Negative Relationship: Plagiarism to Academic Culture

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Student Name: Nan Meng

Instructor: Amy Lewis

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**Introduction**

When international students start their academic study in the US, the first knowledge they must study is not related to their major, but related to academic culture and plagiarism. Colleges and professors treat plagiarism very serious in the United States. Because plagiarism would damage academic culture if it lost control. According to Chinadaily (2015), there was a report by WholeRen Education that 8000 Chinese students at colleges and schools in the United States were kicked out in 2014, 23 percent of these students expelled for plagiarism and cheating. If international students want to achieve their academic success in the US, they should know more about plagiarism to avoid being kicked out.

So this paper will identify plagiarism, academic culture and the process how plagiarism impact academic culture. Subsequent parts of this paper include: background information about plagiarism and how to avoid it; academic culture in the US and reality factors; the relationship between academic culture and plagiarism; and conclusion.

**Plagiarism**

**Background Information about Plagiarism**

Plagiarism is a severe problem in academic field. So what is the definition of plagiarism? Badke(2003) thinks plagiarism is using other writer’s words, sentences or original ideas in one’s paper without cite them. There are two parts of this definition. The first part is use other’s words and unique ideas. The second part is using but not cite it.

Before talk about how to avoid plagiarism, people should identify types of plagiarism. There are five type of plagiarism: words plagiarism, structure plagiarism, ideas plagiarism, authorship plagiarism and plagiarism of oneself. Plagiarism of words and ideas is easy to understand and find, because it is too obviously. For plagiarism of structure, it is a little strange for international students. There are two structure in a paper, sentence structure and paper structure. If students use the same sentence and paper structure from other writers without cite it, it would be think as plagiarism. For plagiarism of authorship, it is the worst type of plagiarism. Because in this type, people completely steal other’s work by change the author’s name. The last is plagiarism of self, it means some people use their own idea or sentence which have published in other paper he or she had wrote without citation. It is strange but really a kind of plagiarism.

**How to Avoid Plagiarism**

So how to avoid plagiarism is becoming a serious question for international students. Gardner(1995) mentioned that paraphrasing and follow citation rule can help students avoid plagiarism. But in general, there are three methods to solve the problem.

First, trying to think independently. Everyone is unique in the world. Different international students have different backgrounds, knowledge and experience. These students should combine with these features and create their own original ideas. These ideas must show some difference from native students’ ideas, because international background will provide several perspectives which native students don’t have.

Second, writing by yourself. Writing skill is one of limitation for international students, it is also a reason why international students always be thought plagiarism. These students should not worry about writing problem. Most university have some facilities or departments to help students who have difficulty in writing. And professor also can understand ideas which international students want to show in their paper. They also should know how to paraphrase which is a good strategy to avoid plagiarism.

Third, citation skill is a necessary ability for graduate students, especially for international students. If internationals students want to avoid plagiarism completely, they had to know how to use citation during their graduate life in the US. International students should make their citation format clear, different major may use different citation style.

**Academic Culture in the US**

**Definition of Academic Culture**

Plagiarism is the most serious challenge for academic culture, for then, for now and forever. Maassen(1996) gave the definition to academic culture, which is a particular group of academics that combines with attitude, beliefs and values. So we can find that spiritual factors are the most significant parts for academic culture. If these factors are changed or damaged, academic culture would no longer exist. This is the reason why plagiarism is banned by every academic field.

**Reality Elements of the US Academic Culture**

The definition of academic culture is too abstract, so it is better to find some specific elements in academic activities to show academic culture. There are three main factors in the US academic culture and activities: paper, class participation, and grades.

Paper or assignment is the basic part of class in the US. It not only influence students’ grades, but also their academic creativity. Paper is the best place for students to show their unique perspectives, especially for those students who want to get higher grades. For academic culture, paper will provide enough sources for scholars to finish their further study and research. More paper, and more possibilities.

Class participant is one of the most important issue in the US academic field, especially for graduate class. All graduate students should participant class discussion and do some presentations which also contribute to students’ grades. These activities create a great atmosphere for academic culture, which need more people to involve and to provide more views.

Grades must be the most significant factor for almost students. For high school students, good grades will help them apply for a better university. For undergraduate students, good grades will lead them to a better job or graduate life. In most situation, grades decide people’s life. Therefore, all students hope have good grades. Some of them work very hard, and get what they want. On the contrary, some students try to find some shortcut, they cheat or plagiarize in their academic study.

**Discussion: Relationship between Academic Culture and Plagiarism**

How plagiarism impact academic culture? There are four stages in the process. It is clear to find the relationship between academic culture and plagiarism in the following chart.

Plagiarism

Students

Good Students

Bad students

Laziness and bad class participation

Grade lower than bad students and lose chance. They may try to plagiarize.

Getting higher grades. Going to college and getting more chance.

Academic value changed

Students’ quality lower

Academic atmosphere changed

Academic Culture Changed or destroyed

First of all, plagiarism will cause laziness and bad class participation. It is so risky that students try plagiarizing in their study. But they can get high score, if they are not be found plagiarizing. So when this phenomenon happen, these students would not work hard any more. Because they get what they want. For class participation, if students already know what the answer is, they would give the same answer without thinking by themselves. Even some of them do not want to join discussion. Without thinking, discussion and presentation must be very boring, which make academic atmosphere worse.

In addition, plagiarism will lead some students have good grades but have poor academic abilities. It is a disaster for academic culture. Poor performance students get more chance, also means good performance students’ chance decrease. If this process consist for several decades, academic culture will be completely damaged, because less good scholars can do research.

Also, students who get good grades by plagiarizing but not be found would encourage more students try to plagiarize during their academic study. Students get high score by plagiarizing is a dangerous signal for academic culture. Because the score they not deserve. Some hard work students or scholars pay much attention but only get the same score. So, these people would change their attitude and value, and become plagiarists. More plagiarists also means less new phenomenon be found, less theory be made, and less create in academic field.

Finally, plagiarism will destroy students’ academic creativity. Creativity is the core spirit for academic. Without creativity, academic research and the world would not improving. Plagiarism would make scholars and inventors become negative and loss their passion. Plagiarists can’t generate new knowledge, creators do not have desire to finish their research, and academic culture would not exist.

**Conclusion**

Plagiarism is dangerous for students, especially for international students. When they come to the US, they should know what plagiarism is and types of plagiarism. They also should know academic culture of the US and key factors which including grade, class participation and paper. All students should protect academic culture, if it destroyed by plagiarism, all efforts scholar made would in vain.

In this paper, there are two limitations. One limitation is hard to use data to measure the impact that how plagiarism damage academic culture. Another is I do not have enough paper or theory to prove the process about how plagiarism influence academic culture. So in the future research, a model should be made to measure how plagiarism impact academic culture, and more theory related to this topic should be added.

Graduate students also need to be well-educated about plagiarism and how to avoid it. Learning how to use citation format still the best strategy and the most convenient method for graduate students to avoid plagiarism. In the future, plagiarism will be controlled, and more unique theory will emerge.

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