SUMMARY NOTES:
DE SHARING SESSION – PLAGIARISM/CHEATING AND RETENTION

March 2     2:30 – 3:35
Present:  Linda Laine, Cynthia Smith, Marty Nikou, Marcia Roberts-Deutsch, Mike Ferguson, Ralph Kam

**Topic: Plagiarism/Cheating**

The group discussed the fact that students have been finding ways to cheat and plagiarize for a long time, and referenced past methods students used in the age of pen and paper exams. Some will find a way to cheat regardless of safeguards.

It was noted that the HCC Library has excellent resources online that instructors can link students to, related to what plagiarism means. Rutgers has interactive tutorial that make clearer what constitutes plagiarism. These kinds of resources should be shared early in the class. Students especially need to understand paraphrasing is plagiarism. Also need to understand danger of mis-representing the ideas or words of an author or source.

**Referenced sites**
Rutgers: [http://library.camden.rutgers.edu/EducationalModule/Plagiarism/](http://library.camden.rutgers.edu/EducationalModule/Plagiarism/)

**Strategies to help students learn**

Discussed reasons for student cheating/plagiarism:

- Some – very busy and prefer cheating to not getting work done
- Some – appear to be unaware of what constitutes plagiarism
- Cultural differences – esp. students from cultures that value repetition as indication of command of information and reflective of knowledge. And some Western cultural precedents of borrowing as form of acknowledgement of caliber of the idea.
- Some students feel the need to help their family or friends pass by cheating, as a social or familial obligation. These are pressures need to recognize and help them overcome.
- Maybe never been called on it. Maybe really do not understand what is expected of them.
- If many instructors don’t try to catch or impose consequences, sense that they can get away with it – worth the risk.

One point was made – should not just be punitive – need to think of how we can more clearly convey to students, across all classes, the *value* of doing their own work. Rather than just negative approach of punitive consequences, emphasize the positive rewards of doing the actual work and learning.
Would help for all instructors and institution to be clearer in the following ways:

* Help students understand meaning of plagiarism – be preemptive. Teach them in several ways and more instructors should be doing this. Example – send/post reference of a short description of when to use quotations and citations given to students at start of class. Ralph will share the document he gives his students. But – will they read it?? Maybe a mixture of reading and online tutorial information? Using humor helps get them to view/read.

*Be clear on *responses*. This differs between instructors. It is something instructors need to think about – how hard to be when they cheat: Flunk the assignment? Flunk the class? Try to expel through academic process? (this entails a lot of resources and effort once it gets to systemic level). There is a need for consequences and benefit of deterrence for other students (though less visible in D.E.). However, might show up on Rate a Prof.

Or does one keep them in the class and give them opportunity to redo/learn how to do work properly? What is better to do as educators in terms of them learning about the need to do their own work. Do you give them a chance? Having a conference with them to go over transgression and show the evidence?

How egregious the cheating often determines punishment.

For D.E. program as a whole: Should build a list on Intranet of plagiarism tutorials for use in classes. Interactive is more engaging than just reading. Establish standardized explanations and wording for (possible) use in syllabi.

**Strategies to spot plagiarism/cheating:**

There are different kinds of cheating from copying from the web to buying papers to even surrogate students. Some don’t even try to hide it.

Some instructors have not had extensive problems; others felt at least 1/3 – ½ are cheating.

Ways to spot cheating:

- Cutting and pasting on Google. This catches a lot.
- Joining a website for sharing essays to see who was on it and what materials are available on it.
- There are expensive ways through purchased software programs.
- First week, have them do sample writing, a short response paragraph or form of writing sample. Make it something they would find hard to copy – personal, or
related to current event, or local issue. Can get a sense of student’s voice and writing abilities.

**Strategies to prevent cheating and plagiarism:**

If one returns graded exams for student to keep, need to make several iterations of exams.

Make sure you have writing assignment be something more of personal opinion or response or specifically tailored topic that they are less likely to be able to plagiarize. Can get the sense of the student’s writing style to compare later.

Make clear and explicit the consequences.

On a more positive note, promote more of a culture of integrity, culture of taking pride in their work. Perhaps create an institutional manifesto or honor code language, even a logo or symbol to use in classes or websites – to highlight institutional emphasis on plagiarism free, cheating free environment - that HCC is an institution committed to carrying out education with integrity.

Do need punishment – there do have to be consequences. Numbers of students cheating are high and growing. And if a sense of no consequences they keep doing it in academic and later in professional life. If they have a sense that only some instructors crack down – worth the challenge.

Catch them early on. Should do lots of assignments in online class to better catch cheating and catch it earlier, rather than just a few assignments, late in the semester.

It was noted again, the Library has valuable resources on plagiarism including specific tips for faculty e.g. kinds of assignments to find out their ‘voice’ early. Also suggested – have assignments reflect local issues – far less likely to find paper mill products on this.

Having them using testing centers is very important. It was noted how commendable HCC Testing Center is in maintaining high standards and preventative measures to stop cheating. High degree of observation, and rigour in their responses; good communication with instructors. Unfortunately not across all campuses; and not all campuses on mainland even have testing centers.

Another example of quality check of student work doing their own was Chemistry lab. Has students take photos – can look and spot copied lab work.

Part of educating them to do original thinking and responsible use of cited sources is to help them understand some of the problems with Wikipedia or blogging as ‘sources’. They need help in using web resources, to know what is a worthwhile source. Here again, the Library has useful resources. To promote this, some instructors require that
any research used must include (or be solely based on) books. And sources must have a stated author or be from a recognized institutional/agency. This makes them aware of the importance of authorship and credibility, as well as making it easier to find plagiarism.

**Topic: Retention**

The group also discussed the issue of retention, beginning with the question of whether there is more of a problem of losing students in distance courses? There are some differences, more losses in DE classes esp. for instructors first starting out in DE. Part of this – students think classes will be easier, less time consuming. False expectations lead to some students dropping /disappearing when work load becomes clear. Also, through experience, instructor learns some strategies for retention in DE format. One does get better as DE instructor, learning strategies from experience.

There is a real problem with deserters – those who never communicate, never hear from them. Then maybe show up mid semester wanting to participate. Question is how to prompt them to interact and engage earlier.

Led to a discussion of students with documented disabilities and how this is handled for students taking different courses from different campuses. There is currently an understanding of reciprocity; if the home campus determines accommodations, other campuses offering DE courses are to accept these needs (so no need for recertifying disability needs). Also practice that home campus pays. This is only an informal agreement, not in formal written form at this point.

Some suggestions for improving retention:

- Communication and key to retention is you have to reach out to them especially early on.
- Build in early, short assignments to engage them and gage their level of participation and attention being paid to the class.
- Maintain one’s own email list to try to better ensure accuracy.
- Call or write to students if they don’t respond to email at start (or during) the semester.
- If students miss classes (work), get in contact. Teacher contacts them if they disappear.
- Provide them Midsemester grades – break down of performance and grade standing, indicate what has been done, is due. Students can make ‘course correction’. Or the result encourages them regarding their progress thus far. Also - let students who are simply not doing the work know the deadline for the W grade. Let them know the deadlines and options.
- Make clear consequences of failing grade if they do not withdraw or pick up the pace. Make clear on what bases you give an N or I, so they do not have false
hopes of easy way out. Should know if they fall far behind, they have to decide
to Withdraw, or do the work, or get an F. In a DE class, even more of a need to
be *explicit* regarding how you give grades.

- If give an Incomplete, have the student come in and make a ‘contract’, schedule,
  and plan out what is due and when. Make tighter timetable than the official
deadline and make explicit what is expected. This has increased completion rate
for instructor using this.
- Have to continually work on that balance between discipline and accountability,
  and nurturing and encouraging. It was noted that HCC have *very* complicated
  lives – need to recognize this.

It was noted that some stay in a class (even if they are not doing the work) for financial
aid. Then some of these students ask for progress report for financial aid reporting
having done no work. Question was asked, how does Financial Aid interpret an W, and
I, an N. Cynthia will follow up to find out.

One instructor is enrolled in distance education class to see what is like from a student
perspective. Observations: taking tests online is tricky. And real sense of fear when it
appears teacher is not competent, or not organized – there is a real sense of
nervousness. Things are much scarier. It was suggested that this teacher write down
some insights about the student perspective after this semester experience to share.

Related to the observation that taking tests online is more open to confusion - was
noted that instructors have to be *very* explicit on DE exam instructions since student
cannot clarify instructions or test questions when taking the test. Have to be *very*
explicit on exam instructions since they cannot clarify while taking test. One instructor
attaches explanation cover sheet for exam. In addition, to help improve each semester,
at the end of the exam – students are asked to respond to the question ‘please let me
know if you have any comments about the exam’; a comments box is on Laulima as
well. Can get very useful feedback from students to improve in the future from this kind
of assessment.