

Reducing the Risk of Plagiarism in the Classroom

By Don Sutherland

During the 2016 Republican Convention, the issue of plagiarism leapt into the headlines as a [speech](#) delivered by Republican nominee Donald Trump's wife, Melania, contained language from an address given by Michelle Obama in 2008. For those of us who teach courses that involve a significant degree of writing, plagiarism is an ever-present risk.

In my BBA 407 Strategic Management course, a research paper accounts for 25% of the course grade. It is a high stakes paper, as the paper is a required element for the course. Failure to complete the paper results in an automatic "F" for the course. These high stakes can increase the temptation for students to take "short cuts," especially those who compress their work into the final days and weeks of the course. One such "short cut" that could appear increasingly attractive as the clock winds down is plagiarism.

To reduce the risk of plagiarism, I take a multi-pronged approach.

First, my course syllabus addresses plagiarism in several places. The section discussing the components of the course grade explains, "Given its importance, students who fail to submit the research paper or those who engage in plagiarism receive an automatic "F" for the course." The section describing the required elements of the research paper provides an explicit reminder that papers are examined for plagiarism. There is a note associated with the grading rubric that informs students, "Plagiarism will result in an automatic 'F' for the course, not just a '0' on the paper." The syllabus contains a description of the City University of New York's (CUNY's) policy on academic integrity and plagiarism.

Second, the Power Point slides from the opening lecture of each semester provides explicit notice that "Plagiarism, cheating, and other academic violations will result in an automatic "F" for the course."

Third, the course's Blackboard site contains the syllabus and a section devoted to Lehman College's Plagiarism policy.

Fourth, the course syllabus provides links to the Leonard Lief Library's [Plagiarism Guide](#) and another link to MIT Comparative Media Studies' "[Avoiding Plagiarism](#)" webpage.

Fifth, the course syllabus advises students to run their paper against Search Engine Reports' [Plagiarism Checker](#). This tool works best on Windows Explorer or Google Chrome. It can be highly sensitive on account of its picking up common phrases and word pairs, which makes it useful for addressing potential issues.

For example, I ran the preceding paragraph against the search engine, and the outcome was, "Excellent, your content is 100% unique." When I ran the first eight paragraphs of this piece, the outcome was, "Great, your content is 81% unique."

I then ran the following quote from Henry Kissinger's *On China*:

The modern Western conception of international relations emerged in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, when the medieval structure of Europe dissolved into a group of states of approximately equal strength, and the Catholic Church split into various denominations. Balance-of-power diplomacy was less a choice than an inevitability. No state was strong enough to impose its will; no religion retained sufficient authority to sustain universality. The concept of sovereignty and the legal equality of states became the basis of international law and diplomacy.

The result: "Warning, your content is only 0% unique."

The comprehensive approach taken toward plagiarism in my course makes it extremely unlikely that any student could claim to be unfamiliar with the issue. Moreover, the link to the free plagiarism checker allows students to avoid being penalized by inadvertent failures to quote or cite text appropriately.