

EXPLORING THE LIBRARIAN'S ROLE IN PROMOTING ACADEMIC INTEGRITY ON CAMPUS

CANDICE BENJES-SMALL, ERIC ACKERMANN, AND KEVIN TAPP

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY ON CAMPUSES

To better understand what is meant by “academic integrity”, and the issues involved with the idea, we conducted a literature review on the topic of academic integrity in higher education, especially undergraduate education. There are four main limitations on this research. First, there is no generally accepted research definition of “academic integrity,” “academic dishonesty,” “cheating,” or even “plagiarism” (e.g., McCabe, Trevino, & Butterfield’s (2001) distinction between copying another’s work vs. failure to footnote another’s idea) (Lambert et al, 2003.). Second, the studies rely mainly on self-reported data which can lead to survey results that exaggerate the amount student cheating (Crown & Spiller, 1998; Mustaine & Tewksbury, 2005). Third, many studies use differing survey time-frames, ranging from as short as six-months (e.g., Mustaine & Tewksbury, 2005) to a student’s entire collegiate career (Lambert et al, 2003.) Finally, the range of cheating behaviors studied can vary from a limited focus on several aspects (e.g., plagiarism and test cheating) to all types (Lambert et al, 2003).

These limitations notwithstanding, the broader studies provide a sobering picture of academic dishonesty. Estimates of the overall number undergraduates who cheated at least once in their academic career range from 35.4% (Mustaine & Tewksbury, 2005) to 82% (McCabe, et al, 2001.) Over time, McCabe, Trevino, and Butterfield’s (2001) longitudinal study found that test/exam cheating (defined as “copying on an exam”, “using crib or cheat notes”, or “helping someone else to cheat” (p. 223)) rose from 39% in 1963 to 64% in 1993. Written work cheating (defined as plagiarism, “fabricated or falsified a bibliography”, “turned in work done by someone else”, or “copying a few sentences of materials without footnoting them in a paper” (p. 223)) increased only slightly from 65% (1963) to 66% (1993), while overall cheating rose from 75% (1963) to 82% (1993).

Currently, there is no equivalent data on academic dishonesty available for Radford University (RU). RU has adopted an Honor Code system (<http://www.radford.edu/~dos-web/academicintegrity.htm>) that covers very similar types of cheating used by McCabe, Trevino, and Battlefield’s (2001) longitudinal study. While the Honor Code is posted throughout campus and published in class syllabi, there is no campus-wide initiative to educate students about academic integrity. It is up to either individual professors or the students themselves to make the effort.

LIBRARIES AND ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Although academic integrity covers many different activities, librarians focus on those which are strongly tied to research. ACRL’s *Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education* addresses these in several different places. Under standard 2, outcomes 5a, 5c, and 5d all directly apply. The information literate student, according to outcome 5a, “selects among various technologies the most appropriate one for the task of extracting the needed information (e.g., copy/paste software functions, photocopier, scanner, audio/visual equipment, or exploratory instruments)” (“Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education”, 2005, p. 10). It is interesting that the ACRL standards include this purely technological process of “extracting” the information efficiently as a separate competency. It appears that for many students, their proficiency in this purely “technological” piece of the process is perhaps running ahead of their competency and understanding of the other, ethical skills addressed in the following outcomes. Outcome 5c pertains directly to the actual process of citing: “.....differentiates between the types of sources cited and understands the elements and correct syntax of a citation for a wide range of resources.” Similarly, according to Outcome 5d, the information literate student “records all pertinent citation information for future reference” (“Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education”, 2005, p. 10-11).

BENJES-SMALL, ACKERMANN, AND TAPP
Radford University

Under Standard 3, outcomes 1c and 1d address direct quotes and paraphrasing: the information literate student “restates textual concepts in his/her own words and selects data accurately.” This student also “Identifies verbatim material that can be then appropriately quoted” (“Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education”, 2005, p. 11).

Also addressing paraphrasing and direct quotations, outcomes c. and d. of Standard 4 state that the information literate student “integrates the new and prior information, including quotations and paraphrasing, in a manner that supports the purposes of the product or performance” and “manipulates digital text, images, and data, as needed, transferring them from their original locations and formats to a new context. (“Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education”, 2005, p. 13). Finally, the information literate student “selects an appropriate documentation style and uses it consistently to cite sources,” and “posts permission granted notices, as needed, for copyrighted material.” (Standard V., Outcome 3 a. and 3 b., “Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education,” 2005, p. 14).

Over time it became clear to us that a long-standing weakness of the Standards has been its assumption that campus faculty, administrators, and librarians will decide amongst themselves who will be responsible for teaching which Standard. In conversations about this problem, we realized it was indicative of a larger issue with the Standards: this is a document which was created by librarians, but not solely for librarians. In the preamble, it says, “Incorporating information literacy across curricula, in all programs and services, and throughout the administrative life of the university, requires the collaborative efforts of faculty, librarians, and administrators” (“Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education,” 2005). Yet the Standards were developed by only one of these groups. If the Standards were not a result of collaboration, how can they be easily accepted and distributed throughout a campus environment?

This situation puts librarians into an awkward position. Most faculty and administrators do not understand what is meant by “information literacy”, and if they do, they are referring to general concepts and not the ACRL framework. If a librarian is lucky enough to find faculty and administrators who are open to the idea of information literacy, it then falls upon him or her to educate them on the ACRL Standards on an individual basis.

As a result, very few campuses have all their groups working together, incorporating information literacy “across curricula, in all programs and services, and throughout the administrative life of the university.” Further complications arise when universities and colleges do not have a campus consensus on academic integrity issues. When the responsibility for academic integrity is spread throughout different campus units, with no superior party setting policies and striving for consistency, chaos can ensue. In many places, no one is designated to teach students how to avoid plagiarism, whether certain actions impact copyright, how to correctly cite sources, or how to use citation software. That doesn’t mean students do not need such instruction; in fact, many students flounder. As Blair Brainard, Head of Reference and Instruction at Radford University’s McConnell Library, often says, “Librarians abhor a vacuum.” When librarians see a need going unfilled, we often step in.

This is certainly true of academic integrity promotion and instruction.

Both the library literature and reflection on our own experiences show that many libraries offer training on plagiarism awareness, correctly citing using APA or MLA, and bibliographic management software like EndNote and RefWorks. Most of the articles detail success stories, explaining how the librarians created workshops worthwhile to their audiences. What is often left unexplored, however, is the question of whether we should be the ones teaching these workshops.

TEACHING ACADEMIC INTEGRITY CHALLENGES

As mentioned earlier, the ACRL Standards delineate what knowledge and skills the information literate student should possess, without detailing who should teach them. Many faculty are quite happy to have librarians’ aid in these areas, and librarians are often flattered when faculty ask us for help. Sometimes requests for help are right up our alley; for example, helping faculty in detection of plagiarism. As Denise Hamilton explains: “It usually happens like this: An instructor suspects plagiarism and wonders if the librarians—who can find anything, after all—can confirm the suspicions” (Hamilton, 2003, p. 27). Many universities subscribe to fee-based services designed to help faculty members easily detect plagiarism, such as Turnitin.com, and faculty often turn to librarians for information and assistance with such services. Additionally, there are many sophisticated techniques which can be used with free internet search engines like Google to identify plagiarized material. Since librarians are doing more and more instruction on how to use Google and other search engines, it is not surprising that they are being asked to use this expertise to ferret out suspected plagiarism. Also, as more of the resources students are using come from online library databases, the best way to confirm suspected plagiarism may be to do a literature search in a library database – and some librarians have developed very sophisticated methods for attacking this challenge (Bugeja, 2000).

When it comes to deterring plagiarism however, many librarians feel out of their element in the classroom. In our workshops, while explaining plagiarism to students, we realized that they can parrot back why plagiarism was bad but cannot actually paraphrase an original source. They lack the skill set to avoid plagiarism. We added paraphrasing and summarizing exercises to our workshop, but we teach it with qualms; we are not English professors.

Trying to correctly cite a resource (especially one online) using APA or MLA is especially tricky for a number of reasons. First, there is the challenge of interpreting the citation handbook, deciding which format is most similar to the odd case a student has brought to the librarian. At the end of April 2006, librarians on the Information Literacy Instruction Listserv (ILI-L) discussed the proper way to use tinyURL and how to cite one’s own forum posting (Godavari, 2006; Ostrow, 2006). Even if we think we’ve figured it out, there is another significant obstacle: the professors themselves.

Professors often have very strong feelings about academic integrity. While all of them would agree that copying and pasting without attribution is plagiarism, little consensus exists beyond that black-and-white example. Professors at RU have revealed differing ideas of what constitutes an adequate paraphrase, what kind of facts count as “common knowledge” and even whether helping a classmate with homework was considered cheating. Many instructors emphasize formatting citations correctly, but a disturbing number seem to have their own versions of APA, such as changing the way library database articles should be cited, or when page numbers should be given. It is not uncommon for a professor to insist something be done as it was done at his doctorate program- even if no other university did it that way!

ADDRESSING CHALLENGES

While libraries may abhor a vacuum, it is equally important that they not operate in one. Many of us teach students how to avoid plagiarism and answer their citation style format questions, but the professors are the ultimate judges. They are the ones who will grade the resulting paper or project and be the ones to decide whether plagiarism is an issue and if a citation is formatted accurately. We are not in a position to assert ourselves as experts in academic integrity.

We can however be part of a wider approach to the problems of plagiarism, copyright, and citation styles. When problems arise, we need to talk to individual instructors about their students’ questions and concerns. It is especially important to involve the faculty member when the professor’s advice seems to contradict the formal citation manual. Many times, the professor relies on his memories of APA and may not know about new revisions or the APA website (www.apastyle.org). Since instructors will sometimes mark down for incorrect citations, it is imperative that students and professors work from the same playbook.

Ideally, we will try to affect change at a higher level. Librarians should create strategic partnerships with selected campus units that will allow both to leverage limited staff resources by creating joint efforts to meet common challenges to academic integrity. We recommend that you partner with your university’s writing center to share citation and plagiarism mitigation efforts. Consider strengthening ties with department that request a lot of library instruction, such as the English Department for freshman composition courses at RU, from which you can learn first hand about the academic integrity issues they encounter from their students. Together you can then develop joint solutions which will allow you to work *with* professors. Optimally, librarians and departments will collaborate on plagiarism and citation guidelines, generating a standard by which everyone in the department will be consistent.

We also need to develop the habit of environmental scanning, or a systematic awareness of what is coming (or may come) to your campus that can affect academic integrity. Watch for new technologies

officially or unofficially under-review for possible adoption; these will often be discussed at faculty workshops and administrative meetings. Then evaluate how these new technologies might impact academic integrity. Will they provide new opportunities for cheating and plagiarism? Or will they provide possible countermeasures to cheating, such as if your university adopted Turnitin.com? Then, decide how the librarians could best be part of the technology. Volunteer to be involved with the technology; to wait to be asked is to be either ignored or given responsibilities you’d rather not have. Remember to foster collaboration with other campus units; we can be most effective when working with others.

REFERENCES

- Bugeja, M. (2000). Busting the new breed of plagiarist. *The Writer’s Chronicle*, 1-7.
- Crown, D.F., & Spiller, M.S. (1998). Learning from the literature on collegiate cheating: A review of empirical research. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 17, 683-700.
- Godavari, S. N. (2006, April 26). *Web page citations*. Message posted to the Instruction Section of the Association of College and Research Libraries’ Information Literacy Instruction electronic mailing list.
- Hamilton, D. (2003). Plagiarism: librarians help provide new solutions to an old problem. *Searcher*, 11(4), 26-29.
- Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education*. (2005). Retrieved 18 Apr, 2006, from <http://www.ala.org/ala/acrl/acrlstandards/standards.pdf>
- Lambert, E.G., Hogan, N.L., & Barton, S.M. (2003). Collegiate academic dishonesty revisited: What have they done, how often have they done it, who does it, and why did they do it? *Electronic Journal of Sociology*, 7(4). Retrieved April 10, 2006, from http://www.sociology.org/content/vol7.4/lambert_etal.html
- McCabe, D.L., Trevino, L.K., & Butterfield, K.D. (2001). Cheating in academic institutions: A decade of research. *Ethics and Behavior*, 11(3), 219-232.
- Mustaine, E.E., & Tewksbury, R. (2005). Southern college students’ cheating behaviors: An examination of problem behavior correlates. *Deviant Behavior*, 26, 439-461.
- Ostrow, M. (2006, April 26). *Citing yourself*. Message posted to the Instruction Section of the Association of College and Research Libraries’ Information Literacy Instruction electronic mailing list.