

# Reducing Plagiarism Through Better Training

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# Autumn 2011

## *EART 10111: Planet Earth*

1–2-page summary of  
*Geology Today* article

## *EART 30551: Meteorology*

3–4-page literature review

All sent through Turnitin



# All students received a 4-page handout.

## **Plagiarism: What it is and How to Write to Avoid it**

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### **Plagiarism – “Presenting the ideas, work or words of other people without proper, clear and unambiguous acknowledgement” (University of Manchester)**

Our experience in the School indicates that students are aware that they should not plagiarize, but they don't know what plagiarism looks like and how to avoid it. In some cultures, plagiarism is perfectly acceptable. In the UK and other western countries, however, plagiarism is unacceptable. The purpose of this document is to walk students through a hierarchy of alterations to the text to discuss what is and what isn't plagiarism.

#### **Example 5:**

The precise onset of plate tectonics remains uncertain. Its onset has been estimated between ca. 4.1 Ga (e.g., Hopkins et al., 2008) and ca. 1 Ga (Stern, 2005). New results by Bastow et al. (2011) support the view that plate tectonics were in operation by at least ca. 1.8 Ga.

**Plagiarism.** Although some words have been changed or replaced by synonyms, some of the original text still remains. Also, the structure of parts of the original text can still be identified. Even citing Bastow et al. (2011) does not excuse the imitation of the original text. Compare with the original text, where highlighting indicates parts that were imitated or copied.



# **Planet Earth 2011: Initial Drafts of Essays**

***87 students***

- ***32 (38%) plagiarized***
- ***12 zeroes***
- ***6 received School hearings***
- ***71% max. Turnitin similarity score***

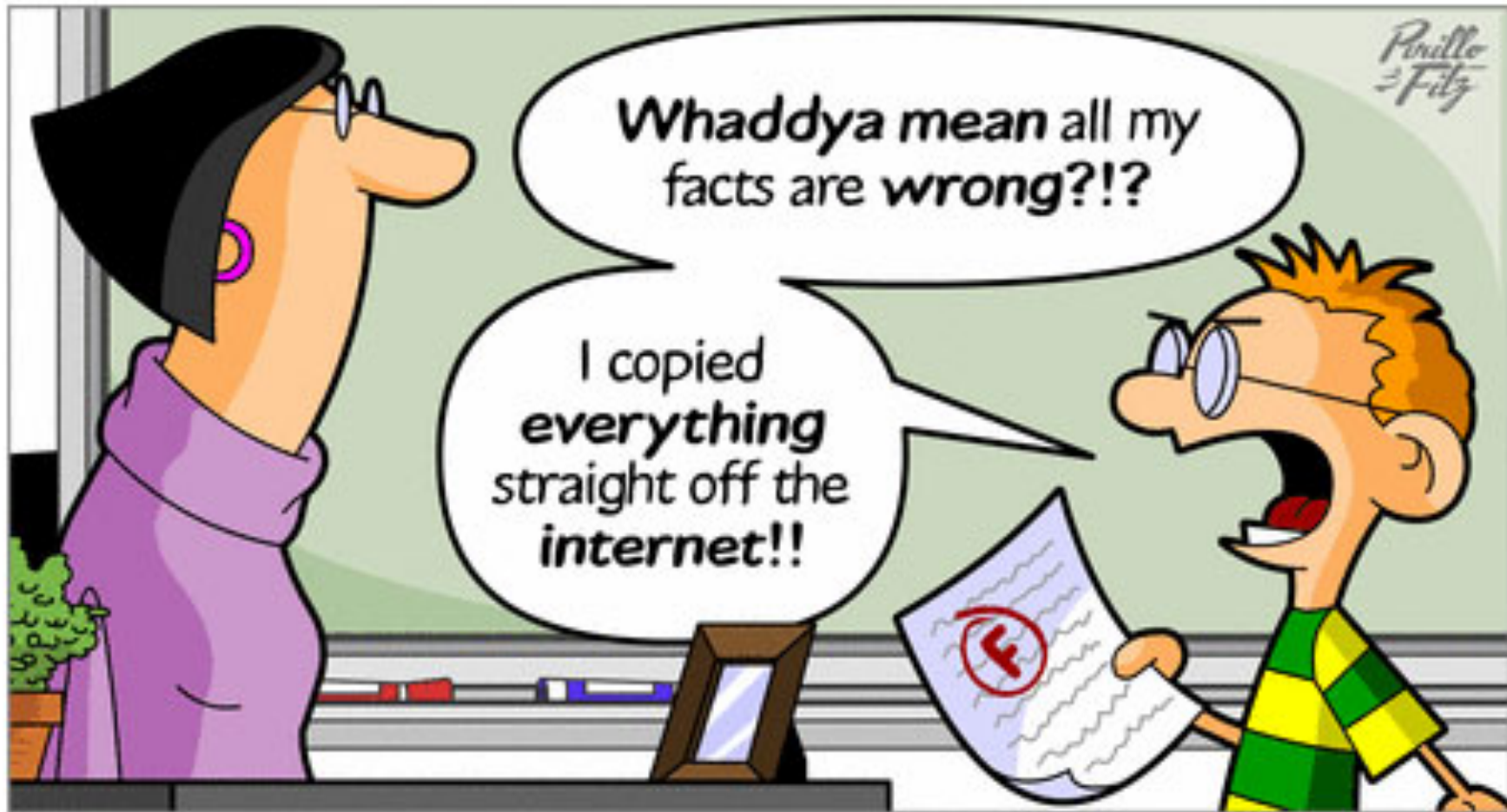
When students were confronted,  
some owned up to their  
plagiarism, but defended it:

*“I can’t say it any better.”*

*“How can I criticize experts?”*

*“My opinion might be wrong.”*

Others got defensive and didn't think they were plagiarizing.



In one of my other tasks, I serve as the Malpractice Officer for our School, handling all cases of academic misconduct.

10 international MSc students sent to Faculty Student Disciplinary Hearings in spring 2012

Given these experiences, we knew we had to do something.

The changes we made produced the following results in the next academic year.

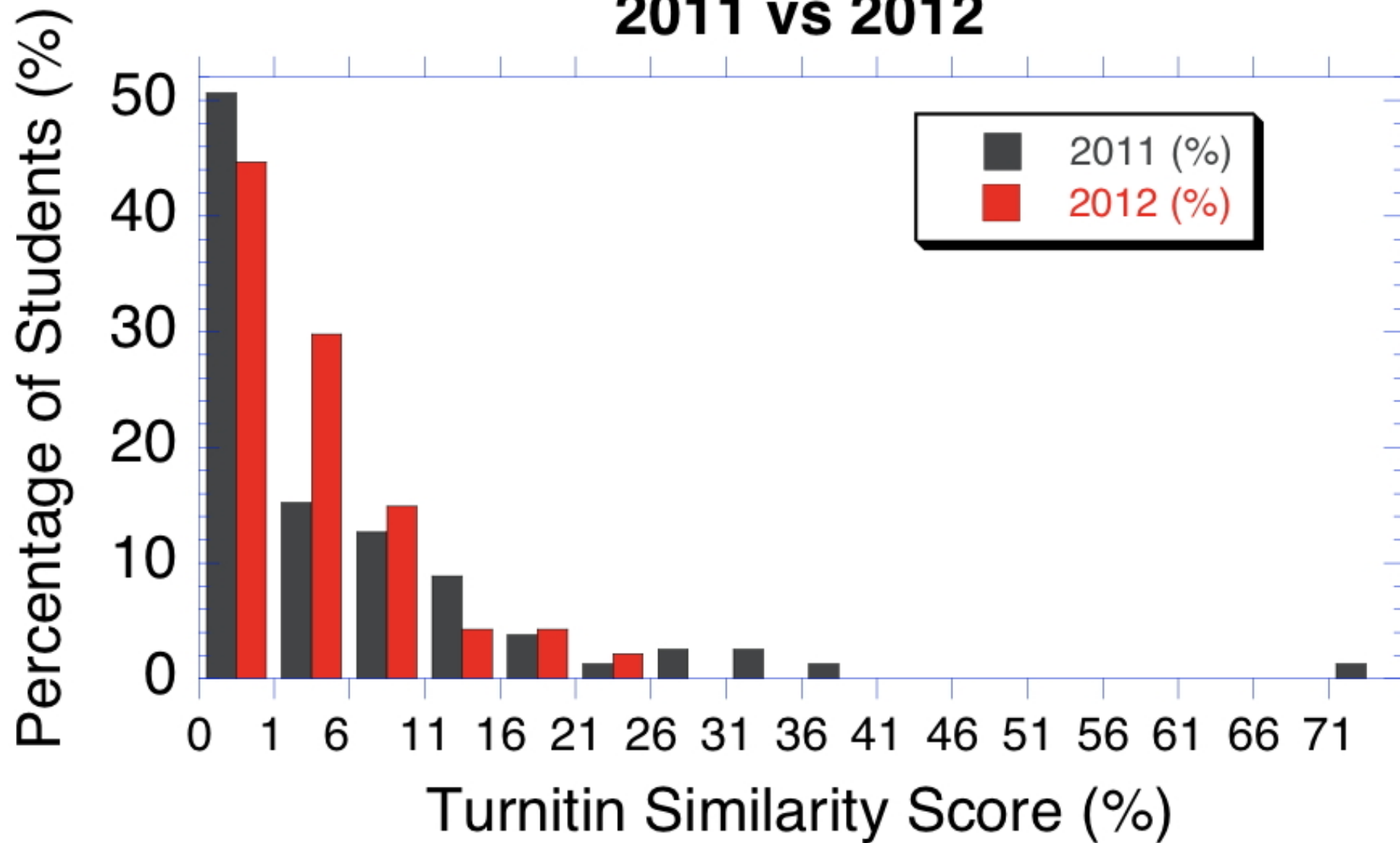


# **Planet Earth 2012: Initial Drafts of Essays**

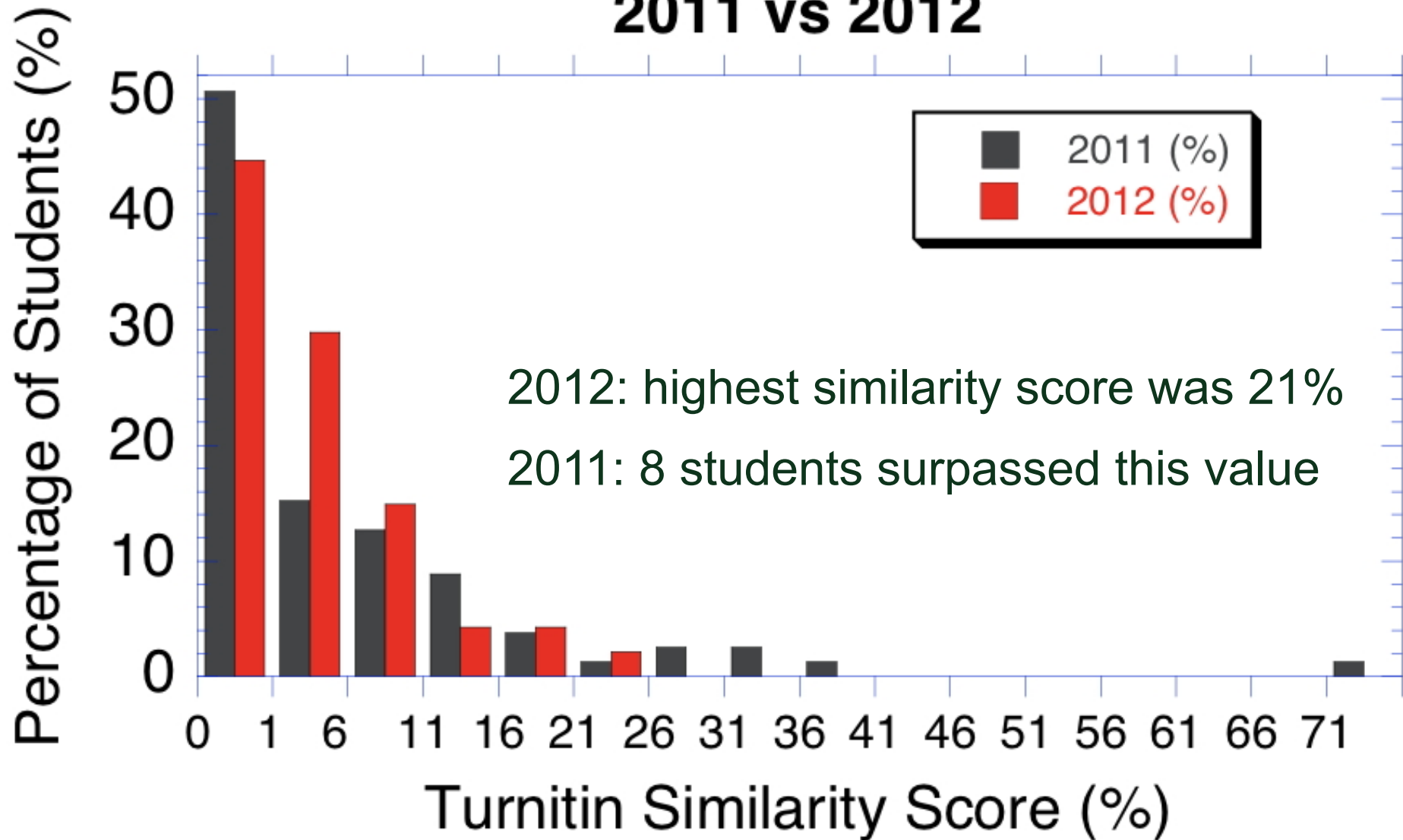
***47 students***

- ***13 (28%) plagiarized***
- ***3 zeroes***
- ***No School hearings***
- ***21% max. Turnitin similarity score***

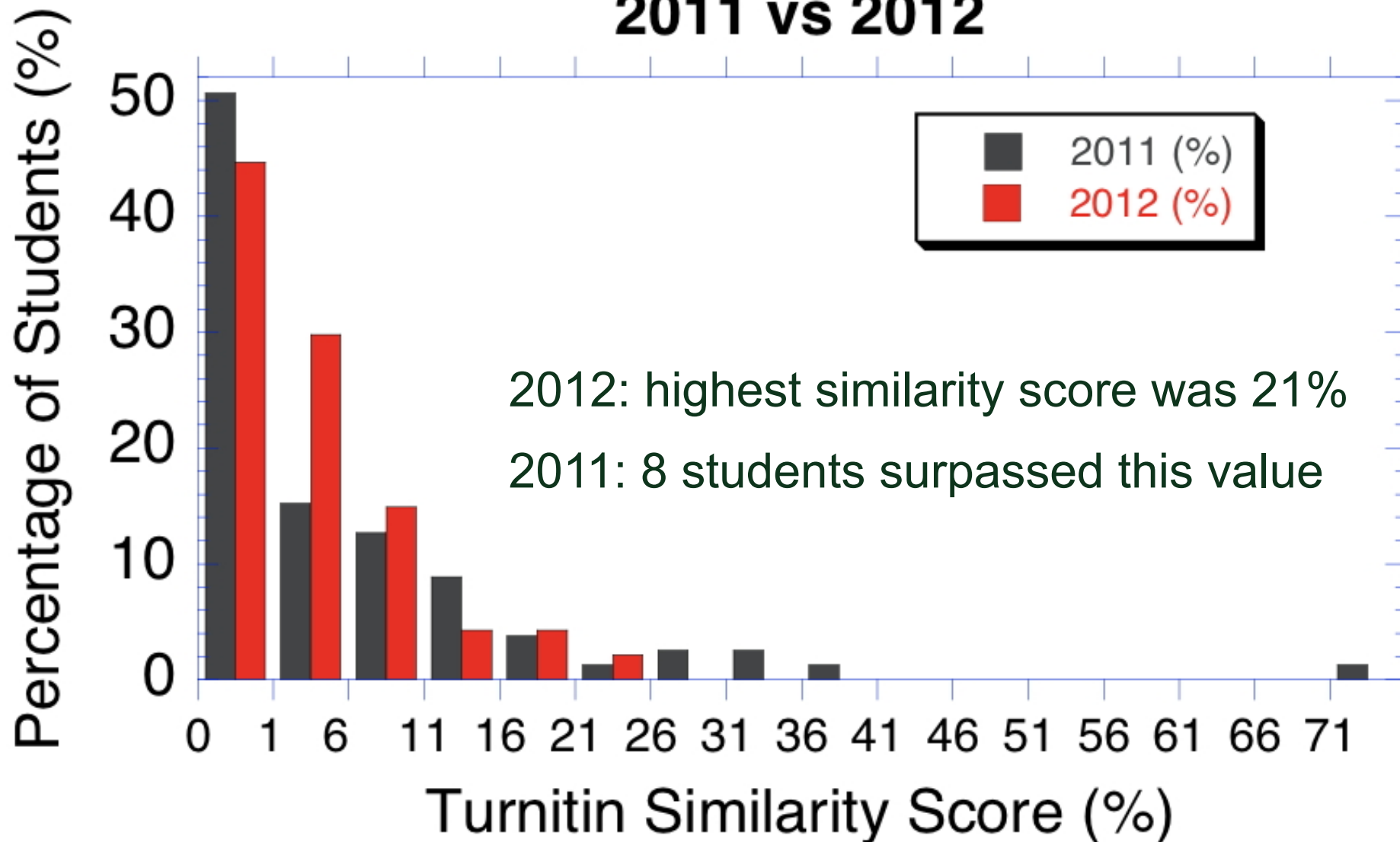
## Planet Earth First-Draft Essays: 2011 vs 2012



# Planet Earth First-Draft Essays: 2011 vs 2012



## Planet Earth First-Draft Essays: 2011 vs 2012



**Not even a single sentence in 2012!**



**How Did We Do It?**

“Do not plagiarize. Plagiarism is bad.”

In researching the problem of plagiarism and its solution, most approaches are punitive and do not address why the students plagiarize in the first place.

These approaches did not address the cause, only punished the symptom.

Our new approach addressed the issue of how students find, retrieve, read, and interpret information.

This subject area is called *Information Literacy* in the literature.

- Induction Week lecture: “How to Succeed at University”
- Academic Malpractice Awareness online module became mandatory and 10% of Tutorial marks
- Four weeks of lectures in Tutorials
  - Approaches to read the literature
  - How to read the literature critically
  - How to synthesize your reading to avoid plagiarism
  - How to organize scientific essay (intro, body, conclusion)
  - How to write and edit your own writing (coherence)
  - How to give a presentation
- More handouts and Blackboard resources on critical reading and scientific writing



# Are you a bucket or a sieve?



When you read the literature, do you walk on the beach and pick up shiny objects and put them in your bucket? Or, do you go in with a foreknowledge of what information you need and sift through the information to obtain the information you want based on your filter (your own background information)?

# What about the MSc students in 2012?

- No major reported cases of plagiarism
- Lecture at beginning of semester
- Changing type of assessment: reporting their own observations supported by literature
- Deal with first-offenses differently

# Evaluations within Tutorial Lectures

	USEFUL	SOMEWHAT USEFUL	NOT USEFUL
How to organize essay into introduction, body, and conclusion	30	11	2
Steps in writing your essay.	30	10	2
Time management skills.	27	13	1
How to approach editing your writing.	25	18	
How to determine reliability of source.	24	19	1
Where to find online sources.	24	15	
Steps in reading critically.	21	19	
Tips for studying.	21	18	1
Working through examples of editing.	19	15	3
Approaches to reading: bucket versus sieve.	18	19	1

# Evaluations within Tutorial Lectures

	<i>I completely disagree</i>	<i>I mostly disagree</i>	<i>In-between</i>	<i>I mostly agree</i>	<i>I completely agree</i>
My knowledge of how to avoid plagiarism in my own writing has improved because of these lectures.		2	8	19	12
My writing has improved because of these lectures.		3	11	16	12
I was interested in the content of these lectures.		2	6	17	14
If these lectures were taught again by this instructor in the future, I would recommend them to other students.		1	5	12	24



The punitive approach **did not** address the underlying skill that was lacking:

- read the literature with a critical eye and interpret in their own words.

*Only when students **understand the content** and **internalize their reading** will they break the habit of modifying original source material for their own essays.*

For more information and a written document of our experience with more details of what we did, please contact me.

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