Editorial

Plagiarism, Self-Plagiarism and Professional Ethics

The pursuit of Master and Doctoral Degrees is surrounded by the temptation to find easier ways in obtaining the desired diploma. There is a noble way to graduate with honor by using one’s own abilities to overcome difficulties and mistakes even if sometimes the time for study might be extended. But there are opposite examples when the attempt to demonstrate a quick success follows to various forms of plagiarism. The plagiarism is a matter of cheating because one takes an advantage of the works from other authors for his/her own benefit. This creates an inequality in the academic society because the true scholars spend considerable time to write down their own texts, while, on the contrary, some authors would decorate their articles without proper acknowledgement with the texts from other researchers. Then the Alma Mater is affected as well, because the author’s affiliation is written on the first page of the manuscript. The authors are fully responsible for the content of their papers. When a paper is being written as a mutual work between student and advisor, both parties are involved in their capacities as first and second author. One cannot blame solely the first author for the apparent decoration of a paper. The involvement of a lecturer in cases of plagiarism is against the Code of Professional Ethics. The academic honesty is the main factor for the prosperity of a university in the competitive arena of graduate and post-graduate studies. There are no systematic attempts so far to reveal all the cases of plagiarism. It would require enormous efforts and the time to be spent for this unpleasant work should be allocated for more creative tasks. One could not possibly catch all the fish in the river when going fishing. But the cases of plagiarism that have been observed should serve as a distress call for the rest of the academic community. A decade from now, most of the information will be stored in centralized databases which would allow computers running specialized software to discover automatically the cases of blind copy and even more sophisticated plagiaristic attempts. The self-plagiarism is also unacceptable as it allows one to increase his/her number of publications by self-copying and publishing similar or even same papers in different conference proceedings or journals. Most reputable journals do not publish anymore conference papers unless at least thirty per cent new material is being added to the journal version. The delicate matter of co-authorship is to be mentioned as well. There is a compelling folklore about the director of a research institute who was a co-author of all the papers written by his colleagues. When the paper was of good quality, he was ready to add his name as a first author. In case of a mediocre paper, he was participating as a second author. Even if the paper was not good at all, nevertheless, he was willing to be included as the last author. At the time of his habilitation, the director’s papers had to be transported to another location and it was necessary to use a van to carry all the publications of the institute. Apparently, the van got a flat tire on the road due to the heavy paper load! The lesson learnt is that the quality is more important than the quantity. Plagiarism is an academic offense that must not be tolerated. In particular, this unethical phenomenon is a demonstration of a lack of imagination and poor writing skills compensated with unacknowledged and inappropriate copy of materials from better writers. Combinatorial skills are not sufficient to produce a good paper. Sometimes the blind copy may include wrong statements which could ease the discovery of the source of information. One could hardly imagine what would be the good motivation of an author who would copy the abstract, introduction, analytical model, etc., from other papers without acknowledgement, or self-copy the first script to produce more self-similar papers. It is to be expected that the alleged authors would make an excuse with their lack of experience, citation amnesia, and good intentions to produce a modified work from a previous one. However, if the majority of papers from the same authors show the same pattern of wrongdoing over a time span of several years, one could doubt their contribution to science. The ethical aspects of the preparation of research papers are of equal importance with the scientific content. The Assumption University (AU) places ethics before knowledge in the pursuit of truth and knowledge. The AU Journal of Technology supports this concept and the instructions on the cover pages of each issue provide comprehensive information for the preparation of manuscripts of good quality that comply with the academic standards.

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