

## **Best Practices for Enhancing Academic Integrity in Written Works**

e.g., publications, comprehensive exams, theses and dissertations

As stated in Oklahoma State University (OSU) *Policy and Procedure 2-20822 Academic Integrity*, “an institution’s reputation and intellectual freedom depend on its uncompromising commitment to the ideal of academic integrity.” As the body of disciplinary and interdisciplinary literature grows at record pace and the time demands on faculty and students increases, it is imperative to continue to ensure proper attribution of the work of others through attention to detail as sources are developed. Irrespective of intentionality, plagiarism, the taking of work or ideas of another and representing it as one’s own, is a concern of everyone in the higher education community.

The use of technology can assist with enhancing the accurate citation of other’s works in publications, theses and dissertations. While not addressed here, these principles also apply to proper attribution of sources and inspiration in oral presentations, exhibits, etc. OSU has software, *Turnitin*, readily available that can check for potential plagiarism in submitted documents. Both students and faculty have access to this tool. Below are the best practices associated with the use of this technology for checking written documents, like theses, dissertations, publications and comprehensive exams, that are typically completed outside of formal course settings.

### Time Frame

Faculty advisors, advisory committees and/or graduate programs are encouraged to require the use of *Turnitin* for plagiarism checks at the final draft stage of theses, dissertations and other written works to enhance the use of citations, citation accuracy and prevent plagiarism. If required, programmatic policies should be developed for such use. If students are concerned about the thoroughness of their citations, they can easily do a self-check before the drafts are submitted to advisors and advisory committees. *Turnitin* results received by the faculty advisor, advisory committee and/or graduate program that indicate a potential plagiarism issue should be addressed with respect to University policy and procedures.

### Turnitin Process

The use of the *Turnitin* software as a plagiarism check results in a *Similarity Report* being produced. Such reports are nuanced. For example, the *Report* for students who submitted a literature review in an earlier class or published a related article will indicate a high degree of overlap; even though in these examples, the work is not plagiarized. Therefore, it is imperative that individuals using *Turnitin* are familiar with how to interpret the findings. There is no magic “cutoff” score for the similarity percentage that indicates there is or is not a potential issue, and the application of academic judgement is necessary. *Turnitin* has a webcast by Dr. Ann Rogerson that discusses the use of *Similarity Reports* (<https://www.turnitin.com/events/virtual/how-to-interpret-a-turnitin-similarity-report-2>; presentation starts around ~3 minutes into the video). This video does a good job of walking through typical questions, such as why one might choose

to include or exclude citations when running a check. In addition, the Institute for Teaching and Learning Excellence (ITLE) has personnel that can also answer such questions – contact info below.

Documents checked for plagiarism with *Turnitin* are incorporated for future use. Therefore, it is recommended that one selects the “do not store the submitted papers” option which is located in the “Optional Settings” section to exclude the draft documents from being retained to prevent false positives in future *Similarity Reports*. Once the final document, such as a thesis or dissertation, is released to the public in its electronic form, *Turnitin*’s software should pick-up the new material.

In brief, *Turnitin* is a technology tool that can be used by students and faculty to ensure OSU’s academic reputation is not marred by academic integrity issues in written works like theses and dissertations.

#### ITLE Information

- OSU *Turnitin* website: <https://itle.okstate.edu/turnitin.html>
- ITLE *Turnitin* contact information: [itle@okstate.edu](mailto:itle@okstate.edu)/405-744-1000
- *Turnitin* Online Instructor Guides
  - [https://guides.turnitin.com/01\\_Manuals\\_and\\_Guides/Instructor\\_Guides](https://guides.turnitin.com/01_Manuals_and_Guides/Instructor_Guides)

**Endorsed by Graduate Council, November 30, 2018**