

# Can University Business Students Identify Plagiarism

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## Abstract

Sixty seven students with senior level standing who were enrolled in the College of Business capstone course were presented with six scenarios dealing with plagiarism for this exploratory study. The students were asked to identify the best response to each scenario. Descriptive statistics were compiled for Overall Student Responses as well as Student Responses by Major, Gender, Age and Ethnicity. The findings reveal that a large number, 46 percent 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. To plagiarize is, “to steal and pass off (the ideas or words of another) as one’s own” (Webster’s New Collegiate Dictionary, 1977, p. 877). 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 both an increase and a decrease depending on the study (Heikes & Kucsera, 2008; Hollinger & Lanz-Kaduce, 2009; McCabe 2005; McCabe and Trevino 1997; Scanolon and Newman 2002). 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). This was followed by a 2005 study by McCabe at more than 80 campuses that almost 40% of undergraduate students reported plagiarizing (McCabe, 2005, p. 6).

Studies have tried to differentiate the types of plagiarism in some of the reportings: handing in another students previously graded papers, recycled papers, citing negligence, and internet replica. According to Hawley (1984) 15.1% of students reported letting another student hand in a paper that has already been given credit in a class. Hawley also looked at what percentage of students recycled papers from one class to another (26.1%)(p. 37). Furthermore, Hollinger & Lanza-Kaduce (2009) 1989 study found that

not citing or giving credit (33.3%) correctly was the highest reported plagiarism (p. 593). The internet has added a new dimension to the plagiarism wars. Research by Scanlon & Neumann (2002) describes that (25%) of their 698 student respondents admitted to using the internet for plagiarizing.

***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). As reported by McCabe and Trevino (1996) the minority of students in their 1993 study reported that the lack of citing or forging bibliographies is not serious cheating. However, they did feel that turning in someone else's paper was serious cheating.

There is no wonder that college and university students are having a hard time understanding why plagiarism is such an issue. 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). This fuels the moral integrity transgressions that have been reported by studies. The current way in which colleges and universities are dealing with these issues are not decreasing the incidences of plagiarism (Power, 2009). Discussion about about selective persecution with the faculty addressing the obvious cases. Faculty and administration does not have the time to invest in constant monitoring and persecution addressing the issue (Kraus, 2002).

***Reasons for Plagiarizing.*** Student's rationale for plagiarizing has varied responses. Multiple authors suggest that not all students understand what exactly constitutes plagiarism (Ashworth & Bannister 1997; DeVoss & Rosati 2002; Howard, 1999; Gilmore 2010; Roig, 1999; 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). Externalization and the use of the internet has also been reported as a possible rationale (Power, 2009; Schrimsher et al., 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 (usually attributed to others); 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) reports that when she told her class that she had found three papers plagiarized and that the students should come to her office hours to discuss the issue, fourteen students were in line outside her office. The additional students were not sure if they had plagiarized or not. When she reviewed with a student the requirements of proper attribution and article searching using the library he said, "You mean I have to do ALL THAT?" (p. 192).

The internet has added a new dimension to the plagiarism arena. 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. Internet in combination with word processing has made plagiarism very easy (Ashworth & Bannister 1997; Rimer, 2003; Power 2009). A recent study of nine universities stated nearly 25% of the students used the internet for plagiarism

(Scanlon & Neumann, 2002). Gilmore (2010) discussed that with those that do plagiarize it is a habit forming behavior.

Student studies have shown that students are not intrinsically concerned about plagiarism. It appears to be a big thing to faculty and administrators when in fact students are externalizing plagiarism (Power, 2009). A student surveyed in Power's (2009) study said, "It seems apparent that at the college level at least, students see plagiarism as a bit of a power trip" (p. 653). 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).

*Teach More Plagiarism.* Power's (2009) research regarding perceptions of plagiarism includes the following quotes from students, "I don't think teachers teach it well enough." (p. 655) "Gilmore (2010), Power (2009), and Schrimsher et al., (2009) discuss that plagiarism needs to be taught more to university students so they can understand what is, and what is not, plagiarism. Some universities are now requiring students to complete a plagiarism tutorial. Yale requires students to complete a plagiarism module before course registration (Aaron, 1992; Aaron & Georgia, 1994). Likewise, Duke and Bowdoin also require tutorials before registration of classes (Gabriel, 2010).

*Positive Reasons for Proper Attribution.* Students are told not to plagiarize because it is wrong. "But they don't really elaborate on how to and how not to" (Power, 2009, p. 655). According to Ashworth & Bannister (1997) students want to clearly understand why plagiarism is so important. Research shows that students want to know what is clearly permissible and what is not permissible.

DeVoss & Rosati (2002) report that teaching students to look at plagiarism as intellectual property helps them see the connection to the "real world". Students respond to examples of intellectual property when combined with copyright, fair use, and plagiarism. 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**

Sixty seven students with senior level standing who were enrolled in the College of Business capstone course were presented with six scenarios dealing with plagiarism for this exploratory study. The students were asked to identify the best response to each scenario.

Cooper & Schindler (2011) state that creating numerical summaries provides valuable insights for the researchers. The response from participants were edited, coded, and entered was tabulated using excel (p. 423). Because the study was exploratory, 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 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.

Shown are the Gender of the participants in the capstone course in the College of Business Administration. Sixty percent of the participants were male and 40% female. Things haven't changed much over the years.

The age of the students providing the data for the descriptive statistics is shown in Figure 2. Figure 3 displays the percentage of students in each major..

Figure 2  
Age of the Responded

Years	Frequency	Relative Frequency	Cumulative Relative Frequency
21	13	19%	19%
22	19	28%	48%
23	12	18%	66%
24	6	9%	75%
25	6	9%	84%
26	1	1%	85%
27	2	3%	88%
28	2	3%	91%
29	2	3%	94%
30	2	3%	97%
31	0	0%	97%
32	0	0%	97%
33	0	0%	97%
34	1	1%	99%
35	1	1%	100%
	<b>67</b>	<b>100%</b>	

Figure 3  
Majors of Undergraduate Business Students

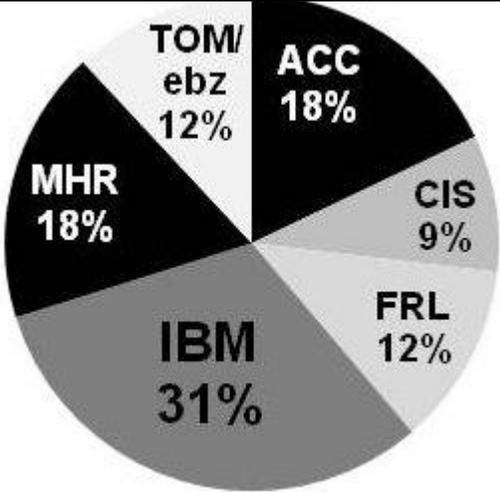


Figure 4  
Overall Student Responses

	1	2	3	4	5	6
A	13%	12%	0%	0%	16%	12%
B	0%	0%	0%	54%	4%	6%
C	<b>63%</b>	<b>69%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>4%</b>	51%	<b>63%</b>
D	24%	19%	0%	<b>42%</b>	<b>28%</b>	19%

Figure 4 displays the percentages for each Response for each Scenario. Sixty three percent choose the correct response for Scenario 1. Which also means that 46% of the students did not recognize they scenarios that were plagiarized. Scenario 2 shows 69% correct, Scenario 3 100% were correct. Only 44% of the respondents were correct on Scenario 4. Twenty-eight percent were correct on Scenario 5 and 63% were correct on Scenario 6.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions for this study include:

- A high percentage (46%) of Senior level students are unaware of the definition of plagiarism.
- A high percentage of Senior level students cannot recognize plagiarized work.
- Telling the students to read the “policy” doesn’t help.

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.
- Continued research which included more than self-reporting on plagiarism needs to be completed.

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