



Evidence Summary

Differences in Faculty Approaches to Plagiarism Deterrence are an Opportunity for Increased Collaboration in Information Literacy Instruction

A Review of:

Michalak, R., Rysavy, M., Hunt, K., Worden, J., & Smith, B. (2018). Faculty perceptions of plagiarism: Insight for librarians' information literacy programs. *College and Research Libraries*, 79(6), 747-767. <https://doi.org/10.5860/crl.79.6.747>

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Abstract

Objective – To learn how faculty members define plagiarism and what actions (if any) they are taking in their classes to educate students about plagiarism.

Design – Online survey.

Setting – A small private college in the Northeastern United States of America.

Subjects – A total of 79 full-time and adjunct faculty members in arts and business.

Methods – Participants completed an online survey, modified from a survey in *The Plagiarism Handbook*, in which they provided their definition of plagiarism. They then answered yes/no questions regarding their knowledge levels and methods of plagiarism instruction used in class. The authors collected data on the faculty members' age, discipline, years of experience, and their status as either adjunct or full-time faculty. After analyzing the results independently, the authors later collaborated to discuss codes and identify clear themes in the list of definitions.

Main Results – An analysis of faculty members’ plagiarism definitions determined that most define plagiarism in a way that roughly aligns with the university’s definition, but identified inconsistencies regarding severity, student knowledge, the role of intent, and the necessity of a source attribution when determining what constitutes plagiarism. The themes in their responses clearly illustrate the major differences in approaches to plagiarism.

The authors also found that while 87% of respondents reported discussing plagiarism in their classes, they usually did so only “a little” or “a moderate amount.” Furthermore, just over 53% of respondents did not provide their students with materials on plagiarism, though 55% reported including a definition of plagiarism in their course syllabi. Researchers also asked whether or not faculty members had invited a librarian to speak to their class about plagiarism, to which 74% of faculty members responded no.

Conclusion – This study suggested that librarians should consider differing perspectives on plagiarism when collaborating with faculty members and that librarian-faculty collaboration on information literacy instruction can help to mitigate the effects of inconsistent practices regarding plagiarism. The study’s authors are integrating their research findings into anti-plagiarism training modules for students at the institution where this study was conducted. Future studies based on this research are planned to further explore the intersections of plagiarism and information literacy.

Commentary

Plagiarism is a persistent topic in the library literature. Some recent work on plagiarism has focused on faculty perceptions of what constitutes plagiarism. For example, one study at Queensborough Community College surveyed faculty members in English and Speech & Theater about their attitudes toward

various plagiarism scenarios (Marcus & Beck, 2011), while another multi-university study specifically surveyed faculty members on their views of student self-plagiarism (Hallupa & Bollinger, 2013). The authors of the present study noted that they believe their method of asking faculty members to provide their own definitions of plagiarism is the first of its kind and the additional data they provided on how often faculty members are communicating plagiarism information to their students is also unusual in the wider body of literature.

This summary uses an appraisal tool developed by Lindsay Glynn to evaluate library and information science research (2006). This tool addresses four sections: population, data collection, study design, and results. The researchers conducted their survey in the context of broader efforts to address student plagiarism through their information literacy program. As employees of a small school with only business and arts & sciences faculties, the size and diversity of the population investigated was limited, meaning results could likely not be generalized.

The full survey is included as an appendix, and it shows that faculty members were asked about several topics not addressed in the Results section. For example, faculty members were asked about their experiences with encountering and reporting honour code violations on the survey, but no data on this subject is shared in the final article. Another question gauged how faculty members perceived plagiarism expectations and consequences for both domestic and international students. The data from this part of the survey was not shared in the article, and it is unclear why it was omitted.

Academic librarians who are seeking to collaborate with faculty members on plagiarism deterrence can build upon the survey data provided here and may consider the findings in discussions with faculty members. The themes identified in the study

can act as a springboard to further discussion with teaching faculty regarding what constitutes plagiarism and how best to address it.

References

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