

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Student Understanding of Scholarly Research

The following information was written by Matt Feagan (M.A. Canadian Studies) for the Instructional Development Centre. Matt's contributions, which are provided below, are also captured in Blackburn, Feagan & Woods (2008: 3-4).

Plagiarism occurs when it is not clear where the student's ideas end and another person's ideas begin (University of Waterloo, 2005:1). Conveying an understanding of scholarly arguments, however, is a central component of most courses. In writing essays or giving presentations, for example, students are often expected to develop an argument in relation to what other scholars have written. The following strategies may help students understand how to show familiarity with other scholars' ideas without plagiarizing.

Have students create an annotated bibliography. An annotated bibliography is a list of readings (with full citation) accompanied by a summary of each reading's main points and relevance to the student's research objectives. Creating an annotated bibliography can help students organize how they are going to handle ideas from the literature and build an argument that distinguishes clearly between each author's position and the student's own ideas, thereby avoiding plagiarism.

Assign reading responses. Having students hand-in short written responses to weekly course readings may help them engage with the readings and keep a record of the material for review. The responses to articles should include a full citation in the appropriate documentation style; the annotation should identify the author's main argument, supporting evidence, and assumptions that need to be examined more carefully. This exercise encourages students to practice their citation skills and to deal with the scholar's ideas in a direct, explicit, and clear manner. Key phrases should be recorded as quotations, with page references. If ideas from this article are subsequently cited in an essay, the student is more likely to recall their origin and cite them properly.

Emphasize the process rather than the final product. Take interest in students' work by asking them about their readings, reactions, and ideas on how they might structure the essay or presentation. Having students submit an annotated bibliography, outline and/or rough draft before the actual essay or presentation is due may help show that you value the process and not only the end product of their work. Valuing the process of research helps avoid the urge to plagiarize and provides an opportunity to build writing skills along the way (Koretsky 2003). Accepting resubmissions once the student has discussed how to improve his or her work will often lead to substantial improvements.

Remind students of the benefits of proper documentation of their sources. Proper documentation strengthens one's own argument by showing an understanding of the work of other scholars (Harris 2004: 3). Furthermore, by engaging directly with academic assessments and debates, students have the opportunity to develop the academic skills that make their education worthwhile and useful.

By building students' ability to convey an understanding of other scholars ideas through proper referencing and research techniques, instructors and teaching assistants can take a pro-active approach to preventing plagiarism.