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Journals May Soon Use Anti-Plagiarism Software on Their Authors

By CATHERINE RAMPELL

This spring, academic journals may turn the anti-plagiarism software that professors have been using against their students on the professors themselves.

CrossRef, a publishing industry association, and the software company iParadigms announced a deal last week to create CrossCheck, an anti-plagiarism program for academic journals. The software uses the same technology as iParadigms' Turnitin, the program used by colleges to check student papers for copycat behavior.

For the overwhelming majority of CrossRef's members, which are academic publishers, this would be their first foray into automated plagiarism checks, said Amy E. Brand, CrossRef's director of business and product development.

Most academic publishers screen for plagiarism the old-fashioned way: manually. They rely on peer reviewers with expertise in a submitted article's subject area to catch poaching from previously published literature.

Phil Caisley, head of information services for the British Medical Journal Group, said some of his company's more-sophisticated editors also supplement their plagiarism checks with Google Alerts. At Elsevier, a leading journal publisher, an article submitted simultaneously to two Elsevier publications will be automatically flagged, and peer reviewers can access the company's article database to search for suspected copycat phrasings, said Philippe Terheggen, Elsevier's director of journal development and support. But for the most part, editors and peer reviewers must already suspect a passage to know what to search for.

In response to growing concerns from members over dual submission of articles to journals and conferences and anecdotal reports of rising numbers of plagiarized papers, CrossRef decided to test automated plagiarism-detecting software tailored to these publishers' needs.

The industry group decided to team up with iParadigms to test CrossCheck with eight prestigious publishers last fall, including the British Medical Journal Group, Elsevier, and Wiley-Blackwell. In the test, the publishing companies allowed iParadigms to scan their proprietary databases and index the full text of millions of articles in CrossCheck. That program's databases also include nine billion articles from current and archived Internet content. Publishers then entered selected articles into CrossCheck to check for instances of "text overlap." (The software is limited to words; it does not check for matches among images or mathematical formulas.)

Publishers in the test are now considering whether to sign up for the service, although none have

officially committed yet. Ms. Brand hopes about 15 publishers will sign on before June, when CrossCheck will be officially available.

CrossCheck is not the first anti-plagiarism software available to academic journals. In addition to Turnitin, iParadigms already offers iThenticate, a program that allows publishers to compare documents against a database.

The chief difference between CrossCheck and iThenticate is that CrossCheck subscribers who find matches in the database will be able to access the full text of the similar article, while iThenticate users, like Turnitin users, can access only a brief excerpt and bibliographic information, according to Katie Povejsil, an iParadigms spokeswoman.

Among other originality-verifying software offerings, there is also a free anti-plagiarism service called eTBLAST, run by researchers at the University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center, which can check only against abstracts in the publicly available Medline database. Data from the U.S. patents database, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, and the Institute of Physics will soon be added, said Mounir Errami, who operates the database.

Publishers said they have not used these existing services because their databases do not contain the current and archived materials needed to do adequate checks.

"We went with iParadigms because it was the only one robust enough to be relied on," said Bernard Rous, deputy director of publications and electronic-publishing program director at the Association for Computing Machinery, which participated in the test.

To use CrossCheck, participating publishers must agree to pay a percentage of their membership fees for CrossRef — the exact amount will depend on the number of publishers that participate — as well as a charge per article checked.

Publishers are still figuring out when to use the program.

"Do you want to check all the submissions you receive, or just the ones you accept?" said Mr. Rous. Some publishers just want to concentrate on vetting articles slated for publication, he said, "but if you do the check earlier, it could help referees do their jobs and not waste time."

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