SafeAssign

Background:

SafeAssign is a plagiarism checking module integrated into Blackboard. OSU has had access to this module for some time but so far it has not been deployed to the instructors. In 2010 Jon Dorbolo conducted a review that addressed questions technical as well as legal questions such as FERPA and intellectual property rights. The Blackboard Operations Committee, formed in 2012, has taken on the task of deploying the tool. In fall 2012, the chair of the Blackboard Operations Committee asked the CRC to review the Request for Feature document to see if the CRC had any questions or concerns regarding the tool or the deployment process. The co-chairs of the CRC invited the Blackboard Operations Committee chair, Lynn Greenough, Dan Schwab and Raphelle Rhoades from Student Conduct, and Joni Tonn from College Student Services Administration, to address a CRC meeting to review the product and answer questions regarding the deployment and use of the tool.

Questions and Concerns:

1. Educating the community
   a. How will this tool be marketed? The CRC expressed some concerns that SafeAssign be marketed and used as a learning tool, not a punishment. Students should not see the use of SafeAssign in a class as an assumption of guilt.
   b. Faculty and students need to have a clear understanding of how to interpret the results of the tool. Who will be responsible for making sure students and instructors know the how to use the tool?

2. Privacy and anonymity for students
   a. There are several databases against which SafeAssign checks a student submitted paper. It needs to be very clear when a student’s paper is entered into the BB Controlled database and how the student’s privacy is protected
      i. When student papers are compared to other student papers, what student information is displayed?
      ii. Do instructors see student’s names from other sections in which there is a match?
      iii. Will students be able to opt out of adding their papers to the global database?
   b. Student Rights
      i. The instructor does not need the student’s consent to run the paper through SafeAssign. How will students be informed? What options do the students have for opting out of using SafeAssign? Will they be permitted to do that?

3. Policies
   a. There needs to be a policy to protect faculty, e.g., a mandatory statement on the syllabus that the instructor will be using SafeAssign and in which mode (draft or graded) and what impact this will have on the students.

4. Implementation
   a. What are some ways in which students may circumvent the system (i.e., if they submit something with a lot of typos)? What can be done to help faculty be aware of these issues?

Recommendations from the CRC

1. Course Syllabus:
   • CRC recommends a policy that instructors using SafeAssign in a course have a statement to that effect on the course syllabus.
   • CRC recommends a policy that faculty who use SafeAssign in a course include a definition of plagiarism in the course syllabus.

2. Assessment
• The CRC recommends a plan for evaluating the impact of the tool on
  a. Classroom enrollment (are students avoiding certain classes because of SafeAssign?)
  b. Student academic integrity (understanding of plagiarism and properly citing sources)

3. Instructors should be made aware of and encouraged to use draft mode

4. A specific policy that can be given to instructors and students that clearly explains
   1. FERPA issues
   2. Intellectual Property rights of the students
   3. Student privacy
**Description:** SafeAssign is a plagiarism checking tool built into Blackboard. An instructor can choose to implement the tool and use it to detect plagiarism in student papers. Student upload their papers to a SafeAssign module that checks the paper against 4 different databases; the Internet, ProQuest/ABI inform databases, institutional document archive containing all papers submitted to SafeAssign by users in their institution, and the global reference database containing papers that were volunteered by students from Blackboard client institutions to help prevent cross-institutional plagiarism. SafeAssign works in two modes; student can use it to check their own work without their score being recorded or the instructor can record the score/grade in the grade book.

**Estimates of current and future usage patterns:** This is difficult to estimate at this time. The Blackboard Operations Committee estimates that “at a minimum 30+ COB courses would use a plagiarism detection tool as soon as it is available in Blackboard. Frequency of usage depends upon the nature of the course and the number of writing assignments an instructor gives.” At least one department (English) has expressed interest in using the tool.

**Draft of Text required:** The instructor in this course will be using the SafeAssign plagiarism detection tool. You may be asked to upload your work and have it checked by the SafeAssign software for originality. The results may be calculated as part of your grade. Your work may be retained in the SafeAssign repository so other papers can be checked against your work. If your work is deposited, it will be anonymous.

**Rationale explaining why this issue rises to the level of the disabilities and academic integrity notices:** SafeAssign does two things; it checks student work for plagiarism and a copy of a student’s paper may be deposited into the SafeAssign repository. This brings up the questions of student privacy and is directly related to academic integrity. Student need to understand how the tool will be used in the class, how the scoring works, and what the consequences are if plagiarism is detected. Students may not feel comfortable submitting their paper to the database and should be aware of what is done with their work.