Plagiarism—Can Students Recognize It?

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Abstract

One hundred ninety six (196) students with senior level standing who were enrolled in the College of Business capstone course, Strategic Management, were presented with ten scenarios dealing with plagiarism. The students were asked to identify the Correct Action for each scenario. The findings reveal that a large number of senior level business students do not recognize when something is plagiarized. The Findings report the descriptive statistics for Gender, Age, Major, and Ethnicity, Also reported are the Overall Student Responses, as well as Student Responses by Gender, Major, Age and Ethnicity.

Review of Related Literature

Students who engage in plagiarism present a problem for all educators, especially those at the college and university levels. While a great deal of research has been conducted on the pervasiveness of cheating in a university setting, (McCabe & Bowers 2009; Hollinger & Lanza 2009; Heikes & Kucsera 2008; Mangan, 2006; McCabe, Butterfield, Trevino 2003; McCabe and Drinan 1999) a diminutive amount of research has been conducted specifically on plagiarism. A few studies have tried to track and report university plagiarism (Power, 2009). According to Bowers (1964) his 1963 study of 99 colleges and universities reported that 28% of students had plagiarized in some form during their college studies.

More recent studies using various student populations have reported an increase in plagiarism (Heikes & Kucsera, 2008; Hollinger & Lanz-Kaduce, 2009; McCabe 2005; McCabe and Trevino 1997). A study of plagiarism conducted in 1989 reported an increase in plagiarism from Bowers 1964 study. This study was conducted at a major Southeastern university and reported 37.7% of the students admitted to plagiarism (Hollinger & Lanz-Kaduce, 2009, p. 594). A 2005 study by McCabe at more than 80 campuses reports that almost 40% of undergraduate students reported plagiarizing (McCabe, 2005, p. 6).

***How Students Perceive Plagiarism*.** Much of plagiarism statistics has been gathered by self-reporting surveys that are not totally reliable (Power, 2009). With the changing norm of the interpretation of what is the appropriate use of original work, plagiarism may even be under reported by students (Genereux & McLeod, 1995; McCabe, Trevino, and Butterfield, 2001; Power, 2009). According to McCabe & Trevino (1996) "Today's college students have grown up in a society where ethical transgressions by leaders in government, business, sports, and academe fill the news" (p.1). The current way in which colleges and universities are dealing with these issues are not decreasing the incidences of plagiarism (Power, 2009).

Reasons for Plagiarizing. Multiple authors suggest that not all students understand what exactly constitutes plagiarism (Ashworth & Bannister 1997; DeVoss & Rosati 2002; Howard, 1999; Gilmore 2010; Schrimsher, Northrup and Alverson, 2009). Turning in the same paper for two different classes was not thought to be plagiarism (Gilmore, 2010). Another area of confusion that was discussed in research was how to paraphrase and when to use original ideas (DeVoss & Rosati 2002; Power, 2009).

According to Hawley (1984) students who plagiarize are not all evil. Many do so from ignorance on the issue. Power (2009) reported the following reasons students plagiarized:

> It is easy to do; they are confident they won't get caught; laziness; there is no victim; an assignment is deemed busywork; they don't like or don't understand the class or topic; they feel pressured for grades; they procrastinate; they don't know how to avoid it; they are unaware that they are plagiarizing; they have a sense that plagiarism in school is more acceptable than in the real world; they lack the ability to rephrase; and finally, they feel there wasn't enough time for the assignment. (p. 649)

To illustrate the confusion DeVoss & Rosati (2002) report that when one of the authors told her class that she had found three papers plagiarized and that the students should come to her office hours, fourteen students showed up. The additional students were not sure if they had plagiarized or not (p. 192). To those teaching at the university level, the ever-increasing availability of electronic material must certainly be making plagiarism easier for students and may also be contributing to its prevalence. (Ashworth & Bannister 1997; Rimer, 2003).

Studies have shown that students are not concerned about plagiarism. It appears to be a big thing to faculty and administrators (Power, 2009). Students reported that they understand that the professors are concerned about plagiarism but they didn't share the same anxiety (Ashworth & Bannister, 1997; Kraus, 2002; Power, 2009).

Instead of punishment and threats to prevent plagiarism, good teaching is the key. Teaching can be the springboard for discussions, "…relating to appropriate research, good writing, similarities and differences in research spaces, intellectual property rights, and the pitfalls and potential of electronic media" (p. 201).

Methodology

One hundred ninety six (196) students with senior level standing who were enrolled in the College of Business capstone course were presented with 10 scenarios dealing with plagiarism. The students were asked to identify the "The Correct Action" for each scenario.

Descriptive statistics were compiled for Major, Gender, Age and Ethnicity, Overall Student Responses, as well as Student Responses by Major, Gender, Age and Ethnicity.

Findings

The descriptive statistics for Gender, Age, Major, and Ethnicity are reported. Also reported are the Overall Student Responses, as well as Student Responses by Gender, Major, Age and Ethnicity.

Gender

Fifty two percent of the participants were male and 48% female. In a 2011 study (Rhodes, Merlino, Darbandi) 60% were males and 40% were females.

Age

The age of the students providing the data for the descriptive statistics was as follows. Sixty percent of the student respondents were between the ages of 22 and 25.

Major

The student respondents were scattered across all of the majors in the College of Business. Accounting = 52%, Marketing = 41%, Management and Human Resources = 37 %, CIS = 20%, International Business = 19%, Operations = 16%, and ebusiness = 5%.

Ethnicity

All ethnicities except Alaska native were represented. Asians comprised the largest ethnicity (56%), followed by Hispanic or Latino (51%) and Caucasian (37%).

Summary of all Correct and Incorrect Responses

Figure 1 lists the topic of each scenario as well as the correct and incorrect responses by all respondents.

Figure 1 – Summary of Responses

	Topic	% Correct	% Incorrect
1	Paraphrasing	68	32
2	Paraphrasing	56	44
3	Citing an Interview	55	45
4	Team member plagiarizes	55	45
5	Citing a logo	67	33
6	Citing a photograph	46	54
7	Original words	51	49
8	Citing a song	20	80
9	Common knowledge	72	28
10	Using the same paper in two classes	37	63

The average percentage of Incorrect responses is 43%. When asked about citing the reference for song on the radio, 80% replied it didn't need to be cited.

Correct Responses by Gender

Figure 3 reports the correct responses by gender. When comparing the male respondents with the female respondents, there is no significant difference in their selection of the correct action for any of the 10 Scenarios.

Figure 3 – Correct Responses by Gender

	Topic	% Correct	% Incorrect
1	Paraphrasing	63	73
2	Paraphrasing	73	83
3	Citing an Interview	52	60
4	Team member plagiarizes	53	58
5	Citing a logo	65	63
6	Citing a photograph	45	48
7	Original words	54	45
8	Citing a song	21	19
9	Common knowledge	69	73
10	Using the same paper in two classes	31	42

Correct Responses by Age

Figure 4 reports the correct responses for each age grou. When comparing correct responses by age group, there is no significant difference in their selection of the correct action for any of the 10 Scenarios.

While there is no significant difference between age group responses, it is interesting that for Scenario 8—posting a song on Facebook—the 26 and up group had more correct responses as did the 18-21 group. The 22-25 year olds had fewer correct respondents.

Figure 4 – Correct Response by Age

	Topic	18 - 21 % Correct	22 - 25 % Correct	26 and up % Correct
1	Paraphrasing	70	68	71
2	Paraphrasing	87	79	79
3	Citing an Interview	58	52	52
4	Team member plagiarizes	48	60	65
5	Citing a logo	68	64	63
6	Original photograph	42	48	37
7	Original words	65	50	46
8	Citing a song	23	7	46
9	Common knowledge	70	72	74
10	Using the same paper in two classes	82	76	75

Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions for this study include:

- A high percentage (47%) of Senior level students were unable to select the Correct Action for the 10 scenarios. In the 2011 study, only 43% (Rhodes, Merlino, Darbandi) overall were unable to select the Correct Action.
- Telling the students to read the "policy" doesn't help.
- There is no significant difference between male responses and female responses.
- There is no significant difference between a person's age and a correct response.

Recommendations for this study include:

- Faculty should include a short presentation about plagiarism in their classes.
- Students and faculty need to be more aware of plagiarism.
- Students need to be interviewed about their opinions about plagiarism.
- Continued research which included more than self-reporting on plagiarism needs to be completed.
- Universities must do a better job of educating students and faculty about plagiarism and how to avoid plagiarism.
- Faculty must assign written assignments and evaluate them carefully.

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