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TO:	Senate
FROM:	Professor Christopher Buddle, Dean of Students
SUBJECT:	Proposal to Repeal the *Policy on Text-Matching Software*
DATE:	March 28, 2018
DOCUMENT #:	D17-53
ACTION REQUIRED:	☐ INFORMATION ☒ APPROVAL/DECISION

ISSUE	A proposal to repeal the *Policy on Text-Matching Software* is presented to Senate for consideration.
BACKGROUND & RATIONALE	McGill's *Policy on Text-matching Software* was approved by Senate and the Board of Governors in December of 2004. The core purpose of the Policy was to ensure the University used 'plagiarism detection software' properly and carefully, and that instructors were clear in stating they would be using specific software in their course outlines. The Policy was developed at a time when the University purchased a specific license for text-matching software and has never been reviewed or revised since its original adoption.
	McGill no longer has an institutional license for text-matching software. This fact alone creates significant confusion among members of the McGill community. For example, instructors sometimes ask Teaching and Learning Services, or the Dean of Students what to write on their course outlines, or how to access the software.
	It is also important to note that any software that detects plagiarism (or other forms of cheating) can no longer just be 'text'-based. Many courses use formulae, equations, and graphs, and appropriate software would need to be able to detect possible breaches of academic integrity beyond text-based plagiarism.
	Institutionally, McGill cannot uphold its commitment to this Policy, and the landscape has changed so dramatically that if a policy is needed to address any software solutions for detecting breaches of academic integrity, such a policy would need to be developed from first principles rather than modifying the current Policy. As such, it is prudent to retire the current Policy and start fresh, if and when required.
PRIOR CONSULTATION	Enrolment and Student Affairs Advisory Committee (ESAAC)'s Subcommittee on Academic Integrity; Teaching and Learning Services.

IMPACT OF DECISION AND NEXT STEPS	Repealing this Policy in no way lessens McGill's commitment to Academic Integrity. Disciplinary officers are well trained to detect alleged breaches under the *[Student Code of Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures](#)* as related to academic offences. Instructors are required to inform students about academic integrity, notably through course outlines. Students are also required to complete an online Academic Integrity module as a way to learn about plagiarism and cheating, and how to do their work in an honest manner. Overall, statistics from the annual reports from the Committee on Student Discipline suggest no meaningful increases in cases of Academic Offences, despite not adhering to the *Policy on Text-matching Software*.

A scan of plagiarism detection options has been done by Teaching and Learning Services, yet no single solution seems to work for McGill as a whole. Options have different costs, databases, privacy options and functionality. Certain departments systematically use specific programs for plagiarism detection. For transparency, it is suggested that students be informed in writing before the end of the add/drop period when such programs are used within a course. |
| **MOTION OR RESOLUTION FOR APPROVAL** | *Be it resolved that Senate approve, and recommend to the Board of Governors for approval, the repeal of the Policy on Text-matching Software, attached as Appendix A.* |
| **APPENDICES** | Appendix A: *Policy on Text-Matching Software* |

POLICY ON TEXT-MATCHING SOFTWARE

Approved:
Senate   December 1, 2004 (Minute 13)
Board of Governors   December 13, 2004 (Minute 7)

Full history appears at the end of this Policy.

The Use of Text-matching Software at McGill

McGill is committed to promoting the highest levels of academic integrity, which is fundamental to achieving our mission of the advancement of learning. In promoting academic integrity, McGill strives to provide information about the meaning of integrity, about how to foster it, and about the consequences of breaching it.

Because plagiarism is a serious attack on academic integrity, universities are increasingly taking steps to deal with it. Any solution must include providing students with information about proper citation and about how to avoid plagiarism (see "Student Guide to Avoid Plagiarism" at www.mcgill.ca/integrity/studentguide/) as well as providing instructors with suggestions about how to prevent plagiarism, such as designing assignments that are difficult to plagiarize (see "Strategies to Reduce Cheating and Plagiarism" at < www.mcgill.ca/integrity/strategies>).

[…]

In light of the foregoing, Senate, on December 1, 2004 (D04-32) and the Board of Governors on December 13, 2004 (GD04-29 "Appendix D") approved that:

a) McGill University should obtain an institutional license for the use of text-matching software that meets the approval of the CSA. In selecting the software, McGill University shall assure itself that the intellectual property   rights of users are protected.

(b) The Policy and Procedures for Use of Text-matching Software as a Means of Investigating Suspected Plagiarism shall be followed at McGill (D04-33).

(c) The Policy and Procedures for the Use of Text-matching Software in Courses shall be followed at McGill (D04-34).

(d) The University shall not oblige instructors to ask their students to submit written work to text-matching software.

(e) Instructors who require the use of text-matching software in their courses shall follow the Policy and Procedures for the Use of Text-matching Software in Courses.

[…]

(h) McGill University will review the use of text-matching software two years after the start of the contract.

The Use of Text-Matching Software as A Means Of Investigating Suspected Plagiarism

[…]

Policy

[…]

When the University has reasonable cause to suspect that a student has represented the work of another person as his or her own, the University may take any reasonable means to verify the originality of the work. Information from text-matching software can be used as admissible evidence, either to initiate or corroborate an investigation or a charge of plagiarism under Section 15 of the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures.

[…]

Procedures

Upon receiving an allegation of plagiarism, Disciplinary Officers who have reasonable cause to suspect that a student has, in the submitted written work, represented the work of another person as his or her own may submit the suspicious portion(s) of the student's work to text-matching software, as one means of verifying the originality of the student's work. The Disciplinary Officer may ask the student to provide an electronic copy of the work, or may scan the work, for submission.

The Use Of Text-Matching Software In Courses

Policy

Instructors may adopt the use of text-matching software to verify the originality of student's written course work.

Procedures

1 Instructors, at the beginning of the course, shall take reasonable steps to inform students of the following:

   a) the reasons for which academic integrity is important (e.g., core values; social contract; level playing field; value of degree; value of education; basis of advancement of knowledge, etc.);

   b) what constitutes plagiarism;

   c) what constitutes appropriate footnotes, citations, and bibliographic references for the course.

  Although students can be referred to the web—e.g., < www.mcgill.ca/integrity> —for some of this material, the issue of academic integrity shall be discussed in class to reinforce its importance.

2 Students shall be informed in writing before the end of the drop/add period that they are expected to submit written work in the course to a text-matching software service, which is meant to assure students that everyone will be evaluated on the basis of their own work and to warn students that plagiarism is likely to be detected.

   Students shall also be informed in writing before the end of the drop/add period that they are free, without penalty of grade, to choose an alternative way of attesting to the authenticity of their work. Instructors shall provide students with at least two possible alternatives that are not unduly onerous and that are appropriate for the type of written work, and the alternatives shall be chosen from the following:

   a) submitting copies of multiple drafts;

   b) submitting an annotated bibliography;

   c) submitting photocopies of sources;

   d) taking an oral examination directed at issues of originality;

   e) responding in writing to a quiz or questions directed at issues of originality;

f) providing a written report regarding the process of completing the work; other alternatives devised by the instruction, provided that they are not unduly onerous, that they are meant to attest for authenticity of the written work, and that they meet the approval of the Dean or Disciplinary Officer in the faculty in which the course is offered.