

UNIVERSITY OF WEST FLORIDA Faculty and Student Use of TurnItIn

The University of West Florida (UWF) maintains a license agreement with iParadigms, LLC for the purpose of using their product TurnItIn, an online text matching service. The TurnItIn service has the potential to be an important resource for promoting information literacy as well as encouraging academic integrity. All UWF faculty have access to the TurnItIn service, and each faculty member can also make the service available to students in his or her classes. Because the TurnItIn service has implications for copyright of student work, privacy of student academic records covered by FERPA, and other related issues, it is critical that all university faculty, instructors, and teaching assistants use TurnItIn appropriately.

University information resources

The Division of Academic Affairs will maintain a website containing essential information for UWF instructors and students regarding the TurnItIn service. Course documentation and other notices should whenever feasible refer to this standard resource. The Center for University Teaching, Learning, and Assessment (CUTLA) will have direct responsibility for maintenance of this web resource.

Notice to students

In all classes where a faculty member or instructor (hereafter referred to as faculty) may want to use the TurnItIn service, the students must be notified. Faculty must provide students with a written notice in the course syllabus (and ideally include a reference to the UWF TurnItIn website referenced above). In addition, faculty are encouraged to remind students each time they discuss an applicable course assignment that TurnItIn may be used.

Recommended UWF TurnItIn notice for course syllabi:

UWF maintains a university license agreement for an online text matching service called TurnItIn. At my discretion I will use the TurnItIn service to determine the originality of student papers. If I submit your paper to TurnItIn, it will be stored in a TurnItIn database for as long as the service remains in existence. If you object to this storage of your paper:

1. You must let me know no later than two weeks after the start of this class.
2. I will utilize other services and techniques to evaluate your work for evidence of appropriate authorship practices.

Student privacy

Student papers are protected by the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) because they are considered educational records and they contain personally identifiable information. When a student's paper or an excerpt from a student's paper is submitted to TurnItIn, the student's name and any other personally identifiable information must be removed prior to submission. This can be done by replacing the student's personal information with some kind of alias information.

When a faculty submits a paper to TurnItIn, that paper becomes associated with the UWF faculty person's name and email address. UWF faculty may be contacted by faculty from other educational institutions regarding the similarities in papers submitted to TurnItIn. UWF faculty should not provide information about students and student papers to faculty from other institutions. Conversely, UWF faculty should not attempt to contact the faculty from other educational institutions if there are questions about matches in paper submissions. Both of these practices are FERPA violations and so should be avoided.

Evaluating Originality Reports

When a paper or excerpt is submitted to TurnItIn, an originality report is created. This report tells the faculty what percentage of the paper is similar to or matches other sources found in the TurnItIn database. Links are provided to further review the suspected content. Faculty must evaluate the quality of the originality report independently and determine if the similarities identified actually represent plagiarized text. The originality report shows all matches, even those where students have cited the text properly. Faculty should examine the identified text to determine whether plagiarism has actually occurred.

Allowing students to use TURNITIN

TurnItIn has the potential to be a positive instructional tool for teaching students about academic integrity and plagiarism. Instructors can create the ability for students to upload their papers into TurnItIn and run their own originality reports. The TurnItIn peer review capability which allows students to review each other's works SHOULD NOT be used. This is a violation of FERPA.

Suspected plagiarism

TurnItIn is only a tool, and as noted above, it is an imperfect one. Instructors are encouraged to make informed use of TurnItIn, both in evaluating reports for "false positives" (e.g., notices of properly-cited references) as well as not relying solely on TurnItIn to detect authorship problems. When plagiarism is suspected, instructors should refer to other resources, such as the Academic Misconduct policy, for guidance.