

Combating Plagiarism

Guidance notes for Academic Staff members

Dear Staff member,

This presentation discusses plagiarism. It is intended to help course coordinators and tutors address plagiarism by setting some guidelines which emphasize both the ethical and educational role in combating plagiarism.

Background:

Plagiarism is one of the topics that is frequently discussed among Academic staff members formally and informally, and in University committees including the Central Examination Committee.

In the External Examiners reports and the Centre for Inclusion and Collaborative Partnerships (CICP) feedback, plagiarism is picked up as an issue that requires to be addressed promptly. In response to these reports, the Arab Open University is adopting a variety of measures and strategies to combat plagiarism. One of these strategies is to raise the awareness among its students about plagiarism and its consequences.

Academic staff members can play a leading role in deterring plagiarism by educating and guiding their students on how to avoid plagiarism.

Plagiarism:

The Oxford English Dictionary defines plagiarism as "the wrongful appropriation or purloining, and publication as one's own, of the ideas, or the expression of the ideas (literary musical, artistic, etc.) of another".

According to the authoritative Modern Language Association plagiarism is "a form of cheating that has been defined as the false assumption of authorship: the wrongful act of taking the product of another person's mind and presenting it as one's own" ¹

Plagiarism is not a new phenomenon; it is an ongoing issue that has been discussed and tackled by educationist, writers, journalists and researchers. ²

Contrary to the belief of some of our academic staff, plagiarism is not part of our culture. In fact, a sum amount of plagiarism incidents has been reported by reputable international universities ³.

John Barrie, president of TurnItIn.com reported” On a given day, we process between 10,000 -15,000 student papers and about 30 percent are less than original”

It is also a subject of controversy. Some researchers think that internet fosters plagiarism and that incidence of plagiarism has increased exponentially in the internet era while others report that plagiarism existed well before the internet.

(“Experts generally agree that the internet and other modern technologies have made plagiarism easier “They disagree, however, about whether the new technologies encourage more students to plagiarize. ⁴

Points of view on reasons for plagiarism vary greatly. Some University professors think that students cheat deliberately on the hope that they will never be caught. Others think that students plagiarize unintentionally because they do not understand what plagiarism is or because they have never been taught about intellectual property rights and how to properly cite sources. ⁵

AOU policy on plagiarism

The AOU by-laws have a clear policy on plagiarism. According to Article11:

Cheating in the Final Examinations and Plagiarism in TMAs”

The following acts represent cases of cheating and plagiarism

- Verbatim copying of printed material and submitting them as part of TMAs without proper academic acknowledgement and documentation.
- Verbatim copying of material from the Internet, including tables and graphics.
- Copying other students’ notes or reports.
- Using paid or unpaid material prepared for the student by individuals or firms.
- Utilization of, or proceeding to utilize, contraband materials or devices in examinations.”

The Arab Open University is taking variety of actions to combat plagiarism and to teach its students that plagiarism is unethical and unacceptable. It aims to develop a culture where students know what plagiarism is and how to avoid it. This includes two approaches. One is to implement penalties of plagiarism as specified in Article (11) of the University by-laws. Penalties of plagiarism include a range of actions which the University can take against the offenders that ranges from failure in the TMA /Final exam to dismissal from the University.

Another approach is to train the academic staff members on how to deal with plagiarism and to raise the awareness of the students on plagiarism as a major offense and how to avoid it.

Your role as a staff member in combating plagiarism

Academic staff members, directly and indirectly, influence student's learning experience. Students look up to their tutors as their role model. Part of the tutor's responsibility is to set and maintain a good example to students and other colleagues by respecting and implementing the University rules and regulations including the regulations dealing with cheating and plagiarism. (It is believed that incidence of plagiarism increases when students feel that they can get away with it.)

Your role as an educationist does not end in discovering plagiarized assignments and penalizing the offender's. It extends to taking the necessary steps to uncover the underlying causes that lead to plagiarism. Talking to your students about plagiarism and including a verbal warning on its consequences during tutorials can help a great deal in combating plagiarism.

The following guidelines give examples of some actions, which can help both course coordinators and tutors in dealing with plagiarism.

1. In your first tutorial, as part of the introduction to the course, talk to students about the university definition for plagiarism and its consequences.
2. When discussing the TMA with students, take the opportunity to discuss plagiarism in TMAs and its penalties and in all subsequent tutorials before students submit their TMAs.
3. Let the students know that you are fairly intolerant to incidents of plagiarism and all plagiarized TMAs will be penalized.
4. Let the students also know that you are aware of purchased TMAs, and online paper mills.
5. Speak to students about the plagiarism detection software that the University uses. Let them also be aware that you and other tutors use other means and techniques to uncover plagiarism and that all cases of plagiarism are discussed among tutors and course coordinators.
6. Talk to students about academic integrity and copyrights.
7. Explain to students how to document web pages, materials from online databases and the differences between web pages and online databases.
8. Give students some examples on how to cite and document sources of information.
9. Encourage your students to attend to office hours to discuss any problems they face in writing their TMA.
10. Guide and follow up the TMA process and encourage students to submit drafts of their TMA including references so that you monitor their progress and provide them with the right feedback and to ensure that the presented material is not plagiarized.
11. Ask students to turn in hard copies of their working notes and annotated bibliography.

12. Inform your students that you can select some random samples of TMA s and ask the authors to discuss them in the following tutorials. (This is a good strategy that tutors can adopt).
13. Let the students know that you read all assignments carefully and that you can easily determine plagiarized TMA s from the style of writing, vocabulary and consistency of the language used.
14. Direct students to sources that help them improve their writing and time management skills.
15. Correct students' spelling or grammatical mistakes without deducting extra marks for that unless it is specified in the TMA Marking guides e.g. Courses of English language programme.
16. Encourage the students to use their own words and expressions and assure them that you know about the difficulties in writing in a second language.

TMA structure and design

The design and structure of TMA can contribute indirectly to plagiarism. Studies on plagiarism from some universities show that structure of the assignment can trigger or encourage plagiarism. ⁶

Assignments should be carefully designed. General course coordinators need to make sure that TMAs are carefully designed and structured.

Here are some tips that you may find useful in designing TMAs:

- Structure the assignment so that it fulfills the intended learning outcomes and engage students in analyzing course and sessions activities.
- As part of the assignment, ask the students to reflect personally on the topic they are writing.
- Avoid repetitions of TMA questions from one semester to another as it is one of the factors that encourage copying and plagiarism.
- Avoid complicated and lengthy assignments. Assignments should be in the form of reports, case studies and closely tied to local issues.
- In the TMA you can specify certain sources or references that the students can use make sure to include variety of sources (course material, books, and online data bases).
- The Assignment should include guidelines for students on how to approach each section of the TMA.
- Allow a sufficient period of time for students to work on their TMAs .Set up the due date for the TMA at a reasonable time of the semester and not towards the end of the semester so that the students do not get into a time crunch. (Remember that deadline pressures encourage students to plagiarize).
- It is recommended that the midterms and final exams include some of the TMA questions or at least a question that ask the students to summarize the main points of the TMA.

The new design of the TMA cover sheets include a section where plagiarism is defined, University policy on plagiarism is spelt out .It also includes a statement section to verify that the submitted TMA is not plagiarized to be signed by the student and handed over to the course tutor.

Tutors are advised to discuss plagiarized TMAs with the course coordinator and to properly document all incidences of plagiarism of each section.

Course Coordinators should monitor the process of marking TMAs, encourage tutors to report plagiarism as some of the new tutors may not be aware of the University policy regarding plagiarism or how to handle such cases.

Course coordinators should monitor tutors' feedback on TMAs more rigorously, and insure that no instance of plagiarism which can be detected by a tutor is overlooked, They should give appropriate feedback and provide the necessary support to all tutors.

Acknowledgement

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