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Collage of confusion: An analysis of one university's multiple plagiarism policies

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ABSTRACT

Plagiarism is a major concern for institutions of higher education, whose stance on the controversy is often reflected in the form of plagiarism policy. Previous studies have examined these policies as individual documents or in relation to other institutions' policies. Yet little attention has been paid to the multiple plagiarism policies of one institution. The purpose of this study was to examine the plagiarism policies of nine Colleges at the University of Iowa, a public US university whose students often take foundational, cross-disciplinary courses as part of their degree requirements and therefore potentially negotiate multiple policies. Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough, 1992) was adopted to examine the differing discourses of the policies. Findings reveal that discourses of authority and ethics are prevalent in all the policies, and that comprehending how the policies correlate to their individual disciplines may prove problematic for students.
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1. Introduction

Over the past several decades, plagiarism research has garnered a great deal of attention. Though studies have focused on a variety of variables, one overarching theme from the findings has come to dominate – the notion that, while plagiarism as an act of transgression does indeed still exist, most instances of plagiarism emanate from the discursive, protracted learning process of engaging in source-based writing, one that students must negotiate as part of their efforts to become active participants in their respective academic communities (Pecorari, 2015). Studies have examined, for instance, definitional dilemmas of plagiarism (Pennycook, 1994), culturally-forged notions of plagiarism (Shi, 2006), the formation of writerly identity (Ouellette, 2008), and differing perceptions of students and professors regarding what constitutes plagiarism (Roig, 2001). All of these studies lend credence to the perspective that learning to avoid plagiarism and become a skilled academic writer takes time and effort.

Plagiarism policy has also been rightfully spotlighted by several studies, as plagiarism policy is the document upon which students, professors, and other faculty should ostensibly depend for educational information about plagiarism as well as guidance regarding their institution's stance for mediating cases of alleged plagiarism. Yet analyses have revealed that policy, on the whole, frames plagiarism as a transgressive act (Adam et al., 2017; Hu & Sun, 2017; Sutherland-Smith, 2011) by situating it alongside other moral breaches in academia (e.g., cheating, copying).

These studies have investigated plagiarism policy in a rich variety of cross-institutional and transnational contexts. Despite nearly universal agreement that plagiarism policies raise more questions than they answer and are thus in need of an

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educative approach, one facet lacking from these studies is the consideration of students who potentially face the obstacle of navigating multiple plagiarism policies simultaneously. Some institutions of higher education in Europe and Asia, for instance, have been shown to possess multiple plagiarism policies at the same institution (Ronai, 2020). In the US, though it is more the norm than the exception for US universities to have centralized plagiarism policies, the possibility of multiple plagiarism policies existing at the same institution is of particular importance for the university students themselves, as discipline-specific plagiarism policies may dictate procedures and regulations more so than an institution's centralized policy (McGrail & McGrail, 2015).

The purpose of this study was to address this gap in the literature by examining the plagiarism policies of nine of the Colleges at the University of Iowa, a public university at which nearly 24,000 undergraduates are enrolled. The significance of this study stems from the need to consider the reality of many of these undergraduate students, who — by enrolling in core coursework across several disciplines — must by extension potentially negotiate the individual plagiarism policies of the Colleges in which these disciplines are housed. In addition, because it is common for students to work towards the completion of their core coursework as first- and second-year students, their knowledge and skills of academic writing in general and discipline-specific expectations specifically are still developing, thus rendering their understanding of these policies critical.

2. Literature review

In recent years, one area of plagiarism research that has garnered considerable attention is policy, particularly since a common form of coursework assessment at institutions of higher education involves source-based writing. Some plagiarism policy studies highlight tensions arising from instructors' or students' conceptions or constructions of policy meaning (Brown & Howell, 2001; Power, 2009; Sutherland-Smith, 2005); other studies analyze the shifting discourses of the policies themselves. It is the latter area that will receive focus in this paper.

Broadly speaking, common discourses within plagiarism policy include moral discourses, regulatory discourses, and developmental discourses (Adam, 2016; Kaposi & Dell, 2012). A moral discourse renders plagiarism a transgressive act in which those who commit it have done so intentionally and dishonestly (Hu & Sun, 2017). The language of moral discourse is thus revealed through law- or crime-related language (Adam et al., 2017). While closely related to moral discourses, regulatory discourses view acts of plagiarism as a violation of academic rules rather than an issue of ethics. Plagiarism is also viewed as either intentional or unintentional. The discourses are thus announced in language relating to "institutional rules, academic conventions, and administrative guidelines" (Hu & Sun, 2017, p. 58). Regulatory discourses often focus on procedure regarding how instances of plagiarism will be handled, but may also provide guidelines on writing skills such as summary, paraphrase, and citation. It is thought that adhering to policy guidelines is the means by which students can avoid plagiarism (Adam et al., 2017). Developmental discourses largely consider plagiarism to be unintentional, and thus construct plagiarism from the perspective of students who are learning how to write academically and become part of an academic community (Hu & Sun, 2017).

Perhaps not surprisingly, the majority of studies have found that the most prevalent of these discourses is moral discourse (e.g., Hu & Sun, 2017; Sutherland-Smith, 2011). Though some institutions have revised their policies to reflect a more educative approach, the majority still employ both legal and moral parlance, thus placing the onus of solving the issue squarely on the students' shoulders (Macdonald & Carroll, 2006).

Plagiarism policies that are legalistic in nature, therefore, act as a vehicle through which university procedures, for instances of plagiarism, are documented and administered rather than as a resource from which students can learn how to prevent plagiarism; in this sense, the policies serve more to protect the university than educate students. From the student perspective, several dilemmas arise with the legal discourses of plagiarism policies. For one, the punitive and authoritative tone may induce anxiety in students, which in turn could affect their ability to concentrate on the task of academic writing; further, such a tone could create the effect of students establishing a moral rather than an academic identity as a writer (Abasi & Graves, 2008). Policies that lack clarity may also hamper students' understanding of plagiarism (McGrail & McGrail, 2015). As well, the wording of policies may affect students' perceptions of the seriousness of plagiarism (Brown & Howell, 2001). Inconsistency in the presentation (McGrail & McGrail, 2015) and implementation of plagiarism policy (Stuhmcke et al., 2016) may also pose challenges for students.

Plagiarism policy across university disciplines also factors into a unique quandary for undergraduate students who must take courses in several different disciplines as part of their liberal arts education — they must learn, on one hand, the vague notion of what academic writing entails, and on the other, simultaneously, the writing rules of their discipline-specific courses (Ellery, 2008). Though a university may have one overarching policy in place, its utility is often supplanted by the policy of an individual school or college within that university, particularly concerning allegations and violations (McGrail & McGrail, 2015).

Despite the need for individual policies, students are often left in the dark regarding discipline-specific writing conventions, as these policies do not typically provide students clarity regarding discipline-specific writing practices in the form of guidelines or training on plagiarism (Liu et al., 2016). Students thus remain unaware that the appropriateness of an academic text is not measured by any standard of good writing but by norms established by a particular discipline (Pecorari, 2006). The policies offer little insight, for example, into the definitional variance of plagiarism (Liu et al., 2016) and citation practices (Harwood, 2008; Shi, 2012; Sutherland-Smith, 2010). Students are also unlikely to recognize that the hard sciences value general information over who discovered it; the social sciences value the identity of the individual who procures and analyzes

Table 1
List of the twelve University of Iowa Colleges.

Business
Dentistry
Education
Engineering
Graduate College
Law
Liberal Arts and Sciences (CLAS)
Medicine
Nursing
Pharmacy
Public Health
University College

data; and the humanities value words and creativity (Jamieson, 2008). Not only what is referenced but how it is referenced can vary; for instance, the use of quotation marks is common in some disciplines (soft sciences) yet exceedingly rare in others (hard sciences) (Pecorari, 2006). With a one-size-fits-all approach to perspectives on academic writing and plagiarism, students may find it difficult to integrate themselves into new discourse communities (Jamieson, 2008). This struggle may manifest itself in developmental skills such as paraphrasing, whose rhetorical purpose is influenced by discipline (Shi, 2012).

In recent decades, research on plagiarism policy has been extensive. Some studies have examined the policy of individual institutions (Adam et al., 2017; Gullifer & Tyson, 2014). Others have examined single policies at multiple universities within one country, e.g., China (Hu & Sun, 2017), Australia (Zimitat, 2012), the US (McGrail & McGrail, 2015; Price, 2002); and across several countries, e.g., Thailand and Canada (Charubusp & Sivell, 2016) and the US, UK, Canada, and Australia (Sutherland-Smith, 2011). Yet to my knowledge, no study has analyzed multiple cross-disciplinary plagiarism policies of one university. The purpose of this study, therefore, was to analyze the plagiarism policies of nine of the Colleges at the University of Iowa.

While it is unclear how many universities (in the US and elsewhere) have multiple plagiarism policies, it is worth noting that several hundred higher education research institutions exist in the US alone, many of which are structured with multiple colleges, similar to the University of Iowa. Relatedly, studies have shown that professors' perceptions of plagiarism vary greatly based on discipline (Bennett et al., 2011; Roig, 2001; Zimitat, 2012) and thus potentially influence professors' teaching of source-based writing. These findings support the notion that plagiarism, as a human construct, is fluid. As Price (2002) notes, plagiarism "shifts across historical time periods, across cultures, across workplaces, even *across academic disciplines*" (p. 90, emphasis mine). Therefore, if professors' conceptions of plagiarism are influenced by the academic writing norms and discourse practices of their disciplines, it stands to reason that these conceptions would accord with discipline-specific plagiarism policies.

The research questions of this study are:

- What potential discoursal variety exists across the plagiarism policies of nine Colleges at the University of Iowa?
- What potential conflicts arise through this discoursal variety, and what attendant challenges might arise from these conflicts for students?

3. Methodology

3.1. University of Iowa plagiarism policies

Undergraduates at the University of Iowa can pursue one or several of over 200 majors, minors, or certification programs ((Undergraduate Areas of Study, 2020)). These majors fall into most of the 12 Colleges of the University (see Table 1).[1] Though undergraduates would not take courses across all 12 Colleges, a combination of several is common, as students must often take foundational courses across disciplines as part of their degree requirements. An accounting or engineering program, for instance, requires students to take several discipline-specific courses in the College of Business or College of Engineering, respectively; these students, however, must also complete core coursework within the three categories of Communication and Literacy; Natural, Quantitative, and Social Sciences; and Culture, Society, and the Arts, all offered through the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences. It should also be noted that several Colleges' plagiarism policies have adapted excerpts of the University of Iowa's Code of Academic Honesty (e.g., the Colleges of Public Health, Engineering, and Education), which originates in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences.

[1] The final College in the list merits explanation as its title is not self-evident; for its degree programs, University College offers a Bachelor of Applied Studies and Bachelor of Liberal Studies, both of which provide students a distance education option. Both degrees also provide alternatives to traditional academic majors; the former, for instance, is designed for graduates of technical schools and community colleges, while the latter enables students to devise study programs with their advisors to meet individual academic objectives.

The plagiarism policies of the College of Dentistry, College of Medicine, and Graduate College have been excluded from this study because they largely do not pertain to undergraduate students (i.e., typically, the students in these programs already have a bachelor's degree). Conversely, while the College of Law and College of Pharmacy programs are mainly geared towards graduate students, their policies have also been included because of the possibility for undergraduates to take coursework in those Colleges. For instance, undergraduates who intend to go to law school after completing their bachelor's degree have the possibility of taking preparatory law coursework.

The plagiarism policies pertaining specifically to undergraduate students have been targeted (rather than graduate students), as undergraduate students must often take courses across different disciplines and are thus potentially exposed to several policies. Graduate students, on the other hand, are more likely to take coursework solely within one College. Further, graduate students – because they have already completed one degree in higher education – are arguably more familiar with the nuances of academic writing and plagiarism.

3.2. Theoretical framework

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is an approach to the study of spoken and written texts that proposes all social practices are inextricably tied to the historical conditions in which those practices were formed. It is through these historical conditions that social relations are maintained or contested (Janks, 1997). At its heart is the belief that CDA is problem-oriented, and thus "necessarily interdisciplinary and eclectic" (Wodak, 2013, p. 303). As a framework, CDA can be used to examine issues of ideology and power in conjunction with language and linguistic forms (Fairclough, 2013). Specifically, these issues manifest themselves in what Wodak (2013) refers to as "undesirable social and political practices" (p. 304).

Previous research suggests that plagiarism policy exemplifies issues of authority and power, as it frames plagiarism, by and large, as a transgressive act (Sutherland-Smith, 2011). By rejecting other discourses, the concept of plagiarism in these policies "obfuscates more than it clarifies" (Chandrasoma et al., 2004, p. 173), as it groups plagiarism with other transgressive acts (e.g., cheating on an exam) and outlines steps of adjudication for punishment.

CDA is thus a particularly apt framework for the analysis of plagiarism policy. As Fairclough (1992) suggests, the "critical" component in CDA sheds light on "how discourse is shaped by relations of power and ideologies, and the constructive effects discourse has upon social identities, social relations and systems of knowledge and belief, neither of which is normally apparent to discourse participants" (p. 12). Within the context of this study, the unknowing discourse participants are the students themselves, who are expected to navigate and come to terms with policy expectations, often across disciplines, yet do not necessarily receive the requisite guidance to do so.

3.3. Data collection and analysis

Data collection occurred by accessing all plagiarism policies, which are publicly available online. The digital medium of the policies ranged from Adobe PDF and MS Word to web only. The first stage of data analysis involved a systematic search for plagiarism-related variables that scholarship has examined and discussed in recent decades (e.g., paraphrase, intent). During this stage, I also remained open to the possibility of the emergence of new themes stemming from a holistic analysis of related scholarship; however, no new themes arose. Since it is common for a single variable to be investigated by scholars across numerous publications (see, for instance, Keck's, 2006, 2010, and 2014 studies of L2 writers' paraphrasing strategies), I was able to establish relevant variables (see Table 2) by scrutinizing the most recent 20–25 years of plagiarism studies, including literature reviews (e.g., Pecorari & Petrić, 2014). The second stage entailed determining whether or not these variables were included in the policies. The third and final stage involved drawing concrete connections between the variables present in both extant scholarship and the plagiarism policies. While plagiarism studies can consider the perspective of both L1 and L2 writers, a dominant theme of these studies is the challenge that any student – regardless of mother tongue – might face in their efforts to make sense of the policy. Consequently, the third stage involved spotlighting the policies' discourses and their relationship to authority and power structures (Wodak, 2013). I thus cross-tabulated both the plagiarism-related variables of the individual policies with the type of discourse in which those variables were embedded.

4. Findings

In this section, I discuss two major themes that have been extracted from the nine plagiarism policies of the following Colleges: Business, Education, Engineering, Law, Liberal Arts and Sciences, Nursing, Pharmacy, Public Health, and University College. First, I discuss the moral, regulatory, and developmental discourses that reside in the policies. Second, I discuss the potential conflict that could arise between these discourses within and across policies.

In general, the most common discourses in the plagiarism policies were moral and regulatory. These discourses were prevalent both across and within policies; specifically, the lion's share of text for each policy was dedicated to outlining the College's legal and ethical stances on plagiarism. In terms of plagiarism-related variables (see Table 2 for chart categorizing the University of Iowa's plagiarism policies), common ground could be found across the policies in some respects, such as the policies' inclusion of a basic definition of plagiarism, reference to integrity, and examples of plagiarism. However, the policies differed greatly regarding other variables. These differences emanated less from how the variables were addressed, but in whether they were addressed at all. In this sense, due to the absence of certain variables, it is problematic to assess to what

Table 2
Characteristics of the colleges' plagiarism policies.

Variable	College								
	Engineering[a]	Law	Nursing	Pharmacy	Public Health	Business	Education	CLAS[2]	University College
Definition	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Reference to integrity	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Examples of plagiarism	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Citation styles	✓								
Intent		✓		✓					
Tips	✓	✓		✓					
Reference to handbooks, websites	✓								
Number of words per attribution	✓	✓							
Common knowledge		✓							
Paraphrase	✓	✓			✓				
Cross-disciplinary reference									
Reference to the learning process									
Instruction regarding suspected violations	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓		✓
Location	Source Use and Plagiarism Policy	Student Handbook	Student Handbook	Code of Conduct	PH Undergrad Student Handbook	Honor Code	Student Academic Misconduct	Code of Academic Honesty	Academic Standards

[a] The College of Engineering has three documents related to plagiarism: an Academic Misconduct policy; a Source Use and Plagiarism policy; and a two-page resource on plagiarism created by the College's writing center.

extent these policies align with or contradict one another. Yet the absence of several variables in the policies is in and of itself revealing, as the policies fail to address a multitude of plagiarism-related issues that students face, as chronicled by plagiarism scholarship. This, in turn, creates an uneven power dynamic in which authoritative stakeholders have positioned themselves to establish and adjudicate a policy that pertains to students' academic behavior but does not typically elucidate for students the policy clarity they might seek. Consequently, students may encounter confusion in their efforts to navigate policies, such as the lack of mutual exclusivity across policy discourses, and the attendant conflict or confusion that could ensue for them as they attempt to construct meaning of policy within the greater context of their studies.

4.1. Discoursal variety

4.1.1. Moral discourses

While the Colleges' policies tend not to refer directly to moral discourse (e.g., plagiarism is not wholesale referred to as 'theft' or students who commit it as 'unethical'), a moral discourse reveals itself through other, blatantly transgressive acts (e.g., stealing an exam, altering a grade); plagiarism is thus associated with these acts by dint of its inclusion in the same policy section as these acts. For instance, plagiarism is listed as a sub-set of academically dishonest behaviors by many Colleges, such as Business (other sub-sets include cheating and unauthorized collaboration (Tippie College of Business Honor Code, 2020)); Nursing (e.g., cheating, falsification of data, aiding and abetting dishonesty (Bachelor of Science in Nursing Student Handbook, 2020)), and Pharmacy (e.g., cheating and failing to respect confidentiality (College of Pharmacy Student Handbook, 2020)). The moral discourse is also revealed in students' tacit agreement to abide by the CLAS Code of Academic Honesty, which states, "I pledge to do my own academic work and to excel to the best of my abilities … I promise not to lie about my academic work, cheat, or to steal the words or ideas of others …" ("Code of Academic Honesty," 2020).

Similarly, as many policies are contained within larger documents that serve to delineate the Colleges' or the University's core values, the presence of plagiarism policy within these documents implies that plagiarism goes against these core values and is thus a breach of morality. For most of these policies, the document title makes direct reference to the discourse in question by including words such as *honor* or *conduct*. Examples include the College of Business Honor Code, the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences Code of Academic Honesty, and the College of Pharmacy's Code of Conduct. The College of Engineering's policy, in fact – as the title implies – is the lone policy that is separate from a Code of Conduct On the one hand, there exists the College of Engineering Academic Misconduct (2020) policy, yet the College also has another document titled Source Use and Plagiarism Policy (2020), which has explicit ties to the College's writing center, the Hansen Center for Technical Communication.". In sum, by firmly situating their plagiarism policy in documents that serve to educate students on a variety of academics-related moral breaches as well as to help students familiarize themselves with and uphold the

Colleges' or the University's core values, the Colleges necessarily frame plagiarism as a transgression whose act, if committed by students, carries dire consequences.

4.1.2. Regulatory discourses

As noted previously, several plagiarism policies include excerpts from the University of Iowa's Code of Academic Honesty, which originates in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences. These excerpts either include or explicitly refer to the Code's definition of and examples of plagiarism. In general, the Colleges' plagiarism policies reflect facets of regulatory discourses in several ways. One facet pertains to the outlining of adjudication for cases of plagiarism. For instance, the CLAS policy, in its Consequences of Academic Misconduct section (which includes plagiarism), details the procedure for instances of first, second, and third offense (College of Education Student Academic Misconduct, 2020). Similarly, the University College plagiarism policy lists potential academic sanctions for students found guilty of academic dishonesty, including completion of an online academic integrity seminar, suspension from the College, and expulsion from the College (University College Academic Standards Committee, 2020).

Another facet of regulatory discourse in the Colleges' policies is reflected in the policies' recognition of intent. Two of the nine Colleges mention intent, but note that the burden of proof falls to the students. The College of Law states this explicitly: "While plagiarism does not require intent, the presence or absence of intent may be relevant to the appropriate sanction. If lack of intent is to be considered in determining an appropriate sanction, the burden to show the lack of intent is on the person charged with plagiarism" (University of Iowa College of Law Student Handbook, 2020, p. 39). The Law policy also considers plagiarism to be "an objective offense" (p. 38). Similarly, the College of Pharmacy states that both intentional and unintentional acts of plagiarism could be considered violations, and in order to avoid violations, students "must familiarize themselves with the appropriate process for crediting sources" (College of Pharmacy Student Handbook, 2020, p. 31).

A final facet pertains to the policies' guidelines regarding what constitutes plagiarism. All policies except for that of University College define and provide examples of plagiarism (although the definition is often embedded in the examples). Similar to the issue of intent, however, in which the burden of proof falls to the students, a key element of regulatory, writing-related guidelines (e.g., paraphrase) is the emphasis on students adhering to the guidelines rather than a comprehensive overview that serves to educate and direct students. For example, the College of Public Health and College of Education, in their descriptions of paraphrase, state respectively that incomplete paraphrasing or improper paraphrasing may constitute plagiarism, yet paraphrase is not defined, nor is it contextualized within its discipline (College of Education Student Academic Misconduct, 2020; College of Public Health Undergraduate Student Handbook, 2020).

4.1.3. Developmental discourses

Because language of the nine policies tends to be steeped in moral discourses and regulatory discourses, analysis of developmental discourses can be problematic, as it often involves extracting excerpts of one discourse from a larger, more dominant discourse.

Nonetheless, a few examples of developmental discourses exist. The College of Law policy, in recognizing the dilemma of determining what constitutes common knowledge (and thus does or does not merit citation), states, "Obviously, certain ideas are in the public domain, so to speak, and require no attribution" (University of Iowa College of Law Student Handbook, 2020, p. 39). The Law policy also provides insight into the issue of how many consecutive words requires citation, noting, "There is no minimum number of words that can be borrowed from another without attribution" but later states "As a general rule, however, any string of seven words or more should always be placed in quotation marks and attributed" (p. 39). The College of Engineering policy touches upon developmental discourses by complementing a definition of plagiarism that centers the importance of citing sources with the notion of acknowledging ideas: "Concepts that you encounter may be difficult to separate from you [sic] own thinking as you move forward." (College of Engineering Source Use and Plagiarism Policy, 2020).

4.2. Potential conflicts

Owing to the differing discourses in the plagiarism documents, as well as the variety of plagiarism-related variables and the manner in which they are situated within those discourses, conflict can potentially arise. Specifically, a student who reads multiple policies may struggle to understand why the policies do (or do not) differ, or how they relate uniquely to a particular discipline. In this section, I examine potential points of confusion within and across plagiarism policies, keeping in mind specifically the students who take cross-disciplinary coursework and thus must potentially negotiate plagiarism policy as it is contextualized by different Colleges.

4.2.1. Discoursal fusion

The fusion of discourses – in this case, moral, regulatory, and developmental – may give rise to confusion for students who attempt to construct meaning of plagiarism policy. Hu and Sun (2017) assert that regulatory discourses emphasize "an institution's role in developing an unambiguous definition of illegitimate writing practices, disseminating transparent guidelines or technical rules on institutionally espoused conventions, and regulating strict adherence to the academic tradition through widely publicized institutional policies" (p. 58). Yet, elucidating plagiarism policy can be problematic when multiple discourses intertwine in the same policy.

For instance, the CLAS plagiarism policy conflates intentional and unintentional plagiarism. In this particular section, a definition of plagiarism is provided, followed by several examples. Most highlight a student's failure to acknowledge or give credit to a source, e.g., "Failing to use quotation marks properly or when needed"; "Failing to paraphrase language completely"; and "Failing to cite sources correctly and completely" ("Code of Academic Honesty," n.d.). On the whole, these examples could be considered honest mistakes on the part of students who are still in the process of learning citation procedures for academic writing. They thus constitute a regulatory discourse because the focus leans heavily on rules and rules violations. However, another example in this grouping includes "Copying homework, quiz, or exam answers from an answer key, solution manual, textbook, web site, or other items from another student, thus presenting another's work as your own" ("Code of Academic Honesty," n.d.). This is the lone example that could be considered a transgressive act, and thus serves to highlight plagiarism within a moral discourse. Consequently, these two discourses are placed in stark contrast to one another: failure to paraphrase completely, for instance, could be considered an accident, yet copying another student's exam answers – a clear case of cheating – could not.

Other instances of contradictory discourses also exist. The College of Engineering plagiarism policy notes the following: "You bear the responsibility to use sources correctly, but *you will not be penalized for asking for help*" (italics in original) (College of Engineering Source Use and Plagiarism Policy, 2020). The first clause states explicitly that the onus of correct source usage falls to the students and failing to use sources correctly may result in penalization (regulatory). Yet the second clause seems to suggest that learning correct source usage is not a dilemma pertaining to moral stance but one of education and learning. In other words, penalization emanates as much from a student's failure to recognize their lack of understanding and ask for help as it does from the act of incorrect source usage itself.

4.2.2. Cross-disciplinary confusion

Further compounding the issue of discoursal fusion within one policy is the potential existence of discipline-specific references across policies. While it is important to point out that some of the differences between individual documents may not necessarily, in practice, be along disciplinary lines, potential confusion emanates from the policies themselves, namely for the students who – as they attempt to navigate the policies – are not privy to the "insider" knowledge of stakeholders who are more familiar with how plagiarism-related issues could change across disciplines. The notion of intent, for instance, plays heavily into the College of Pharmacy policy. The policy distinguishes between intentional and unintentional plagiarism, though frames this distinction by noting that either instance could constitute a violation. Yet few other policies mention intent at all, thus obscuring how a student's motivations might factor into alleged cases of plagiarism.

Other plagiarism-related variables also typify the policies. The College of Law policy, in addressing the issue of common knowledge, suggests it is obvious that certain ideas are "in the public domain" (University of Iowa College of Law Student Handbook, 2020, p. 38), yet fails to cite examples of these ideas or provide insight into how students might identify them. The Law policy also draws attention to how many consecutive borrowed words might constitute plagiarism, noting that no minimum number exists, and that any string of seven or more words should be cited (p. 39). Finally, the Law policy addresses components related to paraphrase: "Students may avoid plagiarism, and yet be denied course hours for papers consisting entirely of even properly annotated paraphrases of other people's work, if those paraphrases appear with but minimal alterations in other authors' analytic structures and arguments" (University of Iowa College of Law Student Handbook, 2020, p. 39). Another example comes to the fore in the College of Business policy, which references the role of group projects and multiple submissions in coursework assignments (Tippie College of Business Honor Code, 2020). While group projects are common in other Colleges' assignments, the manner in which they are referenced differs; for instance, faculty in CLAS must include in their syllabi information about group work policy, which they can access from a webpage meant to be used as a faculty resource. Few policies, however, contain the level of detail regarding plagiarism as the Law policy, potentially leaving students to wonder what function – if any – these variables might play in different disciplines.

5. Discussion

In addressing plagiarism, a common step taken by university professors is to refer their students to the plagiarism policy (Power, 2009). It thus stands to reason that students should be able to make sense of the policy. However, this is not always the case. In this regard, two major themes that emerged from this study merit discussion.

5.1. Policy isolation

The nine plagiarism policies of the University of Iowa that were analyzed reveal that moral discourses and regulatory discourses monopolize the policies. While other studies have also concluded that plagiarism policy is dominated by these discourses (e.g., McGrail & McGrail, 2015; Sutherland-Smith, 2011), the policies analyzed in these studies hail from distinct academic institutions; in other words, it would not be possible for an individual student to encounter these policies simultaneously. Yet because the policies analyzed in this study stem from the same institution, undergraduate students might find themselves having to navigate multiple policies in the same semester.

In this sense, the Colleges' individual policies, to a great degree, function in a vacuum. Though students may struggle to construct meaning of plagiarism and source-based writing as they traverse disciplines via their core coursework (Merkel, 2020), the Colleges' policies make little to no attempt to address for students how, or whether, writing "norms" in relation

to plagiarism policy may harmonize or differ across these disciplines. And while the University has an undergraduate handbook that applies universally to undergraduate students, Colleges can still have their own plagiarism policies. This finding mirrors the criticism that institutional plagiarism policies, even across disciplines, tend to be neutral, presumably as part of an effort to provide students with consistent rules in the same organization (Pecorari & Petrić, 2014).

At the same time, a devil's advocate position can be taken, namely that plagiarism policies are purposely vague and open to interpretation so that each case can be addressed according to the specifics of the individual student, course, instructor, and college. Further, plagiarism policies are both intentionally concise and open-ended as a pre-emptive measure against a variety of cases, both predictable and unpredictable, that may arise (Heitman & Litewka, 2011). Yet while the vagueness injected into policy by the policymakers may serve the institution's interests, it does little to ameliorate the hardships students face in their understanding of the policy. The policies analyzed in this study, then, implicitly operate to reproduce extant power structures (Wodak, 2013).

In order for discipline-specific epistemologies and writing conventions to be recognized, plagiarism policies must endorse and describe "the multiplicity of beliefs" of the academic community (Howard, 1995, p. 802). By doing so, students' constructed meaning of discipline-specific plagiarism policies will more likely align with gatekeepers' intended meaning of those policies; this has the potential to help students, in their writing, assume a social identity or subject position that appropriately aligns with a particular discipline (Abasi et al., 2006).

5.2. The Student's burden

The second theme that emerges is a direct result of the first: when plagiarism policies function in isolation, the onus of determining how to navigate these policies across disciplines falls to the students. In this study, this finding is revealed through the policies via the interweaving of discourses, contradiction of discourses, or presence or absence of specific variables related to plagiarism. Much of the wording or rhetoric in the policies, for instance, could be swapped out with that of other policies; in other words, scant attention is paid to what plagiarism means, and the type of research and writing in which it is situated, in individual Colleges. In this sense, the University's power is maintained, arising through what students might consider discourses of confusion (Adam et al., 2017).

This leaves students in the unenviable (yet often inevitable) position not only of navigating multiple policies across disciplines, but determining how each policy — and, by extension, the purpose of source-based writing — is uniquely embedded in its discipline. As a case in point, the function of passive voice varies across disciplines, in part because the role of the speaker changes: in the sciences, general information matters more than noting who discovered it; yet in the social sciences, data matter, and identifying the researcher enables the reader to evaluate the validity of the data collected (Jamieson, 2008). In a similar vein, findings from this study reveal that few policies acknowledge paraphrasing. One exception is the College of Law policy, which asserts that "Students may avoid plagiarism, and yet be denied course hours … if those paraphrases appear with but minimal alterations …" (University of Iowa College of Law Student Handbook, 2020, p. 39). This perspective aligns with the concept of patchwriting, a form of developmental plagiarism that occurs when writers, in an ongoing effort to develop their academic writing skills, swap out key terms or sentence structure with synonyms (Howard, 1992). Further, no policy embeds paraphrase within a particular discipline, despite the fact that the definition and purpose of paraphrase can vary across disciplines (Vila et al., 2014). A consequence of this opaqueness is the hampering of students' ability to identify and comprehend these and other discipline-specific conventions, which serve as "markers of membership in academic disciplines" (Jamieson, 2008, p. 80); students, in turn, will struggle to integrate into their respective academic communities.

Yet even if individual Colleges' plagiarism policies lucidly chronicle the unique role of source usage within a particular discipline while simultaneously relieving students of the task of determining on their own how these policies might be in conversation with one another, severe limitations still exist. Foremost is the fact that policy, no matter how eloquently worded, will not make a student a better writer; in fact, it cannot even be assumed that a student will understand the policy. As Price (2002) notes, "A curious habit of plagiarism policies is the announcement to readers that possession of the document is tantamount to absorption of its meaning" (p. 102). Yet by suggesting that enrolled students have, in essence, agreed to individual Colleges' codes of conduct, these institutions seem to assume that understanding has been achieved. It is also worth noting that a policy must be read to be understood, yet the reading of policy is not guaranteed (Gullifer & Tyson, 2014).

In recent years, several studies have recommended a complete overhaul of university plagiarism policies, largely because there is little to no evidence that the documenting of plagiarism rules and misconduct procedures actually addresses plagiarism (Stuhmcke et al., 2016). A first recommendation has been for a shift from ethical and punitive discourses to improving pedagogy and increasing awareness of the developmental processes of academic writing (Adam et al., 2017; Charubusp & Sivell, 2016; Park, 2004). Educative guidance can also function as a supplement to plagiarism policy through active engagement such as workshops (Gullifer & Tyson, 2014) and the implementation of teaching and learning strategies (Devlin, 2006). A second recommendation has centered on student agency; for instance, there have been calls for students to share their perspectives on plagiarism policy (Park, 2004) and for their active participation in the creation of honor codes (Park, 2003). A third recommendation focuses on interdisciplinarity itself. Examples include pedagogy on interdisciplinary academic writing coupled with opportunities for debate regarding each discipline's norms (Ellery, 2008), as well as clearer discipline-specific definitions, policies that align with faculty expectations, improved faculty training, policies that incorporate culturally-conditioned notions of source usage, and collaboration between EAP/ESL instructors and discipline

professors (Liu et al., 2016). In essence, recent scholarship advocates for educative plagiarism policy that is supplemented with hands-on opportunities for students to learn about, and challenge, facets of academic writing and disciplinary norms.

6. Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to examine the discourses and plagiarism-related variables of the plagiarism policies of nine of the Colleges at the University of Iowa. Findings indicate that moral and regulatory discourses dominate the policies, which serve to assist authority figures such as faculty and administration to address and resolve cases of alleged plagiarism. Further, as these policies tend to function in isolation, the burden of negotiating their meaning is largely shouldered by the undergraduate students who often take courses in multiple disciplines. As previously noted, a well-executed plagiarism policy – one whose purpose is devoted to the academic welfare of all stakeholders – should include a multitude of components that are designed to raise awareness and educate. However, until plagiarism policies are supplemented by workshops and other pedagogical exercises, the policy itself will continue to function as the centerpiece of plagiarism education to which both students and professors turn. To this end, several revisions to the plagiarism policies of the Colleges at the University of Iowa could help to address the interdisciplinary nature of undergraduates' writing assignments for their core courses.

First, a template could be integrated into all policies that signifies what plagiarism-related variables the Colleges have in common. For example, perhaps the Colleges would agree that the notion of plagiarism as intentional or unintentional should be explicitly chronicled. Second, in addition to delineating similarities, the Colleges' individual policies could insert a text excerpt that situates the purpose and uniqueness of academic writing within that particular discipline (Jamieson, 2008). In other words, the Colleges could explicitly mark where and why policies deviate from one another. For example, if only the College of Business feels the need to tie plagiarism to group projects within one course or across multiple courses (e.g., "double dipping"), then that sentiment should be stated as such. These two steps could enable students to recognize what facets of plagiarism and source-based writing are specific to a particular discipline or apply globally to all their studies. Third, all policies could provide a consistent and relevant list of hyperlinks to overarching University policies whose verbiage and regulations transcend or supplement those of individual Colleges. Other hyperlinks could also be integrated into the policies, such as links that reference University writing centers or web resources.

While it is understandable that the University of Iowa's individual plagiarism policies of its Colleges would, in theory, reflect their discipline-specific writing norms and academic discourses, it seems unlikely that these Colleges' fundamental approaches to education and academic writing would have nothing in common. In other words, in an effort to help students assimilate into both specific disciplines as well as the university in general, these plagiarism policies, in an effort to uphold and elucidate the university's scholastic philosophies and standards, should be contextualized both within a particular discipline and the university at large.

Because multiple universities across the U.S. are structured in a similar manner to the University of Iowa, the recommendations deriving from this study thus extend to universities across the country (and potentially internationally as well). In short, if plagiarism policies are written to be in conversation with one another rather than solely to establish discipline-specific norms in isolation, this may accommodate students not only in their efforts to avoid plagiarism, but to better understand the role that the writing conventions of a particular discipline play within the university.

To be clear, much more than policy change is required to help students better understand the role of source usage and plagiarism in discipline-specific academic writing; however, if achieving those goals begins with raising students' awareness, then plagiarism policy – the document to which several stakeholders refer – must not only help to raise awareness, but provide students with a clarity that helps them to understand what subsequent steps they must take as they strive to become functioning members of their academic communities.

Author statement

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