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ACADEMIC INTEGRITY ONLINE: DEVELOPING SUPPORT MECHANISMS FOR ONLINE GRADUATE STUDENTS

Prepared By

Sarah Elaine Eaton, Jennifer Lock & Meadow Schroeder

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Ethics

Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board (CFREB): Study ID: REB17-1129

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For more information contact:

Sarah Elaine Eaton, Principal Investigator
Werklund School of Education
University of Calgary
2500 University Drive NW
Calgary, AB T2N 1N4

seaton@ucalgary.ca
403.220.6378

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Abstract

The Werklund School of Education (WSE) has identified an opportunity to study the development of online graduate students' understanding of plagiarism and academic integrity. The proposed project will explore the impact of an evidence-based online tutorials designed specifically for new graduate students. This study will address questions students have about how to correctly cite and reference sources for their papers, capstone projects and theses. The tutorials will focus on a positive and educational approach to cultivating academic integrity as an integral element of the graduate student experience, moving away from outdated and punitive approaches that do little to bolster students' confidence in themselves and their abilities.

Previous studies have shown that developing social, cognitive and teaching presence in online courses helps students success but when institutional tutorials are developed they are often done as a static and stand-alone tutorial that do not include interaction with others. The study involves an A/B testing model in which research participants will have their choice of participating in Option A: an asynchronous (on demand) online tutorial or Option B: a synchronous (real time) interactive tutorial facilitated by an instructor. The study will examine online students' preferences and progress in terms of developing their understanding of plagiarism and cultivating a personal ethic of academic integrity as graduate students. We aim to discover what the differences are between static on-demand tutorial and a real-time facilitated interactive session with an experienced instructor.

Key words: academic integrity, plagiarism, online, post-secondary

Literature Review

Academic dishonesty continues to present a major problem in higher education (Altbach, 2015; Colella-Sandercock & Alahmadi, 2015; Leonard, Schwieder, Buhler, Beaubien Bennett, & Royster, 2015). No longer is institutional and instructor focus on plagiarism strictly on detection and imposing punitive consequences, but rather it has evolved to include learning and support, for both students and educators, around what academic integrity is, taking a preventative approach, rather than a punitive one (Busch & Bilgin, 2014; Carroll & Duggan, 2005). This includes developing a culture of academic integrity in which both students and educators are clear on the expectations and processes involved (Groark, Oblinger, & Choa, 2001).

Online courses pose a particular challenge when it comes to plagiarism, both for students and for instructors (Christe, 2003; Ison, 2014; Şendağ, Duran & Fraser, 2012). Tutorials for students provide an opportunity for prevention of plagiarism rather than punishment after it has occurred (Hodgkinson, Curtis, MacAlister, & Farrell, 2016), but to date, little research has been done about how such tutorials might be tailored to the needs of online students.

Research Questions

Research questions about teaching:

(1a) What do instructors of online graduate courses need to know about students' understanding about plagiarism?

(1b) how can instructors help students cultivate their personal ethic of academic integrity?

Research questions about student learning:

(2a) How is online graduate students' understanding of plagiarism improved through a tutorial?

(2b) How is online graduate students' confidence about their performance affected by taking a plagiarism tutorial?

(2c) Do online graduate students prefer the convenience of an asynchronous tutorial or the interactivity of a real-time tutorial? Why?

Methodology

This study uses a mixed methods data collection that will include an A/B testing model. Students in Group A will be invited to take part in an asynchronous (on demand) online tutorial. Students in Group B will be invited to take part in a synchronous (real time) tutorial facilitated by an instructor and allows for interactive group participation. Data will be collected through a (1) pre- and post-survey for online graduate students; (2) online and in-person focus group interviews; (3) Individual interviews with students to determine which method of delivery for the tutorial students perceived to be most helpful and effective to help them develop their understanding of plagiarism and confidence as online graduate students and how they applied what they learned in their courses; and (4) focus group with instructors and administrators to gather their perspectives on how students have developed and applied their understanding of plagiarism and academic integrity.

Significance

Our work follows in the footsteps of Bernstein & Bass (2005) who “wanted to discover what we needed to know about the relationship between teaching and learning to make intelligent decisions about the relationship of technology to learning” (p. 38). We subscribe to their philosophical stance that the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) is not “merely about individual excellence but about a broader agenda for change” (p. 38). Our agenda includes investigating how we can use technology to cultivate students understanding of academic integrity and help them develop holistically as learners.

Student learning in relation to understanding and applying academic integrity. Over the course of our data collection, we intend to investigate what students say about their learning in their day to day practice. Over time we hope that they will provide strong examples of how they have made decisions, investigated and used what they have learned in ways that reflect and embody strong academic citizenship. By the time we get to the final data collection, they should be able to articulate how they have applied their new knowledge around academic integrity in their day-to-day practice.

Knowledge Mobilization Plan

Results of this study will be disseminated in the following ways:

This research will be disseminated in three ways:

1. ***University of Calgary Open Conversation.*** We will host an open conversation session for academic staff and online students to share results from the work. This would be an interactive conversation session to engage educators and students in conversations about the findings and about academic integrity in general.
2. ***Presentations.*** This research will be presented, if accepted, at a minimum of two academic conferences.
3. ***Publications.*** A minimum of two peer-reviewed articles will be written for academic journals.

This project will help educators and learners themselves better understand how we can elevate the knowledge and competencies of students enrolled in an online professional graduate program. Following that, we hope the results from our study will provide other faculties and units on campus with the foundations to build or refine effective academic integrity tutorials for their own online students.

Research Assistant Role

This project will include two (2) Research Assistants (RAs), hired in accordance with University policies and procedures. Duties may include, but are not limited to:

- Attend and actively participate in research team meetings.
- Assist with participant recruitment, obtaining informed consent and keep accurate records for the project.
- Collaborate with the Principal Investigator and other research team members to implement protocols for secure storage of data.
- Schedule interviews
- Maintain detailed and organized project documentation, including reports, data, etc.
- Assist with literature reviews, documentation and report preparation.
- Assist with clerical work as needed.
- Other duties as assigned.

The research assistants must complete the TCPS2 CORE Tutorial and send the PI a copy of your completion certificate before onboarding to the project is complete.

Intellectual Property Statement for Research Assistants

The purpose of this statement is to ensure clarity and transparency among all members of the research team. According to the University of Calgary Intellectual Property Policy:

“Persons paid to perform specific assigned tasks unrelated to their academic program are employed and, in the absence of another agreement, their work belongs to their employer.” (p. 13)

The intellectual property rights for this project technically rest with the research team. You may not claim any of the outputs or results this work as your own. Research Assistants (RAs) are hired to perform specific duties and tasks in relation to the project, but this does not entitle RAs to intellectual property rights.

Research assistants may not copy, publish or publicly share results or any other work relating to this project without the explicit written permission of the entire research team.

Under certain circumstances RAs may be invited to contribute to collaborative dissemination of research results (e.g. conference presentations or publications). The PI, or designate, would extend an invitation to collaborate based on the depth and substance of intellectual contributions made by RA to the research project. Invitations are extended solely at the discretion of the research team.

We encourage our research assistant to engage in an open and frank conversations with the PI, or designate, about what constitutes a substantive intellectual contribution to a research project.

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Research Team

Sarah Elaine Eaton, Ph.D., Principal Investigator – Assistant Professor, Werklund School of Education, University of Calgary.

Jennifer Lock, Ph.D., Co-Investigator – Associate Dean, Teaching and Learning and Professor, Werklund School of Education, University of Calgary.

Meadow Schroeder, Ph.D., Co-Investigator - Assistant Professor, Werklund School of Education, University of Calgary.