

IT COUNCIL

Anti-Cheating Software

Anti-cheating software allows a student to turn in a written assignment electronically, permitting the assignment to be compared with assignments in that semester or previous semesters. The assignment can also be compared to primary sources (e.g. journals). Such comparisons could detect plagiarism. Plagiarism could ultimately be discouraged if students are aware that such comparisons will be made.

My experience as a TA in two introductory biology courses (BSCI 105 and BSCI 106) leads me to believe that anti-cheating software could decrease TA workloads while simultaneously improving academic integrity. Much of my time as a TA was spent grading lab reports, and much of this time was spent checking for plagiarism. I checked references to be sure that a) they existed, and b) that the student's report appropriately paraphrased the original source. If a student's writing style changed dramatically, I did a web search on the phrase to determine the original source for the writing. This was all very time-consuming.

In these two courses (and I suspect many others), it was virtually impossible for an instructor to know if a student's lab report was similar or even identical to that of a previous student, or to that of a student in another section. I would not be surprised if students were aware of this "loophole" and took advantage of it.

Turnitin.com is used at campuses across the country, such as UMUC, Georgetown, and the California State University System. I have not investigated other software, but turnitin.com can be integrated with Blackboard and with WebCT.

A turnitin.com site license for the entire campus would cost \$20,000 per year. This includes software and support. Options for funding this could include the Provost's office, and/or the Technology Fee.

A possibility is testing the feasibility and usefulness of the software by means of a pilot program in one course or one college before deploying the software to the entire campus. A license for one department (up to 1000 students) is \$1500/year.

Questions for the group:

1. Does anti-cheating software have the potential to improve academic integrity?
2. Does anti-cheating software have the potential to decrease the workloads of TA's, lecturers, and faculty?
3. What are options for funding sources?
4. Is this worth investigating further? If so, by whom and with what kind of timeline?