Report Regarding the Pilot use of a Text Matching Service

September 16, 2009

**Introduction**

In the fall of 2008, the Committee on Intellectual Integrity proposed and received support for a pilot project in the use of a text matching service (Turnitin.com) during the Spring 2009 semester. The proposal for the pilot project is attached as an appendix to this document.

This report will only address the use of the “plagiarism” detection service offered by the Turnitin.com Angel Suite. The suite contained additional software, such as a markup program, that were also available to instructors using Angel. These additional software products were not the focus of this pilot program.

**Summary of Pilot**

During the Spring 2009 semester, 49 faculty and staff participated in this project. There were 58 “classes” involved in the pilot project. Most of these classes were regular undergraduate classes. Some were graduate level classes, independent study or research project-based.

The pilot proposal raised a number of issues with respect to policy and functioning. These, and actions taken, include:

* Faculty training should be required before use of a TMS.
  + Winter Breakout, January 12, 10:45 - 12:15, Session Title: "Turnitin Pilot", Presenters: David Bozak and Greg Ketcham
* Archiving of papers should not take place, or provisions should be made to delete the archive at the end of the semester.
  + Instructions to participants set up the use of Turnitin so that student papers would not be archived.
* Faculty should indicate in the syllabus that the TMS product will be used during the semester.
  + The following boilerplate language was given to participants to include in their course syllabus: “The Committee on Intellectual Integrity (CII) has crafted some boilerplate language for you to include in your syllabus: ‘This course will make use of a text matching service called Turnitin. This software tool will compare a submitted paper to websites, published scholarly works and previously submitted papers in order to identify matches to text in the paper. You may use this tool in order to check your draft papers and the instructor may use the tool to examine each document you submit for grading. For complete information on this tool please go to http://www.oswego.edu/provost/integrity/tmspilot/’”
* Students should have unlimited use of the TMS for review of draft papers.
  + Use was unlimited.
* While we recommend that faculty restrain their use of the TMS for papers that they find suspicious, we recognize that the timing of grading papers within a semester suggests the use of the product on all submitted papers.
  + This was discussed during the Winter Breakout training, but ultimately faculty determined how much they would use the originality reports.
* For the pilot project, we recommend the use of the TMS only in undergraduate courses.
  + Both undergraduate and graduate courses participated, to extend the range of its use across undergraduate divisions. In addition, in a few instances, independent study/research projects made use of the software.
* Participation in the pilot should be relatively open. Faculty must agree to (1) training and (2) participation in assessment.
  + We adhered to this requirement. Training was provided, including written training material provided online. Assessment information was requested from all participants – students and faculty. Students were more willing to participate in the assessment survey than were faculty.
* Faculty training should include discussion on how to structure writing assignments to reduce the potential for plagiarism as well as encourage faculty to be creative in the use of the TMS.
  + This was emphasized within the training.
* Assessment should consist of surveys of faculty and student users as well as small focus groups to explore aspects of the use of TMS in a more open-ended manner.
  + We did not, ultimately, pursue the use of focus groups.
* Campus Technology Services should be involved in the project to determine support resources needed for continued use. At a minimum, some training will be needed for members of the Help desk.
  + CTS was involved in this project from the beginning. Greg Ketcham was the point person within the Angel support staff.
* We recommend that the pilot project take place over the Spring 2009 semester. In order to be successful, training will need to be developed this semester and offered during the Winter Breakout sessions.
  + The pilot program ran throughout the spring semester.
* A final report on the pilot project should address the policy issues discussed above, and all policy issues should be referred to Academic Policies Council for their deliberations, should the recommendation of the pilot be to adopt the TMS product for general campus use.
  + As will be discussed below, we do not support the purchase of the Turnitin.com software at this time. Should this recommendation change in the future, then policy issues will have to be addressed and forwarded through the governance process.
* The Committee on Intellectual Integrity will be responsible for the pilot project.
  + CII was involved in the structure, use and assessment of the pilot project, with the support of CTS.

**Results**

Attached to this report are usage statistics, student survey results, and a summary of the faculty survey responses.

In brief, the results of these statistics and assessments show that few plagiarized papers were discovered using this software, students did not particularly find the software useful and faculty were tepid in support of its use. Given the costs of the software (a minimum of $6519 for the use of the plagiarism detection component only, and assuming an AAFTE of 6600 students), at this time the Committee on Intellectual Integrity cannot recommend the continued purchase of this product.

In addition, as the Angel system has been purchased by Blackboard, we may find a comparable product will be available as part of our basic CMS package as Angel is more fully integrated into Blackboard’s existing product line. Recall from our proposal that our first choice was to use a product called myDropBox, which had been purchased by Blackboard and is now part of their standard CMS package.

CII does recommend that we continue to evaluate the issues such a product raises, and that we continue to monitor other options that might arise to assist instructors as they deal with incidents of potential plagiarism.