Plagiarism Committee II Report
A/P Council Meeting
May 21, 2008
Submitted by Greg Scott

HISTORY

I represent the Administrative/Professional Constituency on the SIU Plagiarism Committee II. This is the second committee formed in as many years to review the University definition of plagiarism and procedures in handling such infractions.

The initial committee was formed by SIU President Glenn Poshard in 2006, following plagiarism accusations against former SIU Carbondale Chancellor Walter Wendler. This committee was asked to review the University's plagiarism policy and decide if the term is clearly defined. Subcommittees proceeded to review the policy of each individual campus in addition to the Board of Trustees. Committee members found that existing policies at SIUC and SIUE focused on blatant plagiarism by students; however, different degrees or types of plagiarism were not addressed. Plus, the policies did not address plagiarism by faculty or staff. Also, the Board of Trustees had not developed a plagiarism policy of its own.

Upon conclusion of its extensive research, the plagiarism committee created a 17-page comprised of a Working Guide for Plagiarism Policy. This Guide includes a definition of plagiarism to be consistently for both campuses, in addition to recommendations for changes to existing policy. The definition included in the Working Guide is "presenting existing work as one's own." My understanding is that inconsistencies existed in the definition and policy between the two campuses. This committee was seeking to receive BOT approval of the Working Guide as the official policy for the University; but the Carbondale and Edwardsville campuses would be afforded the latitude to enforce policy for specific situation. The committee also recommended a proactive education university-wide effort to prevent such cases in the future.

PLAGIARISM II COMMITTEE

A second plagiarism committee was formed in November 2007. During our initial meeting, John Haller, Vice President for Academic Affairs, voiced concern that terminology in the Working Guide for Plagiarism Policy could be misunderstood and clarification may be necessary.   An example that has been used is the case of institutional plagiarism, which may be perceived as a negative at first glance. However, individuals in business settings are often encouraged to write content from previous reports and memos. Therefore, this is actually an acceptable form of plagiarism.

The charge of Plagiarism Committee II was to create a complete, clear and fair policy that would apply to everyone in the SIU community. With this in mind, our next step was to decide if the aforementioned Working Guide developed by the initial committee was sufficient to serve our needs, or, was a revised version of this document necessary. Committee member Jerry Nelms, an English professor who is writing a book about plagiarism and member of the initial committee, was asked to develop a revised Working Guide. The Committee reviewed both documents.

CONSENSUS OF PLAGIARISM COMMITTEE II

Our committee decided to use the original Working Guide as is. Committee members were concerned that the revised version redefined plagiarism and thus, did not achieve our goal of enhancing clarity. Some were also concerned that this would weaken our stance in lieu of recent issues on campus.

The issue of extenuating circumstances (i.e., a first-year student would not be as aware of this concept as a faculty member) was discussed. It was decided that a student's level of knowledge about plagiarism be considered as a factor and in some circumstances and these situations should be viewed as "teachable moments" more than anything else.

Secondly, as the initial committee had included in its report, we agree that instituting further education in the form of workshops and classes could prevent issues from occurring in the future.

After finalizing content for the Working Guide, the committee broke up into three subcommittees, and is devising policies and developing an adjudication process for the BOT, SIUC and SIUE, respectively. The BOT's goal was to have this work done by early spring so it could be shared with the constituency groups before it is presented to the BOT.

It is important to note that the intent of this committee is for policies approved to only apply to allegations occurring after approval. Previous allegations involving former students would be handled based on the rules and standards at the time of the infraction. Our policy will not cover incidents that occur at other institutions.

The committee has broken up into three subcommittees – one for the system – one for each campus – to write the plagiarism policy and adjudication process for respective areas consistent with this Working Guide. Each subcommittee's work will be a section of the Plagiarism Committee final report to be completed this summer.

WHERE ARE WE NOW

The Subcommittees are discussing whether or not changes should be made relative to their respective policies and procedures. Changes were recommended last summer to the Research Misconduct: Policies and Procedures document for faculty; and the Student Conduct Code.

Some recommendations the subcommittee has made include the following:

a)
To encourage the University expanding its contract with Turnitin.com to allow students to submit their work individually any time to Turnitin for review. Right now, only faculty and teaching assistants can do so.

b)
To organize workshops each semester, run by scholars knowledgeable about academic integrity, for faculty on the nature of plagiarism.

c)
To develop accessible website and hold workshops for students to assist them in avoiding plagiarism

d)
Encourage every academic unit to develop ways of incorporating ethics education into the curriculum

This basically amounts to taking a proactive stance in dealing preventing plagiarism issues in the future.