MEMO (BY E-MAIL)

To: Heads of Academic Departments/CLC/ELC/GEC/IC/MIC
From: VP(SD) and Chairman of LTC & SDC
Ref: Your Ref: in:
Tel No.: 5207 Fax No.:
E-mail: Date: 26 August 2003

Guidelines for Preventing Student Plagiarism

As Chairman of the Student Discipline Committee (SDC), it has come to my attention that there has been an increase in student plagiarism in these years, especially with the escalation of information flow via the cyber space. A Working Group, comprising, among others, Deans’ representatives, was set up and recommended that teaching departments should play an important role to (i) educate students about plagiarism before we take disciplinary actions; (ii) organise learning and teaching so that academic honesty is promoted and plagiarism is avoided; and (iii) ensure that students know that passing off someone else’s work as their own is a disciplinary offence and the University will enforce this regulation strictly.

In this connection, please circulate this memo and the enclosed “Guidelines for Preventing Student Plagiarism” (August 2003) to teaching staff in your department and work closely with them to implement these guidelines starting from 2003-04 academic year. The following outlines the important role of academic departments, teachers and students in preventing plagiarism.

What academic departments and teachers should do

When students pursue their academic studies in the University, they should be informed of the importance of academic integrity. While the SAO will include a topic on plagiarism in the annual induction programme for new students, teaching departments are requested to take a more proactive role in educating students about plagiarism and the serious implications for their studies if they do plagiarize. A sample letter is attached (Appendix A) to facilitate your communication with all students. It is crucial that the message is disseminated to all full-time and part-time students of all levels (sub-degree, undergraduate, taught postgraduate and research students).

On the learning and teaching front, I wish to reiterate that the design of assessment is an integral part of curriculum development such that assessment methods should (i) address and be in alignment with learning objectives; and (ii) appropriately indicate the level of ability in meeting intended outcomes. These principles have been spelled out in the University’s Self-Evaluation Document, submitted for the April 2003 TLQPR Visit, under one of the five domains of Education Quality Work: “Design of Student Assessment and Use of Assessment Results”. As such, I would appreciate your assistance to remind teachers in your department to ensure appropriate assessment workload and allow students reasonable time to complete an assignment which should be pitched at a level attainable by them. Equally important is to adopt strategies in designing assignment tasks that make plagiarism more difficult (see Appendix B for advice on assessment design to prevent plagiarism). The sources mentioned in the guidelines are useful references that I would urge colleagues to look at seriously.

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What students are required to do

Students also have their role to play in upholding academic integrity. They should, upon admission to the University, study carefully the Student Handbook, which contains essential information for their studies at PolyU. Such information includes, among others, “Academic Studies” (including plagiarism) and “Penalties Applied to Offences”. These topics are included under the chapter on “Conduct and Discipline”. Nonetheless, according to the experience of SDC, some students who came to the Committee’s attention for plagiarism claimed that they had not read through the Student Handbook, and thus did not understand what plagiarism was and that it would lead to disciplinary actions.

Based on the experience of some overseas universities, asking students to declare the originality of their assignments is considered a good practice to alert them to the importance of academic honesty and caution them not to plagiarize. In this regard, teaching departments are advised to design your own declaration form as deemed appropriate for completion by students for major assignments, e.g. term paper, project report and dissertation, at time of submission for marking. Some samples are attached in Appendix C for your reference.

Thank you for your attention.

Prof T P Leung
VP(Student Development)
Chairman, Learning & Teaching Committee (LTC) and SDC

Encl

cc:  VP(AD)
     Faculty Deans
     AS
     DLTC Chairmen
     DoSA
     AgHd(EDC)