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SafeAssign and Plagiarism Prevention

What is SafeAssign?

SafeAssign is a plagiarism detection service and Blackboard tool that is centrally hosted by Blackboard and integrated with the VCCS's Blackboard Learning System; anyone in the VCCS can use it for free. SafeAssign uses text matching software to detect unoriginal passages of text and flags them as potential instances of plagiarism.

(<http://wiki.safeassign.com/display/SAFE/About+SafeAssign>)

How does SafeAssign work?

SafeAssign compares student assignments to a variety of documents, including

*all documents publicly available on the Internet using Microsoft's Live Search engine

*all articles in the ProQuest ABI/Inform database (over 1,100 publication titles and about 2.6 million articles from '90s to present time, updated weekly)

*all papers submitted to SafeAssign at VCCS schools; this collection of papers is called the institutional database

* all of the documents voluntarily submitted to the database by students at all member schools; this collection is called the Global Reference Database. The good people at SafeAssign will not share how many documents are in the Global Reference Database. They issued the cheery statement, "Our Global Reference Database is a new product, so its current size is not an indication of its future potential. We expect accelerating growth, based on rapidly increasing adoption of this new service among our clients. "

(<http://wiki.safeassign.com/display/SAFE/How+Does+SafeAssign+Work>;

<http://wiki.safeassign.com/display/SAFE/Instructor+FAQs>)

The image shows the homepage of CheatHouse.com. At the top left is a cartoon character holding a pen next to the text 'essays & papers for students' and 'CHEATHOUSE.COM'. To the right are three verification badges: two for ControlScan (dated 31-MAR) and one for GeoTrust (dated 01.04.09 01:20 UTC). Below these is a navigation bar with links: 'What is CheatHouse, and how do I join?', 'SIGN UP', 'BROWSE ESSAYS', and 'CUSTOMER SUPPORT'. The main content area is divided into a left sidebar and a main right section. The sidebar contains a search bar with 'essays' typed in, a 'Search!' button, and a 'LOGIN' button with a 'User name:' field. The main section has a header 'Library of essays, research & term papers, book reports, case studies.' followed by 'Over 100,000 essays!' in large yellow text. Below this is the text 'SEE ESSAYS THAT WORK - AND ACE YOURS' and a paragraph about overcoming writer's block. At the bottom of the main section is a button that says 'Sign up and become a member'.

SafeAssign cannot reliably find documents posted on many essay mill websites because such sites often hide their content from search engines with tricks like requiring that you become a member and log in to the site before you are able to access papers. However, passages from papers in essay mill websites that have been copied and pasted into student papers may result in an essay-to-essay match.

Using SafeAssign in Blackboard

You should be able to log into Blackboard at this time in order to access the [BLACKBOARD SAFE ASSIGN TRAINING \(LF298.BB.SA.TRAINING.WRKS\)](#) course, where you can follow along as I give instructions on how to create SafeAssignments, enter direct submissions, and check originality reports. Use the VCCS username you added to your sign-in sheet, and if you have problems logging in, Colleen Bishop will give you a hand.

There are two ways to use SafeAssign in your Blackboard course: you can create SafeAssignments that students may upload their papers to, or use Direct Submit to copy and paste suspicious passages of text or upload individual essays or .zip files of up to 100 essays at a time yourself. **SafeAssignments**

When you set up a SafeAssignment in a Blackboard course, your students must submit their own papers. The process works much like the regular Assignment feature in Blackboard. After students submit their work, their papers are checked against the four databases listed above.

How to create a SafeAssignment:

1. Click the "Edit View" link in the upper right corner of any content area of the course.
2. Choose "SafeAssign" from the drop-down menu.

3. Click "Go"
4. Enter an assignment name and the total number of points possible for the assignment.
5. Adjust or accept the default options, then click "Submit."

Optional fields include the following:

- **Instructions:** Add directions here; you may use html tags in this window.
- **Available:** Select whether or not the SafeAssignment should be visible to students.
- **Availability Dates:** Use these controls to set a date range when students can submit SafeAssignments.
- **Drafts:** Allows students to check their papers for possible instances of plagiarism without storing their files in the Institutional Database. (Otherwise, if students were to submit the paper again, it would have a 100% match against itself.) This can be a useful as tool if you want to give your students the chance to check if they properly cited their sources.
- **Students Viewable:** Controls whether or not students can view the originality report that is generated when their papers are submitted.
- **Urgent Checking:** Sets papers to high priority in the queue. (No word on how much faster these puppies get checked).
- **Optional Announcement:** Click "Yes" to create an announcement about the SafeAssignment. Enter a subject and message for the announcement; you can use html tags here, too.

(<http://wiki.safeassign.com/display/SAFE/Create+a+SafeAssignment+for+Students+to+Upload+to+%28in+Blackboard+Enterprise%29>; <http://www.blackboard.niu.edu/blackboard/resources/safeassign.shtml>)

What's missing here?

Assignment Files. You cannot attach files to SafeAssignments, which is kind of a bummer for people like me who like to attach detailed instructions in Word documents directly to their assignments.

Where It Can Get Tricky

The file formats that SafeAssign can accept are zip, .doc, .docx, .odt, .txt, .pdf, .rtf and .html files. Make sure your students know that the service will not accept other file formats in case you have students who are using Wordpad, Works, etc.

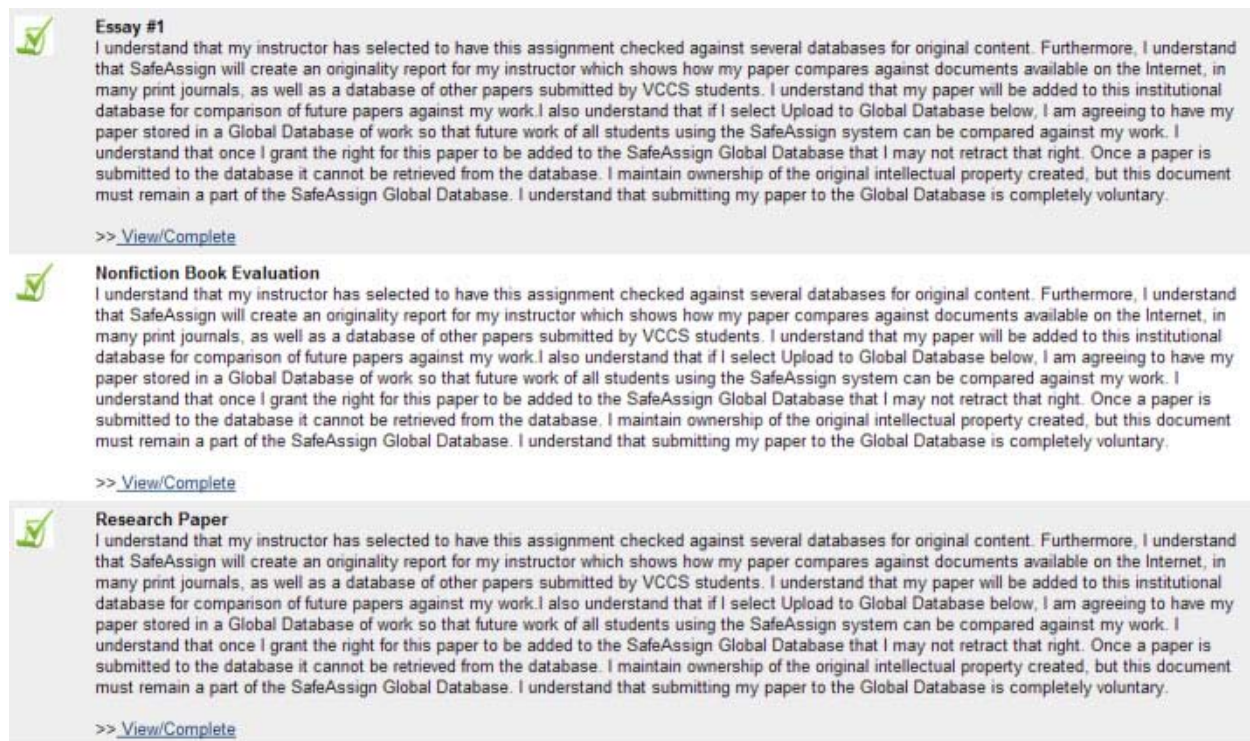
If students may be submitting papers to the SafeAssignment that include images, please inform them that the images must not exceed 2MB or the submission may fail.

(<http://wiki.safeassign.com/display/SAFE/Create+a+SafeAssignment+for+Students+to+Upload+to+%28in+Blackboard+Enterprise%29>)

Headache Central: The VCCS Release Statement

The VCCS' "Release Statement" explains to students that 1) SafeAssign will check their papers against multiple databases for text matches, 2) their essays will be added to the institutional database, but students may choose not to submit their work to the Global Database, and 3) students "maintain ownership of the original intellectual property created."

The release statement shows up under each SafeAssignment you post for your students and is two paragraphs long. Everything you add in the "Instructions" field shows up directly under (and appears to be part of) the "Release Statement."



The screenshot displays three examples of release statements for different assignments. Each example starts with a green checkmark icon and a title. The text of each statement is identical, explaining that the instructor has selected the assignment for originality checks against several databases. It states that SafeAssign will create an originality report and that the paper will be added to the institutional database for comparison against other papers. It also mentions that if the 'Upload to Global Database' option is selected, the paper will be stored in a Global Database of work, and the student understands that once the right is granted, it cannot be retracted. The statements conclude by affirming the student's ownership of the original intellectual property and that the submission to the Global Database is voluntary. Each statement ends with a blue link that says '>> View/Complete'.

TIPS

1. Put important instructions elsewhere; use the SafeAssignment instructions field only to remind students of what they already know (due dates, etc.)

2. Use simple html tags to make instructions stand out from the Release Statement

`All text you type here will be RED`

`All text you type here will be BOLD`

` All text you type here will be BOLD AND RED`

3. Use the "Availability Dates" controls to make each item unavailable after its due date so that you do not have a log jam of SafeAssignments. For example, I let students turn in their essays up to 48 hours late for a reduced grade, so for each assignment, I set "Display Until" to two days and a few hours after the essay's due date. I leave all of the other fields on their default settings. If you like to mess around with things and potentially break them, you'll find a table of all of the SafeAssignment fields and their functions at the end of your packet.

Direct Submit

Direct Submit is a good option if you would like to perform a plagiarism check on a few suspicious papers or passages instead of the work of an entire class. You can use Direct Submit to check papers without your students' involvement or knowledge. Papers uploaded through Direct Submit are added to the Institutional Database but cannot be added to the Global Reference Database, and there is no Gradebook integration with papers submitted through Direct Submit.


How to directly submit individual student assignments:

1. From the Control Panel, click "SafeAssign" under "Course Tools."
2. The default screen is "SafeAssignments"; click the "Direct Submit" tab.
3. A list of folders and papers will appear. This list includes papers already uploaded through "Direct Submit."
4. Navigate to the folder you want to upload the paper(s) to.
5. Click "Submit Papers."
6. Under "Submission Options," you have two choices:
 - a. If you click "Submit as Draft," a SafeAssign originality report will be generated but the paper will not be added to the institutional database and will not be used to check other papers in the future.
 - b. If you click "Skip Plagiarism Checking," SafeAssign will add the paper to the institutional database but will not generate a SafeAssign originality report. Pretty much the only time you would want to do this is if you are uploading papers from an earlier incarnation of the course to make sure that your current students are not reusing essays.
7. Under "File Upload," you have two choices:
 - a. Browse for a file you have saved on your computer. As you can see, acceptable file formats are .zip, .doc, .docx, .odt, .txt, .pdf, .rtf and .html. This means that individual papers as well as papers of these file formats that are grouped in a .ZIP package are accepted. (Since this is fast and spiffy, this is the recommended Fuster method.)
 - b. Select "Copy/Paste Document," type in the paper's title, and then paste the document text in the "Paper text" field.

Viewing SafeAssignments and Direct Submissions

You can view SafeAssignments and Direct Submissions, including originality reports, through the Control Panel. Click on "SafeAssign" under "Course Tools." Click "View" under any assignment to read the text of your students' documents, download the files they have submitted, and view their SafeAssign originality reports. You can also click "Clear Attempt" to remove a document submission from the database; this is useful if a student uploads the wrong file. This will not clear that file from the Institutional Database or, if the student has voluntarily submitted his or her work to it, from the Global Reference Database.

Viewing Originality Reports

It usually takes a few minutes for SafeAssign to process an originality report. Reports highlight any blocks of text in submitted documents that match reference sources from the four databases. Reports show similarity ratings, allow instructors to view line-by-line comparisons of papers vs. matching external documents, and link back to the matching documents on the Internet, student papers in databases, etc. Click  under “SA Report” to access a student’s originality report.

Sample Originality Report from SafeAssign

Help Close

Paper Information

Owner: Katie Fuster	Folder: root	Print version: 
Filename: Tyler	Submitted: Aug 22 2008 00:45:55 EDT EST	Direct link: 
Matching:  100%	Paper ID: 16630392	

Suspected Sources

Click on a source to view the original, or click on the magnifying glass to see the source highlighted in the text below.

 Highlight All  Unhighlight All

-  <http://www.bettertimesinfo.org/bread.htm> 
-  http://www.fabulousliving.com/index.php?option=com_resource&controller=article&article=19904&category= 
-  <http://www.castleberryisd.net/intranet/inetinstructionaltechnology/documents/4thgradelessons/4thirsl> 

 Re-process the paper without the selected sources

Paper Text

English 111

Professor Fuster Aug 1, 2008 Process Analysis Essay:  [How to Bake Bread](#) It isn't difficult to make your own bread at home, however. A little time and patience will do the trick, along with some good instructions. No time or patience? You can still have wonderful homemade bread, thanks to the incredible bread baking machines on the market. These machines work very well. You simply pour in a few ingredients, turn them on. Homemade bread is made with real quality ingredients and it takes time to create. It is not forced to rise faster, and it has less preservatives than store bought bread.  "Many people think baking your own bread is somehow complicated. But bread baking was invented a very long time ago. So, how difficult can it really be? It takes less of the cook's time than getting into the car, driving across town to a grocery store, standing in line, and buying a cheap loaf of inferior bread." (Waldrop) First, place very warm liquid in bowl and sprinkle yeast

Read your originality reports carefully. A text match is not necessarily an indication of plagiarism. Also, SafeAssign cannot detect the presence or lack of correct citations after quotations, so it will flag all quotes, correctly cited or not, as potential instances of plagiarism.

Grading Submissions

Remember, SafeAssignments are integrated into the course Grade Center; Direct Submissions are not. SafeAssignments may be accessed and graded directly from the Grade Center just like Assignments; similarly, they will display a '!' until the course instructor manually assigns a grade. You can also access the full menu of SafeAssignment fields by clicking on “Grade Details,” then “View Attempt,” as this screen shows.

✓ Modify Grade

1 Assignment Information

Name Research Paper (SafeAssignment)

Description

2 Student's Work

Student ID	Student Name	Text File	Matching	SA Report	Submitted	
3520082	Armstrong, Cary	 	19%		Mon Mar 23 23:17:38 EDT 2009	<input type="button" value="Clear Attempt"/>

3 Modify Grade

Enter or modify a grade for the assignment.

Grade	Points Possible	Weight
<input type="text"/>	100.0	0.0

4 Feedback to Student

Comments

File To Attach

The Best Way to Tackle Plagiarism? Prevent It!

Do not recycle essay topics and prompts from previous semesters. This greatly increases the chance that former students will pass old papers on to current students.

Make your assignments hard to plagiarize by giving specific and somewhat unusual requirements. Ask your students to answer specific questions or write about certain subtopics in a given order. Make an interview with a community member a required primary source. Have students write an I-Search paper instead of a traditional research paper. (See <http://www.literacymatters.org/content/isearch/intro.htm> for an overview of the I-Search, or check out Ken Macrorie's book *The I-Search Paper* from Boynton/Cook Publishers.)

Teach students correct bibliographic and in-text citation methods for your field, and instruct them on how to use and correctly cite direct quotations, paraphrases, and summaries in their assignments. Diana Hacker's *Rules for Writers* is a great resource, as is her *Research and Documentation* website (see web links).

Procrastinators often resort to plagiarism, so break major assignments down into smaller parts with staggered due dates as opposed to having the just final product (or worse, all major assignments) due at one time. For example, if you've asked your students to write a research paper that cites from at least five resources, ask your students to turn in summaries of each of their resources in the weeks before the research paper is due. Have students turn in an outline of their paper before they begin drafting it.

Include a clear definition of plagiarism and your school's academic honesty policy in your course syllabus, and state the consequences for plagiarism in your syllabus, on assignment directions, etc. 100% of my students noted that knowing that one consequence of plagiarism would be a failing grade convinced them to avoid plagiarizing others' work.

Decide what constitutes a failing grade for an assignment vs. what merits a failing grade for the class. Does a 100% copied paper mean an F for the assignment or for the whole course? If a student may not have plagiarized a passage intentionally, will you give him or her the opportunity to correct the paper's citations, or will you assign a reduced or failing grade?

Discuss academic dishonesty in class and/or on your class discussion board; your students take note and are less likely to test their luck when you strongly emphasize academic honesty and ethical research.

I Caught One; Now What?

If you can prove that your student plagiarized all or part of his or her work, you may select an appropriate punishment from the following:

- Reprimand the student.
- Require that the work in question be done over.
- Assign a grade of zero on the work involved.
- Assign a grade of F for the course.

Email your dean or program lead for a copy of the Report of Academic Dishonesty form and fill it out in detail. Schedule a meeting with your student; according to LFCC's 2008-9 Student Handbook, "the student must be provided the opportunity to read and sign the form, indicating that he or she is aware of the report and of the right to appeal." Whether or not the student chooses to sign the form, forward it to the vice president of learning. Keep EVERYTHING (copies of your form, originality reports, email communication with the student, etc.) in case the student appeals your decision. The VPL will then put the student on disciplinary probation; this is critical because additional reports of academic dishonesty for that same student usually result first in a one-semester suspension, then in his or her expulsion from LFCC.

I Think I Caught One, But I'm Not Sure

Invite the student to your office to discuss the finer points of the paper. When pressed for more information about his or her magnum opus, most students will admit what, how, and why he or she plagiarized. However, if you find that your student can actively and coherently converse with you about the paper's topic, congratulations! You have awakened a slumbering savant and can forget about that whole nasty plagiarism business.

In our Blackboard course, you may access today's presentation under "Course Documents." Links to websites given in this presentation and other helpful resources can be found under "External Links."

Contact information for Katie Fuster is available under "Faculty Information."