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Last Updated: 6:09 pm | Monday, April 23, 2007

Software detects plagiarism

NKU teachers keep students on toes

BY HOWARD MCEWEN | ENQUIRER CONTRIBUTOR

NKU is reporting few problems a few months into using a plagiarism-detection software program.

Speech teacher Vicki Ragsdale began using the software last semester for one section but has expanded it to all three of her speech classes.

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

ADVERTISEMENT "I really like it as a teaching tool for students," Ragsdale said. She uses the software "to help them see in a concrete manner what constitutes plagiarism. I have Turnitin set so that they can see what percent is plagiarized and what sections of their speech show up as plagiarized."

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.

Students are able to change anything that has been red flagged. Furthermore, every student paper that is submitted to Turnitin is added to the database for comparison to the works of others.

Ragsdale said it's hard to say if students were plagiarizing others' work before Turnitin because of the large number of speech classes.

"I really like how Turnitin allows you to see what sentences and sections are plagiarized and the source that they plagiarized from," Ragsdale said. "I also like the fact that the basis of comparison, previous speeches and papers, is a large bank of input from other universities."

Tyler Rumpke, a freshman business management major from Cincinnati, is one of Ragsdale's students. He described the software as "benign."

"It benefits students because we can see how much plagiarism there is in our papers," he said. "There is no harm."

He believes students were plagiarizing in the past but that the new software has made that harder.

"There might be some way around it though, I think," he said.

Ragsdale believes the software was a good investment for the school.

"The software is easy to use and the instruction for usage from Sara Mann (NKU's online education development coordinator) has been excellent," she said.

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