

Student Success with Less Stress: Designing a Student-Centered Program

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The transition to college can be a difficult and confusing process. Administrators and faculty expect students to conform to policies in codes of conduct, yet students are often unaware of and ill-prepared to comply with institutional expectations. At a college or university, students are expected to submit their own work for credit or provide appropriate attribution to others when using their ideas, concepts, or words. Unfortunately, experience has shown that students often come to higher education lacking the training necessary to cite appropriately. In fact, many students arrive at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) unfamiliar with the acronyms APA or MLA.

Students are often delighted when they discover that their residential hall rooms are equipped with the fastest and most sophisticated technologies, including high speed Internet access, which allows for much faster digital acquisition and transfer of copyrighted material. Illegal file sharing has become so deeply engrained in the culture of today's college student that many, when informed about laws like the Digital Millennium Copyright Act (DMCA) and organizations such as the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA), view them with apathy or even hostility.

Each year, the UCLA Office of the Dean of Students adjudicates hundreds of cases involving allegations of plagiarism and copyright infringement. Consequences for violating the academic dishonesty policy typically involve suspension or dismissal from the University. Likewise, consequences for violating University computer use policies include loss of computer privileges, removal from university housing, and suspension. Additionally, the RIAA recently began an aggressive campaign to curb illegal file sharing by issuing dozens of subpoenas to colleges and universities, forcing institutions to turn over names of hundreds of students who have used campus computer networks to engage in illegal file sharing (Foster, 2003; Read, 2004). In some cases, students have settled their disputes with the RIAA by agreeing to pay between \$12,000 and \$17,500 (Carlson, 2003).

Designing with Students in Mind

In collaboration with several offices on campus, the UCLA Library has created a student-centered online tutorial to help students navigate the campus, its resources and policies, as well as manage their new world of heavy workloads, tight deadlines, new freedoms, and added responsibilities. With an attractive retro design and an informal lighthearted tone, *Bruin Success with Less Stress* (<http://www.library.ucla.edu/bruinsuccess>) is comprised of five independent yet interrelated sections, and follows Carlos and Eddie, two UCLA undergraduate students who face a number of decisions. Eddie's scheming antics are often offset by his straightedge friend Carlos as they explore a number of issues including plagiarism, the scholarly process, intellectual property, file sharing, and strategies to manage time, research, and workload. Recognizing that a discussion on campus policy, the law, ethics, and the scholarly process could potentially become ineffectually boring, the tutorial incorporates realistic scenarios, student quotes and opinions, interactive questions and answers, and references to popular culture. Each section includes a print-friendly, one-page summary and proof of completion.

With high speed Internet access available in campus residence halls, students can conveniently access full-text articles through online library databases, copy and paste portions of those articles into term papers with or without proper attribution, email a friend a past assignment to "borrow," all while listening to illegally downloaded music. By presenting information in a provocative manner and avoiding the didactic, *Bruin Success with Less Stress* engages students and helps them make informed choices before they find themselves in questionable situations. For instance, the section on file sharing, "Need a File, Share a File," includes student comments on the actions of the RIAA ranging from the concise, "Stupid, stupid. Totally dumb," to the subtitled, "And Now for a Total Rant," where one student shares many rationalizations for illegal file sharing. The law and campus policies balance student opinions, and "Need a File, Share a File" is complemented by a separate section devoted to intellectual property issues, "Rock Machine: Intellectual Property," so titled because it opens with Eddie sharing his hand-written song lyrics with Carlos and a prompt for students to respond to the question, "Are Eddie's lyrics copyrighted now?"

Bruin Success with Less Stress also offers practical strategies and resources for coping with the pressures of transitioning to college while balancing school, family and a social life. In "Avoiding Disaster: Eddie Gets Organized," Carlos helps Eddie effectively strategize in order to tackle his research assignments and manage his time, projects, and stress levels. While the University prides itself on the outstanding caliber of incoming students, gaps exist in their prior experiences with the conventions of academic writing. Although it is true that some students blatantly plagiarize, many students unintentionally plagiarize as they are unaware of citation style guidelines or lack the experience or education to follow them. *Bruin Success with Less Stress* therefore includes "Oops, I Plagiarized: Citing and Documenting Sources," a section which not only teaches the simple mechanics of how to write a citation, but also helps students contextualize the "rules" of documentation, exposing the rationale behind the "rules." As documenting

sources is a bland topic at best, "Oops, I Plagiarized" is peppered with "true plagiarism horror stories" from the news and from campus; one such horror story recounts the true tale of a student who plagiarized none other than the very instructor who graded his paper. Lastly, a section entitled, "Don't Get Busted: UCLA Policy and Academic Integrity," introduces students to academic integrity, student conduct codes, common pitfalls students encounter, and strategies to avoid them.

Toward Success

In creating *Bruin Success with Less Stress*, the UCLA Library promotes the ethical use of information, steers students towards success and supports the missions of various campus departments including the Office of the Dean of Students, the Writing Programs, and the Office of Residential Life. The library collaborated with these and other offices on campus to create an online tutorial that is innovative, fun and highly informative. *Bruin Success with Less Stress* was launched in spring 2004 and is actively being publicized to first-year students by the Office of the Dean of Students through first-year orientation. The library also has launched an aggressive advertising campaign to inform students, faculty, and staff about the website. As the program has just been started, it is too early to tell how effective the program will be in curbing cheating, plagiarism, and illegal file sharing on campus. The Library and the Office of the Dean of Students hope to study the effectiveness of the program over the course of the next two academic years.

References

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