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Using Popular Culture to Teach Academic Integrity

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Since the “information literacy movement” sprung forth in the early 1990s, libraries have increasingly become involved in the teaching of research skills, and with that, research ethics. This movement culminated with the first *Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education*, released by the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) in 2000. In particular, Standard Five stated that, “The information literate student understands many of the economic, legal, and social issues surrounding the use of information and accesses and uses information ethically and legally” (*Information Literacy*). Yet Lynn Lampert in 2008 observed that more emphasis was being placed on the “culture of detection, characterized by infrequently held discussions of punishment and the consequences for acts of plagiarism and academic dishonesty,” than was on “proactive efforts to create a curriculum that educates students about the proper ways to incorporate external materials into their writing or projects” (4). While students may have a basic minimal understanding of cheating and copy-paste plagiarism, they may not enter college with the understanding of intellectual ownership, ethics, and the meaning and purpose of citation. Being that reference librarians in particular have seen their professions evolve into that of “research experts” thanks to the increasing promotion of information literacy, and recognizing that punitive action wasn’t as effective a deterrent, universities have brought us in as partners in the remediation process.

The previous *Information Literacy Standards* have since been replaced by an updated and more nuanced document, the *Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education*, in

2016. The principle surrounding the *Frameworks* is that information literacy isn't a step-by-step process to be followed like a recipe, but a set of interlinked concepts that inform each other. While respect for creative and intellectual property is interwoven throughout the document, it is emphasized most strongly in two particular concepts. First is that "Information Has Value...as a commodity, as a means of education, as a means to influence, and as a means of understanding and negotiating the world" (*Frameworks* 6). This value is not dependent on whether a created work is a scholarly paper or a sci-fi romantic comedy posted to YouTube. It is valued by those who use it and those who create it, and recognition should be paid to the creator. The other concept is in the idea of "Scholarship As Conversation" (*Frameworks* 8). To illustrate this, I ask my students to imagine they are at a social event, and there is a small group of like-minded people discussing a particular topic. You overhear something and want to comment, so you enter the circle, acknowledge the last speaker, and add on your own idea. Another speaker in the group thanks you for your idea and links it to their own. "This is how citation works," I tell them. They bring in expert voices to support their argument, and if they so happen to publish, those voices may now cite *you*. In the exchange of ideas and creation, that conversation cannot happen in a vacuum; ideas are influenced and sparked by those that came before. But sometimes, especially when speaking to a group of 18-to-22-year-olds glued to their devices, you need an extra weapon, a "pop gun" so to speak, to make the concept of intellectual honesty more relevant.

Pop Culture and Ethics

While much has been written on the subject of using popular culture in overall library instruction, not as many publications discuss using it to specifically teach academic integrity. The most obvious examples are generally in the realm of music sampling, particularly in the rap

genre. In her article for the *Mercer Law Review*, Kim Chanbonpin compares the cultures of hip hop and legal writing. The ability to write legal opinions and memorandums require an in-depth knowledge of statutes, case law, and precedent. It is nearly impossible to not reuse information or direct quotes in this type of writing, but the ability to “remix” case law into something new and innovative, rather than simply imitate via “cut-and-paste” plagiarism, is what separates the novice legal writer from the expert (Chanbonpin 632-33). Similarly, in hip hop culture, the ability to remix, sample, and pay homage without “biting” is the mark of an innovator. In spite of its youth, hip hop has a strong sense of nostalgia. Chanbonpin notes, “in good hip hop music, references to a prior work clear a space for transforming that prior work to serve the artist’s own unique purpose” (624). Hip hop has its own “regulating agents” in the artists and fan community, and in its forms of citation. One is through acknowledging the original artist in the liner notes and legal copyright permissions. The other is in the actual track; the citation can be explicit, via a “verbal shout-out,” or implicit, dependent on the “collective knowledge” of the community (Chanbonpin 625). An implicit example would be when Snoop Dogg or Puff Daddy used a similar rhyme scheme in their tracks as the late 1980s group EPMD (Chanbonpin 626-27). A more recent addition would be in Lin-Manuel Miranda’s musical *Hamilton*, in which the “collective knowledge” is once again called upon to recognize common lexicons in hip-hop such as the “what’s your name” call-and-response, or Hercules Mulligan’s “brrrap, brrrap” machine gun sound employed by rappers such as A\$AP Rocky and Lil Wayne. Miranda explicitly cites other artists in both song title and lyrics, for instance Notorious B.I.G.’s “10 Crack Commandments” in the number “10 Duel Commandments,” or the “meet me outside” lyric from DMX’s “Party Up in Here” paraphrased in the “Meet Me Inside” number. Just to be safe,

however, many of the musical references are included both in the program and in other *Hamilton*-related publications (Wickman). But hip-hop insiders probably didn't need that. Chanbonpin, by the end of her paper, makes her case that legal writers and rappers both employ the "remix" as a way to convey their vast knowledge of the culture, be it hip hop or case law, and their status as an insider (637-38).

Wakefield uses a similar rationale in a class more college-level library instructors will likely conduct sessions for: English Composition. In her article "Using Music Sampling to Teach Research Skills," she offers similar parallels in teaching concepts such as fair use, the "common knowledge" deviation, the substance of "author's voice," and examples of good versus poor paraphrasing. Puff Daddy's track "I'll Be Missing You" is used as a gateway; the rapper obtained copyright permissions from the owners of The Police's 1986 song "Every Breath You Take." Samplers may use their borrowed beats or base lines to enhance their lyrics, just as a writer should use sources to enhance their reasoning (Wakefield 359). Wakefield points out to students that at least they don't have to pay copyright fees when using other writings in their papers; they just have to cite (358). Popular culture is not always an effective tool in teaching research ethics, particularly when working with international students. Henderson & Whitelaw wrote of an attempted pilot program in a partnership between universities in Melbourne and Beijing; the Australian university used popular culture examples from movies, television, and music. While the e-learning resources were positively received by fellow scholars, the Western-centric references were lost on the Chinese students (17). Even in a traditional Western cultural setting, it is important to understand the mindset of students and their familiarity with world events; the most recent Beloit College Mindset List is usually a good place to start ("The Mindset List").

The Academic Integrity Seminar at MSU

The Academic Integrity Intervention Program (AIIP) at Mississippi State University began in conjunction with the 2007 implementation of the Student Honor Code. The purpose of this new approach to academic honesty was to be proactive, rather than reactive; to emphasize more to students, for instance, on why citation was good, rather than why plagiarism was bad. The original intent was to have three parts to the program; an online module-based tutorial focusing on general research ethics, a library workshop to teach practical ways to study effectively and cite sources, and a wellness component addressing the underlying issues that can lead to a student committing an honor code violation. Such issues can include anxiety, depression, and stress. Eventually the wellness part was scrapped and the library's Instructional Services Department was tasked with creating the in-person "Academic Integrity Seminar." The format originated with my previous supervisor as a lecture, using Charles Lipson's *Doing Honest Work in College: How to Prepare Citations, Avoid Plagiarism, and Achieve Real Academic Success* as a required text. Once I took on responsibility for the seminar in 2008, I began to incorporate more structured discussion and interactivity. I was also fortunate in 2011 to attend the ACRL Institute for Information Literacy Immersion program; the pedagogical knowledge I gained there furthered the evolution of the class.

While I was continuing to teach academic integrity in Starkville, Mississippi in August 2012, Harvard University officials had suspended several students as a result of being caught cheating on a take-home exam the previous spring. In the class, the professor had allowed students to use any books, class notes, and even internet resources during the exam, but not to discuss or collaborate with one another on their answers (Perez-Pena). The scandal made the

New York Times, as well as other major media outlets. A colleague in the Reference Department decided to use the *Times* report of the case in a similar, non-remediative workshop called “Keeping It Honest: Avoiding Plagiarism in Your Papers.” When there was a department restructuring, merging Reference and Library Instruction to become “Research Services,” I took over this workshop. Taking the reins on “Keeping It Honest” gave me ideas to revise the Academic Integrity Seminar, which shared corresponding learning objectives. While researching the original Harvard case, I came across a more humorous take, done by the satirical evening news parody, *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart*.

I realized that I could use this as an example of how academic dishonesty could affect the reputation of an institution. I already used a quote from the president of the IEEE Signal Processing Society, to discuss this issue (a carry-over from the origins of the class); in his message he said, “you should support rules within your employer’s institution that ensure you are made aware of all submissions that bear your name.” (Mintzer 4). Unfortunately, the quote was in the scope of professional research ethics and publications, and I had a hard time conveying this concept to an undergraduate audience. While the particulars of the case were presented dryly in the *New York Times*, Stewart’s take was much more humorous, riffing on Harvard’s prestigious reputation, and the absurdity of such an institution allowing “open internet” exams, asking “is this Harvard or the University of Phoenix?” (Stewart 01:09-12). For a couple of workshops, I avoided using the actual video, instead appending the *Times* piece with a few gifs from the episode. Once I spoke to a fellow librarian that specialized in copyright, I began to link directly to the version on Comedy Central’s site and use the video in class under the “Fair Use” doctrine. My test was a group of incoming freshmen student-athletes, the majority

of them football players. Not only did they respond positively to it, but I was able to hold their attention for the remainder of the class.

In the course of the *Daily Show* piece, I have found there are two other opportunities to discuss integrity in addition to the Harvard case. First, is when Stewart goes on a tangent about the reality show *Project Runway* (01:55-02:09). In the episode Stewart references, contestant Keith Michael Rizza is disqualified and asked to leave the competition after it is discovered he used the Internet and hid pattern-making books (“Reap What You Sew”). Though he claimed never to have used the books, Rizza was still in violation of the contract he signed with producers and the rules of the fashion design competition. For those students unfamiliar with the series, a quick one sentence description is offered, and then they are posed with the question, “why did the producers make that rule in the first place?” During class discussion, students can usually pinpoint that the rules aren’t arbitrary; that using “how-to” books and outside resources are not in the spirit of a competition at that level, and that when Rizza signed the contract he was promising to be honest. From that point, it is easy to draw a parallel to academic work. Students will recall signing a copy of the Honor Code, or a statement to their professor that they have read and understood the syllabus. And that syllabus may have restrictions on using outside materials in exams, or using solutions manuals when completing lab or homework assignments,

The other opportunity for discussion reopens the conversation about the effect dishonesty can have on the reputation of a profession, institution, or community; it is triggered with the ultimate punchline of the piece:

STEWART: By the way, what type of class would take a group of smart people
with potential to succeed, dangle a forbidden fruit in front of them, almost

encouraging them to be corrupt, and then force them to deal with the embarrassment of a national media scandal because of it, ultimately then imposing a relatively toothless punishment?”

CNN REPORTER: The class is reportedly Government 1310, “Introduction to Congress.”

STEWART: [crumples paper] I rescind the question. I completely get why Harvard is number one. Those kids are going to do great in Congress. (Stewart 02:33-03:26)

In a Gallup poll reported in December 2016, members of Congress rated at the bottom of professions perceived as having high or very high “honesty and ethical standards,” with 59% of those polled responding that they regarded Congress’s standards of ethics as “low” or “very low.” This figure places members of Congress below car salespeople, advertising practitioners, lawyers, and journalists, all professions students have volunteered when I ask them about professions that have bad reputations for honesty (Norman).

Different parts of the *Daily Show* piece draw different reactions, depending on the audience. The final “Introduction to Congress” punchline doesn’t always land among a general audience of undergraduates. But in an orientation for political science and public administration graduate students, the entire room breaks out in laughter, including among the faculty. The student athletes find particular humor in Stewart’s obsession with *Project Runway*, and everyone laughs at Stewart’s incredulity that a Harvard class allows use of the Internet during a test. It also doesn’t hurt that our school’s in-state rival, Ole Miss, refers to itself as “The Harvard of the South,” so the “Phoenix U” line is taken as an additional friendly dig at our neighbors.

When I saw the positive reaction I received from using the *Daily Show* video, I decided to seek out other examples in popular culture. As a fan of popular music I am familiar with many of the more famous accusations of plagiarism in the industry. However, I had struggled to find good examples to use in a class setting, until I found a video from the YouTube channel “WatchMojo,” which has a steadily refreshed stream of Top Ten videos on a variety of pop culture topics. The video “Top 10 Rip-off Songs” specifically compared cases that led to actual litigation (or public threats thereof by the involved artists); it purposely left out songs that included sampling or were merely “sound-alike” according to listeners. With a runtime of 14 minutes and 17 seconds, it is not practical to play the entire video, so I had to decide what segment to start and end with. Given the average age of traditional undergraduates, I settled on two more recent songs. One was “Blurred Lines” by Robin Thicke, accused by Marvin Gaye’s estate of copying “Got to Give It Up.”; the other was “Bittersweet Symphony” by The Verve, sued by the Rolling Stones for sampling an excessive amount of an orchestral version of “The Last Time” (“Top 10 Rip-off Songs” 07:46-10:00). These were cases with different outcomes, and we discuss those nuances in class. Still, this is an imperfect system; I would ultimately prefer to find stand-alone clips with case facts not filtered through the Mojo group, or that are sometimes interrupted by advertising (an interference becoming more common on YouTube). I believe by working with our in-house Digital Media Center I can embed audio samples into the actual presentation.

Sometimes the news becomes popular culture; this was the case last summer, when Melania Trump made a speech at the Republican National Convention, and critics realized that large parts were nearly identical to a speech then-First Lady Michelle Obama made at the

Democratic National Convention in 2008. Late night hosts and Twitter had a field day in what was already an unusual election season, while those of us tasked with teaching academic honesty immediately latched on to the incident as an opportunity to demonstrate a timely example of plagiarism. CNN helpfully provided a side-by-side comparison, posted to YouTube (“Melania Trump”). However, there was trepidation on the part of my colleagues and myself. Was this a case of becoming “political,” in a heightened campaign, and in a predominantly red state? I decided to simply let the video speak for itself, with a disclaimer that there was still debate as to who had written the actual speech Mrs. Trump gave at the RNC. We then discussed the concept of paraphrasing versus direct quotes, and common knowledge versus borrowed facts. The concepts that Michelle and Melania spoke of in their speeches were fairly universal, but the wording could have been done differently. Melania or her speechwriter could have been the victim of what I call “refrigerator poetry” paraphrasing; where you move the original words around and replace just a few, instead of finding your own voice and words to express a similar idea. Since the election I have not used this example in the classroom, though I may revisit it in the future.

Feedback and Future Plans

Student and faculty feedback has thus far been primarily anecdotal, via direct face-to-face comment or through post-workshop surveys. Participants in the workshop have approached me afterwards to say they had been dreading the workshop for weeks, but that the popular culture content, in addition to my delivery, made the class more pleasant and informative. A music major appreciated the music plagiarism video and mentioned how she could use the example in her own teaching in the future. Another commented in an evaluation how inventive they found the

use of the *Daily Show* piece. The content's entertainment value holds their attention, but the explanations inform their view of intellectual property, acknowledgement of creators, and the role citation plays in the scholarly communication process. At this time there are no solid statistics for the first full year since we incorporated the popular culture content; 2016-2017 school year information will not be tabulated until later this year. But based on previous year's statistics, it is promising; plagiarism charges dropped from 183 to 156 between 2015 and 2016; cheating charges plummeted from 239 to 96. The Honor Code Office has plans to incorporate an exit survey for the AIIP in Fall 2017 (Deer).

In the meantime, there are plans to both incorporate more popular culture elements and initiate a more formal evaluation of the course, to gauge the true effectiveness of having these pops of pop culture in the seminar. Only recently I discovered that there were accusations of plagiarism in Beyonce's "Formation" video; she used clips from a documentary on bounce music, and while producers received clearance from the copyright holder, they did not immediately acknowledge the original creators (Ferretti & Evans). Here we can discuss the differences between copyright and citation, and the question of legality versus ethics. And just last week before his confirmation, new Supreme Court Justice Neil Gorsuch was accused of plagiarizing passages in one of his books (Quintana). It seems there will be more timely examples to use as each generation that comes through our campus gates learns the principles of academic integrity.

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