

National anti plagiarism strategies: A shared responsibility in transnational university partnerships?

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Over the past ten years Australian Universities have engaged in transnational partnerships with overseas institutions using a variety of different delivery methods. With these partnership arrangements, traditional problems with student plagiarism can occur; however, the international nature of arrangements can also give rise to additional problems. In 2002 the Centre for the Study of Higher Education (CSHE) at the University of Melbourne was commissioned by the AUTC to produce a booklet entitled 'Assessing Learning in Australian Universities' which included a section entitled 'Minimising Plagiarism'. In this paper we address the question of how the responsibility for implementing anti plagiarism strategies should be shared in transnational partnerships, and identify and discuss the associated difficulties. We review the experiences of dealing with student plagiarism in a course offered at Charles Sturt University, and consider the four-part strategy recommended in the CSHE booklet in the context of this subject delivery. We find that while the responsibility for some of the strategies lies solely with either the university or the transnational partner, other are clearly shared. Key difficulties discussed include resourcing strategy implementation at partner institutions and instilling and fostering shared commitment.

Introduction

Over the past ten years, Australian universities, including Charles Sturt University (CSU) have engaged in transnational partnerships using a variety of different delivery methods. The Australian Government (2005) defines transnational education as 'the delivery and/or assessment of programs/courses by an accredited Australian provider in a country other than Australia, where delivery includes a face-to-face component'. The face-to-face component 'includes a physical presence of instructors *offshore*, either directly by the Australian provider, or indirectly through a formal agreement with a local institution/organisation' (Australian Government, 2005). This paper has adopted the government's definition of transnational education and training with the exception of partnerships in Sydney and Holmesglen that are seen as 'transnational' because the enrolled students all come from overseas and are taught by commercial institutions which are not a part of CSU. This definition is distinctly different to the concept of international education, which is taken here to refer to the commercial provision of *on-shore* international higher education by the Australian university staff (Marginson, 2001).

CSU has transnational partnerships in many disciplines but this paper will focus on the Information Technology (IT) discipline, with subjects taught in both Bachelor and Master of IT courses as well as a Master of Business Administration. These courses are delivered at partner institutions in Sydney, Victoria, London, Malaysia, and China. We will focus on CSU's involvement over the past five years, since the authors' experience with transnational education commenced in 2000.

Like many other Australian universities, CSU had been concerned about plagiarism issues over the years and these issues were highlighted with the growth in the number of transnational students (Figure 1). In 2004 the CSU Academic Senate established a Plagiarism Management Working Party which became a Standing Committee on Plagiarism under the CSU Learning and Teaching Committee in 2005. One of the authors of this paper has been a member of this

committee since its inception and has had experience of making decisions related to transnational plagiarism issues since 2000.

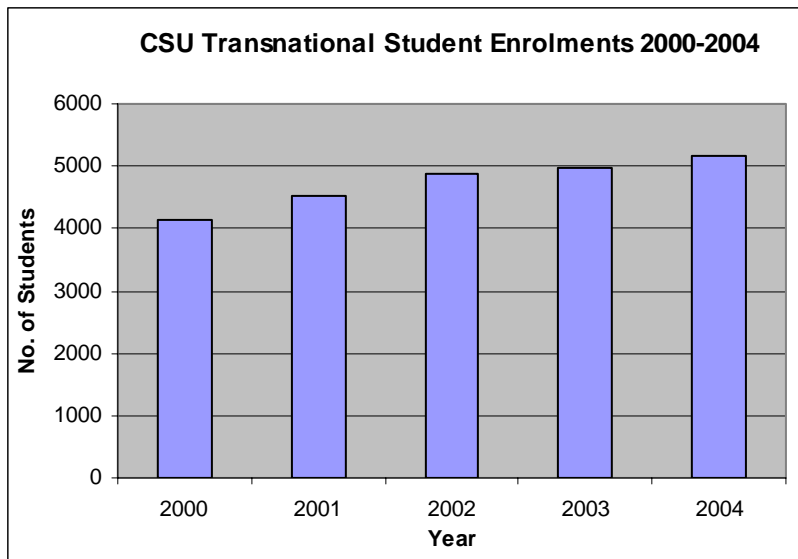


Figure 1 CSU Transnational student enrolment figures for the years 2000 to 2004, showing an increase in enrolment numbers over this period (Sourced from Office of Planning and Audit, Charles Sturt University (2005) 'Pocket Statistics' Total Number of Enrolments by Location (Administrative Campus) for Gar Corp (China), Holmesglen (Victoria), I.R.I.(Malaysia), LSC (London), and Study Group (Sydney) transnational partner institutions)

In 2002 the Centre for the Study of Higher Education (CSHE) at the University of Melbourne was commissioned by the AUTC to produce a booklet entitled 'Assessing Learning in Australian Universities' (James, McInnes & Devlin, 2002) which included a section entitled 'Minimising Plagiarism'. James, McInnes & Devlin (2002) state that plagiarism in higher education takes many forms. They specifically list five forms which are 'more common'. Only two of these forms are relevant to this paper, that is:

- 'Downloading information, text, computer code, artwork, graphics or other material from the internet and presenting it as one's own without acknowledgement'; and,
- 'Quoting or paraphrasing material from a source without acknowledgement' (James, McInnes & Devlin, 2002).

The other forms of plagiarism mentioned by James, McInnes & Devlin (2002) involve submitting work completed by another person, cheating in examinations, handing in the same work more than once and plagiarism related to group work. These forms are not considered within this paper.

With transnational partnership arrangements, traditional problems with student plagiarism can occur; however, the international nature of arrangements can give rise to additional problems. In this paper we address the question of how the responsibility for implementing anti plagiarism strategies should be shared in transnational partnerships, and identify and discuss the associated difficulties.

Method

The analysis presented in this paper is based on experiences that the authors have had at CSU while delivering Information Technology (IT) subjects. The education delivery model that exists for these partners has CSU providing the learning materials in the form of subject outlines, study guides, readings etc, and the subjects being taught by lecturers employed by the partner.

CSU moderates both the assignments and exams to ensure that CSU standards are being adhered to. The students graduate with a CSU degree.

The moderation process can result in partners using assessment items that are identical to CSU's, or they write their own which are then approved by the CSU subject convenor. Final grades are recommended by the partners but only approved after a moderation process that involves checking a sample of marked assignments and exams at the end of each session. This process can result in a time delay before possible identification of plagiarism by CSU academics.

This research employs an instrumental case study approach (Stake, 1995) using a single-case. This approach is useful for providing a general understanding of a phenomenon. The authors' experiences represent both direct and participant observations. Whilst this approach provides a depth of information which is particularly useful in the study of plagiarism issues in transnational partnerships, the potential bias of the authors, as active participants, is noted. Thus, the paper is subjective in that it is based upon the authors' own experiences and viewpoints.

The aim of the paper is to consider the anti plagiarism strategies recommended by James, McInnes & Devlin (2002), which have been endorsed by the CSU Academic Senate to be promoted to academic staff of the University as good practice (Charles Sturt University 2004, AS 04/88). The consideration of the strategies will generalise to recommendations that CSU and all transnational/Australian partnerships can consider.

CSU has taken an educative rather than punitive approach to plagiarism (Charles Sturt University 2004, AS 04/85), encouraging avoidance rather than dealing with misconduct. The most effective methods of minimising plagiarism are seen to be 'proactive' rather than 'reactive'. They involve educating students to understand University expectations regarding academic integrity and the use by academic staff of approaches to assessment, which minimise plagiarism. Thus our recommendations share this emphasis.

Anti plagiarism strategies

In the CSHE booklet (James, McInnes & Devlin, 2002), Universities and academics are recommended to focus efforts at addressing plagiarism around four main strategies. The strategies are interpreted here to represent over-arching principles. The first principle advocates a collaborative approach, amongst all levels within the University, to recognising and countering plagiarism. This principle provides a framework for considering the three other main principles (Figure 2). These three principles form a three-point plan that aims to 'make expectations clear to students; design assessment to minimise opportunities for plagiarism; and visibly monitor, detect and respond to incidences of plagiarism' (James, McInnes & Devlin, 2002).

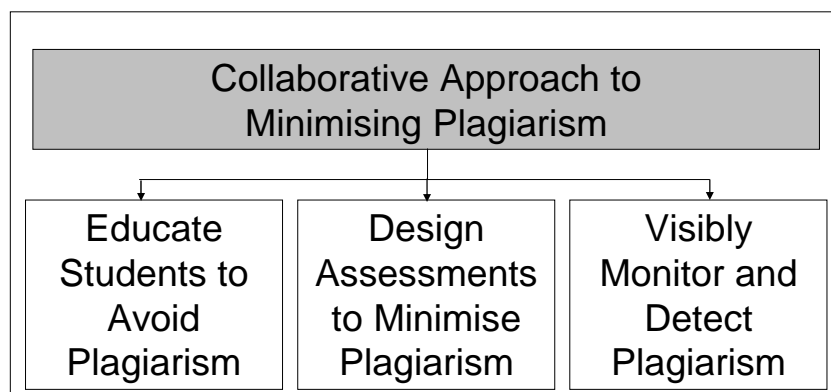


Figure 2 Four main recommended principles for addressing plagiarism (James, McInnes & Devlin, 2002)

Following these principles, thirty-six specific strategies for minimising plagiarism are presented by James, McInnes & Devlin (2002). These strategies are gathered from a range of sources.

Recognition of the propensity for some of the suggested strategies to add significantly to academic workload, and the relevance on adoption to dependence on the local context is highlighted.

Considering these issues, specific questions arise, such as:

- Is it possible for transnational partners to take responsibility for these strategies or should they be controlled by the Australian institution which has to guarantee the quality control to the Federal government and, for equity reasons, should provide the same opportunities to all students that it governs?
- What if academics at Australian institutions are not willing or capable of adopting them? Where does that leave the transnational partner?
- If the transnational institutions are willing to implement these strategies, either alone or in partnership, what are the implications?

In this paper, the authors consider the thirty-four of the thirty-six strategies. Strategies that suggest the inclusion of group or team work to minimise plagiarism are not considered.¹ We focus on shared responsibility and the issues associated with their implementation in transnational partnership arrangements. This includes those strategies that:

- are considered the responsibility of the Australian institution, and largely out of the partner(s) control;
- have aspects that could be seen as a shared responsibility. In principle, these strategies would not be difficult for transnational partners to implement if they wished to do so; and,
- would require an investment by the partners in staff time and new procedures.

Each of the strategies for minimising plagiarism was considered and classified according to the perceived level of shared responsibility (low, medium or high) and the ease with which the strategy could be implemented (easy, moderate or hard). A summary of this analysis is shown in Figure 3. Brief summaries of each of the strategies is provided in the Appendix.

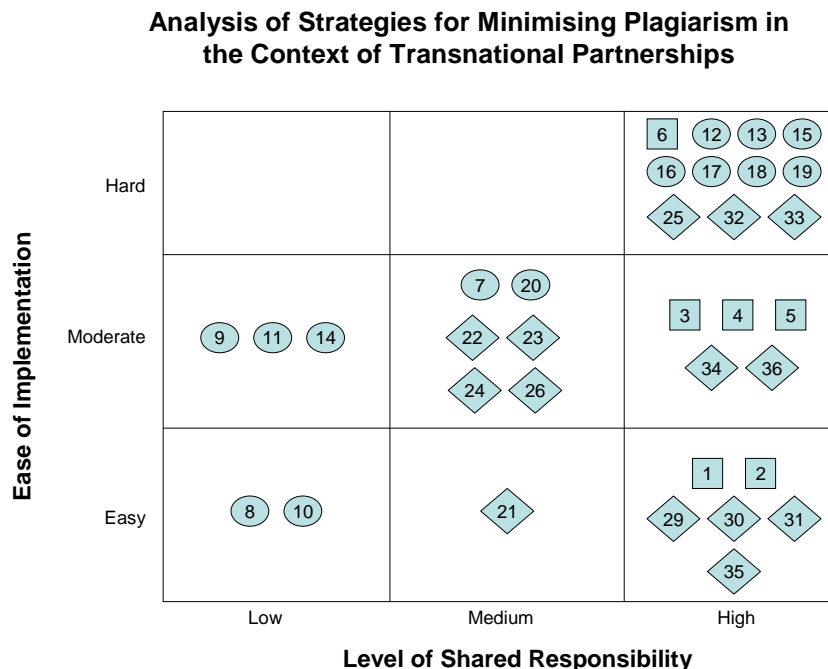


Figure 3 Analysis of CSHE strategies for minimising plagiarism

Discussion

Educate students to avoid plagiarism

The first six strategies come under the heading 'Teach students about authorship conventions and about how to avoid plagiarism' (James, McInnes & Devlin, 2002). All these strategies fit in Figure 3 in the area of a high level of shared responsibility, though strategies 1 and 2 appear easy for any transnational academic staff member to implement as long as they were committed to reducing plagiarism. Strategies 3-5 require time and expertise while 6 would need extra assessment with associated time and cost issues. However, they cannot be assumed to be easy for transnational partners to implement because cultural issues associated with international students and learning models complicate the implementation of some of these strategies in transnational partnerships.

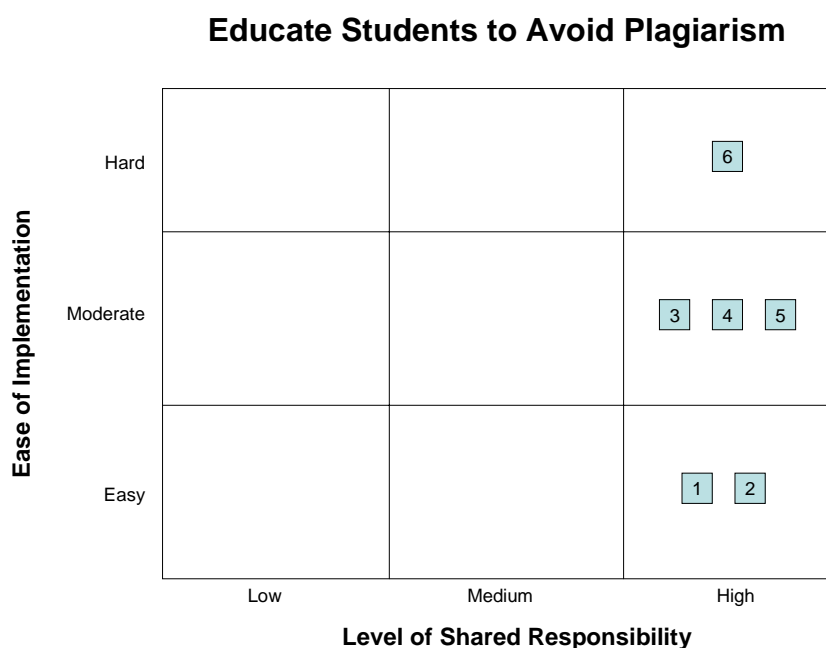


Figure 4 Analysis of CSHE strategies aimed at the education of students to minimise plagiarism

A number of factors are seen to contribute to plagiarism. These have been identified as including poor time-management skills (Cohen, 2003), lack of effective deterrence (Zobel & Hamilton, 2002), financial pressures (Cohen, 2003), lack of integration in university social life (Caruana, Ramaseshan & Ewing, 2000), poor spoken and written English skills (Cohen, 2003; Myers, 1998), differences in learning cultures (Zobel & Hamilton, 2002). While all of these can be seen to apply, in various degrees, to most student cohorts, issues associated with English as a second language (ESL) and different learning cultures are emphasised in many of our transnational partnerships. Indeed, referencing and plagiarism have been identified as among the most significant challenges facing international students undertaking report writing tasks (Baskett, Collings & Preston, 2004).

In addition, although no specific evidence or support was found in the literature, it is hypothesised that academics from other learning cultures may have difficulty themselves in defining plagiarism. The authors, in their own experiences at CSU, have discovered a range of attitudes amongst the Australian academics; some would rate the same piece of work as 'poor referencing' whilst others would initiate student misconduct regulations. It is therefore not unreasonable to assume a range of values at transnational partner's institutions which may be

aggravated by different learning cultures. CSU's approach to plagiarism, and the strategies recommended to educate both students and staff about plagiarism, may need to be extended to include staff delivering courses at partner institutions.

It is recognised that providing students with material to learn about how to correctly reference is insufficient, and integrating practical assessment tasks aimed at developing these skills is required (Cohen, 2003). Another strategy includes the running of workshops which are voluntary and do not form a component of a student's assessable work (Counsell, 2003). Both these strategies require expertise, time and commitment by both staff and students.

At CSU the responsibility for defining and encouraging avoidance of plagiarism has been taken up by Student Services, who have created a passworded web site <http://www.csu.edu.au/division/studserv/> which includes an *Online Guide to Avoiding Plagiarism* (Charles Sturt University, 2005). The material on the website is also provided in booklet form. A copy of this booklet was given to every commencing on-campus and distance student in 2005. Logistical issues prevented distribution to the transnational students in 2005 but, after discussion about its design in relation to ESL students, there has been a suggestion that another booklet be written specifically for these students, perhaps in their first language. Additionally, academic staff at CSU are encouraged to have an 'expert' Learning Skills Advisor or librarian give guest lectures to their on-campus students in order to have them explain plagiarism and referencing issues.

Unless transnational partners are willing to invest in similar experts (and many of these partners are commercial concerns), it is more difficult for them to educate their students about plagiarism and how to avoid it. Integrating writing skill development tasks into coursework is an approach which has proved successful (Baskett, Collings & Preston, 2004), however, the provision of Learning Skills Advisors to implement such initiatives in transnational partnerships raises resourcing issues. In this situation, it is arguably the responsibility of the Australian institution to provide online and printed materials, but should they go so far as to provide visiting Learning Skills staff? However, one transnational partner has recently invested in reducing plagiarism and employed a specialist English Skills advisor who in part will explain Australian university assessment demands in terms of plagiarism and referencing.

Design assessments to minimise plagiarism

Strategies 7-14 and 20 are designed to 'Counter plagiarism through the design of assessment tasks' (James, McInnes & Devlin, 2002).

At CSU the design of assessment tasks is by default the responsibility of its academics, though the transnational staff can create assessment items with the approval of the Australian subject convenor. Therefore, strategies 7 to 14 and 20 would either need to be adopted at CSU on behalf of its transnational partners, as well as for local students, or CSU staff would need to cooperate with the needs of transnational staff to create different assessment items.

Some of the strategies recommended by James, McInnes & Devlin (2002) may not suit the pedagogy of all cohorts at CSU so local staff may be reluctant to implement them. Strategy 7 recommends not using the same essay question year after year. This strategy could reduce plagiarism between cohorts but logic indicates that it will not necessarily reduce it within one cohort. Postgraduate distance students at CSU benefit from the opportunity to write an essay on a topic of their own choosing, thus making it most relevant to their own work circumstances. The transnational partner worried about plagiarism under these circumstances could pick a different topic for their students each year in order to satisfy strategy 7. Strategy 20 requires fewer than three assessment items but this is the CSU standard and to change current practice would require change by both partners.

In principle, strategies 8 and 10 are the easiest to implement since they are both low on shared responsibility and they simply require academic staff to follow quality assessment practices. Strategies 9, 11 and 14 are harder to implement (see Figure 3) in that they require assessment items to be tailored to recent events or introduce a different case study. This gives the transnational partners an opportunity to design assessment items for their students that are more relevant to their cultural context but also require extra time and effort.

The next two strategies in this section are 12 and 13, which require both a high level of shared responsibility and would be more costly and difficult to implement due to the need for specialised classroom learning and individual assessment. Strategies 15 to 19 have even higher implementation costs because they require in-class procedures such as presentations that allow individual students to display their first-hand knowledge. All of these strategies, if adopted, would be the responsibility of the transnational academics and would require considerable amounts of extra class time and effort. Some of the transnational partners rely on blocks of teaching time over weekends and time is critical simply for transmitting information.

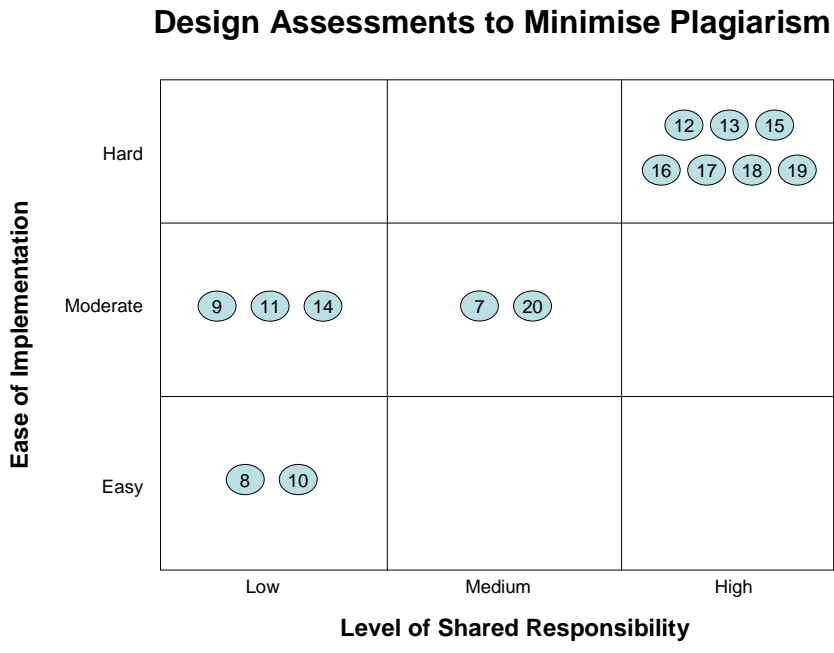


Figure 5 Analysis of CSHE strategies aimed at the design of assessments to minimise plagiarism

Visibly monitor and detect plagiarism

The next set of strategies, from 21 to 36, covers the issues of visibly monitoring, detecting and responding to incidences of plagiarism. All of these strategies involve medium to high levels of shared responsibility between the University and the transnational partner, however, the majority fall within the easy to moderate levels in terms of difficulty of implementation (Figure 6).

Strategies 21 to 26 appear under the heading ‘Ask students for evidence that they have not plagiarised’ (James, McInnes & Devlin, 2002). Strategy 21, which involves including the location (e.g. site of the library and call number of sources, internet site and date accessed of sources) is considered the easiest to implement. Strategies 22, 23, 24 and 26 involve submitting various pieces of evidence of information sources either prior to, or accompanying, assessment items. While the level of shared responsibility remains the same as strategy 21, the ease of implementation increases to a medium level due to the necessity for transnational partners to ensure both the collection of this material, as well as checking its validity. Strategy 25 suggests resubmission of assessment items where requirements for providing evidence of sources have not been met. The shorter teaching timeframes often in place in transnational partner institutions complicate the adoption of this strategy.

Visibly Monitor and Detect Plagiarism

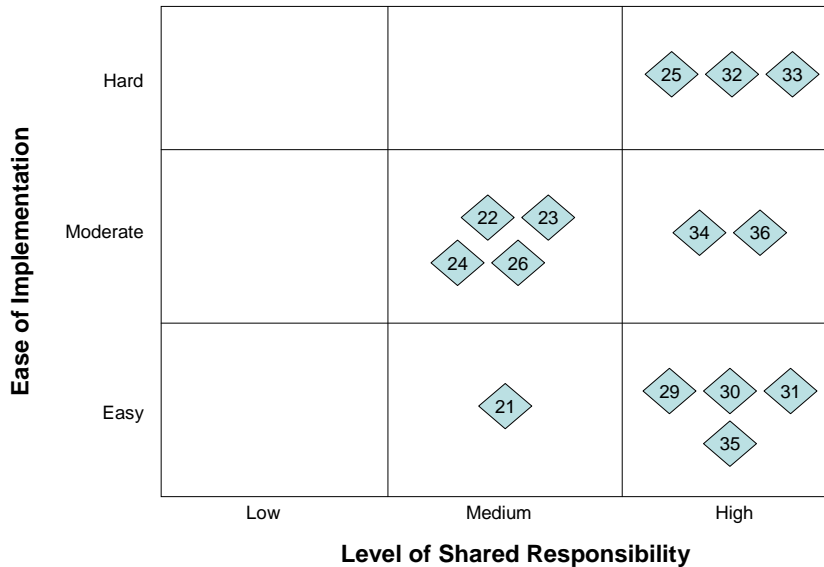


Figure 6 Analysis of CSHE strategies aimed at visible monitoring and detection to minimise plagiarism

These strategies, whilst generally punitive in nature, place emphasis on students to be responsible for monitoring and ensuring against plagiarism, by providing evidence. The educative approach to plagiarism taken by CSU complicates the adoption of these strategies in transnational partnerships as, to the knowledge of the authors, none of these strategies have been yet been adopted by CSU in the IT area.

Strategies 29 to 36 primarily focus on the detection of student plagiarism. The ease with which students can access vast stores of text via the Internet has placed increasing focus on methods for monitoring and detecting plagiarism. Additionally, this group of strategies also emphasises the need for academics to become familiar with the resources that may be used for plagiarism, and to respond quickly and decisively to cases of plagiarism.

Strategies 29 to 31 come under the heading 'Become familiar with resources that may be used for plagiarism'. They primarily involve raising the awareness of academics at both CSU and transnational partnerships of the common sources students may use to plagiarise from. These strategies are all clearly areas of joint responsibility and appear relatively easy to implement. Particularly relevant for the IT discipline are the many web sites with code for a large range of elementary programming problems. Awareness of these sites, for CSU academics when setting assessment items, and partner academics when receiving submitted student assignments, is required.

Strategies 32 to 35 deal specifically with the use of detection software and other deterrents. Recent research has focussed on evaluating a range of automatic plagiarism detection tools. While some have shown the use of automatic detection software to be useful in detecting instances of plagiarism (Zobel & Hamilton, 2002), others report varying success and issues (Royce, 2003). At CSU, a pilot study of the Turnitin® (Turnitin) plagiarism screening tool was conducted by the Faculty of Commerce for the University's Working Party on Plagiarism Management (Charles Sturt University, 2005). The study identified no instances of 'reportable' plagiarism in the sample of fifty assignments assessed. A key issue identified in the report was the need for experience and training in the use of the software in order for benefits to be realised. Given the resourcing issues highlighted in an internal acceptance of the technology, these would seem exacerbated and perhaps unrealistic in transnational partnership arrangements. However, one of the authors has found that using Google to detect overt

plagiarism, while time consuming, is very effective and could easily be adopted by transnational partners.

Finally, strategy 36 suggests academics 'respond quickly to incidents of plagiarism'. Given that lecturer's at partner institutions take on the academic teaching role, this strategy is probably the one that transnational partners need to take most responsibility for. To facilitate the implementation of this strategy, transnational academics must be will and able to initiate CSU's student misconduct regulations immediately. As the determination of grades through moderation processes is often not done until months after a potential incidence of plagiarism, clear delineation of responsibility with regard to plagiarism monitoring, detection and implementation of misconduct regulations versus grade allocation is required.

Conclusion

We find that while the responsibility for some of the strategies lies solely with either the University or the transnational partner, for others the responsibility is clearly shared. Additionally, the level of shared responsibility for the implementation of anti-plagiarism strategies in transnational partnership arrangement is not necessary correlated with the ease or difficulty of implementation.

A number of strategies, which have high levels of shared responsibility and are seen to be easy to implement should be investigated for implementation. In particular, the following recommendations are made:

Educate students to avoid plagiarism: An educative climate towards plagiarism should be encouraged at partner institutions. Simple strategies, such as warning students of information security practices while using computing facilities, should be implemented (Strategies 1 to 2)

Design assessments to minimise plagiarism: The University should consider those strategies which would either need to be adopted at CSU on behalf of its transnational partners, as well as for local students; or CSU staff would need to cooperate with the needs of transnational staff to create different assessment items (Strategies 7 to 14 and 20)

Visibly monitor and detect plagiarism: Staff at both the University and transnational partner institution should be assisted in becoming familiar with resources that may be used for plagiarism by students, and for plagiarism detection (Strategies 29 to 31)

Much of the published research regarding cultural issues as a cause of plagiarism in International student cohorts involves students living away from home. This is not the case in many of CSU's partnership arrangements. Research should be undertaken to identify the causes of plagiarism in these arrangements. While some of the strategies are relatively simple to implement, others are more difficult and raise a number of issues, especially in relation to cost and time. Prioritisation of these strategies requires an understanding of the nature of plagiarism in these situations. Where cultural issues dominate, an educative approach is appropriate and strategies aligned to this approach should be prioritised for implementation. However, other causes of plagiarism amongst students studying at partner institutions may be better addressed using punitive approaches. Thus, while recommendations are made in this paper based on the shared responsibility and ease of implementation of plagiarism strategies, the need for further research to understand the causes of plagiarism in these situations is required.

Notes

- 1 James, McInnes & Devlin (2002) list five 'more common' forms of plagiarism. Only those that deal with not acknowledging sources are considered in this paper. Those forms of plagiarism that involve submitting work completed by another person, cheating in examinations, handing in the same work more than once and plagiarism related to group work are not considered, and thus, strategies dealing specifically with these issues are not relevant.

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APPENDIX – Summary of anti plagiarism strategies

Strategy	Summary	Level of Shared Responsibility	Ease of implementation
1	Create environment of student involvement and interest	High	Low
2	Educate and warn about risk situations such as copying files	High	Low
3	Teach the skills of summarising and paraphrasing	High	Medium
4	Teach the skills of critical analysis and building an argument.	High	Medium
5	Teach the skills of referencing and citation.	High	Medium
6	Include demonstration of skills developed in assessments in mini-assignments	High	High
7	Avoid assessment re-use	Medium	Medium
8	Avoid assignments that ask students to collect, describe and present information	Low	Low
9	Randomise questions and answers for electronic quizzes/assignments.	Low	Medium
10	Ensure assessment tasks relate to the specific content and focus of the subject	Low	Low
11	Set the assignment specification on a unique or recent event	Low	Medium
12	Use essay/assignment topics that integrate theory and examples or use personal experience	High	High
13	Use assignments that integrate class specific activities	High	High
14	Use alternatives to the standard essay, such as case studies	Low	Medium
15	Assess work produced in class	High	High
16	Use timed open book essays for assessment	High	High
17	Viva (i.e. orally examine) a random selection of the students	High	High
18	Request students make presentations based on their written assignments	High	High
19	Require students to submit essay outlines and/or non-final versions of assignments	High	High
20	Minimise over assessment	Medium	Medium
21	Request correct referencing	Medium	Low
22	Request photocopies of references	Medium	Medium
23	Collect an annotated bibliography before the submission is due	Medium	Medium
24	Insist on evidence for significant claims	Medium	Medium
25	Return assignments to students to redo if requirements for providing evidence of sources are not met.	High	High
26	Use/include a meta-essay or meta-assignment	Medium	Medium
27	Use group work or syndicates	High	Medium

28	Assign group tasks but to submit individual assignments	High	Medium
29	Be familiar with available resources for assignments	High	Low
30	Use a search engine to help find the sites students are likely to find	High	Low
31	Demonstrate to your students your awareness of electronic resources available to them	High	Low
32	Require all students to submit essays and assignments electronically	High	High
33	Archive electronic student essays and assignments to enable later crosschecking	High	High
34	Use deterrence penalties	High	Medium
35	Require cover sheet defining plagiarism and requiring the student's signature	High	Low
36	Do something about blatant examples of plagiarism immediately	High	Medium