

TEACHING STAFF CONCERNS ABOUT ACADEMIC INTEGRITY AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS FOR STAFF DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract: Anecdotal evidence suggests that, even when academic staff are aware of the existence of a plagiarism policy, many still don't use it. They either prefer to deal with it in their own way, or ignore the issue. In order to encourage increased and improved use of the existing policy, we were interested in understanding staff concerns about plagiarism generally. As part of a Postgraduate Certificate (PG Cert) in Teaching and Learning in Higher Education, a 3 hour workshop is devoted to Academic Integrity. At the start of the workshop, participants are asked to complete a survey on their experience and concerns regarding plagiarism, and their awareness of local policies and procedures. Staff are then asked to articulate their single biggest concern around academic integrity, and this collection of concerns and the ensuing discussion is used to direct aspects of the workshop. With different groups, the emerging group concerns will have different flavours; some teaching-focused, some student-focussed and some policy-focussed. The data from the surveys over the last 3 years gives an insight into staff awareness of policies and procedures at our institution as well as highlighting the general ethos and attitudes regarding student plagiarism. This paper will compare the collected data against early results from the IPPHEAE project staff survey. Knowledge about the levels of awareness of plagiarism policy amongst staff has implications for staff development. This paper will give an overview of various approaches to awareness raising and staff development that have been used in our institution, with an indication of the levels of success and factors contributing to this.

Introduction

The National University of Ireland, Galway, is a university in the west of Ireland, with about 17,000 students and more than 2,000 staff across 5 Colleges, including Arts & Humanities, Business & Law, Science, Engineering, and Medicine & Nursing.

The Centre for Excellence in Learning and Teaching (CELT) is a central unit of the university which provides support to academic staff for teaching and learning as well as playing a role in determining policy in the areas of learning, teaching and assessment. One aspect of CELT's remit is to provide a Postgraduate Certificate (PG Cert) in Teaching and Learning in Higher Education, offered to academic staff. Each year, about 36 staff enrol on this 30 ECTS programme, which is voluntary. In any year, the participant profile ranges across all disciplines, with a range of years of experience. Any staff member who completes the PG Cert can progress to a Postgraduate Diploma (PG Dip) in Academic Practice and, ultimately, an MA in Academic Practice.

The university takes a holistic approach to plagiarism, informed by good practice in the UK, the United States and Australia. In 2004, a Code of Practice for Dealing with Plagiarism was developed, which established the role of *plagiarism advisor*—a member of academic staff, associated with a School, whose role is to deal with reported cases of plagiarism within that School according to the code. In 2006, the *plagiarism committee* was created, made up of plagiarism advisors, and giving them the authority to apply

penalties according to an agreed set of criteria. In 2012, the code of practice (National University of Ireland, Galway, 2012) was reviewed and revised, informed by experience and incorporating a version of the Benchmark Plagiarism Tariff produced by the third phase of the Academic Misconduct Benchmarking Research (AMBeR) project (Tenant and Rowell, 2010).

Since 2006, the Turnitin originality detection tool has been used, in varying ways, across the university and in 2008 it was integrated into the university's virtual learning environment (VLE), allowing it to be used with large numbers of students with a minimum of administrative overhead (Flynn, 2010). Associated with the technology, regular workshops on using Turnitin to deter plagiarism are offered to all academic staff. Support on using the software using a proactive and constructive approach is also offered.

General advice on aspects of academic integrity, interpretation of the Code of Practice, and approaches to deterring plagiarism is available on demand. However, there are still concerns about the level of staff awareness of the institutional policy and its implementation, and awareness of approaches to addressing issues of student plagiarism generally.

A Workshop on Academic Integrity

To address some of these concerns, in 2009 it was proposed to incorporate a workshop on academic integrity into the PG Cert module on Course Design, Assessment and Evaluation. The module is given as a series of seven 3 hour workshops on aspects such as curriculum design, learning outcomes and Bologna, student engagement, evaluating teaching, and assessment. Critically, the workshop on Academic Integrity is scheduled to follow the workshop on Assessment, so that participants can make links between good assessment practice and plagiarism deterrence.

The format of the workshop is described in the following paragraphs.

Taking time to focus

Participants (approx 16 in each group) are asked to complete a survey, asking about their knowledge of the code of practice; their level of concern about plagiarism in the classes they teach; the number of cases they have seen in the last year; the name of a plagiarism advisor for their School; who they would ask for advice about student plagiarism; whether they discuss issues of plagiarism with students, tutors or other staff; and finally, what tips they have for deterring plagiarism. The purpose of the survey is to focus them on their own thoughts around issues of academic integrity, prior to the workshop discussion. Participants are informed that the survey data may be used as part of research.

They are then asked to write down their single biggest concern about plagiarism. After some minutes, participants are asked to discuss with their neighbour what they have written down. This usually creates a good buzz in the room and people begin to relax a little. Finally, the facilitator goes around the room, asking each person to describe their concerns, which are noted on a flipchart or whiteboard. Links can be established and items clustered to get an overall picture of those issues of most concern

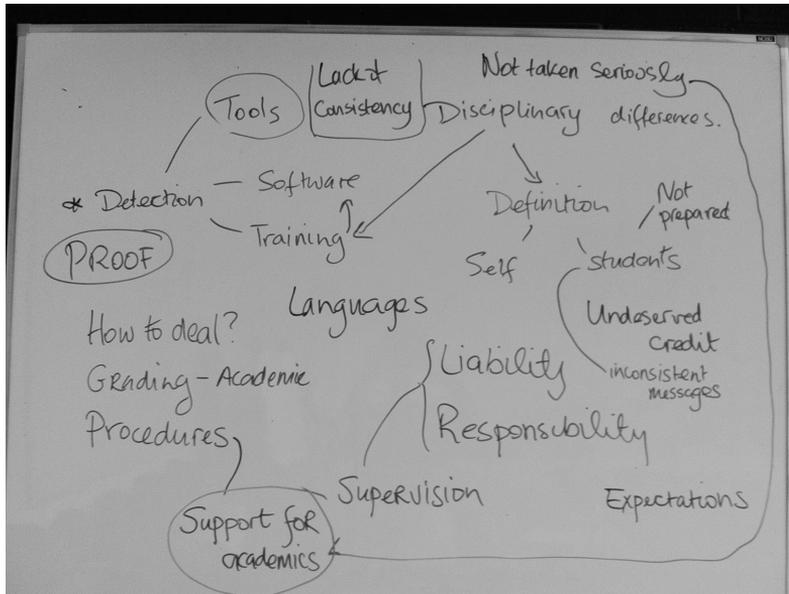


Figure 1. Staff concerns, group A, 2012

to the group. See, for example, figure 1, showing the result of this exercise for one group in March 2012.

This discussion of staff concerns serves a number of purposes. First, it allows each participant to articulate some aspect of academic integrity that is important to them. Second, it allows the facilitator to focus the workshop on the collected issues, particularly where there may be misconceptions. By often referring back to the collection of concerns during the three hour workshop, participants feel a sense of ownership of the discussion. Finally, it gives the facilitator a very useful insight into staff perceptions of academic integrity which, over three years, have built into a valuable collection of data.

The workshop continues

The workshop continues with a discussion of what we understand by the term plagiarism. In particular, we use the *Where do you draw the line?* exercise from Carroll (2007). This usually demonstrates that there is inconsistency in staff views of plagiarism, even when staff come from the same discipline and teach the same groups of students.

From this realisation, we move to consider the student view of plagiarism, why students plagiarise, and what we might do as academics to address these issues.

The middle hour of the workshop is spent looking at internet plagiarism, including a tour of ghost-writing sites, essay mills and other web-based opportunities available to students. This is often very shocking for the group, since they may have never seen or considered the availability of such services for students.



Figure 2. Wordle representing Staff concerns, 2010

The group then focuses back on good practice for assessment and how this can be used to deter plagiarism. This links nicely with the previous workshop on assessment, and returns the general mood to one of positivity and empowerment.

Finally, we consider policy and what makes a good policy. We discuss reasons why academic staff might choose not to follow the policy, including administrative overhead or lack of trust.

Assessment

The overall assessment of the module is based on the development of a course review folder, focusing on one course that is currently being taught, and reviewing it in the context of the seven workshops.

For the workshop on academic integrity, participants are asked to consider an existing student assignment, analyse it and identify opportunities for plagiarism, make changes to design-out opportunities for plagiarism. They are also asked to consider how they might use the opportunity to help students learn about issues of academic integrity.

Academic Staff Concerns

The workshop, as described in the previous section, has now been running annually as part of the PG Cert in Teaching and Learning in Higher Education for 3 years, with another workshop due to run in March 2013. Staff feedback has been very positive.

Data about academic staff concerns, collected as described previously, has been retained as flip chart pages or photographs taken of the final whiteboard. The records are also made available to the participants, via the VLE, after the workshop, sometimes using a graphical form (see figure 2).

The data over three years has been analysed using a simple keyword approach and grouped according to whether the concerns tend to be centred on students, matters concerning teachers and teaching styles, issues of policy, or concerns related to the institution.

In this section, we describe those issues of primary concern to academic staff under four headings. In the next section, we will consider how awareness of policies and procedures, according to our survey data, compares to the early results of the staff survey for the project *Impact of Policies for Plagiarism in Higher Education Across Europe (IPPHEAE)* (IPPHEAE, 2013). Finally, we will discuss the implications for staff development at the National University of Ireland, Galway.

Student focused

Student focused concerns can be grouped into five categories:

- Students' lack of skills and awareness (S.1)
- Opportunity for plagiarism (S.2)
- Effect on learning (S.3)
- Impact for training (S.4)
- Reputation (S.5)

One of the key concerns expressed by staff is that students lack the skills necessary to avoid plagiarism (S.1). There is a strong belief that students are plagiarizing innocently or unintentionally, that they do not have a good sense of what is expected of them in higher education. Connected to this is the observation that students do not have the skills necessary to complete written assessments in higher education, including information literacy skills, study skills as well as basic writing skills. Coming from secondary school, in particular, the concern is that students are not well prepared for learning. When information about plagiarism and plagiarism avoidance is made available, through induction or course guidelines for example, often students become confused or worried about their own skills, which may further compound the problem.

Related to this is that students often receive mixed messages about what is expected of them and what is acceptable when it comes to academic writing. One teacher might be very relaxed towards acknowledging the work of others, while another teacher is very strict about particular referencing conventions. Many students do not realize how serious plagiarism is.

The second area of concern to staff is the increased opportunity for students to plagiarise, sometimes related to the opportunity offered by technology (S.2). In general, staff refer to the tendency for students to use a copy and paste approach to writing; they are not (yet) aware of essay mills and ghost writing services. This concern is linked to the first (S.1) in that students have developed this, previously successful, approach to writing and believe it to be an appropriate strategy at university level.

Staff who are involved in teaching large cohorts of students, in some cases up to 850 students in one class group, will identify collusion, or inappropriate collaboration, as an issue. Collusion often occurs between students in the same class group, or between years in the same overall programme.

A small number of staff will identify laziness as an issue: some students don't want to put the effort into an assessment and will resort to other approaches.

One particular issue that comes up occasionally is that of language/translated plagiarism, most often from language teachers. This can centre around technology and the use of tools such as Google Translate, for example. There are also anecdotes about students using their friends, who may be native speakers of the language to be learned, to complete assignments for them.

A significant number of staff suggest that plagiarism is an impediment to learning (S.3), and that by plagiarizing the student is missing an opportunity to learn and to develop her own ideas. Connected to this is the possible impact of widespread plagiarism on hard-working students, and that their learning may be affected by the actions of others.

The lack of awareness and skills has an impact on teaching (S.4). Academic staff are concerned that there is a need for training for students about what is plagiarism and how they can avoid it, information skills and referencing/citation skills. It is not clear, from the ensuing discussions, who is expected to provide such training.

And finally, staff are worried that the student who plagiarises is given undeserved credit if the act goes unnoticed. On the other hand, if the case is reported, they worry about the reputation of the student (S.5). Where is the record kept and who has access to it? This is particularly relevant if the student is taking a course leading to a professional qualification, for example Nursing.

Teacher focused

Often, the concerns of the group, as articulated, focus on the teacher and how academic dishonesty can have an effect on the role of the teacher. These are grouped into four categories:

- Time and effort (T.1)
- Impact on teaching and assessment (T.2)
- How to deal with issues (T.3)
- What support is available (T.4)

One of the primary concerns raised by workshop participants is the time and effort required to actively monitor and address plagiarism (T.1). In an environment where there is increasing pressure to produce more research and teach more students, monitoring of student activities in large groups is not insignificant. Where problems with writing are found, resulting from either intentional or unintentional plagiarism, the time and effort required to follow up, collect evidence, and go through the formal process, can be off-putting. For many staff members, particularly those who have had a bad experience in the past, it is simply easier to ignore issues of plagiarism and just reduce the mark of the student. This, in turn, has an effect on the culture of the organisation (U.1).

Another concern is that the issue of plagiarism restricts what can be done with continuous assessment (T.2). Staff worry that they will have to resort to final, written exams. While staff generally agree that continuous assessment supports student

learning, this only works if the expectations of the staff and students match, and if students genuinely put the work into the assessment.

A second issue around the effect on assessment is that of grading. Linked to (S.5), students may be getting undeserved credit for unoriginal work, so the opportunity for learning has been missed. Alternatively, staff might be dealing with the issue by simply marking students down, where an opportunity to learn about writing and referencing skills may be missed.

Some participants will be concerned about what to do if/when plagiarism is discovered (T.3). Some are not aware of the code of practice, while others may have had discouraging experiences while using it in the past.

Finally, there are many questions around what support is available to staff, either within a discipline or at institutional level (T.4). Some staff will have a strong sense of support from their colleagues, while others may feel unsupported within their School or discipline, perhaps referring to an unsympathetic head of unit.

Policy focused

Policy focused concerns are grouped into three categories

- Penalties (P.1)
- Fairness (P.2)
- Usage (P.3)

Concerns around penalties (P.1) tend to focus on whether they are appropriate, with some staff believing that existing penalties are too strong and others believing that they are too weak. A major concern is whether they are consistently applied across the university. Clarity is needed around the criteria used to determine penalties and how borderline decisions are made.

Fairness is raised as an issue in a number of contexts (P.2). Is the policy inherently fair? Is the policy being applied in a fair and consistent manner? Is it fair to all students and staff? For example, if the penalty applied for a (first) plagiarism offence is simply a warning, is that fair to other students who have not plagiarized?

There is also a concern that the policy is not being used by all staff (P.3), through ignorance of its existence, a choice based on time and effort required (T.1), or a lack of trust in the process (U.1). This, in turn, has implications for the fairness of the policy (P.2).

Institution focused

Finally, the institution focused concerns are grouped into two categories

- Culture (U.1)
- Reputation (U.2)

Concerns about the culture of the institution or the discipline (U.1) come up in different ways. Some participants observe that there is a culture of ignoring the issue of academic dishonesty among students, or not taking it seriously, perhaps in the hope

that it might go away. Others observe a general lack of trust in the policy or a general reluctance to use it. In some disciplines there is a reluctance to even discuss the issues, and individual staff members can feel very isolated through lack of support (T.4).

The concern about institutional reputation (U.2) is clear. The integrity of the qualification awarded as well as the integrity of the institution is under threat and most staff have some worries about the accreditation of students who have not met requirements.

Awareness of Policies and Procedures

As part of the initial survey undertaken by participants at the workshop, they are asked about the level of awareness of the Code of Practice for Dealing with Plagiarism. Specifically, the following questions are included:

- Are you aware of the NUI Galway Code of Practice for Dealing with Plagiarism?
- Have you read the NUI Galway Code of Practice for Dealing with Plagiarism?
- Can you name a plagiarism advisor for your School? Enter name in the text box.

In the first year of the survey, 2010, almost 87% of respondents were aware of the existence of the policy, with a slight variation across different Colleges. However, only 60% of respondents had read the document, and just over half (52%) could correctly name a plagiarism advisor for their school. Given that the group was made up of academic staff who, by volunteering to take the PG Cert, could be said to have an increased awareness and interest in issues around teaching and learning, we assume that these figures are higher than across the general University community.

By March 2012, the percentages had increased, with all survey respondents reporting an awareness of the policy and over 80% admitting to have read it. In the intervening time, the role of plagiarism advisor had been strengthened and made more visible. Only one person (from 29) was unable to name a plagiarism advisor for his School.

This tallies with very early data from the IPPHEAE project, relating specifically to NUI Galway. In late 2012, teaching staff at NUI Galway were made aware, via email, of the IPPHEAE project and encouraged to take the staff survey available at the project information website ippheae.eu.

From the raw data provided by IPPHEAE for NUI Galway (IPPHEAE, 2013), 12 teaching staff members at NUI Galway responded to the survey. In response to the questions:

- 5.b. This institution has policies and procedures for dealing with plagiarism
- 5.c I believe this institution takes a serious approach to plagiarism prevention
- 5.d I believe this institution takes a serious approach to plagiarism detection

all twelve responses are either “Agree” or “Strongly Agree”.

This is encouraging and indicates a good level of awareness of the existence of the code of practice and its use.

Less encouraging, perhaps, are the responses to the questions:

- 5.g. Penalties for plagiarism are administered according to a standard formula

Table 1

Results from IPPHEAE Staff Survey

Question	Strongly Agree	Agree	Not sure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
5.g	6	3	3		
5.h	6	1	3	1	1
5.i	6	2	4		

- 5.h. I know what penalties are applied to students for different forms of plagiarism and academic dishonesty
- 5.i. Student circumstances are taken into account when deciding penalties for plagiarism

which demonstrate that while staff may be aware of the policy, they are not so familiar with the content or associated procedures (see Table 1).

Further evidence that teaching staff are not familiar with the content of the NUI Galway code of practice, and in particular the role of the School plagiarism advisor, can be found in the answers provided to the questions:

- 15.a. Who decides whether a student is guilty of plagiarism?
- 15.b. Who decides on the penalty applied to students for plagiarism?

In the data collected, only two respondents (17%) mention the plagiarism advisor as the person responsible for making these decisions. Other responses vary from the individual tutor, a department panel or an institutional panel.

The number of responses to the IPPHEAE is very small, just 12 out of a possible 2000, and therefore not statistically valid. However, the responses come from staff across 4 of the 5 Colleges and they do support the results of the workshop surveys. The conclusion is that while academic staff are aware of the existence of university policies and procedures to deal with plagiarism, they are not familiar with the content.

Consequences for Staff Development

It is clear, from the survey data and from experiences in supporting academic staff, that staff development in the area of Academic Integrity is needed. Academic staff have a range of concerns, many of which can be addressed through training opportunities, provision of resources and the availability of advice and support.

Approaches that have been taken at NUI Galway to provide training opportunities, along with an indication of success, are described in the following paragraphs.

Workshops as part of PG Cert

This workshop is as described in previous sections. The advantage of the workshop is that it is embedded firmly within the context of teaching and learning, and relates explicitly to good practice in student assessment. The concerns of staff are addressed directly through the format of the workshop and any questions or misconceptions about policy and procedure are addressed.

Feedback from the workshop has been encouraging. Sample statements from participants include:

- Until the class devoted to the theme of academic integrity/ plagiarism, it was a case of don't ask, don't tell. (Participant A)
- Ultimately, the best way to deter plagiarism is to develop and encourage student centered (sic) learning that encourages academic integrity. (Participant B)
- It raises so many issues and concerns in my head, not just for oneself or other staff members designing assignment and unknowingly or knowingly receiving plagiarized work, but also for the students. (Participant C)

Participants come from a range of disciplines, so it can be expected that these individuals may go back to their respective units and start to address the culture from within. However, it is a small number of individuals, about 80 to date, and a complete change of culture will take a long time.

Technology Workshops

These are workshops based around the use of a particular technology, for example Turnitin or GradeMark, and offered to a departmental group or to any interested staff. While the focus is on the technology, these offer an opportunity to discuss general issues of academic integrity.

Our experience has been that these workshops are most successful when offered to a departmental group, since discussions can be encouraged concerning a consistent approach to dealing with academic integrity within the discipline. As noted in Flynn (2010), this encourages a shared understanding of academic integrity across a teaching team, resulting in a consistent message for students.

Workshops on Deterring Plagiarism

A version of the PG Cert workshop, entitled Deterring Student Plagiarism is offered on request to discipline based groups. Like the technology workshops, this works best when staff from a single discipline or teaching team come together and can discuss issues in a constructive and supported environment. Again, this leads to increased consistency and clarity for students.

A workshop of this type has the potential to transform the culture within a discipline, but requires commitment from the participating staff and strong leadership to drive the change.

Availability of Resources and the Role of the Plagiarism Advisor

It will not be a surprise to anybody working in academic development that teaching staff find it difficult to find time to come to training workshops. Academic staff usually attend a workshop because it forms part of a wider programme (as in the PG Cert), the staff member has a particular need (as in the technology workshop) or the staff member has been compelled to attend by a head of unit.

Where resources are available, teaching staff will not discover these until such time as they are needed, usually because of a problem with plagiarism within the teaching context.

We suggest that, as the role of the plagiarism advisor becomes more embedded within the School or discipline organisation, there is potential to further promote values of academic integrity across all university activities, including teaching, learning, supervision and research.

Related Research

The literature recognises the need for a holistic approach to plagiarism prevention, where there is a shared responsibility between students, staff and institution (Macdonald and Carroll, 2006).

Carroll (2007) recommends that staff should be informed about the policy for plagiarism, to ensure everyone knows about it, and new staff should be informed as part of their induction. Anecdotal evidence suggests that, even where staff are aware of the existence of a policy, many still don't use it. They either prefer to deal with it in their own way, or ignore the issue.

Flint (2004) explored the staff perspective on plagiarism and showed that there was a strong emotional aspect to dealing with plagiarism, resulting in a variety of strategies being used. The paper concludes that an understanding of the issues could be used to inform future actions, including staff development.

Other authors (for example Bennett et al, 2011) have considered faculty perceptions of and attitudes towards plagiarism, demonstrating a lack of consistency in definitions and differences in perceptions between staff and students. Pickard (2006) suggests that better understanding of staff and student perceptions towards plagiarism will be useful in guiding staff development. Andrews et al (2007) identify three themes in narrative comments from staff surveys, relating to factors that contribute to cheating behaviour, lack of support for staff in reporting plagiarism, and institutional policies. Zivcakova et al (2012) in a study involving 8 faculty members, found that faculty concerns could be categorised into two sub-themes: issues with other faculty members, and institutional policy issues.

Conclusion

In this paper we demonstrate that teaching staff have a wide range of concerns regarding academic integrity and how it affects students, staff and the institution as a whole. Some of these concerns can be addressed through staff development and the provision of support for staff and students.

While the Academic Integrity workshop as part of the PG Cert produces advocates with an awareness of the issues, they are still individuals within larger units.

Key to the success of staff development efforts is a willingness to address the culture of the unit, discipline or institution, and a realisation that values of academic integrity have to be embedded across all teaching and learning activities.

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