TO: All College of Science instructors who use TurnItIn.com

FROM: Tom Fleming, CoS Coordinator for TurnItIn.com
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DATE: January 3, 2008

RE: Legal Issues regarding TurnItIn.com

   There are lawsuits currently pending against iParadigms, the operator of TurnItIn.com, by some students who feel that their "original work" is being used for commercial purposes without their consent or profit. This is because TurnItIn.com retains the students' work in their database to check for plagiarism. iParadigms is confident of their legal standing. However, I have received this communication from Jerry Hogle, UA Interim Vice President for Instruction:

   "…we do have to watch the legal questions still raised by the fact that students submit their work to a database at TurnItIn.com that will continue to use their papers (albeit without names or personal details). After consulting with a University Attorney here and with TurnItIn.com, which has given us a measure of indemnification in the new contract, I ask that you and your faculties help us with our local response to this problem by making sure that students know what they are really doing – and that they have some recourse – in any class that requires them to submit papers through TurnItIn.com. I request, then, that you please ask all faculty in your college who use this program in their courses to include this statement in all their syllabi handed out to students as each class begins:

If you decide to take and continue in this course, you are agreeing to submit your papers online, when so instructed, to a plagiarism-prevention program called TurnItIn.com. When you set up your individual account with TurnItIn.com for this class, make sure you understand and consent to all the terms that the program provides you at that point. You should note that TurnItIn.com – always without your name and any personal information – will retain your paper as part of their database so that students who plagiarize from it can be detected.   Because of this program, the vast majority of you who do your own work and cite your sources of information properly will not have to compete with students who commit undetected plagiarism. Anyone who has questions or problems with TurnItIn.com may talk privately about these with the instructor."

Therefore, we ask you to include this language in all of your course syllabi if you continue to use TurnItIn.com. Experience has shown that very few students object to using TurnItIn.com. But for those who might, we want you to handle it as you see fit. You could ask the student, in lieu of submitting to TurnItIn.com, to provide you with several interim drafts for their project with notes to show their progress on the project. The student with genuine concerns can always seek redress through the petitions process. The goal here is to make it difficult for the student who might object to using TurnItIn.com because they want to plagiarize. Please feel free to contact me with any issues or concerns you may have.