



Evidence Summary

The Launch of a Joint Library/Writing Centre Online Course on Academic Integrity

A Review of:

Greer, K., Swanberg, S., Hristova, M., Switzer, A. T., Daniel, D., & Perdue, S. W. (2012). Beyond the web tutorial: Development and implementation of an online, self-directed academic integrity course at Oakland University. *The Journal of Academic Librarianship*, 38(5), 251-258. doi: 10.1016/j.acalib.2012.06.010

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Received: 3 Mar. 2013

Accepted: 21 Apr. 2013

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Abstract

Objective – To outline the collaborative development of an online course addressing academic integrity by a university’s library system and writing centre.

Design – Case study.

Setting – A public research university in the Midwestern United States.

Subjects – 1650 students who completed the online module.

Methods – Oakland University (OU) Libraries and the Writing Centre began to collaborate on the development of a new online course on

academic integrity in 2011. It was felt that an existing online library tutorial on plagiarism no longer met the needs of students and faculty. The development of the course was informed by the Association of College and Research Libraries’ *Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education* (2000) as well as a research study investigating students’ use of sources in their scholarly writing across several institutions. Moodle, the institution’s learning management system (LMS), was used to develop the learning object.

Main Results – OU Libraries and the Writing Centre launched the six-part online course entitled “Using and Citing Sources” in January 2012. They developed modules around

learning outcomes in five broad categories: defining academic integrity and plagiarism; the use of sources in academic writing; paraphrasing; quoting; and citation. The final module provided students with an opportunity to practise lessons learned in the first five modules. The use of the LMS to design and host the course limited the tutorial to registered students, but provided developers with access to additional course functionality without labour-intensive coding. It also allowed Writing Centre staff to access students' performance data on the modules prior to their appointments. Improvements over the previous online tutorial included expanded content on academic ethics and referencing, more active learning elements, video content, and the opportunity for students to choose discipline-specific examples. In the first four months of its availability, 1650 students completed the course, with 3330 attempts overall.

Conclusion – The diverse perspectives and expertise that individuals from OU Libraries and the Writing Center brought to their collaboration greatly informed the development of the course. The time and effort saved by using the university's existing LMS to develop interactive content and the focus on providing students with opportunities for active learning within the course contributed to the project's success.

Commentary

Plagiarism and teaching students how to avoid it are issues academic librarians and their allies continue to grapple with. The authors' advice to look to outside partners in educating students about academic integrity is well taken, particularly as many libraries find themselves trying to do more with fewer resources. Designing learning objects within a university's existing LMS rather than expending the time and money to build them from scratch is also a possibility other libraries should consider.

The fact that this information comes in the form of a case study does prove problematic

for the critical appraisal process. One of the most popular study designs for information researchers, the case study has been a target for criticism in evidence based library practice for the lack of rigour and positive bias many such studies display (Eldredge, 2004; Glynn, 2006). As such, it is not surprising that case studies score low on critical appraisal tools when compared to systematic reviews or randomized controlled trials, and practitioners should keep this in mind when weighing such evidence in their decision making process.

A general critical appraisal tool, however, may fail to highlight best practices in those circumstances where the case study may be the most appropriate study design. In her discussion of quality improvement case studies in the medical sciences, Greenhalgh (2010) offers a checklist of ten questions that writers and readers of library case studies may find useful when considering the quality of the research presented. Such studies in medicine, like many in library and information science, are often tasked with detailing attempts to improve the overall experience of the patient/client within a complex system of services. Several questions stand out when considering the work of Greer et al. through this lens. Greenhalgh writes, "Was the intended quality improvement evidence based?" (192). While the authors of the study reference previous work on the role of libraries in addressing questions of academic integrity and the role of collaborations with other departments on campus in this work, little outside evidence on best practices in designing online education is cited to support the pedagogical decisions made. Greer et al. admit that the choice to deliver the content online was for practical reasons (lack of face-to-face time with students), but there are lessons to be drawn from the literature both within and outside of our discipline on how to best go about this.

Greenhalgh also asks, "How did the authors measure success and was this reasonable?" (p. 193). The only evidence presented of student performance in the online course is the large number of students (1650) who completed it in the first four months of its availability. This

figure does suggest that OU faculty saw value in the content and were assigning it to their students, although more information on the size and composition of the student body at the institution would provide readers with a better sense of the scale of this achievement. The explanation provided by the authors as to why an even larger number of students (3330) tried and failed to complete the course is unsatisfying. For example, the large number of unsuccessful attempts could point to problems with overall course design rather than simply students' desire for a higher score. Student performance data from the individual modules is not provided, even though the study notes that that this information is being collected and used internally to inform future changes to the course. There is no mention of ethics clearance in the study, so one possibility is that the authors did not have permission to release the data. It would also have enriched the study had more information been included as to how the previous online tutorial was assessed and found wanting.

The absence of such assessment data, and the article's focus on a description of the course's development rather than an analysis of its impact limits its overall value to the rest of the library community. Improving students' understanding of the ethical issues around their use of information is a worthy goal, but it

is not yet clear that this course accomplishes what it sets out to do. There is an indication that the authors' future reporting on the project will include measures of student performance and faculty feedback, and further details would be welcomed by other libraries looking for ideas on how to best address issues of academic integrity in their own institutions.

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