Alerting Students to Their Ethical Responsibility – Plagiarism Prevention & Detection

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PLAGIARISM

- A Pandora box – can no longer be contained because of the development of technology
- Learning Objective of my talk –
  - show an awareness of the complications in the detection of plagiarism
  - Recognise the need for a rethinking of a comprehensive system of detection, prevention and penalty
- Based on my personal experience
PLAGIARISM (THE PAST)

- I believe it existed – nobody knows the extensiveness
- Could still be detected occasionally but was very rare and penalty quite severe
- “Vulnerable” offenders
  - Students whose English were poor
  - Students who were unskillful to tell lies
  - Students who were extremely unlucky
- Problem of burden of proof
NEW TECHNOLOGY

- The internet makes plagiarism much easier
- One reason leads to the proliferation of plagiarism – teachers become helpless
- Powerful search engines and plagiarism detection programmes restore some hope
- Call for a new regulatory framework
THE DETECTION

- Turnitin / SafeAssign
- Index of Similarity
- Types of “similar” content
  - Copying from e-journals / ebooks
  - Copying from student papers
  - Copying from website information
  - Professional jargons
  - Cited content / references
STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF DETECTION PROGRAMMES

- Powerful search engines – extensive search
- Only reach information in electronic format – materials on hard copies only slipped through
- Sensitivity – very smart in detecting the content
- Not smart enough to detect the context
- Able to quantify similarity (with an index)
- Reinforce the simple minded use of a magic number
MY EXPERIENCE (ALSO SA POLICY)

- Experimentation with Turnitin – extensive but many are minor
- I asked every assignments of my courses to be submitted for plagiarism checking
- SA asks all student assignments to be submitted to SafeAssign – for stamping the submission date and for plagiarism checking
- Allow students to submit a draft to avoid unintentional plagiarism
Prevention is important
Students should be alerted of the seriousness and consequences of plagiarism
They should also be equipped with the skills in proper academic writing
SA distributes (in both hard copies and soft copies) a guideline for proper academic writing to every students at the beginning of every academic year
A few courses also run specific workshops (not the norm and not every year)
SOME PERSONAL REMARK ON PLAGIARISM DETECTION AND PREVENTION

- Students should take their own responsibility (draft submission checking)
- Plagiarism can be in the form of varying degree – intentional/unintentional, minor/serious
- Plagiarism is a misconduct but not necessarily be dealt with by disciplinary action
- We need a comprehensive understanding of plagiarism and new mind set in prevention / detection and penalty
- Going to be controversial
THANKS YOU