is, and have not plagiarised. Students submit their work to plagiarism detection software so that all work is evaluated for plagiarism in the same way. The overall result of the plagiarism check is made available to the students. There is one standard procedure to deal with all plagiarism issues within the department.

Initial indications are that this approach has had a small effect. However, students continue to plagiarise, and the academic has to continue to be a sleuth, and a policeman. Part of the problem lies in the inconsistency of the definition of plagiarism, approaches to detection, and punishment. Students need to be given simple consistent information about what plagiarism is, how it will be detected, and what the consequences could be, this needs to be applied equally and fairly across the entire institution.

Keywords: Plagiarism, detection, consequences, fair, Turnitin.

Introduction
Some young people dream of becoming academics, of following rich and rewarding scholarly pursuits. Other young people probably want to grow up to become master detectives such as Sherlock Holmes. How many of the people who wanted to grow up to be academics such as Dr. Joseph Bell on whom Sir Arthur Conan Doyle based the character of Sherlock Holmes (Siracd, 2005), realised that they would be expected to spend an inordinate amount of time being a sleuth pursuing not one master criminal such as Professor Moriarty (Siracd, 2005), but a horde of plagiarising students.

It seems as if everything is upside down, Holmes pursued Professor Moriarty, while today's academics are expected to pursue students. Many academics have no desire to catch or prosecute students in any acts other than scholarly academic ones.

As any reader of detective fiction will be aware, detection work is slow, plodding and time consuming. Once detected, a case needs to be opened and ultimately closed, yet another time hungry exercise. In addition to being a sleuth, academics are expected to be successful authors such as Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. Conan Doyle was able to give up his initial occupation (medicine) and devote all his time to writing (Sherlockholmes website). Sadly, academics do not have the luxury of free time, and must continue to teach, write research, and play at detectives. This paper is an attempt to not only share one academic's experiences, but also to generate another paper and so close another research case.

Ethical issues

Academics have been wrestling with, and teaching ethical issues for ages. However, ethical issues have been given more exposure since the Enron and other corporate scandals. Sections on ethics have become part of Information Systems(IS) text books in the past few years. One ethical issue is student plagiarism; a second is what an academic does about plagiarism; a third is is it ethical to have several approaches to plagiarism in one institution or department?

Laudon and Laudon (2004) suggest the following 5 step process to analyse an ethical issue:

1. Identify and clearly describe the facts.
2. Define the conflict or dilemma and the higher-order values.
3. Identify the stakeholders.
4. Identify the options one can reasonably take
5. Identify the potential consequences of ones options.

What are the facts?

Several IS text books refer to plagiarism at universities. Post and Anderson (2006, p555) reported that 37% of 30,000 undergraduates in a survey admitted to using the Internet to commit cut-and-paste plagiarism. Chaffey & Wood (2004, p658) said that 81% of students sampled in a survey at the University of Canberra had plagiarized. In a second survey of 6 Australian universities in which 1751 essays in 17 subjects were examined, 8.85% contained unattributed text in no less than 25% of the work (Chaffey & Wood, 2004). 'Every scrap of evidence suggests that cheating is happening at every level' (Chaffey & Wood, 2004, p658). At UCT in 2005 an Engineering student had been rusticated for inaccurate research data, a Commerce student with previous convictions was expelled after being found guilty of plagiarising an essay, and two other Commerce students received suspended expulsion and community service for presenting similar tutorial answers (Amoore, 2005). UCT have between 120-150 plagiarism cases per annum, of these about 7 are rusticated or expelled, the remainder receive community service.

Many students feel that there is a low probability of being caught plagiarising especially in large classes, and it is easy to copy material from the Internet according to Hamilton , Tahaghoghi and Walker (2004). Zobel (2004) describes a series of cases in which an individual wrote assignments for students, and even sat exams for a fee. The facts are that many students appear to be plagiarising at universities.

The conflict and the higher-order values

Are students properly educated about plagiarism? Do text books, lecturers and universities clearly define plagiarism and the consequences if caught? "Universities play a major role in instilling understanding of and respect for intellectual property," (Hamilton, Tahaghoghi and Walker, 2004). Many universities deal with plagiarism offenders harshly (suspension and expulsion are not uncommon punishments).
What is the definition of Plagiarism? How many text books define or discuss plagiarism.

Chaffey and Wood (2004, pG10) define plagiarism as "Passing off another person's previously written material or concepts as your own." O'Brien and Marakas (2006) talk about plagiarism once on page 443 without defining or explaining it. Post and Anderson (2006, p555) devote a paragraph to plagiarism without defining it clearly. Most IS textbooks do not mention plagiarism at all, so where would IS students find a definition? Even textbooks such as "Ethics and technology" by Tavani (2004) fail to bring up plagiarism.

Some aspects of plagiarism such as copying (re using) source code are peculiar to IS. According to the Open Source Initiative (OSI, 2005), Open Source Software (OSS) is defined as software that is freely available and grants the rights to read, use, modify and distribute the source code for the software under the same conditions, without being discriminatory in any way. Some programming and project management textbooks encourage code reuse (McLeod & Smith, 2003). This raises the issue of good or acceptable plagiarism.

How many lecturers spend time defining plagiarism and explaining the consequences to students? The Information Systems Department of the University of Cape Town (UCT) considers plagiarism to be "the deliberate passing off of another person's work as though it was your own." Notices such as the following have been posted on some noticeboards around the UCT campus. "*Senate requires all students to make a declaration when submitting written work; they declare that the work submitted is their own and that where the work of others has been used (whether it has been quoted verbatim or paraphrased or referred to) it has been attributed and acknowledged using a standard referencing convention*" (Amoore 2005). Copy of declaration in Appendix 1.

Is this adequate? No. There is no simple, clear, easy to understand definition of plagiarism, nor are examples of plagiarism given to most students.

There is evidence that academics and students have different perceptions of plagiarism (Ashworth, Bannister & Thorne, 1997; Hamilton et al, 2004; Park, 2003), and that many students are not aware of what plagiarism is (Ashworth, Freewood & MacDonald, 2003; Hamilton et al, 2004; Park, 2003). A UCT student was punished for plagiarism for re-using work he had previously submitted in 2004. Even had the student read literature on plagiarism, he would possibly not have found 'copying ones own work' a plagiarism offence. Students are encouraged to work in teams, yet when two students at UCT worked as a team to complete an assignment in 2005, they were punished for plagiarism.

Are students ever tested to check their understanding of the concepts of plagiarism and its consequences? Should they be?

Most text books do not define plagiarism, many lecturers do not define it, students seldom have a clear understanding of plagiarism and the consequences thereof, and they often are unaware of exactly which procedures (declaration) to use. Although the UCT Senate insists on a signed declaration accompanying all handins (Amoore 2005) this is not monitored or enforced. Even within departments at UCT there is no consistency – it is generally left up to individual academics. Some academics accept any declaration, others insist on the official UCT declaration, while others do not bother with any declaration. Obviously this is confusing to students, and could be unfair. Where one student could be punished while another is not punished, for committing a similar plagiarism offence within the same course or department. Some students have been penalised for submitting the incorrect plagiarism declaration.

One major issue at UCT is that there are no plagiarism standards, and plagiarism is not uniformly understood or enforced. Different academics have different opinions on what plagiarism is, how it should be detected, and what to do if detected. Is this fair to students? Academics are required to report any cases of plagiarism they find. But whom do they report them to, the head of department, faculty office, university tribunal, or all three? No clear policy is in place within most departments, and faculties at UCT. Some academics enthusiastically examine all submissions, others examine a sample of submissions, and a third group do little about plagiarism believing students will be punished in their places of work (Hamilton et al, 2004). Is it ethical for a department to have several views on an issue such as plagiarism?

Plagiarism detection software such as iParadigms, Glatt Plagiarism Services, MyDropBox, CFL, Turnitin and several others are available. UCT has installed Turnitin, but most academics at UCT do not use it (89 out of $\pm$2000 academics at UCT used it in 2005, less than 5%). The software is available, easy to use, and effective. Wong (2004) stated that only 20% of academics use plagiarism detection software. The question is why? Perhaps they have no desire to be Sherlock Holmes.

In the business world, several organisations such as Association of IT Professionals (AITP), Computer Society of South Africa (CSSA), British Computer Society (BCS) offer professional codes of conduct (O'Brien & Marakas, 2006). Several companies require employees to sign a corporate 'code of conduct'. Some governments have passed legislation attempting to control ethical aspects of IT (Elliot, 2004). Then there are institutions such as the Open Source Initiative (OSI, 2005), and Governments such as the South African Government (NACI, 2004) which promote and encourage the sharing of source code. There is no single unified approach to dealing with issues such as plagiarism within business, government or society.

Conflicts arise as there is no clear widely accepted definition of plagiarism, plus plagiarism is not detected or dealt with in a consistent and reasonable manner. The consequence is that students are not treated equitability and justly.

The stakeholders

The students (who are often unclear on the exact definition of plagiarism and why they should not plagiarise (Ashworth, Freewood & MacDonald, 2003; Hamilton et al, 2004; Park, 2003)), academics and educational institutions (who do not have a uniform attitude or policy regarding plagiarism(Ashworth, Bannister & Thorne, 1997; Hamilton et al, 2004; Park, 2003)), parents and society (many of whom appear to be unaware of the plagiarism issue and its consequences), business and government environment (who do not have a uniform attitude or policy regarding plagiarism (O'Brien & Marakas, 2006; OSI, 2005; NACI, 2004)), and software vendors (who are out to profit from the plagiarism issue).

Thus the stakeholders do not have a common understanding of the issue, or the consequences.

The options

The options an academic can take vary from ostrich behaviour (stick ones head in the sand, do nothing and hope the problem will go away) to developing and enforcing a plagiarism policy. The policy can be an individual academics policy, a departmental policy, a faculty policy, or a university policy.

RMIT University in Australia has developed and enforced a university policy with a wide-range of regulations and procedures for plagiarism (Hamilton et al, 2004). Academics at RMIT may not deal with students in an ad hoc fashion, they are obliged to report all plagiarism incidents.

UCT does not have a university wide policy, nor do faculties have plagiarism policies, and most departments do not have departmental plagiarism policies. In 2004-5, the Department of Information Systems (IS) at UCT gave academics the freedom to decide on plagiarism policies for courses. All student work which went through Turnitin (academics discretion as to whether to use Turnitin or not), was as follows. If Turnitin rated the amount of plagiarism below 25%, no penalty, greater than 25% but less than 50% a mark of zero was awarded, and if Turnitin rated more than half the work as plagiarised, the student was sent to the tribunal. All IS students who were sent to the tribunal in 2004-5 based on Turnitin were found guilty by the tribunal, and punished. In 2005 Turnitin found 1% of third year IS students guilty of over 50% plagiarism, and 20% had a rating between 25-50%. The percentage changed between the first and second semesters, with the over 50% cases dropping from 1,5% to 0,7%, while the cases between 25-50% increased from 18% to 21%.

The Department of Information Systems at UCT decided that it could not wait for UCT to get its act together regarding plagiarism, as UCT still does not have a standardised policy on hiring staff in spite of being in operation for over 175 years. The IS department

therefore decided that as from 2006, all students would submit all work directly to Turnitin plus a hardcopy of a signed declaration. This means there is virtually no additional work for academics, and as Turnitin checks for plagiarism, in a consistent manner.

The department begins by attempting to educate the students about plagiarism and the consequences. Therefore all IS course notes include a definition of plagiarism, some examples, and possible consequences. In an attempt to handle all alleged offenders equally and fairly, it is important to make certain that students understand plagiarism and its consequences.

Students are required to submit each piece of work in electronic format to Turnitin, and to submit a signed paper declaration in which they acknowledge that they understand what plagiarism is, and have not plagiarised. The overall result of the Turnitin check is made available to the students.

Standards were set (as previously described) for offenders, and these were applied consistently throughout the department.

The options range from individual academics deciding on a plagiarism policy, through departments, faculties and finally university policies. UCT department of IS decided to adopt a departmental definition and plagiarism policy. Students were then educated as to the definition and consequences of plagiarism within the department. Detection software was used for all student submissions. Punishments were to consistent standards, and these were publicised.

Potential consequences of ones options

The option to adopt a uniform policy within a Department is not ideal, as ideally it should be institution wide. However, within one department there is a consistent definition of what plagiarism is for students and academics, a consistent and fair procedure for students and academics to follow, a consistent examination of work (Turnitin), and consistent and fair consequences.

One of the consequences is that students will encounter different definitions, detection methods, and consequences in other departments at UCT. This is not ethical, nor is this fair to students. The Department of Information Systems needs to lobby Senate to develop a university wide plagiarism policy.

Conclusion

Detecting student plagiarism is a mind-numbing, slow, boring and time-consuming task. Dealing with the detected cases is not only painful and frustrating, but takes an enormous amount of time and energy. When faced with class sizes in the hundreds, an academic can be hard pressed to detect and deal with plagiarism effectively. Students may continue to plagiarise, and the academic has to continue to be a sleuth, and a policeman.

Part of the problem lies in the inconsistency of the definition of plagiarism, variation of understanding of students and academics, different approaches to detection, and inconsistent punishments. Students need to be given simple information about what plagiarism is, how it will be detected, and what the consequences could be. Students need to observe that all their work is checked consistently using one tool throughout the university, students need to see that infringements are punished equally and fairly across the entire institution.

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Appendix 1 – UCT Plagiarism Declaration

Declaration

1. I know that plagiarism is wrong. Plagiarism is to use another's work and pretend that it is one's own.

2. I have used the ..... convention for citation and referencing. Each contribution to, and quotation in, this essay …… ..... from the work(s) of other people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced.

3. This essay ..... is my own work.

4. I have not allowed, and will not allow, anyone to copy my work with the intention of passing it off as his or her own work.

Signature:…….. Date …/…/…..

Full Name of Student(s)