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## NKU buys plagiarism-detector software

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A charge of plagiarism can be damaging to the credibility of a student or university. To protect against it, NKU has made an investment in a software program called Turnitin.

"If you see a cop sitting on the road, you're less likely to speed," said Leslie D. Turner, chairman of NKU's accounting department.

Turnitin is designed to help catch "cut-and-paste" plagiarism that is easy to do using the massive amounts of information on the Internet.

Recently, the degrees of 39 mechanical engineering students at Ohio University have come under review because of charges of plagiarism. OU professors are also being held accountable for a lack of supervision.

"I don't think that plagiarism is any less or more of a problem here," said Turner. "I think it's a problem at all major universities ... In today's world with cut and paste it's just a much more difficult problem to try to prevent. I think that's why there's a growing sense from the faculty that we need some kind of help."

With Turnitin, students don't turn their papers in during class. Students upload the reports as a computer file to the Turnitin Web site. Turnitin then reviews the document against a large database. Suspicious passages are red flagged. The software will report how much the student's work matches another and will oftentimes display the original work.

Turner compares this to a "cop sitting on the road." Students are given an opportunity to see the Turnitin report and to make changes before finally submitting it.

A Turnitin brochure claims that "papers are compared to a database of academic and professional content not available on the public Internet, including millions of articles and abstracts from over 10,000 journals and periodicals."

Furthermore, every student paper that is submitted to Turnitin is added to the database for future comparison to the works of others.

"Before Turnitin, I would read through a paper and if I had any suspicion at all that it was too good for a student I would pick a unique phrase and Google it," said Turner. Before Internet search engines, detecting plagiarism was often a matter of luck.

Some faculty members are hesitant to use the software, though.

"There are some faculty who believe it's not in the best interest of the university for students and faculty to use it," said Turner. "Some think it sets up an environment of distrust."

But Turner counters that "it can be used as a tool to help students prevent falling into the trap of plagiarizing."

For those who have used the software "the program is relatively easy to use and most instructors pick it up pretty quick," said Sarah Mann, NKU's online education development coordinator.

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