

Teaching Citation Skills and Dealing with Plagiarism

I. Teaching Citation Skills and Preventing Plagiarism

Knowing how to use and cite the work of others is necessary to locating one's work in a larger conversation and is thus a key component of a liberal arts education. English 102 has been charged with teaching basic citation skills. Many UofL students, however, are transfer students. And new media constantly necessitate learning new conventions (e.g., how does one cite a blog or a tweet?). In addition, citation skills require continued practice and refinement and should develop in tandem with the student's increasing knowledge of a field. What constitutes "common knowledge," for example, is something one increasingly learns to judge as one becomes steeped in the discipline. Faculty, therefore, are urged to provide guidance and examples to students at all levels of the curriculum.

Syllabi might usefully include a link to the UofL Writing Center's tutorial on citation (<http://coldfusion.louisville.edu/webs/a-s/writingcenter/uwc.cfm?page=plagiarism>) and an invitation to answer questions. Faculty might consider devoting a small amount of class time to teaching students to integrate and cite the work of others, according to the conventions of the discipline.

Faculty may wish to consider using Safe Assign, a program available through Blackboard that searches websites and other student papers submitted for the assignment and indicates to the instructor the percentage of commonality.

II. Dealing with Citation Errors and Plagiarism

Syllabi should indicate to students the importance of good citation skills and should indicate the penalty or range of penalties for errors or plagiarism. Faculty have the authority to determine what the penalty will be, but they are reminded to make it commensurate with the infraction. For example, citation errors (e.g., a bad judgment call on "common knowledge" or an elision that corrupts a quotation) might be recognized as a learning opportunity, with the student allowed to rewrite the assignment; the importation of uncited material offered as the student's own might merit a failure for the assignment with no opportunity for rewriting; a second such offense might merit failure for the course. Faculty are urged to use their best professional judgment in distinguishing situations that call for instruction and rewriting from those that call for failing grades. Simply overlooking citation problems of *any* degree of seriousness, however, is a failure to fulfill our responsibility as faculty members.

If a faculty member determines that a student has committed plagiarism (as opposed to having made a citation error), he or she should take the following steps, which elaborate the process described in the Undergraduate Catalogue under "Student Conduct, Discipline, and Grievance Procedures for the College of Arts and Sciences," Section V.

- Address a letter to the dean, indicating the course, the student's name, the infraction, and what penalty you are imposing. This need not be a lengthy document, but it should provide specific information about the offense. For example, it should indicate the source from which uncited material was taken. Photocopies from the source and the student's paper are not required but can be very good evidence if the case is referred to the Academic Discipline Committee.
- copy the letter to the student and include the information that the student has the right to appeal the penalty to the Committee on Academic Discipline (e.g., "by copy of this letter I am reminding the student that he/she has the right to appeal this penalty to the Academic Discipline Committee of the College if he/she believes that it has been unfairly imposed").
- Send the letter NOT to the dean but to Andrew Williams in A&S Advising, Gardiner Hall. Andy will put the letter in the file, and if it is the first such infraction by the student, that will end the matter, unless the student chooses to appeal the matter to the Academic Discipline Committee.
- If, when Andy files the letter, he discovers that this is not the first infraction by the student, he will take the matter to the Academic Discipline Committee, which may impose a harsher penalty (e.g., suspension for a semester or a year).
- If the student appeals to the Academic Discipline Committee, the Committee may review the evidence and uphold the instructor without a hearing; if the Committee needs additional information, there will be a hearing, to which both the student and the instructor will be invited. The committee will make a recommendation to the dean, based on the evidence in the file and that presented at the hearing. Neither the committee nor the dean will change any grade given by an instructor, but they may recommend that the instructor reconsider a grade. If an instructor is asked to reconsider a grade, the decision to change the grade or not to change it still remains with the instructor.

III. Reporting

So that the faculty may be aware of the College-wide record, the Academic Discipline Committee is asked to report to the faculty, at the end of each academic year, the number of letters filed during that academic year to report incidents of plagiarism and the number of those that were found to be second offenses.