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New Chalk Talk

The Center for Learning and Teaching Newsletter
Teaching News

The Center for Learning and Teaching
Academic Center, Room 212A
Tel. 20.2.797.6659, clt@aucegypt.edu

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More Thoughts on Plagiarism from a Colleague

The subject matter of our last issue, "The New Plagiarism", generated a lot of feedback from faculty, and is obviously a high priority on many of our colleagues' minds. Following are excerpts from a memo circulated by Ms. Cynthia Sheikholeslami, an ELI teacher, to her colleagues in the ELI, which she passed on to me. The issues that she raises address another important aspect of the problem, namely our own responsibilities as faculty. Here is what she has to say:

Dear All:

In light of the "New Chalk Talk" issue on Plagiarism distributed to faculty recently, AUC's initiatives to combat plagiarism, and my experiences this semester with a plagiarized essay in the ELI's Effective Writing course for graduate students, as well as a plagiarized research paper which had been submitted for another course (as is permitted in the ELI's Library Research course for graduate students) and accepted as a good paper by the professor, I would like to offer the following thoughts for consideration:

1. We need to give the strongest message possible starting from day one, from the lowest to highest levels in the ELI, that plagiarism is not acceptable.
2. All the materials we distribute in class that are not completely and originally written by us should be CLEARLY and COMPLETELY referenced to the source from which they came, whether photocopied from books or obtained from other published sources (including electronic/online). Right now, many handouts in our files do not have the complete (or any) reference to the source from which they were taken. This gives a message to students that attributing materials to sources is not important...the wrong message! It also shows that we ourselves are massively guilty of plagiarism.
3. Test materials should include the citation for the sources of reading passages. I suppose even a page with sources for mini-talks in the listening tests (and class exercises) should be included.
4. If reading passages are quoted and edited, the conventions for showing editing (with ellipsis, brackets, etc.) of quoted material should be followed. Students will then get accustomed to seeing them in use and it will heighten their awareness of what quoted vs. paraphrased text is.

5. Exercises made by us, which incorporate quoted/paraphrased material (text, tables, diagrams, etc.), should have the sources cited in full.
6. It should be imperative that pages photocopied from books (even when cut and pasted into new formats) include the complete citation to the source on them. This should also apply to materials incorporated in WebCT and other websites, including those obtained from electronic sources.
Not doing so is not only clear copyright violation but also plagiarism.
7. When students are asked to summarize and paraphrase and respond to passages from readings and lectures in class or on tests or for papers, it should be mandatory that they include the reference to the source with their summary or paraphrase or response. We should be aware of what the characteristics of a paraphrase have to be so it does not reflect the language of the original text – just switching the grammatical forms around and using a few synonyms is not considered different enough to avoid plagiarism as the language is still essentially that of the source.
8. Students need to be made aware that their language is not expected to sound like sources written by professionals and native speakers of English, and that their own critical thinking is highly valued. This is especially important for EFL students coming from an educational system where rote memorization and regurgitation are the norm and independent thought is discouraged.
9. I have recently encountered the opinion, which the students claimed was from an AUC instructor, that in a research paper, students should NOT include their own critical thinking on the topic, but ONLY what they get from their research in the library!
10. Documented cases of intentional plagiarism should be grounds for immediate failure and, if repeated, dismissal from AUC, as per the AUC Academic Honesty policy.

Please send comments or suggestions to aellozy@aucegypt.edu