

USING SCENARIOS TO TEACH UNDERGRADUATES ABOUT COPYRIGHT, FAIR USE, AND PLAGIARISM

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INTRODUCTION

Students, today more than ever before, are immersed in a culture of dishonesty. They see Oprah publicly castigating James Frey, the author of *A Million Little Pieces*, for distortions, lies, and exaggerations in his “memoir.” The news reports talk of prestigious scientists who are discredited at Seoul University for falsifying data after having claimed to clone human embryos. A *New York Times* reporter is caught either fabricating stories or plagiarizing them.¹ This is the culture that young people find themselves in, and the message they seem to hear is “go ahead and be dishonest as long as you don’t get caught.” The Internet provides easy opportunities to plagiarize and even offers advertisements for term papers for sale. Most young people today freely copy, exchange, and download copyrighted songs, videos, and TV shows from file-sharing sites. While students know that it’s not legal, they don’t believe that they are doing anything wrong ethically, mainly because “everybody is doing it.” Based on a 2002 survey, Don McCabe’s report from The Center for Academic Integrity indicates that, “On most campuses, 70% of students admit to some cheating. Close to one-quarter of the participating students admitted to serious test cheating in the past year and half admitted to one or more instances of serious cheating on written assignments.”² Roig and Caso (2005) report that 72% of the student participants claimed to have used a fraudulent excuse in college at least once.³ As one can see, the problem of ethical behavior with regard to information and academic integrity is much broader than just the issue of plagiarism.

CONTEXTS FOR TEACHING STUDENTS ABOUT INFORMATION ETHICS

Information ethics can be taught in a variety of settings, including philosophy, English, journalism or mass communication courses. Library science courses that teach information literacy concepts are another appropriate place to teach information ethics. Librarians may be called upon to teach information ethics as part of

course-integrated instruction. Finally, when there are campus wide efforts to teach faculty and students about academic integrity or information ethics, the library faculty can offer their perspectives on plagiarism, copyright, and fair use. At the University of South Florida, information ethics is a unit taught as part of an undergraduate course on Library and Internet Research Skills.⁴ The University of South Florida, located in Tampa, Florida, is the second largest university in the Southeast, with campus enrollment at about 35,000 students. Library and Internet Research Skills (LIS 2005) is a three credit hour, fifteen week class taught by instructors in the School of Library and Information Science. The course can be an elective for any student on campus, but is a required course for Mass Communication majors.

THE CHALLENGE OF TEACHING MILLENNIALS IN THE ELECTRONIC CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT

Students in LIS 2005 classes work in an electronic classroom that contains about 25 computers. Quite understandably, the computers are as much a distraction as an asset in exploring the world of information. At the start of each class period, teachers request that students close out their chat sessions, finish their email correspondence, or complete the homework lab activities on their computers. Like so many Generation Yers, students who take LIS 2005 like to multitask and it can be very difficult to keep their undivided attention. In Kate Manual’s (2002) article about teaching information literacy concepts to Generation Y, she points out that 17-19 year olds have “visual and kinesthetic learning styles” and that they learn more holistically. “Gen Yers generally need to see the big picture, in every sense of the word, when being introduced to concepts and procedures.”⁵ Thus, active learning works better with these students than direct instruction. Moreover, Grassian and Kaplowitz (2001) point out that “students do not learn much just sitting in classes listening to teachers...they must talk about what they are learning, write about it, relate it to past experiences, apply it to their daily lives.”⁶ This is especially true when teaching ethical issues surrounding information. Lecturing students about ethics does not have the same impact as active learning, where students process, discuss, and debate ethical issues with their peers and

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their teachers.

DESCRIPTION OF INSTRUCTION: USING INQUIRY-BASED LEARNING ACTIVITIES

While instructors need to present some informational content about copyright, legal protections, plagiarism, and fair use to undergraduates, it helps to offer them a bigger picture of these issues within the context of student inquiry. A good place to begin is to ask students who they think plagiarizes and why. It's clear at the outset of these discussions that most undergraduates understand that plagiarism is unacceptable, but the variety of responses they offer indicate that the matter is complex and reasons for student cheating and plagiarism are not cut and dried. Student responses to the question of why students plagiarize include: "They (students) are lazy!" "They don't know that they are plagiarizing." Still others tend to blame their teachers. One student said, "Some professors are just always looking for it and don't cut students any slack." Another student complained that some teachers at the high school level don't assign documented papers nor do they grade them carefully, so students get the wrong idea, thinking that plagiarizing is "no big deal." Given what research shows us about student behaviors related to ethics and information (such as copying or downloading copyrighted music) it's not surprising that students with poor writing skills coming out of high school think that it's not important to cite sources carefully.

DESCRIPTION OF INSTRUCTION: USING SCENARIOS

After some general discussion about plagiarism, students participate in an in-class group activity involving scenarios. Arranged in groups of three to five students, each group is given a scenario where they are asked to act as judges, give the type of offense, and offer a verdict. Each group reads the scenario aloud, discusses the verdict and their reasoning, and records their answers. Later, all groups are required to share their scenarios with the entire class. It is during the analysis phase of scenarios that instructors then offer additional information about local university policies about plagiarism, rules about citing sources that are part of some scenarios, copyright law information, and more detailed definitions of concepts like common knowledge or fair use. Adding more substantive information when students are invested in their analyses means that they will be more receptive to that information contextualized into the bigger picture. The scenarios provide excellent teachable moments. For example, students often do not think there is anything ethically wrong with citing a quote from a book that they accessed from a journal article as though they had consulted the book. In the debate that ensues, the instructor can not only argue that it is unethical, but also show students that there are appropriate and ethical ways to cite a primary source that is quoted within a secondary source without doing anything wrong.

REFLECTION ON INSTRUCTION: LESSONS LEARNED

In teaching this unit to students, it's clear that there is much they do not know about plagiarism, copyright, or fair use. For

example, using some scenarios revealed that some students simply do not know how to paraphrase or summarize correctly and end up with statements that are too close to the original. This most likely happens because students tend to copy and paste material, change a few words here and there, and think they are paraphrasing. Students are also unsure of what they should or shouldn't cite. When told that students must provide a citation when using an image from the World Wide Web for a project, students are surprised. They are even more surprised to find out that one cannot paste in others' images from a Google image search as visuals for their own Web publications without permission from the creator. The thorniest area of discussion with students involved copyright infringements. Most of the Generation Yers seem to feel entitled to help themselves to any piece of music, video, or television show they can download from a peer-to-peer network without paying for the material. Even though they know it is illegal and that some would view it as unethical, most of them believe that the laws are "unfair" because "everyone does it." They tend to rationalize their positions by saying that some music groups don't mind the extra publicity and they believe that as long as they are copying or downloading for their own use and not distributing copyrighted materials for profit, that they aren't doing anything wrong. Pointing out the potential lawsuits and fines does not seem to have much of an effect on students. Part of the problem is that undergraduates hear confusing and mixed messages about copyright from the Internet itself and from their friends. While LIS 2005 instructors do not think they will significantly change students' attitudes about copyright, they feel that by engaging them in thinking critically about ethics and the law, they at least raise awareness about the potential consequences of such behaviors. File-sharing is a fact of life with Generation Yers and may contribute to why they are shocked when the consequences of another kind of stealing, plagiarism, are so severe. While none of this seems to be very much of a "big deal" to students, it's important for parents, teachers, and educators to explain that not only unethical behavior in school is unacceptable, but unethical behavior with regard to copyrighted material is also unacceptable.

CONCLUSION

Teaching students about information ethics is a very important part the information literacy curriculum. The ACRL Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education addresses ethical behavior in Standard Five: "The information literate student understands many of the economic, legal, and social issues surrounding the use of information and accesses and uses information ethically and legally." Under Standard Five an outcome listed is that students demonstrate an understanding of intellectual property, copyright, and fair use of copyrighted material."⁷ Given student attitudes and the culture of the Internet, this may be one of the biggest challenges to educators in higher education. Using scenarios can be one way to make this material more real to students and more applicable to their daily lives.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ Macklem, K. (2006, March). Their cheatin hearts: A new journal finds plagiarism and fraud, in high places. *MacLean's*, 119(12), 37 retrieved 30 April 2006 from WilsonOmnifile.
- ² McCabe, D. (2005). Levels of cheating and plagiarism remain high: Honor codes and modified codes are shown to be effective in reducing academic misconduct. *The Center for Academic Integrity*. Retrieved May 8, 2006 from http://www.academicintegrity.org/cai_research.asp
- ³ Roig, M. & Caso, M. (2005) Lying and cheating: Fraudulent excuse making, cheating, and plagiarism. *The Journal of Psychology*, 139(6): 485-494.
- ⁴ Ariew, S. *Library and Internet Research Skills*. Retrieved May 8, 2006 from <http://uweb.cas.usf.edu/%7Esaariew/sy105.html>
- ⁵ Manuel, K. (2002). Teaching information literacy to generation y. *Journal of Library Administration*, 36(1/2). 195-217.
- ⁶ Grassian, E.S. & Kaplowitz, J.R. (2001). *Information literacy instruction: Theory and practice*. New York: Neal-Schuman, 116-117.
- ⁷ Association of College and Research Libraries (2000). *Information literacy competency standards for higher education*. Accessed May 11, 2006 from <http://www.ala.org/ala/acrl/acrlstandards/informationliteracycompetency.htm>
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APPENDIX

THE SCENARIOS

Sample Scenarios: Read each scenario. Act as the judge and give the type of offense (plagiarism, copyright infringement, or other ethical dilemma), and give your verdict – guilty or not guilty. Then explain your verdict. Use what you learned in class and the lecture notes to justify your verdict. Share your verdicts with the class and discuss. If unsure about a verdict, do some more research to verify the answer.

Scenario 1: Source: Davidson, R. (1973). *Genesis 1-11*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP.

Original Wording: “Such ‘story myths’ are not told for their entertainment value. They provide answers to questions people ask about life, about society and about the world in which they live” (p.10).

Mary’s Paper:

Specifically, story myths are not for entertainment purposes rather they serve as answers to questions people ask about life, about society and about the world in which they live.

Scenario 2:

George has a presentation tomorrow for his public relations class. While searching the Internet, he found the perfect graphic to illustrate one of his key points. Even though he’s pretty sure the graphic is copyrighted, he decides to cut and paste it into his PowerPoint presentation anyway. He lists the website and date he visited the site below the graphic. Did George do anything wrong?

Scenario 3:

Last week, someone stole Linda’s car. Although the police were able to recover the car, the thief stole all her cds from the car. Adam, Linda’s chemistry lab partner who has had a crush on her since the first day classes, decides this is the perfect opportunity for him to tell Linda how he feels. They have similar taste in music, so he decides to make some burn some of his cds for her. He doesn’t want to do anything illegal, so he only burns the cds she already had, figuring it’s not a problem since she had already bought the cds herself. Has Adam done anything wrong?

Scenario 4:

Stan has to write a paper on *Othello* for his Literature class. The following is a source Stan used in his paper. Did Stan do anything wrong?

Original Wording: The main image in *Othello* is that of animals in action, preying upon one another, mischievous, lascivious, cruel or suffering, and through these, the general sense of pain and unpleasantness is much increased and kept constantly before us.

More than half the animal images in the play are Iago’s, and all these are contemptuous or repellent: a plague of flies, a quarrelsome dog, the recurrent image of bird-snaring, leading asses by the nose, a spider catching a fly, beating an offenceless dog, wild cats, wolves, goats and monkeys.

Stan’s Paper: The majority of the animal images in the play are Iago’s, and all of these are contemptuous or repellent. He refers to a plague of flies, a quarrelsome dog, bird-snaring, leading asses by the nose, a spider catching a fly, beating an offenceless dog, wild cats, goats and monkeys. Through these images the general sense of pain and unpleasantness is increased and kept constantly before us (Spurgeon, 1935, p. 335).

Scenario 5:

Jane has a final economics paper due on Monday. One of her sources, a journal article, uses a quote from a book. Jane likes the quote and wants to use it in her paper, but can’t find the book in the library. Since it’s already Sunday and her paper is due the next day, she doesn’t have time to get the book through interlibrary loan. Even though she doesn’t have the original book, she has the quote from the journal article, so she decides to use the quote and cite the book. Has Jane done anything wrong?

Scenario 6:

Rob just got a DVD burner for his birthday. He decides it would be a great idea to burn the DVD’s he rents from NetFlix. He figures it’s not a big deal since the DVD’s will be for his own use and he won’t be giving them out to his friends. Has Rob done anything wrong?

Scenario 7:

David heard that “Lost” is a great TV show, but he missed the first season. He decides to go to his favorite file-sharing site on the Web and download the first season episodes to watch them. He figures ABC won’t mind because he can catch up and continue watching Season 2 which is good for them commercially. Has he done anything wrong?