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Ethics Gaps and Ethics Gains: Differences and Similarities in Mass Communication Students' Perceptions of Plagiarism and Fabrication

MIKE CONWAY AND JACOB GROSHK

Survey data on journalism students' perceptions of plagiarism and fabrication indicate an ethics gap in which students interested in journalistic areas (newspaper, magazine, broadcast, photojournalism, and online) are more concerned about journalistic ethics than students interested in nonjournalistic areas (public relations, advertising, graphic design, others). Students interested in journalistic areas also suggested harsher penalties for plagiarism and fabrication. Further analyses, however, found that the ethics gain among nonjournalistic students increased to a nearly equivalent amount as journalistic students over the course of their respective university educations and training experiences, including student media work and internships. While ethics gaps do exist between journalistic and nonjournalistic students, ethics gains by all students from across levels of concern and severities of penalties indicate that students' ethical beliefs are malleable and show considerable growth during university education.

In the fall of 1987, the president of what was then the Association for Education in Journalism (AEJ), David Weaver of Indiana University, ignited a controversy within the academy when he said he would "frankly rather see advertising and public relations taught in business schools."¹ That brought a barrage of criticism, including calls for Weaver to resign as AEJ president. The incident illuminated the often uneasy alliance of different media-related

careers taught under the umbrella of journalism and mass communication education in the United States. An underlying concern throughout the decades-long debate involves the mission of journalism education and how best to teach students who have career goals ranging from advertising, public relations, graphic design, to journalism across several platforms.

This survey research attempts to learn more about differences in stu-

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dents' conceptions of two core areas of academic and journalistic ethics: plagiarism and fabrication. Specifically, a principal goal is examining if students feel differently about these ethical areas depending on their area of study. Our students generally can be separated into two groups: journalistic and nonjournalistic areas of interest. Journalistic areas include careers in newspaper, online, photojournalism, magazine, and broadcast environments, and nonjournalistic areas of interest include graphic design, public relations, and advertising. This study's foundation is the education of future media professionals and involves the interaction between students' views on plagiarism and fabrication and the career paths students plan to follow.

Literature Review

The history of U.S. journalism and mass communication education, dating to the late nineteenth century, has been one of disparate media careers looking for the proper curricular home for interested students. Classes in newspaper reporting and editing started in English departments and business schools at colleges and universities. Independent journalism departments and schools began early in the twentieth century as Columbia, Missouri, Illinois, Wisconsin, Indiana, and other universities set up specific curricula for journalism careers.²

When broadcast news became a popular area of study, courses started in journalism programs and speech departments, while others were combined with later television courses in radio-television departments.³ Advertising and public relations proved to be tougher fits because of the perceived

need for both business and communication knowledge. Before 1950, more advertising courses were taught in business schools than in journalism. Interestingly, one public relations pioneer, Edward Bernays, wanted those courses taught in a social sciences curriculum, while the public relations practitioners favored journalism programs. Throughout the second half of the twentieth century, public relations and advertising courses gravitated to journalism and mass communication programs.⁴

By the early 1980s, interest in public relations, advertising, and broadcasting careers had eclipsed traditional journalism. In a 1980 survey of U.S. journalism and mass communication students, 17.7% of journalism majors were interested in public relations, 16.1% in radio/TV news and production, followed by 15.9% in advertising, and only 10.9% in daily newspapers. This shift in interest "captured much of the collective attention" at the 1981 AEJ Convention held at Michigan State University.⁵ Some educators believed it was time to restructure the core courses in journalism to reflect the growing interest in public relations and stop the "mere token recognition"⁶ of PR within journalism programs. In the professional world, journalists and public relations practitioners didn't always agree on the value of each other's careers,⁷ and that uneasiness spilled over into college programs.⁸

The emergence of public relations and advertising as popular segments within journalism programs, as well as the rift between the practitioners, helps explain the reaction to Weaver's 1987 comment about moving some courses into business schools.⁹ At the University of California-Berkeley, Dean

Ben Bagdikian said PR and advertising had "no place" in his graduate journalism program because journalism is about truth and the other two careers "must conform to the wishes of their client and employer."¹⁰ Some public relations educators and practitioners have also suggested a different curricular home.¹¹ A survey of public relations practitioners showed this division, in which 53% of respondents believe PR should be taught in journalism schools, 34% in business schools, and 12% wanted to see it as a combination of business and journalism.¹²

The infusion of new courses and the rapid change in technology in the 1980s caused leaders in U.S. journalism education to come up with a blueprint for curricular change. The resulting *Oregon Report* advised educators to move away "from industry-oriented sequence programs and towards more generic mass communication study."¹³ Titles of many journalism programs were altered to include "mass communication" to signal the change in educational mission. A leading U.S. journalism education association also went through a name change, from AEJ to AEJMC.

The past fifteen years have also seen a continuation of shifts in which areas students choose to study. In 1991, journalism and mass communication graduates were divided as 21.5% in broadcasting, 18.2% in public relations, 17.1% in news-editorial, 14.5% in advertising, and 28.7% in "other." Fifteen years later, with the emergence of new media careers and other communication specialties, "other" had jumped to 37%, while the remaining categories had all decreased, including broadcasting to 18.7%, public relations to 17.5%, news-editorial

to 14%, and advertising to 12.8%.¹⁴ Journalism and mass communication programs added vocationally specific skills courses over decades to adapt to students' changing interests and to diffuse conflict between the career areas. But potential differences in the career areas could still surface in curricular areas designed for all students. One of these areas, ethics instruction, has emerged as an important area in journalism and mass communication education during the past thirty years.

Ethics in Journalism and Mass Communication Education. At the same time journalism and mass communication programs struggled with vocational changes and resources, the study of ethics started to take hold in the curriculum in the United States. Political and social turbulence in the 1960s, followed by the Watergate scandal in the 1970s, brought about more scrutiny of journalism and how it was practiced.¹⁵ In a 1977 survey, 27% of journalism and mass communication programs offered a course in ethics, but a majority said the topic should be handled across the curriculum, not in a specific course.¹⁶ Christians cites the growth of interest in professional media ethics and the extensive study of ethics education by the Hastings Center of New York in the late 1970s as key reasons for the proliferation of media ethics instruction.¹⁷ The 1980s became a "watershed decade" for ethics as journalism programs with dedicated courses jumped from 68 to 117 between 1977 and 1984.¹⁸ With the growing popularity of ethics courses in mass communication, some worried that journalism educators were not qualified to teach ethics courses effectively and that work might best be left to philosophy departments.¹⁹

By 2002, in a survey of heads of academic units and instructors with an interest in ethics, roughly 75% agreed or strongly agreed that media ethics had established an essential place in the curriculum.²⁰ Various research projects have looked at the effectiveness of ethics courses and their relation to the profession.²¹ In one study of new students and graduating seniors, students interested in print and broadcast news had higher ethical standards at the beginning of their college years than when they graduated. The authors reasoned that as students became involved in student media and professional internships, they became more attuned to the real world of journalism as opposed to the classrooms' theoretical world.²²

The ethics debate also reveals schisms between journalism and public relations/advertising curriculum.²³ McBride noted a "cultural chasm" between journalism and public relations because the ethics of the former is based on objectivity, while the latter is based on persuasion.²⁴ Barney and Black argue that public relations practitioners should not be compared to journalists in ethical matters because they operate more like courtroom lawyers. They are "advocates in an adversarial society," using selective truth to advance their client's interests.²⁵

Less attention has been focused on students and their different areas of interest in a mass communication program. Culbertson²⁶ found public relations and advertising students put much heavier emphasis on the media's role to persuade than the students in the journalism sequences, who favored a model of the news media's responsibility to inform and educate the public. Public relations and advertising stu-

dents also indicated a stronger need for audience research while journalism students put a heavier emphasis on audience need.

When considering journalism ethics, the most common survey approach to assess students, and journalists themselves, involves asking questions about nuanced journalistic ethical situations, such as anonymous sources or hidden cameras.²⁷ Such studies, though, rarely involve two of the biggest sins in journalism: plagiarism and fabrication. Stealing or making up material is an ongoing concern in journalistic circles, with major offenders—including Jayson Blair at *The New York Times* or Stephen Glass at *The New Republic*—publicly humiliated for their actions.²⁸ Both trade and academic studies have been devoted to these two areas,²⁹ yet little research has been conducted on how students think or feel about these core ethical issues, and whether their specific media area of interest will result in differing perceptions of plagiarism and fabrication.

Research Questions

Plagiarism and fabrication are important areas to study partly because they are often overlooked in mass communication research, in favor of more nuanced ethical questions. Journalists and educators know that plagiarism and fabrication are major ethical violations, but less is known about what students think about plagiarism and fabrication. In addition, because these two ethical breaches are more closely aligned with journalism careers than other vocations taught in journalism and mass communication programs, it is important to investigate whether all

students agree on the severity of the ethical violation and what possible penalties should be imposed for those who plagiarize or fabricate.

Given the confluence of debates concerning the most effective way to teach students who are seeking a myriad of media careers options along with the best curricular model to instruct students on ethical issues in media, the following research questions were designed to gain insight into differences among students in the core ethical areas of plagiarism and fabrication:

1a: Do students with different areas of interest, specifically journalistic and non-journalistic areas, report different levels of concern for journalistic plagiarism and fabrication?

1b: Do students with different areas of interest, specifically journalistic and non-journalistic areas, report different levels of penalties for journalistic plagiarism and fabrication?

2a: Are there different changes in concern relating to journalistic plagiarism and fabrication over the course of a journalism school career if the students are divided into journalistic and nonjournalistic areas of interest?

2b: Are there different levels of penalties suggested for journalistic plagiarism and fabrication over the course of a journalism school career if

the students are divided into journalistic and nonjournalistic areas of interest?

3a: When controlling for other variables, which areas of interest contribute to students' levels of concern for journalistic plagiarism and fabrication?

3b: When controlling for other variables, which areas of interest contribute to students' levels of suggested penalties for journalistic plagiarism and fabrication?

Method

Surveys were designed as part of an ongoing, larger project to study journalism and mass communication students' views and perceptions of academic and journalistic ethics. Data were collected by distributing surveys to students in a school of journalism³⁰ at a major state university in the Midwest for six consecutive semesters.³¹ Surveys were distributed during the first and last weeks of each semester. The first course is a required reporting class that students take soon after being admitted to the school, averaging 15.38 students per section with a survey response rate of 99.5%. The second course is a required senior "capstone" seminar on media and society that students typically take shortly before graduation. The capstone course's average class size was 30.38, with an 87.3% survey response rate. This journalism program does not include a dedicated ethics course. Students often refer to the capstone seminar as an ethics course, but each instructor determines the amount of

ethics material in the class, ranging from 25% to 90% of the overall course.

One major benefit of this survey research approach is that data include students' perceptions just after they have been admitted to the journalism school and then again just before they graduate. As conceived, this static-group comparison research design³² aggregates before- and after-test condition effects and has a robust sample size of 2,925 completed surveys.³³ The importance of this design and model of instruction is that it minimizes the likelihood that the results might be skewed by one instructor and integrates variations that may have occurred in individual courses over this three-year time period. Because some research questions in this study are concerned with the change in students' ethical perceptions from the beginning to the end of their journalism education, and not during a single semester, all survey results from the start and end of the semester have been combined for each of the respective classes.³⁴

Results

The most popular areas in this journalism school are public relations and magazine reporting, each chosen by 32.1% of students, ahead of advertising at 20%. These areas were followed by students interested in newspaper reporting (18.6%), broadcasting (15.5%), "other" (13.7%), photojournalism (8.8%), graphic design (4.9%), and online journalism (3.1%).³⁵

A factor analysis verified the two key constructs measured in this study: student concern for journalistic ethics (Factor 1) and suggested penalties for unethical journalistic behavior (Factor

2). Each factor was constructed by adding together three questions from the survey, each utilizing a 4-point scale.³⁶

The first analysis examined the propositions put forth by RQ1a and RQ1b to measure variations in students' perceptions of journalistic ethics depending on their areas of interest. Students interested in newspaper careers had the highest level of concern for journalistic ethics (Factor 1) and expressed harsher penalties for plagiarism and fabrication (Factor 2), with a mean of 3.49 on a 4-point scale for both factors. At the other end of the spectrum for both concern and penalties were students who expressed an interest in advertising with an average of 3.05 for Factor 1 and 3.10 for Factor 2, respectively. This statistically descriptive investigation of RQ1a and RQ1b, as shown in Table 1, revealed that areas of student interest are quite evidently related to the level of concern regarding unethical journalistic behavior but less so for suggested penalties of such behavior.

Students with an interest in non-journalistic areas demonstrated lower average levels of concern and suggested penalties than the baseline average of all students with only two exceptions—the Factor 1 scores of graphic design students (+.01 above the mean) and the Factor 2 average of students from the "other" category (+.09 greater than the mean). Overall, the pattern found here is suggestive of a significant ethical difference between students with interests in journalistic careers and those expressing an interest in nonjournalistic careers, which was the specific intent of RQ1a and RQ1b.

Using the results of Table 1 and previous research of this specific sur-

Table 1
ORDERED RANKINGS OF THE AVERAGE LEVELS OF STUDENT CONCERN AS WELL AS SUGGESTED PENALTIES FOR JOURNALISTIC PLAGIARISM AND FABRICATION BY AREAS OF INTEREST

<i>Students' Areas of Interest:</i>	Concern for Journalistic Plagiarism and Fabrication (Factor 1)	Suggested Penalties for Unethical Journalistic Behavior (Factor 2)
Newspaper (<i>n</i> = 531)	3.48	3.51
Online (<i>n</i> = 89)	3.33	3.33
Photojournalism (<i>n</i> = 249)	3.31	3.30
Magazine (<i>n</i> = 915)	3.29	3.31
Broadcast (<i>n</i> = 440)	3.26	3.30
Baseline: All Students (<i>n</i> = 2,839)	3.23	3.32
Graphic Design (<i>n</i> = 139)	3.24	3.31
Other (<i>n</i> = 388)	3.17	3.41
Public Relations (<i>n</i> = 913)	3.14	3.24
Advertising (<i>n</i> = 561)	3.06	3.20

Note: Reported means were based on 4-point Likert-type scales that ranged from 1 (not at all concerned) to 4 (very concerned) for Factor 1. Means of Factor 2 were also based on a 4-point Likert-type scale with a range of 1 (do nothing) to 4 (fire journalist). Total *n* exceeds the number of all students because students could select more than one area of interest. Means calculations used listwise deletion to produce equivalent *n.s.* across Factors.

vey ³⁷ as guidelines, areas of interest were grouped into two general categories: journalistic areas of interest (newspaper, online, photojournalism, magazine, and broadcast) and non-	journalistic areas of interest (graphic design, public relations, advertising, and other). The sample size of each large category was generally equivalent, with 1,166 students indicating a
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Table 2
MEAN LEVELS OF STUDENT CONCERN AND SUGGESTED PENALTIES FOR JOURNALISTIC PLAGIARISM AND FABRICATION BY JOURNALISTIC AND NONJOURNALISTIC AREAS OF INTEREST

<i>Students' Areas of Interest:</i>	Concern for Journalistic Plagiarism and Fabrication (Factor 1)	Suggested Penalties for Unethical Journalistic Behavior (Factor 2)
Journalistic (<i>n</i> = 1,143)	3.36	3.38
Nonjournalistic (<i>n</i> = 1,115)	3.11	3.27
Differences in Means (<i>df</i> = 2,256)	0.25***	0.11**

Note: Reported means were based on 4-point Likert-type scales that ranged from 1 (not at all concerned) to 4 (very concerned) for Factor 1. Means of Factor 2 were also based on a 4-point Likert-type scale with a range of 1 (do nothing) to 4 (fire journalist). *T*-tests used list-wise deletion and two-tailed significance tests, and assumed equal variances.

*** *p* < .001; ** *p* < .01.

journalistic area of interest and 1,149 students expressing an interest in a nonjournalistic area.³⁸

Comparing the two groups, results show more specific evidence that students with an interest in journalistic areas not only had higher levels of concern (3.36) but also approved of harsher penalties (3.38) than students interested in nonjournalistic areas of media. As shown in Table 2, students who expressed nonjournalistic interests showed an average concern of 3.11 and average penalty of 3.27 units. These differences in means were statistically significant for both factors.³⁹

Research questions 2a and 2b involved exploring any changes over the course of the journalism school experience in concern or suggested penalties for plagiarism and fabrication

by students interested in journalism or nonjournalistic areas of interest. The study was designed to detect any interactions between the two groups, such as one group increasing concern while the other decreases or stays the same during the college years. Instead, results showed significant increases for *both* journalistic and nonjournalistic area students; they were found in both concern (Factor 1) and suggested penalties (Factor 2) for these ethical violations from the beginning to the capstone course.⁴⁰ Concern about journalistic plagiarism and fabrication increased .21 for the journalism group (3.27 to 3.48) and .16 for the nonjournalism group (3.02 to 3.18). By the time they reached the capstone course, both groups of students also expected much harsher penalties for journalists caught

Table 3
MEAN LEVELS OF STUDENT CONCERN (FACTOR 1) AND SUGGESTED PENALTIES (FACTOR 2)
FOR JOURNALISTIC PLAGIARISM AND FABRICATION BY PROGRESS IN COURSEWORK AND AREAS
OF INTEREST

<i>Students' Interest Areas and Courses</i>	Concern for Journalistic Plagiarism and Fabrication (Factor 1)			Suggested Penalties for Unethical Journalistic Behavior (Factor 2)		
	Beginning Course	Capstone Course	Differences in Course Means	Beginning Course	Capstone Course	Differences in Course Means
Journalistic Areas of Interest	3.27 (<i>n</i> = 688)	3.48 (<i>n</i> = 467)	0.21***	3.26 (<i>n</i> = 685)	3.53 (<i>n</i> = 469)	0.27***
Nonjournalistic Areas of Interest	3.02 (<i>n</i> = 526)	3.18 (<i>n</i> = 603)	0.16***	3.16 (<i>n</i> = 537)	3.37 (<i>n</i> = 598)	0.21***
Differences in Means of Areas	0.25***	0.30***		0.10***	0.16***	

Note: Reported means were based on 4-point Likert-type scales that ranged from 1 (not at all concerned) to 4 (very concerned) for Factor 1. Means of Factor 2 were also based on a 4-point Likert-type scale with a range of 1 (do nothing) to 4 (fire journalist). *F*-tests used pairwise deletion and 1 degree of freedom.

*** $p < .001$.

plagiarizing or fabricating, an increase of .27 for the journalism group (3.26 to 3.53) and .21 for the nonjournalism group (3.16 to 3.37).

As shown in Table 3, both groups of students, those interested in journalism careers and those interested in nonjournalism careers, became much more concerned about and expected harsher penalties for plagiarism and fabrication during their years in the journalism program. The main difference between the groups can be traced

to their level of concern and suggested penalties in the beginning course, when the journalistic group's level of concern and penalties outdistanced the nonjournalistic area group by .25 for Factor 1 (3.27 to 3.02) and .10 for Factor 2 (3.26 to 3.16).

These results are meaningful statistical evidence that demonstrate students' levels of concern for journalistic plagiarism (Factor 1) and suggested penalties for unethical journalistic behavior (Factor 2) increased over

time, even *across* different areas of interest. This finding has important implications not only for models of instruction but also for the field of journalism in general. Affirmative responses to RQ2a and RQ2b can be interpolated through the notable differences in means for groups of students differentiated by courses and areas of interest in Table 3.

The final two research questions (RQ3a and 3b) were designed to explore beyond the classroom to the entire journalism school experience. Two regression models were utilized to control for various demographic, experiential, and attitudinal characteristics of students to place the overall contribution areas of interest have on student concern (Factor 1) and suggested penalties (Factor 2) for unethical journalistic behavior. Only two areas emerged as significant predictors for both Factor 1 and Factor 2: newspaper reporting and advertising. In line with descriptive findings already identified, students interested in newspaper reporting showed a positive, statistically significant relationship.⁴¹ Alternately, students interested in advertising demonstrated a negative, statistically significant relationship for Factor 1 and Factor 2, as shown in Table 4.⁴²

Results from these regression models also point to a host of other contributing factors that were positive, statistically significant predictors for both factors, such as being enrolled in the capstone course and having worked in student media or journalistic internships that shape students' ethical perceptions of very basic instances of plagiarism and fabrication.

Summarized in Table 4, it is quite clear that students enter and experience their college education with

greater or lesser levels of concern for journalistic ethics. To some extent, these beliefs map onto areas of interest that are anchored in journalistic or nonjournalistic media practices and careers. Though regression models report a number of statistically significant predictors that include attitudinal, experiential, behavioral, seasonal, and time sensitive measures, perhaps the most essential finding is twofold: student areas of interest are important pedagogical considerations and enrollment in the capstone course represents a positive effect on students' beliefs regarding fundamental journalistic ethics.

Summary and Conclusions

First, it is important to note that overall, students at this journalism school are concerned about journalistic plagiarism and fabrication and expect harsh penalties for violators. In fact, more than 60% of students surveyed reported that journalists who steal material or make up information or sources should be fired.

Students with the highest concerns (Factor 1) for plagiarism and fabrication are the ones interested in careers associated with the journalism profession including newspapers, online, photojournalism, magazine, and broadcast. At the same time, students interested in advertising indicated the lowest levels of concern among the students, just below public relations, "other," and graphic design. When comparing the results for suggested penalties for plagiarism and fabrication (Factor 2), a similar but less pronounced separation of interests is found.

Table 4
REGRESSION ANALYSES OF VARIABLES PREDICTING STUDENTS' LEVELS OF CONCERN (FACTOR 1)
AND SUGGESTED PENALTIES (FACTOR 2) FOR JOURNALISTIC PLAGIARISM AND FABRICATION

Variables	Factor 1		Factor 2	
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>
Area Interest Newspaper	0.243***	0.046	0.151**	0.050
Area Interest Advertising	-0.083*	0.041	-0.092*	0.044
Area Interest Magazine	0.049	0.036	-0.073*	0.039
Student Media Experience	0.096**	0.034	0.096**	0.037
Journalistic Internship	0.117**	0.039	0.118**	0.043
Capstone Course	0.175*	0.071	0.252**	0.077
End of Semester	0.097**	0.030	0.039	0.032
Fall Semester	0.038	0.032	0.201***	0.035
Year (2005-2006-2007)	0.007	0.019	0.093***	0.020
Pressure Justifies Unethical Behavior	-0.176***	0.025	-0.192***	0.027
Number of Other Students that Cheat	-0.070*	0.029	-0.028	0.032
Age	-0.036#	0.020	-0.027	0.022
Adjusted R ²	0.086		0.083	
<i>N</i>	2,246		2,247	

Note: Coefficients reported are unstandardized. All other areas of interest, non-journalistic internships, grade level, and gender were non-significant.

p* < .10; *p* < .05; ****p* < .01; *****p* < .001.

These differences become even clearer in Table 2 in answer to RQ1a and RQ1b. When students are divided into journalistic (newspaper, online, photojournalism, magazine, broadcast) and nonjournalistic (advertising, public relations, other, graphic design) groups, the journalistic group had sig-

nificantly higher levels of concern for plagiarism and fabrication and expected significantly harsher penalties for such transgressions than the nonjournalistic group.

For educators, the important next question involves what happens with students' interest in these ethical areas

during the course of their journalism school career (RQ2a and RQ2b). Results show both journalistic and nonjournalistic groups showed significant increases in levels of concern and suggested penalties for ethical violations during their time in school. The same symmetry emerges in the area of suggested penalties for plagiarism and fabrication. So for these students, the main differences are how they felt about plagiarism and fabrication at the start of their journalism school careers. Therefore, no matter their area of interest, the journalism and mass communication school experience significantly increased the students' concerns about plagiarism and fabrication. Thus, while an ethics *gap* exists among journalistic and nonjournalistic interest areas, both groups show a meaningful, statistically significant ethics *gain* in their levels of concern and the severity of punishments they suggest for journalistic plagiarism and fabrication.

Considering these core journalistic sins, this journalism program's students are getting the message, regardless of their area of interest. For those concerned that these disparate areas of interest demand separate curricula, these findings show the journalism school experience can benefit all students, at least in the area of plagiarism and fabrication. These results run counter to what Reinardy and Moore⁴³ discovered in their study of students at the beginning and end of their college careers; they found students to have lower levels of ethical concern upon graduation. Differences in these studies could be explained by the fact that the earlier one looked at more nuanced ethical issues such as use of anonymous sources and correcting grammar in direct quotes while this study

focused on the core areas of plagiarism and fabrication.

As educators, we are often absorbed with what happens within the classroom, which is the area over which we have most control. Much research into journalism ethics in college involves the classroom experience.⁴⁴ But realistically, taking classes is only one part of college. Using a regression analysis to study the bigger picture, influences on students' views on plagiarism and fabrication become clearer. Looking at all potential influences, one of the strongest predictors for a higher concern for ethics is the group of students interested in a newspaper career. Students interested in careers in advertising show a lower level of concern and less severe penalties for plagiarism and fabrication.

Other significant factors predicting higher ethical concerns and penalties included those who worked in student media or completed journalistic media internships, which is in line with previous research on journalism influences.⁴⁵ Students who take classes in the fall have a higher level of concern for journalistic ethics, which fits the observation that students can appear less engaged in the spring semester, especially during their senior year. Those students who indicate that academic pressure could justify cheating on schoolwork are significantly less concerned about journalism ethics and would impose lesser penalties for those infractions. In addition, students who believe more students cheat are significantly less concerned about journalism ethics.

While it was noted this journalism school does not have a dedicated ethics course, this study was not intended to weigh in on the issue of the proper

approach to teaching ethics in a journalism and mass communication curriculum. In an early examination of media ethics instruction, Christians noted the need for research on approaches that do not involve a stand-alone ethics course, so this topic is a ripe area for future research.⁴⁶

The specific wording of the survey questions and the areas of ethical concern involved in this study also highlight potential dilemmas for both instructors and students in journalism and mass communication programs. The survey questions focus on ethical transgressions by journalists (see Appendix A, questions 10-15). Even though these students attend a journalism (without "mass communication" in its title) school, students interested in public relations or advertising may not relate to a journalist's ethical dilemma in the same way as a situation involving a professional in their area of interest.⁴⁷ This wording could account for some of the ethics gap. In addition, while plagiarism and fabrication are core ethical violations in both academics and journalism, they may not be considered as consequential in other areas of mass communication. Barney and Black⁴⁸ see the persuasion ethic of the public relations professional as just as valid as the objectivity ethic of the journalist. The instructor teaching an inclusive class (students interested in all areas of media) must then find distinct examples and common ground to satisfy the needs of all students, especially in courses involving ethics or media and society issues. Students with a myriad of career goals think differently about core ethical values. Future research should explore these differences for insights into how curricula and specific educational

approaches could be altered to reflect the differences in students who study under the broad area of journalism and mass communication.

While ethics *gaps* are important to acknowledge, we do not lose sight of other important findings here: ethics *gains*. While this study is confined to one journalism program, students in both journalistic and nonjournalistic areas of interest over their time in school showed significantly increased concern for those ethical violations and expected harsher penalties for those who plagiarized or fabricated material. Even more interesting is that students in the two areas increased their concern at roughly the same rate. One might have expected nonjournalistic area students to show little change in their views on these issues during college, but instead their concern increased at close to the same rate as students interested in journalism. Therefore, the main difference in concern for these ethical violations can be traced to how the students viewed plagiarism and fabrication when they first entered the program and short of manipulating admission standards, mass communication educators cannot control how students view these issues when they arrive. This study clearly shows that students' ethical beliefs are malleable and the college experience, including internships, student media, and classroom instruction, can bring about a heightened awareness of ethical issues.

Appendix and Notes follow.

Appendix A
SAMPLE SURVEY

(This survey was designed for a larger project concerning students' perceptions on academic and professional ethics. Most of the data for this study came from answers to questions 10-15.)

Please circle the response that is closest to your opinion/answer to the question.

1. In your experience in college so far, how many students engage in academic dishonesty (cheat on tests and exams, plagiarize from documents and the Internet, buy papers online, make up information and quotes, etc.)?

Most Many Some None Don't Know

2. If you know or believe that a number of students engage in academic dishonesty, how concerned are you about their behavior?

Very Quite Somewhat Not At All Don't Know

3. If you saw a fellow student cheating on a test or exam, would you report the student to the instructor?

Yes No Don't Know

4. If you saw a fellow student copying from your test or exam, would you report the student to the instructor?

Yes No Don't Know

5. Would you try to stop the student from copying from your test or exam?

Yes No Don't Know

6. Have you ever reported a fellow student for cheating?

Yes No

7. How concerned are you about your fellow students' engaging in the following practices in journalism courses?

a. Inventing sources (either in journalism stories or academic papers)

Very Quite Somewhat Not At All Don't Know

b. Making up quotes

Very Quite Somewhat Not At All Don't Know

c. Using information from the Internet without attribution

Very Quite Somewhat Not At All Don't Know

8. How do you think a university should handle a situation when a college student has been found to have engaged in the following practices in journalism courses?

a. Inventing sources (either in journalism stories or academic papers)

Expel the student Incident goes on record & student must retake class

Reprimand in other way Do nothing

b. Making up quotes

Expel the student Incident goes on record & student must retake class

Reprimand in other way Do nothing

Appendix cont. next page

Appendix cont.

- c. Using information from the Internet without attribution
Expel the student Incident goes on record & student must retake class
Reprimand in other way Do nothing

9. Journalism majors sometimes report that the pressure of deadlines in their skills courses on top of the pressures in other courses, in extracurricular activities and jobs, and in their private lives, causes them occasionally to engage in these practices. Under these circumstances, how justified do you think these practices are?

Very Quite Somewhat Not At All Don't Know

(the next few questions change the focus from students to professional journalists)

From time to time, journalists are found to have plagiarized a story or fabricated (made up) information in a story.

10. How concerned are you when you hear that a journalist has plagiarized in a story?

Very Quite Somewhat Not at all Don't know

11. How concerned are you when you hear that a journalist has fabricated material for a story?

Very Quite Somewhat Not at all Don't know

12. How concerned are you when you hear that a journalist made up a source for a story?

Very Quite Somewhat Not at all Don't know

13. How do you think a news organization should handle a situation when a journalist has been found to have plagiarized?

Fire the journalist Move person to another beat/position
Reprimand in some other way Do nothing

14. How do you think a news organization should handle a situation when a journalist has been found to have fabricated material for a story?

Fire the journalist Move person to another beat/position
Reprimand in some other way Do nothing

15. How do you think a news organization should handle a situation when a journalist has been found to have made up a source for a story?

Fire the journalist Move person to another beat/position
Reprimand in some other way Do nothing

(This questionnaire is anonymous, but we would like to know some demographic information.)

16. Gender Male Female

17. Year Freshman Sophomore Junior Senior Graduate Student

18. Age _____

19. Area of Interest (circle one or two)

advertising broadcast news graphic communication magazine newspaper
photojournalism public relations education online other/ undecided

20. If you've worked in student media at IU, please circle all that apply: IDS Arbutus
WTIU News Forum WIUS WFIU Other _____

21. If you've had an internship, circle the term that best describes the company/organization.

advertising broadcast news graphic communication magazine newspaper
photojournalism public relations education online other/undecided

Thank you for participating in this survey.

Endnotes

1. Michael W. Hirschorn, "Programs in Advertising and Public Relations Fuel Growth of Journalism-School Enrollment," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, October 14, 1987, A35-36, in Chronicle quote folder, Box 5, David Weaver Papers, Indiana University Archives (99/037), hereafter referred to as the Weaver Papers.

2. Everette E. Dennis, "Whatever Happened to Marse Robert's Dream? The Dilemma of American Journalism Education," *Gannett Center Journal* 2 (1988): 1-22; Tom Dickson, *Mass Media Education in Transition: Preparing for the 21st Century* (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2000).

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5. William J. Roepke, "Educators Ponder Shifts in Student Career Goals," *Journalism Educator* 36 (3, 1981): 3-7, 61.

6. Roepke, "Educators Ponder Shifts," 7.

7. Lillian Lodge Kopenhaver, David L. Martinson, and Michael Ryan, "How Public Relations Practitioners and Editors in Florida View Each Other," *Journalism Quarterly* 61 (4, 1984): 860-65, 884; Sandra Kruger Stegall and Keith P. Sanders, "Coorientation of PR Practitioners and News Personnel in Education News," *Journ-*

alism Quarterly 63 (2, 1986): 341-47, 393; Craig Aronoff, "Credibility of Public Relations For Journalists," *Public Relations Review* 1 (2, 1975): 45-56; Michael Schudson, *Discovering The News: A Social History of American Newspapers* (NY: Basic Books, 1978).

8. Ron F. Smith, "A Comparison of Career Attitudes of News-Editorial and Ad-PR Students," *Journalism Quarterly* 64 (2, 1987): 555-59; Peter Habermann, Lillian Lodge Kopenhaver, and David L. Martinson, "Sequence Faculty Divided on PR Value, Status and News Orientation," *Journalism Quarterly* 65 (2, 1988): 490-96; Cutlip, "History of Public Relations Education"; Richard A. Falb, "Proposal: Join PR and Advertising Education—Away from Journalism or Business," *Public Relations Quarterly* 36 (4, 1991/1992): 44.

9. In letters from fellow professors, Weaver was told to apologize, resign, and one even equated his comment with racial prejudice: "I assert most strongly that a person with such Neanderthal viewpoints should never had accepted the presidency of AEJMC." (Donald K. Wright to David Weaver, November 13, 1987. Chronicle quote folder, Box 5, Weaver Papers.) In response, Weaver said he was not talking about public relations and advertising curriculum in general, but merely certain courses. He also said he made those comments as an author of study on journalism school trends, not as AEJMC president. (David H. Weaver, "President's Report—AEJMC Winter Meeting, December 4-6, 1987. Chronicle quote folder, Box 5, Weaver Papers; David H. Weaver, "From the president...", *AEJMC News*, January 1988, 2-3. Chronicle quote folder, Box 5, Weaver Papers.)

10. Hirschorn, "Programs in Advertising and Public Relations," A36.

11. Walter Rosenthal, "Teach Public Relations Where it Belongs: In the Marketing Department," *Journal of Marketing Education* 6 (3, 1984): 29-32; Falb, "Proposal: Join PR and Advertising Education"; Ted Y. Joseph to David Weaver, December 31, 1987, Chronicle quote folder, Box 5, Weaver Papers.

12. John E. Guiniven, "Public Relations Executives View the Curriculum: A Needs Assessment," *Journalism & Mass Communication Educator* 52 (4, 1998): 48-56.

13. Oregon Report, *Planning For Curricular Change in Journalism Education*, 2d ed., 1987, Project on the Future of Journalism and Mass Communication Education: School of Journalism, University of Oregon: 1.

14. Lee B. Becker, Tudor Vlad, and Joel D. McLean, "2006 Enrollment Report: Enrollments Level Off; Online Instruction Now Routine," *Journalism & Mass Communication Educator* 62 (3, 2007): 263-88.

15. Edmund B. Lambeth, Clifford G. Christians, Kenneth Fleming, and Seow Ting Lee, "Media Ethics Teaching in Century 21: Progress, Problems, and Challenges," *Journalism & Mass Communication Educator* 59 (3, 2004): 239-58.

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19. C. June Martin, "The Case of the Lost Ethic: Making Moral Decisions," *Journalism Educator* 43 (1, 1988): 11-14; James W. Carty, "Should J-schools Teach Ethics?" *Journalism Educator* 33 (1, 1978): 8; John C. Merrill, "Do We Teach Ethics—Or Do We Teach about Ethics?" *Journalism Educator* 33 (2, 1978): 59-60.

20. Lambeth et al., "Media Ethics Teaching in Century 21."

21. Kendra Gale and Kristie Bunton, "Assessing the Impact of Ethics Instruction on Advertising and Public Relations Graduates," *Journalism & Mass Communication Educator* 60 (3, 2005): 272-85; Patrick Lee Plaisance, "An Assessment of Media Ethics Education: Course Content and the Values and Ethical Ideologies of Media Ethics Students," *Journalism & Mass Communication Educator* 61 (4, 2007): 378-96; Thomas W. Cooper, "Ethics, Journalism and Television: Bibliographic Constellations, Black Holes," *Journalism Quarterly* 65 (2, 1988): 450-55, 496; Gary Hanson, "Learning Journalism Ethics: The Classroom Versus the Real World," *Journal of Mass Media Ethics* 17 (3, 2002): 235-47.

22. Scott Reinardy and Jensen Moore, "When Do Journalists Learn About Ethics? An Examination of Introductory and Graduating Students' Ethical Perceptions," *Journalism & Mass Communication Educator* 62 (2, 2007): 161-75.

23. Stanley L. Harrison, "Ethics and Moral Issues in Public Relations Curricula," *Journalism Educator* 45 (3, 1990): 32-38; Thomas H. Bivens, "A Theory-based Approach to Public Relations Ethics," *Journalism Educator* 45 (4, 1991): 39-44; Elizabeth M.

Tucker and Daniel Stout, "Teaching Ethics: The Moral Development of Educators," *Journal of Mass Media Ethics* 14 (2, 1999): 107-18.

24. Genevieve McBride, "Ethical Thought in Public Relations History: Seeking a Relevant Perspective," *Journal of Mass Media Ethics* 4 (1, 1989): 9.

25. Ralph D. Barney and Jay Black, "Ethics and Professional Persuasive Communications," *Public Relations Review* 20 (3, 1994): 233.

26. Hugh M. Culbertson, "Study of Student Beliefs Suggests Sequences Do Make a Difference," *Public Relations Quarterly* 31 (1, 1986): 24-27.

27. Amanda Ball, Mark Hanna, and Karen Sanders, "What British Journalism Students Think About Ethics and Journalism," *Journalism & Mass Communication Educator* 61 (1, 2006): 20-32; David H. Weaver, Randall A. Beam, Bonnie J. Brownlee, Paul S. Voakes, and G. Cleveland Wilhoit, *The American Journalist in the 21st Century: U.S. News People at the Dawn of a New Millennium* (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2007); Reinardy and Moore, "When Do Journalists Learn About Ethics?"

28. "Witnesses and Documents Unveil Deceptions in a Reporter's Work," *New York Times*, May 11, 2003, p. 26; "Times Reporter Who Resigned Leaves Long Trail of Deception," *New York Times*, May 11, 2003, p. 1, 24; Jack Shafer, "Glass Houses," *Slate*, May 15, 1998, <http://www.slate.com/toolbar.aspx?action=print&id=2074>, (December 26, 2006); Tom Scocca, "Faking It," *Boston Phoenix*, May 21-28, 1998, <http://72.166.46.24/archive/features/98/5/21/MEDIA.html> (March 1, 2007); NBC, "Dateline: A Question of Trust," *NBC News*, March 5, 2004

(videotape recording); Kambiz Foroohar, "Tracking Lies," *Forbes.com*, May 11, 1998, <http://www.forbes.com/1998/05/11/otw2.html> (December 26, 2006); CBS, "Lies," *CBS News 60 Minutes*, August 17, 2003 (Lions Gate Films, 2002, included on *Shattered Glass* DVD).

29. Christopher Hanson, Robert G. Picard, and Paul McMasters, "Debate: Jayson Blair and Newsroom Ethics," *Journalism Studies* 5 (3, 2004): 399-408; Barry M. Kroll, "How College Freshmen View Plagiarism," *Written Communication* 5 (2, 1988): 203-21; Paula Wasley, "The Plagiarism Hunter," *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, August 11, 2006, 8; Paula Wasley, "Panel to Review Plagiarism at Ohio U.," *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, September 8, 2006, 9; Elizabeth Banks Hindman, "Jayson Blair, The New York Times, and Paradigm Repair," *Journal of Communication* 55 (2, 2005): 225-41.

30. While this school of journalism has not added "mass communication" to its name, it does encompass all vocational areas usually associated with a mass communication program.

31. All surveys have been filled out voluntarily, anonymously, without any form of reward or compensation. Researchers and course instructors have not been in the classroom at the time the students are given the surveys. The research was conducted following the rules of the university's human subjects committee.

32. Donald T. Campbell and Julian C. Stanley, *Experimental and Quasi-Experimental Designs for Research* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1963).

33. The authors have taught only three sections of 78 under investigation, thereby mitigating threats to

validity from observer-participant bias introduced by convenience sampling of only courses taught by the instructor/researcher.

34. This approach takes into account that many of the students are counted twice a semester, at the start and again at the end of the course, and one of the statistical tests controls for this inevitability, which introduced no bias in the overall results of a previous study by the same authors; Mike Conway and Jacob Groshek, "Forgive Me Now, Fire Me Later: Journalism Students' Perceptions on Academic and Journalistic Ethics" (paper presented at the annual meeting of AEJMC, Washington, DC, August 2007).

35. Students could select more than one area of interest, which resulted in the total percentage over 100%.

36. Factor 1 demonstrated a Cronbach's alpha (α) reliability score of .90, which indicated a very strong relationship where respondents ranked items 10, 11, and 12 of the survey instrument (Appendix A) in a similar fashion. The reliability of the scale for Factor 2 was $\alpha = .78$, which represents an acceptable level of cohesion of students' responses to items 13, 14, and 15 of the survey instrument (Appendix A); Edward G. Carmines and Richard A. Zeller, *Reliability and Validity Assessment* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1979).

37. Conway and Groshek, "Forgive Me Now, Fire Me Later."

38. There were also 588 students that indicated an interest in both journalistic and nonjournalistic areas in addition to 22 students that failed to identify any area of interest. Only journalistic and nonjournalistic groups were analyzed because differences between those two groups were the

specific area of interest in this study, which reduced the sample size to 2,315 surveys.

39. ($t(2256) = 8.32, p < .001$) for Factor 1 and ($t(2256) = 3.26, p < .01$) for Factor 2.

40. ($F(1, 2285) = 54.453, p = .000, \eta_p^2 = .023$, observed power = 1.000) for Factor 1 and ($F(1, 2285) = 16.567, p = .000, \eta_p^2 = .007$, observed power = .983) for Factor 2.

41. ($B = 0.243, p < .001$) for Factor 1 and ($B = 0.151, p < .01$) for Factor 2.

42. ($B = -0.083, p < .05$) for Factor 1 and ($B = -0.092, p < .05$) for Factor 2.

43. Reinardy and Moore, "When Do Journalists Learn About Ethics?"

44. Christians, "Variety of Approaches"; Christians, "Media Ethics Courses"; Byung Lee and George Padgett, "Evaluating the Effectiveness of a Mass Media Ethics Course," *Journalism & Mass Communication Educator* 55 (2, 2000): 27-39; Plaisance, "An Assessment of Media Ethics Education"; Reinardy and Moore, "When Do Journalists Learn About Ethics?"

45. Weaver et al., *The American Journalist in the 21st Century*; Conway and Groshek, "Forgive Me Now, Fire Me Later."

46. Christians, "Media Ethics Courses."

47. The past two major surveys of mass communication ethics instructors also use the terms "journalism" and "journalist" in questions designed for instructors who presumably teach students with a variety of career interests. Lambeth et al., "Media Ethics Teaching in Century 21."

48. Barney and Black, "Ethics and Professional Persuasive Communications."