Abstract: Research has established that the term plagiarism is open to different interpretations, resulting in confusion among students and staff alike. University policy on academic integrity/misconduct defines the behaviours that all stakeholders must abide by, and the parameters for reporting, investigating and penalising infringements. These definitions are the benchmark for assessing how well students understand plagiarism. An invitation to complete a survey examining studentsï¿½ understanding of the ...

Running head: Reading the policy on plagiarism

Who has read the policy on plagiarism? Unpacking students' understanding of plagiarism

Abstract

Research has established that the term *plagiarism* is open to different interpretations, resulting in confusion among students and staff alike. University policy on academic integrity/misconduct defines the behaviours that that all stakeholders must abide by, and the parameters for reporting, investigating and penalising infringements. These definitions are the benchmark for assessing how well students understand plagiarism. An invitation to complete a survey examining students' understanding of the institutional policy on academic integrity was sent to all domestic students enrolled at an Australian University. A total of 3405 students completed the survey. The data were examined by year of study, Faculty, and whether the students were studying on-campus or by distance education. Findings indicate that only half of the participants had read the policy on plagiarism and that confusion regarding what behaviours constitutes plagiarism was evident. The implications of these findings are that systematic educative approach of academic integrity is warranted.

Key words

Academic Integrity, College students, Education Higher, Plagiarism, University Policy, Universities (education), University Student

Who has read the policy on plagiarism? Unpacking students' understanding of plagiarism

In Higher Education, mastery of competent and disciplinary-specific writing is arguably a fundamental skill that demonstrates a student's understanding of subject-based knowledge (Berkenkotter & Huckin, 1995). Students express their authorial voice by synthesising the ideas drawn from scholarly literature within their own work. This process requires understanding the rationale for attribution and how to cite original sources in order to avoid plagiarism (Wingate, 2006). Yet the evidence suggests that many students unintentionally plagiarise, and confuse plagiarism with behaviours that are defined as cheating or collusion (Ashworth, Bannister, & Thorne, 1997; Barrett & Cox, 2005; Gullifer & Tyson, 2010). Moreover, not understanding what plagiarism is appears to contribute to increased anxiety of inadvertent plagiarism and uncertainty of what constitutes plagiarism (Ashworth et al., 1997; Breen & Maassen, 2005; Gullifer & Tyson, 2010; James, McInnis, & Devlin, 2002; Yeo, 2007). Studies indicate that plagiarism may occur due to this confusion rather than intentional plagiarism (Ellery, 2008; Gullifer & Tyson, 2010; Park, 2003; Sutherland-Smith, 2008; Zimitat, 2008). Specifically, students may not realise that altering an original source, even by a few words constitutes plagiarism and that internet sources must be cited.

The confusion surrounding the term plagiarism may also be experienced by academics, therefore contributing to the inconsistencies students are exposed to. For example in two studies conducted by Miguel Roig (1997, 2001) students and academics were able to paraphrase simple text without plagiarising, but as text became more complex and technical, many students (Roig, 1997) and some academics (Roig, 2001) made minor changes to the text by altering a few words. Although greater skill is required to paraphrase dense and

complex text, this practice could be construed as plagiarism due to the lack of attribution. Similarly in the high school setting, Craig and Evans (1990) found that a quarter of teachers and almost half of the students did not realise paraphrased text must be acknowledged. These findings reinforce the idea that there is no absolute standard among staff in recognising plagiarism, and therefore managing it consistently.

After examining the plethora of research published on academic dishonesty/ misconduct/integrity, it is obvious that a standard definition does not exist. Some studies group all academic misconduct behaviours as a single category, or other studies will use a variety of terms to define academic dishonesty, with plagiarism often described as being a form of cheating, academic fraud, misrepresentation or fabrication (Ashworth et al., 1997; Athanasou & Olasehinde, 2002; McCabe, 1992; McCabe, 2005b; McCabe, Trevino, & Butterfield, 2001, 2002; Newstead, Franklyn-Stokes, & Armstead, 1996; Whitley Jr, 1998). It is therefore hardly surprising that the ambiguous nature of the term *plagiarism* may result in inadvertent plagiarism.

Chris Park (2003) confirmed that students are genuinely perplexed about the concept of plagiarism. He found that some students unintentionally plagiarise due to the lack of familiarity with writing conventions when quoting and paraphrasing. There is also an expectation that students entering university understand the values of authorship, therefore the importance of attribution. They are also expected to discern common knowledge from material that must be cited. The uncertainty surrounding plagiarism is further complicated by contextual issues, such as the perceived degree of seriousness and degrees of violations. While there appears to be little agreement on a precise definition of plagiarism, there is consensus that it includes using another person's ideas, work, and expression and passing it off as one's own ideas, work and expression (Gibaldi, 2003).

Arguably the definitions that determine what constitutes plagiarism are those within university policy. It is these definitions that all stakeholders in the university setting must abide by, and that set the parameters for reporting, investigating and penalising infringements. More importantly, it is these definitions that should be the benchmark for assessing how well students understand plagiarism. By delimitating definitions of plagiarism to those set in university policy, the problem of generalising and finding a universal definition is eliminated. This is an important consideration given the socio-cultural context in which plagiarism occurs.

It is of interest to note that a search of the published literature revealed that while research has investigated why students' plagiarise (Burrus, McGoldrick, & Schuhmann, 2007; McCabe, 2005b; Sutherland-Smith, 2005); who plagiarises,(Harding, Mayhew, Finelli, & Carpenter, 2007; Iyer & Eastman, 2006; McCabe, 2005a); how they plagiarise (McCabe & Trevino, 1993); how many plagiarise (Hard, Conway, & Moran, 2006; Lin & Wen, 2007; McCabe, 2005b) what students think it is (Ashworth, Freewood, & Macdonald, 2003; Devlin & Gray, 2007; Gullifer & Tyson, 2010; Power, 2009; Yeo, 2007) and how to prevent it (Devlin, 2006; Duggan, 2006; McGowan, 2005a) no research to date has actually asked students if they had read the institutions policy, or how well they understand the definitions of the different academic misconduct behaviours within that policy. Given the importance of university policy to strategically guide the management of plagiarism and the emphasis placed on communicating the policy to all stakeholders, this anomaly is interesting. Moreover the consequence of not reading the policy may contribute to widespread ignorance of what behaviours constitute plagiarism.

A case-study approach, therefore, was initiated to investigate how well students' at an Australian university understand plagiarism, as defined in that institution's Academic

Misconduct Policy. Charles Sturt University (CSU) is a multi-campus university with four faculties (Arts, Business, Education and Science) offering a diverse range of courses and disciplines at the Bachelor and postgraduate level. The majority of students at CSU study by distance-education (off- campus). Distance education utilises teaching methods and technology to enable students to access education when they are not physically present on-campus (Cleveland-Innes & Garrison, 2010). Studying by distance education requires access to the internet as courses are supported by online technology.

The Charles Sturt University policy on Academic Misconduct (2010) subsumes plagiarism (along with collusion and cheating) as *one* of three types of academic misconduct. Within the policy, academic misconduct is defined as:

> *.... acting in a way, or attempting to act in a way, or assisting another student to act in a way which could reasonably be expected to defeat the purpose of a learning experience or an item of assessment or an examination. Academic misconduct will normally be evidenced by plagiarism, cheating or collusion (p.2).*

The Academic Misconduct Policy defines plagiarism as occurring when;

> *... he or she [student] gives the impression that the ideas, words or work of another person are the ideas, words or work of the student. Plagiarism will include:*
>
> *copying any material from books, journals, study notes or tapes, the Web, the work of other students, or any other source without indicating this by quotation marks or by indentation, italics or spacing and without acknowledging that source by footnote or citation;*
> *or*
> *rephrasing ideas from books, journals, study notes or tapes, the Web, the work of other students, or any other source without acknowledging the source of those ideas by footnotes or citations. This could include material copied from a source and acknowledged, but presented as the student's own paraphrasing. (p. 2)*

The Academic Misconduct Policy at CSU recognises that consideration of the motivation of the student is important when assessing cases of plagiarism as can be seen in the following extract:

Plagiarism is to be distinguished from inadequate and/or inappropriate attempts to acknowledge the words, works or ideas of someone else, as for example when a student makes a genuine attempt to reference their work, but has very poor referencing skills. (p.2)

While the policy recognises that cases may differ according to the intent of the student, a booklet developed by the university advises students that academics are responsible for reporting suspected cases of plagiarism to the appropriate authority regardless of intent (McVilly & McGowan, 2007) . Moreover, students are also informed in the booklet that factors such as the 'the seriousness of the misconduct, the relative experience of the student and whether the student has previously been found guilty of misconduct' (p.8) are considered when an allegation of plagiarism is investigated. Penalties are stated to become "progressively harsher depending on the nature of the plagiarism" (p.8). Penalties can range from no action to be taken, a caution or reprimand, resubmit work, no marks awarded for submitted work, fail subject, and exclusion from university. A combination of these penalties can also be applied.

Currently at CSU, the responsibility to learn about academic integrity resides with the student. The CSU student charter (Charles Sturt University, 2012) suggests that the university encourages a sense of community and with that comes shared values and expectations. The shared values refer to freedom of inquiry, knowledge refinement and dissemination, ethical practice, and the responsible stewardship of resources. These values are expressed through shared expectations that staff and students have of each other. The points in the charter relevant to academic integrity are that students can expect:

- *access to information about University regulations, policies and procedures including research and study requirements, and that they will be applied appropriately*

And the university can expect students to:

- *adhere to University rules, regulations, policies and procedures*
- *interact with the University with honesty, integrity and in a timely manner*

According to the charter, the role of the university is to make access to the information about university regulations, policies and procedure available, with the assumption that once the information is available, it is the responsibility of the student to be familiar with, and adhere to the information within the regulations, policies and procedures. Access to CSU regulations, policies and procedures are publicised and made available every teaching session through information placed in each subject outline, and in a letter sent at the beginning of the session to each student through an electronic mailbox. Students can also access the information through the CSU website.

The current strategy to promote academic integrity at CSU seems to rely on students' responsibility to source and independently learn about plagiarism by becoming familiar with the Academic Misconduct Policy. However, it appears that this strategy is not working as plagiarism continues. An answer for this problem may be found by assessing how well students know and understand the Academic Misconduct Policy at CSU. Thus, this research used a case-study approach to investigate the following research questions:

1. How many students at CSU have read the CSU policy on Academic Integrity?

2. How well do students rate their own understanding of plagiarism and that of other students?

3. How well do students understand the behaviours that constitute plagiarism, cheating and collusion in the CSU Academic Misconduct Policy?

4. Where do students primarily obtain their knowledge of plagiarism?

In addition, differences in understanding based on gender, year of study, Faculty affiliation, and mode of study were examined.

Method

Characteristics of Sample

The population of interest was all current domestic (studying in Australia) students enrolled at CSU. All eligible students (N = 30 092) were invited to complete an online survey, of which this study was a small component. Of the 4477 respondents who started the survey, 3405 provided sufficient information to allow analysis. The sample thus represented 11% of the overall population of domestic CSU students. The demographic details of the sample and census data for the population of students enrolled at that time are in Table 1.

Table 1

Comparison of Sample Characteristics as a percentage of Population Characteristics

Characteristic	Frequency		Percentage of Sample (%)	Percentage Of Population (%)
	Sample	Population		
Gender				
Male	1060	13709	31	42
Female	2264	20950	66	64
Faculty				
Arts	932	6541	27	20
Business	709	9267	21	28
Education	617	6945	18	21
Science	958	8041	28	25
Attendance mode				
On campus	1058	13332	31	41
Distance education	2350	21327	69	65
Year of study*				
1	828		24	
2	842		25	
3	745		22	
4	472		14	
Post-graduate Students	344		10	

*no population statistics available

A series of Chi-square goodness-of-fit tests were used to compare the proportion of cases from the sample with the known values of the population (obtained via university statistics) for gender, faculty, and mode of study. The tests indicated that the sample differed significantly from the CSU population for gender, Faculty, and attendance mode, $\chi2$ (1, N = 3324) = 83.10, $p < .001$, CSU, $\chi2$ (3, N = 3216) = 83.10, $p < .001$, and $\chi2$ (1, N = 3324) = 82.51, $p < .001$ respectively. Cramer's Phi was 0.16, for gender and mode of study, and 0.23 for Faculty, all of which indicate a small to medium effect size (Cohen, 1988). This suggests that the sample does not deviate substantially from the population and that it can be considered to be reasonably representative of the population.

Measures

The current study used the following four self-assessment items. Where relevant eleven-point rating scales (0 to 10) were used:

1. Have you read the <u>CSU Academic Misconduct Policy</u> which addresses plagiarism? If response is Yes, then:

    a. Please rate how <u>clear</u> you think the CSU policy on plagiarism is.(extremely confusing to extremely clear)

    b. Please rate how <u>fair</u> you think the CSU policy on plagiarism is (extremely fair to extremely unfair)

2. Based on your knowledge please indicate how well you <u>understand</u> what plagiarism is? (no understanding to complete understanding)

3. In general, how well do you think <u>students</u> at CSU <u>understand</u> what plagiarism is? (no understanding to complete understanding)

An additional item required students to indicate what they based their knowledge of plagiarism on:

4. Please rank the following sources (1 to 5) in order of what your knowledge of plagiarism is based on:
    a. Lecturers
    b. Other students
    c. Materials in e-Box or subject outlines

       d. The Academic Misconduct Policy

       e. Other

If the participant selected "other" a free -text box was provided to elaborate and clarify their response. The responses were content- analysed and coded into eight categories (see Table 7).

Demographic information requesting gender, course of study, mode of study (internal student, distance education student), and load of study (full- time or part-time), was also collected.

It is possible that self-report measures of students' own understanding of plagiarism may be influenced by self-presentation bias. This occurs if they believe that their responses reflect their own competence relative to other students, or are inconsistent with the expectations of the university and teaching staff (Kopcha & Sullivan, 2007; Schaeffer, 2000). Nancarrow and Brace (2000) suggest that a way to bypass socially desirable responding is to ask participants indirect questions regarding what they think other people might feel about a particular issue. The assumption here is that a respondent will project their thoughts or behaviours about that particular situation (Fisher, 1993). Thus, the use of indirect questioning may reveal insights not only about the participants beliefs, but also what other similar others may be thinking. Therefore items 2 and 3 were statistically compared, to examine if there was a significant difference between self-assessing their own understanding of plagiarism and assessing other students understanding. A significant difference may allude to self-presentation bias within the sample.

Understanding Plagiarism Scale (UPS).

The focus of the Understanding Plagiarism scale (UPS) was to systematically assess how well students comprehend the definitions of plagiarism, cheating, and collusion as set

out in the CSU Academic Misconduct Policy. Participants were instructed to indicate from a list of behaviours whether or not they consider the behaviour to be plagiarism (see Table 4.) The statements in the UPS are congruent with the CSU policy definitions of plagiarism, cheating and collusion. Answering 'yes' to a plagiarism item would constitute a correct response. Conversely, answering 'yes' to a cheating or collusion item would indicate an incorrect response. An additional five supplementary items were developed by the authors as plausible behaviours that may be commonly misidentified as plagiarism. As with the cheating and collusion items, a yes answer to these items would indicate an incorrect response.

In order to obtain a total scale score and sub-scale scores, the cheating, collusion, and supplementary items were first reversed so that all correct responses were coded 1 (correctly identifying plagiarism and correctly identifying non-plagiarism) and all incorrect responses were coded 0. The second step was to sum the total number of correct responses from all the items that make up the UPS. This would yield a total scale score ranging from 0 to 17, with higher scores indicating a greater understanding of plagiarism and the ability to discriminate between plagiarism and other forms of academic misconduct.

Procedure

Approval from CSU's Human Ethics Research Committee was obtained, and then an email was sent inviting students to complete an anonymous online survey. Data were collected over a two-week period. Once emails were sent, email addresses were deleted from the email server. Students were not directly asked if they had ever plagiarised.

Results

Reading the policy.

In this sample only half (52%) of the 3405 participants indicated that they had read the policy.

Given the lack of literature that has specifically examined whether or not students have read the policy, it was decided to examine the characteristics of those students who indicated that they have read the policy. There was a significant association between gender and reading the academic misconduct policy with males significantly more likely to read the policy than females, $\chi2$ (1, $N = 3324$) = 8.52, $p = .004$, phi = .051. A positive association was also found for mode of study and reading the misconduct policy with distance education students more likely to have read the academic misconduct policy compared with on-campus students, $\chi2$ (9, $N = 2966$) = 29.93, $p < .001$, phi = .100.

In order to control for the effect of gender, and to examine whether males who study by distance education were more likely to read the academic misconduct policy than female distance education students, gender was added as a layer in the analysis (see Table 2). There was a significant association between mode of study and gender on reading the academic misconduct policy, with more male distance education students $\chi2$ (1, $N = 1058$) = 35.42, $p < .001$, Phi = .185 reading the academic misconduct policy than females, $\chi2$ (1, $N = 2247$) = 32.39, $p < .001$, Phi = .121. There was no significant association between faculty and reading the misconduct policy.

While significant gender and mode of study differences in reading the misconduct policy were found, in terms of Cohen's (1988) criteria, the effect sizes were small and hence have little practical significance. In other words, any strategies to increase reading rates of the academic misconduct policy should not specifically target either gender or mode of study as a

criterion. Rather, all students enrolled at CSU should be included in any strategy that would increase the reading rate of the academic misconduct policy.

Table 2

Percentage of participants who had read the academic misconduct policy by mode of study and gender.

Mode of Study	Read Academic Misconduct Policy	Gender		Totals ($N = 3305$)
		Male ($N =1058$) %	Female ($N = 2247$) %	
Distance (off-campus)	Yes	43.8	36.4	1116
	No	16.8	31.2	1131
($N = 2279$)				
Internal (on-campus)	Yes	11.5	13.2	585
	No	27.9	19.1	473
($N = 1026$)				
	Totals	100	100	3305

Rating the clarity and fairness of the policy.

Participants who had read the policy where then asked to rate how clear the policy was. Overall, the clarity of the policy was highly rated ($M = 7.24$, $SD = 2.14$) with more than 72% of the respondents giving a rating of 7 or greater. Less than 8% of the participants who had read the policy gave a rating of 2 or less. Participants who had read the policy were also asked to indicate how fair they thought the misconduct policy was. This item was reverse coded. In general, the policy was rated as fair ($M = 6.76$, $SD = 3.03$) with the majority of participants (64%) rating fairness above 6. Thus, the majority of students who had read the Policy rated the misconduct policy as clear and fair.

Subjective measure for understanding the term 'plagiarism'

The results for the question of how well students understood the behaviours that made up the plagiarism items in the CSU academic misconduct policy are shown in Table 3.

Table 3

Means and standard deviations for students' self-ratings of understanding plagiarism and rating other students' understanding of plagiarism by gender, faculty, year of study, and attendance mode.

	Rating self-understanding of plagiarism		Rating other students' understanding plagiarism	
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
Gender				
Male	7.84	2.13	6.13	1.96
Female	7.71	2.18	6.01	1.87
Faculty				
Arts	7.66	2.21	6.06	1.88
Business	7.79	2.17	6.22	1.81
Education	7.94	2.12	5.97	1.99
Science	7.66	2.20	6.01	1.93
Year of Study				
1	7.73	2.19	6.13	1.91
2	7.72	2.20	6.11	1.85
3	7.72	2.09	6.04	1.89
4	7.76	2.17	5.85	1.91
Postgraduate	7.85	2.29	6.03	1.97
Attendance Mode				
Distance-Education	7.90	2.09	6.10	1.90
Internal	7.41	2.30	5.94	1.92
Total sample	7.75	2.17	6.05	1.91

In general, respondents indicated that they had a reasonably good understanding of plagiarism ($M = 7.25$, $SD = 2.17$) with more than 80% of the sample rating their understanding of plagiarism as 7 or above on the 11-point scale. Less than 10% of the sample indicated little understanding of plagiarism (rating of < 3), and of those, only 0.1% indicated "No Understanding".

In order to check for self-presentation bias, students were asked how well they thought other students at CSU understood what plagiarism is. The mean score of 6.05 ($SD =$

1.91), indicates that participants rated other students as having a moderate understanding of plagiarism (see Table 3). Less than 10% of respondents rated other students' understanding as 3 or less.

A paired-samples *t*-test was conducted to examine whether there was a significant difference between self-rated understanding of plagiarism and the rating of other students understanding of plagiarism. A significant difference was found, $t(3336) = 37.03$, $p = .001$ (two-tailed), with respondents indicating that they rated their own understanding of plagiarism as better than that of other students. Cohen's *d* (.83) indicated a large effect size. The fact that students reported their own understanding of plagiarism as better than that of other students suggests that a socially desirable response bias may have been operating.

In order to probe whether there were differences among groups (gender, faculty affiliation, attendance mode and year of study) in how other students' understanding of plagiarism was rated, a series of pairwise comparisons and ANOVAs were conducted. Given the large sample size, an alpha of .01 was used to test for significance. No significant differences were found for any of these analyses.

Discerning plagiarism behaviours in the UPS

As can be seen in Table 4, there was a ceiling effect for the plagiarism items of the UPS, with most respondents obtaining near perfect scores for each of the items. However, as evident in the table, there was more variability for the cheating, collusion, and supplementary items, with them sometimes being incorrectly endorsed as plagiarism. In other words, students were unable to accurately demarcate whether these behaviours were plagiarism or not.

Table 4

Percentage responses for identifying whether the item was considered to be plagiarism.

Item	Read Policy (%) (*N* = 1759)		Not read Policy (%) (*N* = 1646)		Total Sample (%) (N = 3405)	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Plagiarism Items						
Copying passages from textbooks, journals, or the Web, without acknowledgement	**93**	7	**99**	1	**99**	1
Copying actual text without using quotation marks	**95**	5	**94**	6	**94**	6
Reusing in whole or in part the work of another student	**93**	7	**92**	8	**93**	7
Submitting the work of another person, which has had only minor changes, without acknowledging the source	**97**	3	**96**	4	**97**	3
Taking ideas from a source such as a brochure, advertisement, television program, or radio program, and using them as your own without acknowledgment	**93**	6	**88**	12	**91**	9
Cheating Items						
Making changes to an assignment that has been marked then returning it for re-marking claiming that it was not correctly marked	41	**59**	37	**63**	39	**61**
Taking unauthorised materials into an examination	43	**57**	41	**59**	42	**58**
Falsifying data obtained from experiments, surveys, or similar activities	43	**57**	43	**57**	43	**57**
Copying the answers of another student in an examination	82	**18**	79	**21**	80	**20**
Collusion Items						
Allowing another student, who has to submit an assignment on the same topic, access to one's own assignment	50	**50**	41	**59**	46	**54**
Writing the whole or part of an assignment with	44	**56**	38	**62**	41	**59**

another person						
Using the notes of another person to prepare an assignment	42	**58**	33	**67**	38	**62**
Supplementary items						
Making up false reference citations	66	**34**	63	**37**	65	**35**
Citing sources that have not actually been read	36	**64**	31	**69**	33	**67**
Leaving out a reference	67	**33**	69	**31**	68	**32**
Giving incorrect information about the source of a quotation	71	**29**	69	**31**	70	**30**
Formatting a reference contrary to your disciplines preferred reference style	14	**86**	11	**89**	13	**87**

Note: bolded responses denote correct response.

Means and standard deviations for average total scale scores for plagiarism, cheating, collusion and supplementary items are reported in Table 5 and indicate that students demonstrated a high degree of accuracy in identifying those behaviours that are classified as plagiarism in the Academic Misconduct policy.

Table 5

Mean total sum scores for correctly identifying behaviour as plagiarism or not

Category	Range	Read Policy	Not Read Policy	Total Sample
		M (SD)	*M (SD)*	*M (SD)*
Plagiarism	0 - 5	4.77 (0.59)	4.70 (0.66)	4.74 (0.63)
Cheating	0 - 4	1.91 (1.43)	2.00 (1.40)	1.96 (1.42)
Collusion	0 - 3	1.64 (1.11)	1.88 (1.04)	1.76 (1.08)
Supplementary	0 - 5	2.46 (1.44)	2.57 (1.37)	2.52 (1.41)

To understand whether or not reading the policy improves understanding of plagiarism, an independent *t*-test (for equal variances not assumed) was conducted using the

UPS. There was a significant difference between scores for students who did not read the policy ($M = 7.61$, $SD = 2.22$) and students who had read the policy ($M = 7.25$, $SD = 2.39$); t (3402.85) = 4.570, $p < .001$ (two-tailed), indicating that those who had *not read* the policy performed significantly better than those who had. Although the magnitude of the difference, was small (Cohen's $d = .16$) this result is important. It suggests that reading the academic misconduct policy does not enable participants to accurately discern among the different behaviours that make up the academic misconduct policy. Furthermore, the data suggest that those students who read the policy were slightly more likely to incorrectly endorse cheating and collusion behaviours as plagiarism.

The final item asked participants to rank a range of sources in order of importance in relation to their knowledge of plagiarism. These items were coded so that only the primary source of information was analysed for each participant. Percentage responses for items ranked as their primary source of information are reported in Table 6. The most frequently cited primary source of information on plagiarism across the entire sample was lecturers. However, for those students who had read the policy, the policy itself was the primary source, followed by information from lecturers. Noteworthy was the fact that 12% of participants who indicated that they had not read the policy on plagiarism, ranked their primary source of information on plagiarism as the policy. This anomaly may be attributed to participants not being entirely clear of what the actual policy is, perhaps confusing subject outline information or the university booklet on avoiding plagiarism as being "policy".

Table 6

Percentage response rates for reported primary source of information on plagiarism by whether or not academic misconduct policy was read.

	Read Policy	Not Read Policy	Total Sample

	(N = 1566) %	(N = 1491) %	(N = 3057) %
Lecturer	21	37	29
Other students	9	8	9
Electronic Mail box/ subject outline	19	16	17
Policy	32	12	22
Other	19	27	23

For those students who had not read the policy, lecturers were ranked as the most frequent

primary source of information followed by the category "other" sources of information

(broken down in Table 7).

Table 7

Reported categories and percentage response rates for "other" categories of primary sources of information on plagiarism by whether or not academic misconduct policy was read.

Category	Read Policy (*N* = 655)	Not Read policy (*N* = 749)	Total (N = 1404)
Workshop	31	40	36
General sources of knowledge (e.g. dictionary, internet, common sense etc)	24	21	22
Formal document (e.g. referencing guides, law, journal articles etc)	18	13	15
Public sources and interpersonal communications (e.g. media, family, news etc)	11	12	11
Employment	7	6	6
Combination of above	4	6	5
Invalid response	6	3	4
Personal experience	.5	.3	.4

Table 7 displays the coded categories for those participants who indicated 'other' as

their primary source of information. For the 23% of students who reported "other" as their

primary source of information, completing a workshop was the most common source of

information of plagiarism followed by using general sources of information and then

referring to formal documents. It was interesting to note that 11% of these participants

reported using public sources (which are not regarded as scholarly sources) as their primary source of information on plagiarism.

Discussion

In this study fifty percent of participants indicated that they had read the CSU Academic Misconduct policy. Male students and distance education students were significantly more likely than female students and internal students to read the policy. Male distance education students were the group most likely to have read the academic misconduct policy. There was no significant association between faculty affiliation and reading the misconduct policy.

The finding that only half the sample read the policy is surprising given the emphasis placed on academic integrity at CSU. It is of concern that students are indicating that they have not read the Academic Misconduct policy given that it is an integral requirement and obligation under the student charter. If the information is readily available, why are students not taking the necessary steps to engage with the material provided? As stated in the Avoiding Plagiarism at CSU booklet (McVilly & McGowan, 2004), a strategy to avoid plagiarism is to understand the terminology as set out in the Policy.

An answer may be found in the business and marketing literature on information overload (Edmunds & Morris, 2000). In a review of the literature on information overload, Eppler and Mengis (2004) provide a range of terms to describe information overload, such as cognitive overload, sensory overload, communication overload, knowledge overload and information fatigue syndrome . Essentially information overload has been found to negatively correlate with individual performance, that is, information is retained up to a certain point, but as it increases beyond this point, individual performance rapidly declines

resulting in information overload (Chewning & Harrell, 1990; Eppler & Mengis, 2004; O'Reilly 1980).

It is plausible that students may be receiving too much information at the commencement of each semester and in order to filter the information they may be selecting resources perceived to be useful or relevant at that time. It is also posited that as the session progresses, time pressures and motivational factors may affect the ability to adequately take in important information on academic misconduct. Moreover, researchers have indicated that when issues of academic integrity arise, students may perceive the content to be irrelevant to their training and on the periphery of their future role prospects (Ashworth et al., 1997; Gullifer & Tyson, 2010; Park, 2003). Thus, these factors may contribute to the reasons why students avoid reading the academic misconduct policy, despite the relative ease of access to it.

Despite claims that clear definitions of plagiarism and well developed institutional policies about plagiarism enable greater understanding of attribution of knowledge (Lampert, 2008), it is evident in the findings of this research that academic misconduct items of cheating, collusion and supplementary referencing are confused with plagiarism behaviours regardless of whether a student has read the policy or not. These results may indicate that some students could have incorrectly reported reading the academic misconduct policy when they had not. Given that social desirable responding was evident in their ratings of self-understanding plagiarism, this premise is plausible. Alternatively, the participants may have regarded subject-based information as the 'policy', or that information overload may impede students reading the policy on academic misconduct.

The importance of these findings for CSU may reside in how students' *engagement* with university policy is improved. It is clear that only half the student body are reporting to

have read the policy, clearly not fulfilling their obligations under the student charter. Moreover, under the same charter, it does not appear to be sufficient for CSU to only provide *access to information* about University regulations, policies and procedures. Rather, there appears to be a need for more active engagement with learning about academic integrity while at the same time ensuring that this does not contribute to information overload. These findings support an earlier study of the authors (Gullifer & Tyson, 2010) whose focus group participants reported to confuse behaviours that are defined as cheating or collusion with plagiarism.

The current research contradicts some findings of earlier studies with regards widespread uncertainty about what constitutes plagiarism. Noteworthy, was the high degree of accuracy in identifying the behaviours that constitute plagiarism. This finding sheds an interesting light on Roig's (1997) early research. He indicated that students lacked the necessary knowledge to identify plagiarised text. He suggested that possible criteria used by students to determine whether a text has been plagiarised, is the presence/absence of acknowledgment to the original author. He reported that many students seem to believe that "... as long as the original author is credited and/or as long as minor modifications are made to the original, the material is generally considered properly paraphrased" (p.121) . In other words, students may perceive it is proper to take portions of text, perhaps with little or no modification, and to appropriate such text as their own writing. Yet, in the current study, when presented with plagiarism behaviours, students were clearly able to identify that plagiarism involved more than just attribution of an author,

On the other hand, the current findings appear to support Barrett and Cox (2005) who reported that confusion seems to reside with being able to discern from a range of academic behaviours as opposed to knowing what plagiarism is. They found that students categorised

the act of copying another student's work as acts of collusion, or framed more positively as collaboration instead of plagiarism. Thus, the confusion seems to reside with being able to discern from a range of academic behaviours as opposed to knowing what plagiarism is. An explanation put forward by Howard (2000), suggested that the term plagiarism is "...unwieldy, unstable and insidious' (p. 488). Howard's response to address the confusion that abounds is to replace the use of the word *plagiarism* with terms that accurately describes the behaviour undertaken by the student, such as *cheating, non-attribution* and *patchwriting* (p. 799). Findings from the current research support her suggestions, but would further deconstruct terms such as cheating and non-attribution to more concrete behaviour.

Strategies to combat student plagiarism that emphasise students being knowledgeable about institutional policies on academic honesty (Higbee & Thomas, 2002) may not be sufficient. Rather than relying solely on students proactively seeking the policy on academic misconduct, universities must take a more proactive role using a wide range of strategies. As a way forward, CSU could address the common factors that may have an impact on the incidence of inadvertent plagiarism among students. These factors, as outlined by James et all., (2002) include; helping students understand the concept of plagiarism and the practical implications in practice, understand citation and referencing conventions, and address some students' limited academic skills (critical analysis, thesis construction, paraphrasing).

The use of formal workshops may go some way in addressing these recommendations. Educating students about academic integrity may have a greater impact on helping students differentiate between the behaviours that make up the academic misconduct policy. Thus, a university-wide systematic approach with an educative focus may have a greater impact on improving students' understanding of academic misconduct, as opposed to an expectation that students read the policy. This call to using an educative

approach is not novel. Rather a range of authors have expressed similar sentiments (Carroll & Duggan, 2005; Ellery, 2008; Gullifer & Tyson, 2010; R. Howard, 2002; McGowan, 2005b) calling for greater use of education strategies alongside detection and punishment. Future research may benefit from the formal evaluation of a training program as a means to reduce the incidence of plagiarism.

Although this research has resulted in some clear implications for academic integrity at Charles Sturt University, the case study approach does have some limitations. Findings, assumptions and conclusions, while informative, may not be generalisable to other higher educational settings. Nevertheless, given the idiosyncratic development of academic integrity policy in higher education institutions, and the dearth of a standardised agreed upon definition of plagiarism, one could argue that developing generalisable results is difficult, hence the justification of case study methodology. Consequently, this research extends our understanding of student (dis)engagement with academic integrity policy and the resultant lack of understanding of the behaviours that make up academic integrity, in particular confusing plagiarism with collusion and cheating, at one institution.

To conclude Jude Carroll (2002, p. 39) argued, institutions must take some responsibility to understand "where and when students find out about plagiarism". This advice may seem prudent since it appears that half of the participants in this study have gained some knowledge about academic misconduct *without* reading the academic misconduct policy and have in fact performed better at discerning plagiarism behaviours than those participants who had read the policy. This finding challenges our first premise that problems with plagiarism might be attributed to students not reading or understanding plagiarism policy documents. Rather, students' understanding of plagiarism and how to avoid it requires much more than knowing what is in the policy documents. Instead, our

focus should be on teaching academic integrity and the behaviours that one must engage in

to demonstrate the mastery of competent and disciplinary specific writing, and avoiding

those behaviours that do not (Berkenkotter & Huckin, 1995).

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