A Survey of Undergraduate Student Attitudes towards Plagiarism and Self-Plagiarism

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Abstract

In this article, we present early results of surveys conducted at the University of Toronto, Mississauga campus, across four terms (January 2020 to December 2021) of early-year undergraduate students to determine their understanding and views of plagiarism. Our survey instrument gathered basic demographic information as well as asked participants to respond to 24 statements using a 5-point Likert scale. We share our analysis of responses to 15 statements in the survey which were intended to provide an understanding of the "moral universe" of students—that is, the way that they contextualize plagiarism in terms of their moral standards. Our major finding is that although students across three disciplines (Humanities, Social Science, and Science) recognized the potential harm of plagiarism to the value of their degrees, they also believed self-plagiarism to be less serious than other forms of academic integrity offences. We consider how the moral universe of students differs from the moral universe implied in the University's codes and argue that the messaging used by academic institutions should convey the reasons for taking plagiarism seriously. We argue that presenting plagiarism as similar to theft of property rather than an issue of pedagogy might inadvertently encourage students to consider self-plagiarism to be more acceptable than other forms of plagiarism.

Keywords: academic integrity, Canada, plagiarism, survey, undergraduate

Introduction

Institutional language regarding academic integrity at the university level frequently differs both from the assumptions held by students about academic integrity and from the scholarly ideals of academic societies. In statements of principles regarding academic integrity, institutions and scholarly societies frequently speak of fostering a culture of practice, seeing the basic principles of honesty and transparency as central to the work of research and teaching. For example, the International Center for Academic Integrity (ICAI) "defines academic integrity as a commitment to six fundamental values: honesty, trust, fairness, respect, responsibility, and courage", and

declares that these values "enable academic communities to translate ideals into action" (ICAI, 2021). Similarly, academic integrity may be described as akin to the cultivation of civic virtue and of moral character, and sometimes even as essential to the building of virtuous societies (Christensen Hughes & McCabe, 2006). Systemic and/or abstract ideals of academic integrity find expression in such overarching statements of principle.

In other contexts, however, institutions and societies may describe academic integrity in moralistic or legalistic terms, emphasizing instead the evils of academic dishonesty in often florid language. Park (2003) usefully summarized a number of such statements from previous American writers and organizations, noting the use of such words as *sin*, *attack*, and *cancer*, or as *theft*, *forgery*, and *crime* to describe breaches of academic integrity. Biswas (2015) noted the cultural and institutional contexts that may lead to expressions of anger as reactions to academic offences, depending on the rhetorical situation. An example of strong language in an institutional Canadian context that frames violations of academic integrity as the violation of property rights, involves the description of plagiarism as "wrongful appropriation and purloining," and even "perversion of originality" (University of Toronto Governing Council, 2019).

Previous research has argued that for students, on the other hand, conceptions of academic integrity tend to be situational and contextual. Not lacking in ethical reasoning, students' ideas may instead operate on different principles from the stated ideals of institutions. For example, students may see differences in seriousness between academic offences depending on a harm standard (Burnett et al., 2016; Molnar & Kletke, 2012), believing, for example, that using other people's intellectual property with their consent is less harmful than using it without their consent, whatever the institution's rules might be (Park et al., 2013). Students may also regard the importance of academic integrity in a given instance as relative to immediate need (Miller et al. 2007; Murdock & Anderman, 2006), or as wrong but nevertheless necessary in a sufficiently tight pinch, or excusable in the case of ignorance (Beasley, 2014). Research also suggests that students may distrust their institutions' fairness in the enforcement of the rules and procedures of academic integrity (Adam et al., 2017) or regard their institutions as providing insufficient support while making unreasonable demands, so that no one should wonder why people cheat to get by (Devlin & Gray, 2007). Additionally, it is often the case that first-year students may have no clear idea of what academic integrity consists of, and may not see a point in it or in official attempts to cultivate it (Loquaio & Ives, 2020).

Research also suggests that first-year students may indeed be committed to the ideals associated with academic integrity, but do not necessarily have the tools to apply those ideals to the situations in which they find themselves (Crook & Cranston, 2021). Thus, this is not only an ethical but also a pedagogical problem, especially given that faculty may not themselves be clear or consistent about their roles in the fostering of the values of academic integrity within their institutions (Richardson & Healy, 2019), and/or that faculty and student perceptions of the matter may vary significantly from each other (Andrews et al., 2007).

Self-plagiarism on the undergraduate level is the submission of identical or closely similar work for credit in multiple undergraduate courses without citation or prior permission (e.g., MLA, 2021) and is a curious and difficult subset of plagiarism. Although there has been much discussion of self-plagiarism editorially, and much written on the problem of self-plagiarism in professional contexts (e.g., Arumugam & Aldhafiri, 2016; Berquist, 2013; Henly, 2014; Horbach & Halfmann, 2019; Thurman et al., 2016), comparatively little primary research has been conducted on undergraduate self-plagiarism to date (Bruton & Rachal, 2015; Eaton, 2021; Eaton & Crossman, 2018). Results from existing research are consistent, however, in that students generally do not see self-plagiarism as comparably serious to plagiarism of other sources (Baysen et al., 2018; Bokosmaty et al., 2017; Canay-Pazos et al., 2021; Clarke et al., 2022; Erich et al., 2014; Halupa & Bollinger, 2015; Sanni-Anibire et al., 2021). This belief may stem from a number of causes. Students may find self-plagiarism not to be a coherent or clearly explained concept (Anson et al., 2020; Bokosmaty et al., 2017; Halupa, 2014; Halupa & Bollinger, 2013; Sanni-Anibire et al., 2021); or there may be differing cultural or contextual perspectives towards plagiarism in general (Hu & Lei, 2012). Students may encounter standards in this area that vary by situation or discipline (Moskovitz, 2016) or may believe, given institutional definitions of plagiarism as property theft, that the concept should not generally apply to repetition of one's own previous work (Eaton, 2021; Eaton & Crossman, 2018). There is evidence, however, that interventions focusing on moral development and embedded within course-specific contexts may have positive results in fostering academic integrity among students (Stephens & Wangaard, 2016; Stephens et al., 2021); this possibility motivates our own project.

To understand the attitudes and knowledge of beginning students in our own institution, we surveyed students in first-year courses across the disciplines, asking them what they understand about the ethics and practicalities of academic integrity. In other words, we sought to understand the broad moral context within which students think about academic integrity, or what we term the *moral universe* of students' understanding of academic integrity, and how this moral context might differ from that of the university's other members. Our purpose in doing this was twofold. First, so that we may lay the foundations for longitudinal tracking of such understanding and second, so that we may in the long term support the creation and refinement of in-course interventions in order to clarify and foster academic integrity at our institution. Ultimately, we hope to contribute to establishing what Jason Stephens refers to as a "culture of integrity" (Gallant & Stephens, 2020; Stephens, 2016) through motivating students' moral development by linking it to their pedagogical development. What we discuss below are the early results of our work, with a particular focus on 15 statements in the survey which evaluated students' understanding of self-plagiarism.

Methodology

We surveyed undergraduate students enrolled in first year Science, Social Science and Humanities courses at the University of Toronto, Mississauga campus. We approached

instructors of large, introductory, first-year courses, asking permission to invite students to participate in the study during class time. In a classroom presentation, a member of our team explained the goals of the research, guided students through the informed consent process, distributed the paper surveys, and/or shared a link to an online version. Two of the courses (i.e., Biology 2 and Media Studies 2) were taught by members of our team. These instructors were not present in the class when the project was presented and explained, and it was made clear to students that all data would be anonymous. The use of both paper and online versions of the survey was necessitated by the shift, in the spring of 2020, to remote instruction due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The surveys were conducted across four terms, beginning in January 2020. Printed surveys were distributed to participants (during class time) during this first semester, although students also had the option of participation via an online version of the survey instrument at that time. During the next three terms (Fall 2020, Winter 2021, and Fall 2021), only the online version was used to collect data since there were no in-person classes. This research was approved by the University of Toronto's Research Ethics Board, protocol 38471.

The Survey Instrument

The instrument employed in the study was originally proposed by researchers in 2010 (Mavrinac et al., 2010) and subsequently tested and modified by another group of researchers (Howard et al., 2014). The instrument consists of two sections. The first section gathered basic demographic information, including age, gender identity, year of undergraduate study, intended area of study and hours of employment. We also included a definition of plagiarism drawn from the university's *Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters* (2009). The second section consists of 24 statements, with responses using a 5-point Likert scale; in our discussion below, we focus on responses to 15 of these statements. Our scores, listed in Table 1, are based on the Likert Scale results, where *Strongly Agree* = 5, *Agree* = 4, *Neither agree nor disagree* = 3, *Disagree* = 2, *Strongly disagree* = 1. Thus, mean scores above 3 tend towards *agreement*, whereas scores below 3 tend towards *disagreement* with each statement. These statements are identical to those included in the 2014 version published by Howard et al. (2014).

Participants

Participants were drawn from the discipline of Science through two Biology courses, Social Science through two Media Studies courses and the Humanities discipline through English and Religion courses.

Administered across four terms, we collected data from 3,206 participants (Table 1). The student populations of Biology 1 and Biology 2 had a great deal of overlap, as do the populations of SocSci 1 and SocSci2; thus, many of the students in Biology 2 and SocSci2 may have completed the survey twice. We have no definite explanation for the lower participation rate during the Fall

2020 term, although it seems quite possible that the novelty of beginning university study in a remote context played a role. The variation across disciplines is easier to explain as they are related to differences in course enrolment numbers (i.e., first year Science classes tend to have larger enrolments compared to first year courses in the Humanities).

Table 1. *Terms, courses, and number of participants*

Term	Discipline	Course Identifier	Participants
Winter 2020 (Jan. – Apr.)	Science	Biology 2	582
(*n* = 1,160)	Social Science	Media Studies 2	312
	Humanities	Religion 1	266
Fall 2020 (Sep. – Dec.)	Science	Biology 1	148
(*n* = 338)	Social Science	Media Studies 1	132
	Humanities	Religion 1	35
	Humanities	English 1	23
Winter 2021 (Jan. – Apr.)	Science	Biology 2	384
(*n* = 836)	Social Science	Media Studies 2	343
	Humanities	Religion 1	109
Fall 2021 (Sep. – Dec.)	Science	Biology 1	590
(*n* = 872)	Social Science	Media Studies 1	192
	Humanities	Religion 1	90

Of the total number of participants, 53.2% (*n* = 1704) were drawn from the discipline of Science, 20.8% (*n* = 667) from the Social Sciences and 16.3% (*n* = 523) from the Humanities.

We also asked the participants to provide information on three demographic factors: gender, age, and work hours. The majority of participants identified as female (64.5%, *n* = 2069), 33.6% (*n* = 1077) identified as male and 1.9% (*n* = 60) preferred not to answer (which was an option in the survey). Most students (84.8%) indicated that they were 17 to 19 years old. Thirteen percent of the students were older than 20 years, whereas less than 0.5% responded that they were younger than 17 years. Approximately 1.5% of students chose not to answer this question. The courses were all first year, but 2nd to 4th year students are also able to enroll in these courses. As a result, 9.4% of the participants indicated they were in their second year of study, 2.2% were in their third year, and 1.5% were in their fourth or higher year of study. Eight students preferred not to answer this question. Of the students surveyed, 64% of them did not engage in any work, 28.4% of them worked part time, and 7.6% worked full time.

Statistical Analysis

In this analysis, we answered two questions: Firstly, is there a difference in the students'

perception of plagiarism between disciplines. Secondly, is there a change in the students' perception over time.

To detect a difference between disciplines, we excluded Biology 2 and Media Studies 2 data from the Winter 2021 semester. Most of the students in these two courses would have taken Biology 1 and Media Studies 1 in the preceding Fall 2020 semester, respectively, as pointed out above. By excluding these two winter semester courses, we ensured that responses from each of the included courses were independent. We used a two-way ANOVA with semester and discipline as explanatory variables and the mean aggregate response across the 15 statements as the response variable.

Having courses with overlapping student populations permitted us to investigate whether students changed their perception over time by comparing responses from consecutive courses across two semesters. We ran two one-way ANOVAs, comparing Biology 1 (Fall 2020) to Biology 2 (Winter 2021; excluded from the previous analysis), and Media Studies 1 (Fall 2020) with Media Studies 2 (Winter 2021; excluded from the previous analysis).

Using the dataset without Biology 2 and Media Studies 2 from Winter 2021, we also assessed the impact of participant demographics on students' perceptions. In a three-way ANOVA, we asked whether work status, gender, or age influenced perceptions.

Statistical analyses were carried out in SPSS version 26.1.1 (14) (IBM Corp., Armonk, NY).

Findings

In this analysis, we focused on what we consider the moral universe of early year students' views regarding plagiarism, as evidenced by 15 statements in the survey. Neither term ($F(3, 2312) = 0.95$, $p = 0.48$) nor discipline ($F(2, 2312) = 0.28$, $p = 0.77$) were significant factors (Figure 1). This was also true of their interaction ($F(4, 2312) = 1.77$, $p = 0.13$).

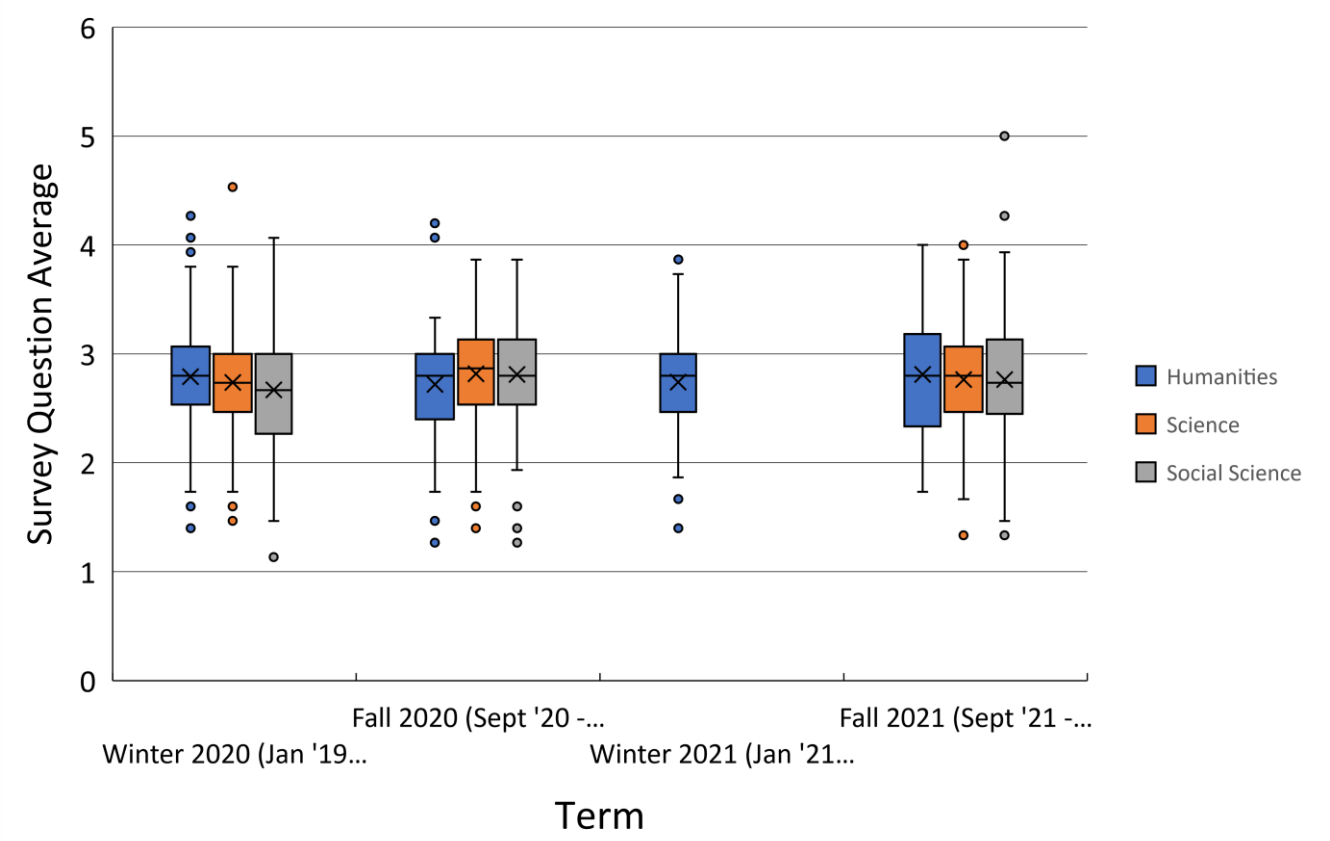

Figure 1. Boxplot comparing response scores between disciplines. Boxes display the middle 50% of data (the interquartile range), and the line in the box shows the median, the X indicates the average. Whiskers extend 1.5 x the interquartile range.

When comparing the two sets of courses with overlapping populations, we did detect a difference in one of the comparisons. Students in the two Biology courses did not change their perception ($F(1, 507) = 1.13$, $p = 0.29$). However, students in the Media studies courses significantly lowered their response average from the fall to the winter course ($F(1, 446) = 13.12$, $p < 0.05$), though the effect size was small ($eta^2 = 0.03$) (Figure 2).

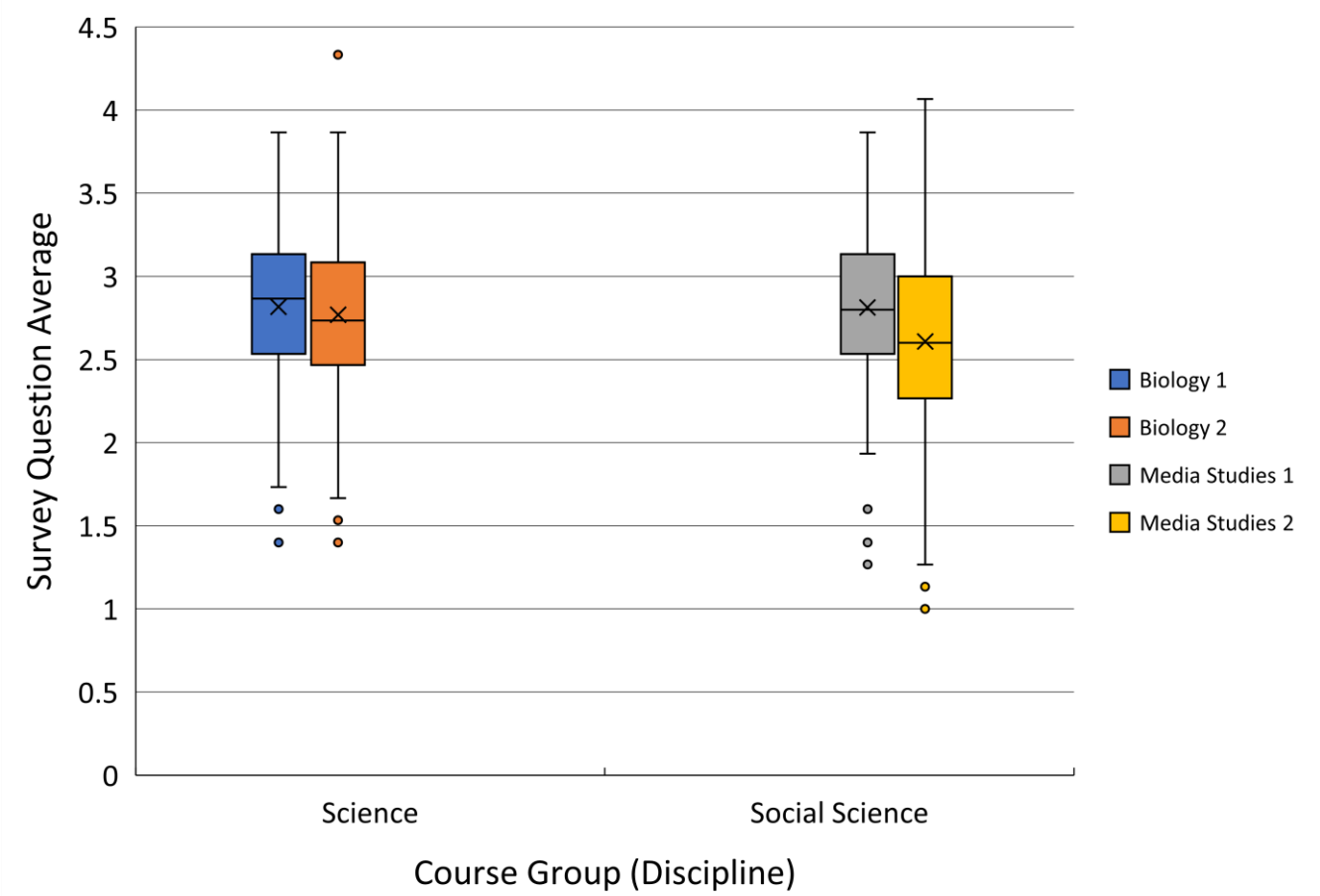

Figure 2. Boxplot comparing response scores between the paired courses in Biology and Media Studies. Boxes display the middle 50% of data (the interquartile range), and the line in the box shows the median, the X indicates the average. Whiskers extend 1.5 x the interquartile range.

Table 2 lists 15 statements from the survey, as well as the mean average response scores. The aggregated survey results represent a snapshot of undergraduate student attitudes towards plagiarism in the context of their university studies. The table also lists survey results by discipline, where we explored potential differences between students enrolled in first year Science, Social Science, and Humanities courses.

Table 2. Mean response scores (*SD*) to the 15 survey statements by discipline.

	Mean Response Scores			
Survey Statements	**Overall**	**Science Discipline**	**Social Science Discipline**	**Humanities Discipline**
S1: Sometimes you cannot avoid using other people's words, because there are only so many ways to describe something.	3.37 (1.08)	3.42 (1.06)	3.29 (1.08)	3.35 (1.13)
S3: Self-plagiarism is not punishable because it is not harmful (you cannot steal from yourself).	3.16 (1.25)	3.18 (1.24)	3.03 (1.25)	3.31 (1.29)
S4: I am more tempted to plagiarize when I am very stressed about the assignment.	2.66 (1.23)	2.75 (1.23)	2.49 (1.21)	2.7 (1.25)
S6: Self-plagiarism should not be punishable in the same way as plagiarism is.	3.57 (1.11)	3.65 (1.04)	3.34 (1.17)	3.71 (1.14)
S9: Short deadlines or a heavy workload give me the right to plagiarize a bit.	1.8 (0.86)	1.75 (0.79)	1.87 (0.93)	1.85 (0.91)
S10: It is justified to use your own previous work, without providing citation, in order to complete the current work.	2.63 (1.09)	2.63 (1.07)	2.56 (1.09)	2.78 (1.14)
S11: Given a commonly perceived decline in moral and ethical standards, it is important to discuss issues like plagiarism and self-plagiarism.	3.88 (0.86)	3.97 (0.76)	3.75 (0.95)	3.83 (0.86)
S12: Plagiarism is as bad as stealing an exam.	3.49 (1.14)	3.51 (1.13)	3.49 (1.14)	3.42 (1.16)
S14: A plagiarized paper does no harm to the value of a university degree.	1.96 (0.90)	1.90 (0.84)	2.03 (0.96)	2.05 (0.96)
S19: Sometimes, it is necessary to plagiarize.	2.05 (0.95)	2.00 (0.91)	2.11 (0.99)	2.12 (0.99)
S20: I am tempted to plagiarize if I have permission from a friend to copy his or her work.	2.39 (1.11)	2.46 (1.11)	2.27 (1.09)	2.42 (1.11)
S21: I am tempted to plagiarize if I currently have more important obligations or tasks to do.	2.36 (1.12)	2.41 (1.13)	2.25 (1.09)	2.40 (1.12)
S22: I am tempted to plagiarize because, even if caught, the punishment will be light (the reward outweighs the risk).	1.68 (0.80)	1.64 (0.76)	1.72 (0.84)	1.74 (0.85)

	Mean Response Scores			
Survey Statements	**Overall**	**Science Discipline**	**Social Science Discipline**	**Humanities Discipline**
S23: My initial definition of plagiarism prior to completing this questionnaire matched the University's definition of plagiarism.	3.34 (1.03)	3.36 (1.01)	3.31 (1.06)	3.35 (1.03)
S24: My views of plagiarism have changed since completing this survey.	2.78 (0.99)	2.79 (0.96)	2.81 (1.01)	2.67 (1.00)

The survey results tended to align with our expectations. The highest level of agreement (3.88) was for the statement, (S11) *Given a commonly perceived decline in moral and ethical standards, it is important to discuss issues like plagiarism and self-plagiarism*. This is not surprising as the statement does not explicitly claim a position with regards to plagiarism. Rather, it states the importance of dialogue regarding these issues. This differs, for example, from the statement, (S22) *I am tempted to plagiarise because, even if caught, the punishment will be light (the reward outweighs the risk)* which makes an explicit claim regarding the temptation of plagiarism. In this instance, the statement received the highest level of disagreement (1.68).

Defining plagiarism

While there was general agreement regarding knowledge of how the university defines plagiarism (S23) with a score of 3.34, it is noteworthy that roughly one fifth (22.2%) of the respondents either Agreed or Strongly Agreed with the statement (S24), "My views of plagiarism have changed since completing this survey." The fact that, at least in the Social Sciences, students appear to change their views of plagiarism over time also provides evidence that students' perceptions can change. Interestingly, just under half of those who Agreed or Strongly Agreed also Agreed or Strongly Agreed that their initial definition of plagiarism matched that of the university. This suggests that at least for some students, there is a potential difference between understanding the university's definition of plagiarism and the students' own views of plagiarism. Alternatively, this response may indicate that students gained a more nuanced appreciation through survey statements which apply the definition in concrete terms. In other words, half of the total participants agreed that their knowledge of the definition matched that of the university, but that did not imply that they did not improve their understanding through the act of completing the survey.

Rationale for plagiarism

Students clearly recognized that plagiarism is potentially harmful to the perceived value of their degree (S14, see Table 2), but we wanted to better understand the reasons or rationale they may have regarding plagiarism. When asked whether there are times when it might be necessary to plagiarise (S19), 71.0% Disagreed or Strongly Disagreed, but over a quarter of the participants responded with neutral or agreed with the statement.

Table 3. Percentage of responses to each of the 15 survey statements included in this analysis.

Survey Statements	**Strongly Disagree**	**Disagree**	**Neither agree nor Disagree**	**Agree**	**Strongly Agree**	***n***
S1: Sometimes you cannot avoid using other people's words, because there are only so many ways to describe something.	5.5	18.8	19.7	44.9	11.1	3,201
S3: Self-plagiarism is not punishable because it is not harmful (you cannot steal from yourself).	10.8	22.9	22.5	27.4	16.4	3,180
S4: I am more tempted to plagiarize when I am very stressed about the assignment.	21.5	28.1	19.0	25.7	5.7	3,194
S6: Self-plagiarism should not be punishable in the same way as plagiarism is.	5.3	12.9	21.8	39.7	20.3	3,185
S9: Short deadlines or a heavy workload give me the right to plagiarize a bit.	41.9	42.3	10.7	4.5	0.7	3,197
S10: It is justified to use your own previous work, without providing citation, in order to complete the current work.	14.6	35.5	27.5	17.1	5.4	3,190
S11: Given a commonly perceived decline in moral and ethical standards, it is important to discuss issues like plagiarism and self-plagiarism.	2.1	4.4	17.6	55.4	20.5	3,168
S12: Plagiarism is as bad as stealing an exam.	5.8	16.2	20.3	38.3	19.4	3,193

Survey Statements	**Strongly Disagree**	**Disagree**	**Neither agree nor Disagree**	**Agree**	**Strongly Agree**	***n***
S14: A plagiarized paper does no harm to the value of a university degree.	33.1	45.3	15.0	5.2	1.4	3,171
S19: Sometimes, it is necessary to plagiarize.	32.2	39.8	19.4	7.8	0.8	3,174
S20: I am tempted to plagiarize if I have permission from a friend to copy his or her work.	24.3	35.1	19.4	19.3	1.9	3,169
S21: I am tempted to plagiarize if I currently have more important obligations or tasks to do.	25.8	35.4	17.5	19.5	1.8	3,173
S22: I am tempted to plagiarize because, even if caught, the punishment will be light (the reward outweighs the risk).	48.6	38.5	9.6	2.8	0.5	3,183
S23: My initial definition of plagiarism prior to completing this questionnaire matched the University's definition of plagiarism.	5.5	15.3	28.7	40.5	10.1	3,176
S24: My views of plagiarism have changed since completing this survey.	10.5	27.1	40.4	18.4	3.7	3,177

Three statements related to stress or time management issues (S4, S9, S21) shed light on how students justify plagiarism. Almost a third of participants (32.1%) Agreed or Strongly Agreed with the statement (S4) that *I am more tempted to plagiarize when I am very stressed about the assignment*. When asked whether a short deadline or a heavy workload might be a justification for plagiarism (S9), only 5.2% of the participants Agreed or Strongly Agreed. Instead, the temptation of plagiarize may be related to students having (S21) "…more important obligations or tasks to do." One fifth (21.1%) Agreed or Strongly Agreed with that statement. However, the wording of the two statements is such that clear conclusions cannot be drawn regarding potential reasons for committing acts of plagiarism. One statement suggests that tight deadlines give students a "right" to plagiarize, whereas numerous obligations or tasks result in an environment of "temptation." Rights and temptations are very different concepts, and while some

students recognize the temptation to plagiarize that may result from stress and tight deadlines, they would not go as far as suggesting this allows them the right to plagiarize. In other words, students' perception of lenient punishment did not reduce temptations to plagiarism (S22).

Impact of participant demographics.

We asked participants to indicate their age, gender, and whether they worked and if so, how many hours they worked weekly. Of these, only age showed a significant effect on the average response score (3-way ANOVA; Age: $F(4, 3094) = 8.86$, $p < 0.001$; Gender: $F(1, 3094) = 1.91$, $p = 0.17$; Work: $F(4, 3094) = 1.34$, $p = 0.25$). The significant effect was mainly due to older students tending to have lower response scores compared to students in the younger age groups.

What we found most revealing about the results has to do with another cluster of statements that focus on self-plagiarism or the use of work that a student has submitted either earlier in the course or in another course. The survey includes a brief definition of plagiarism, but not necessarily of self-plagiarism. This means that student interpretation of self-plagiarism played a potential role in their responses. Consider differences between participants in the Social Science courses and the Humanities courses in responding to the statement (S3) "self-plagiarism is not punishable because it is not harmful (you cannot steal from yourself)." As shown in Table 4 below, a higher percentage of Humanities students were sympathetic to the idea that self-plagiarism was less harmful compared to other types of plagiarism.

Table 4. Comparison of frequency (in percentage) of responses between disciplines to statements regarding self-plagiarism

Statement	Discipline	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Number of responses
S3, "Self-plagiarism is not punishable because it is not harmful (you cannot steal from yourself)"	Social Sciences	13.5	22. 5	24.3	26.5	13.2	969
	Sciences	9.4	24.4	21.8	27.8	16.6	1690
	Humanities	10.6	19.0	21.3	27.6	21.5	521
S6 "Self-plagiarism should not be punishable in the same way as plagiarism"	Social Sciences	8.8	15.2	25.3	34.7	16.1	969
	Sciences	3.4	12.1	21.1	42.7	20.8	1697
	Humanities	5.4	11.2	17.5	39.3	26.6	519

Statement	Discipline	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Number of responses
S10 "It is justified to use your own previous work, without providing citation, in order to complete the current work"	Social Sciences	17.6	33.6	29.2	15.0	4.6	971
	Sciences	13.4	37.4	26.8	17.5	5.0	1701
	Humanities	12.7	32.6	26.8	19.9	7.9	518

While the nature of the assignments may differ between the Sciences and the Humanities, first year Social Science and Humanities courses both require similar skills and use similar evaluation techniques; specifically, the need to synthesize the work of others in the form of a written essay. This pattern is repeated in responses to statement (S6) "self-plagiarism should not be punishable in the same way as plagiarism" and (S10) "it is justified to use your own previous work, without providing citation, in order to complete the current work:" more Humanities students agreed or strongly agreed with these statements than Social Sciences students.

These patterns across similar statements illustrate a difference between these two domains, but it will take additional research to better understand the reasons behind these differences.

Discussion

Our work thus far has the potential to partly illuminate the moral universe of early year students' views of academic integrity. Some aspects that we feel are important to bring out include the findings of: only a minimal disciplinary gap in students' view of plagiarism; students do not seem inclined to accept excuses or justifications for it; students do not regard self-plagiarism as being as problematic as other forms of plagiarism; and students do not feel encouraged to plagiarize by a perception of institutional leniency.

1: Students across disciplinary boundaries viewed issues similarly

We noted above some of the differences in terms of how students viewed these issues; overall, though, the results showed many similarities as well. Students in all three disciplines viewed plagiarism as a very serious issue, and overall, the amount of agreement between students in the various classes is striking. However, within this broad agreement, there is an interesting point that we would like to signal. It is true that the responses from the three classes were almost identical in terms of seeing plagiarism as damaging the *value* of one's degree (S14)—in other words, they agreed most in terms of what we might refer to as a property-based evaluation of

plagiarism. There was a similarly high level of agreement that plagiarism was as bad as stealing an exam (S12)—again, the reference to "stealing" something physical links this question to property. There was, however, more distinction between the three disciplines in terms of moral evaluations of plagiarism (S11): The Science students were the strongest in terms of viewing plagiarism as a symptom of "moral decline," closely followed by the Humanities students, whereas the Social Sciences students were considerably less likely to support this view.

2: Students did not cut themselves a great deal of slack

When offered the opportunity to partially excuse themselves due to concerns about workload, stress, and so on, students from all three courses generally and strongly chose not to do so—thus aligning themselves with institutional messaging, which also does not present these as valid excuses. As discussed above, there was a stronger tendency to acknowledge the temptation to plagiarize, but that did not extend to actually excusing plagiarism. Within the context of this study, we cannot tell how many students were responding performatively, by supplying the answers that they think we want to read, or aspirationally, by supplying responses that they might not hold to in their actual practice; however, we can say that they were committed to maintaining at least the appearance of rigor, consistent with the university's own messaging. There is, however, one aspect of plagiarism that somewhat contrasts with this, noted in the point below.

3: Students took self-plagiarism less seriously than other forms of plagiarism

Overall, students from all three disciplines took plagiarism very seriously, but they also took self-plagiarism less seriously than other forms of plagiarism: This is where their moral universe differs most strikingly from the moral universe implied in the University's codes, and consequently, this is also what seems to us to be the most interesting result from our work thus far. We wonder if this tendency to not take self-plagiarism as seriously as other forms of plagiarism has to do with using an economic or property-based approach to the issue, as discussed above. From such a perspective, it is possible that self-plagiarism could seem less serious because the material in question is the student's own property (this may also account for the high number of students who disagreed with the statement that plagiarism was excusable because "words are not assets"). If this is the case, messaging around self-plagiarism should be carefully examined to ensure that it moves the conversation away from property rights and instead stresses the pedagogical and developmental concerns involved—which, we feel, are the concerns that matter the most anyway. In other words, showing how plagiarism sabotages the intellectual development that students are here to achieve seems to us to be a more sensible strategy than simply, bluntly presenting it as "stealing" someone else's ideas.

Much research on academic dishonesty in recent years has focused on precisely the latter phenomenon. For example, Yu et al. (2017), in providing a nuanced conceptual framework for understanding academic dishonesty, nevertheless define such dishonesty exclusively as copying

from other sources or sharing information illicitly. Similarly, Molnar and Kletke (2012) define cheating as a violation of others' intellectual property, whereas Childers and Bruton (2015), in their study addressing the narrowness of past research's understandings of plagiarism, nevertheless restrict the concept to the copying of others' sources. This focus is understandable, given the ease with which electronic communication makes the copying of text and sources (e.g., meta-study of Husain et al., 2017); it has never been simpler to make use of the work of others. As well, this aspect of plagiarism makes intuitive sense from a "property" perspective, whereas—as Eaton (2021) and Eaton and Crossman (2018) note—self-plagiarism is a complex, disputed, and under-studied category of academic misconduct. Unfortunately, it is also the area in which student attitudes are most at odds with the university's standards.

As we noted above, our research indicates that Humanities students were the least likely to see self-plagiarism as a serious issue, with Social Sciences students being the most likely and Sciences students being somewhere in between (but overall aligning more with the Humanities students). This division is intriguing, but we cannot at present account for it. The incorporation of focus groups and/or some open-ended questions on the survey might help in understanding these results.

4: Students did not feel tempted to plagiarize because of university leniency

Roughly a fifth of students surveyed said that being extremely busy or the encouragement of friends could tempt them to plagiarize, but only a twentieth of them said the same about perceived mild punishment for plagiarism. Students understand that the university sees plagiarism as a serious problem; they just do not all see the full extent of the problem, as the university understands it.

Conclusion

These findings give some cause for optimism, as well as encouragement for further study. Students do seem to at least pay lip service to most aspects of the university's understanding of plagiarism, and they do seem to understand that it is a serious issue. While they do show a relative lack of awareness of self-plagiarism, this study has at least identified it as an area of concern, one that can be focused on in future messaging.

On a somewhat more abstract level, it seems to us that our institutions would be wise to pay close attention in their messaging to the reasons that they give for taking plagiarism seriously. As noted at the outset, the language that institutions use does not necessarily correspond in meaningful ways with students' contexts when faced with situations in which violations of academic integrity may become a temptation. The students seem as aware as we faculty that academic integrity is serious, but the results we report here regarding attitudes about self-plagiarism suggest that they are viewing the ethics of plagiarism through a narrowly legalistic lens, rather than seeing fully how it relates to their own academic development; such a view

corresponds to some of the common institutional language around academic integrity, as noted in the introduction. This argument, derived from our surveying experience, reinforces other arguments about academic integrity concerns and the messaging around them, as discussed in the introduction.

These arguments may well be implicit in the sort of messaging that we often engage in, but it would, we feel, be beneficial to make them more explicit. To take just one example, we cited above the ICAI's well-known definition of academic integrity: "a commitment, even in the face of adversity, to six fundamental values: honesty, trust, fairness, respect, responsibility, and courage." As faculty, we understand how these values relate not just to ethical concerns, but also issues of pedagogy and intellectual development, but it is possible that we do not make full range of application of these values sufficiently apparent to students.

Or, to take another example, when Burnett et al. (2016) discuss the importance of fostering a climate of academic integrity, they justify it by saying that "[a] strong ethical base is crucial to student development given that such qualities and skills are *typically transferred to the workplace*. Determining students' perceptions of academically ethical behavior is important in proposing the success of students *outside the classroom and beyond graduation*" (p. 51, italics ours). This is no doubt true, but it presents "student development" in this case as being nothing more than the student's acquisition of an ethical mindset that will help them fit into the workforce; there is no mention of how academic integrity functions in the student's own intellectual development.

We can draw an example of how this might be done from our own experiences, as one of the authors of this paper does regular presentations on academic integrity in early year courses. In these presentations, he often begins his discussions of how to effectively and honestly paraphrase and summarize by bringing out the ways in which doing these things helps students develop, reflect on, and critique their own understanding of the material they are reading. Having (hopefully) created a context focused on learning rather than legality, he then points out how plagiarism sabotages these learning goals. What he encourages students to do, then, is to see things from a perspective described in writing pedagogy as "write to learn," in which writing is seen not as product, but as process—as a means, in other words, "to order and represent experience to our own understanding. In this sense language provides us with a unique way of knowing and becomes a tool for discovering, for shaping meaning, and for reaching understanding" (Fulwiler & Young, 1982, x).

Such a perspective, if consistently applied in messaging and in classroom instruction, would be useful in addressing all forms of plagiarism, including self-plagiarism. We would suggest as well that future work in this area ought to focus on designing and assessing instruction—including institutional messaging, of course, but also and crucially classroom interventions, presentations and workshops—that would present issues of academic integrity from the "write to learn" and

pedagogical perspectives that we have discussed in this article, rather than property-oriented perspectives.

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