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Sounding the depths of crowd-sourced plagiarism



Advertises as host of “course specific study materials,” boasting “25 million course-specific study materials” from 11,000 institutions. (CourseHero, 2019)

In practice, host of student-shared coursework and course materials ranging from syllabi to answer sheets = crowd-sourced plagiarism.

168,627 ERAU artifacts
105,641 ERAU WW artifacts
(as of 3/1/2020)

(student affinity^{2,3} + networked information economy^{1,4})

x

structural barriers (access + DCMA claim workflow)

=

Challenger-deep of academically dishonest behavior

Course Villain

Search and report tool leveraging CourseHero.com API (application programming interface) metadata.

Searches CourseHero.com twice, daily. Custom queries. Generates reports with 20 most recently uploaded query matches.

Facilitates the review of flagged documents, and expedites DCMA claim workflow

How much is being shared?

Attempt to track and measure the change in volume of uploaded course material.

‘Google Alerts’ vs. Course Villain vs. CourseHero.com (native search)

ECON210; MATH111; MGMT221

Measured change in number of artifacts

Course	C.H.	G.A.
ECON210	+8,357	6
MATH111	+2,794	0
MGMT221	+1,728	1

Course Villain:

- 55 reports / 836 “matches”
- 360 unique documents
- 20 matching university content
- 17 matching queries
- 16 MATH111 / 1 ECON210

* Lots of noise, repeat ‘hits,’ and removed content *

Conclusions:

- > Clearly a great deal of content being shared, but it is *very difficult* to accurately track changes in volume of pace.
- > Scope of the space and its activity will remain concealed without better access.

What is being shared?

- Attempt to track and differentiate kinds of uploaded course materials:
- > What kind of material is being shared from/within a single course?
- > Is there a difference in shared content between courses?

Compromise Metric *

- WEAX 201: 44%
- ENGL 123: 31%
- RSCH 202: 56%
- MATH 111: 71%
- UNIV 101: 0%
- PYSC 102: 46%

* (Medium + High value assignments) / total number of artifacts uploaded

Research implications

Plagiarism is a deeply nuanced issue: Cultural / Disciplinary / Institutional. *And* how happening in new, hidden spaces, on incredible scales. Spaces like CourseHero.com don’t simply represent problematics to be solved – they also represent opportunities to investigate how and to what degree students are engaging in ethically grey behavior, in real-time.