Is Turnitin.com Enough?

GGU takes Academic Integrity very seriously—and we are lucky to have a tool like Turnitin.com to help instructors and students ensure that academic work in their courses stands up to our high standards. **But: is Turnitin.com enough?** There are a couple of things you may not know about the platform, to keep in mind when you're grading student submissions.

First: Turnitin.com has a vast database that is updated regularly, BUT **websites like CourseHero.com present a challenge even for Turnitin**—especially when those websites include user-generated content. It sometimes takes several weeks for newly uploaded documents to make it into the Turnitin.com database.

Secondly, Turnitin's scanning algorithm **tracks paraphrasing to a degree, but imperfectly**. If enough individual words have been changed or added, the scan may not be able to register the likeness.

What does this mean? Well, in short: Turnitin.com is not the end-all-be-all of academic integrity. It can be a great resource—but it is not a complete one. Don't presume student work is original because the Turnitin scan returns a low similarity index. So, what can you do to ensure student work is original? Here's a few steps to take, and things to look out for:

- **Use the Turnitin.com software** to perform an initial check—but don't stop here!

- **Scan student submissions at the latest possible date** to ensure the Turnitin database is as comprehensive as possible. If you have already scanned work but want to refresh the findings, open the submission, click the red funnel icon, and select "New Report."

- If something seems suspicious, **search it yourself**: try googling specific phrases, or looking up what papers or sources are readily available on the subject.

- Pay attention to odd vocabulary, or **synonymization**: does it seem like the student is trying really hard to use sophisticated vocabulary? Do any words seem *off*, or *not quite right* in context? For instance, is a student writing about the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, but calling it the Comprehensive Proclamation of Person Privileges?

- Pay attention to **voice and writing style**: is the student writing at a much more sophisticated level than they have previously? Does the writing *sound* like the student?

- Pay attention to **ordering**: sometimes plagiarism isn't just about copy-pasting directly from an uncited source, but using the structure of an argument from one.

- Alert students to the GGU Academic Integrity Policy and to the GGU document on University Writing expectations, guidelines, and resources. These resources should help students to understand what academic integrity means and what the stakes are for violating the university policy.