

AS&CC Report about TurnItIn.com

Over the past several months, members of the Academic Standards and Calendar Committee (AS&CC) have been exploring the possibility of adopting a plagiarism detection and deterrent system such as TurnItIn.com.

At our 10/30/15 meeting, the Committee began discussions about the usefulness and need for such a tool. Some initial concerns raised included the effectiveness of this software in actually catching instances of plagiarism and the lack of enforcement of student offenses by the different Colleges once these instances are noted.

At our 12/4/15 meeting, Dr. Jessica Goren (Associate Professor, Pharmacy Practice) provided some background information regarding Turnitin.com. The initial request to explore the use of Turnitin.com at URI came from the College of Pharmacy. Their intent is to use it as a teaching tool and not necessarily for the purpose of assigning grades. The Committee agreed to explore four areas related to this topic and to report back at the February 2016 meeting. The members responsible for each section are listed.

1. Turnitin.com (how does it work, how do they develop the database, cost, does the company license to university only or can it be purchased by a college, etc.). **Jessica Goren**
2. Alternatives (are there alternatives, do they cost less, etc.). **Joanna Burhardt**
3. Pros/Cons (what are the pros and cons of using Turnitin.com, what have others reported about it, etc.). **Tony Mallilo**
4. Interest at URI (is there an interest for such a software at URI, how many departments would use it if it were available, how would they use it – require for grading or teaching tool, what do they currently do to deter/address plagiarism, etc.). **Mayrai Gindy and Jack Humphrey**

Joanna Burhardt identified several viable alternatives to TurnItIn.com (SafeAssign – an addon to all enterprise Blackboard clients and Plagscan) including some that were freely available (PlagiarismChecker.com, DupliChecker, CopyLeaks, Viper).

Tony Mallilo examined the pros and cons of TurnItIn.com and concluded that there were too many concerns for a University-wide adoption of the tool including its accuracy, unknown rate of false positives, possible omission of copied materials from sources not online, etc. In addition, he warned of the possibility of faculty members relying too heavily on the “score” from TurnItIn.com without being aware of its limitations or receiving proper training.

Input from student members of the Committee was also solicited and the same concerns identified above were cited.

Jack Humphrey reported that there is no University-wide demand for such a tool after discussion with members of the Enrollment Services Advisory Committee whose members include the assistant and associate deans of each College.

Jessica Goren reported that the College of Pharmacy has decided to purchase TurnItIn.com on its own and is not requesting a University-wide purchase. They plan to use it as a teaching tool for students at the early stages of their program in order to better prepare them as they progress forward.

In conclusion, the Academic Standards and Calendar Committee has taken a serious look into the possible University-wide adoption of TurnItIn.com and has concluded at its 2/12/16 meeting that (1) it is not widely being requested by Colleges to warrant University-wide adoption, (2) there are serious concerns about its use and accuracy if used to influence student grades, and (3) there are other comparable, freely available alternatives.