



Plagiarism and Business Plans: A Growing Challenge for Entrepreneurship Education?

By:

Dr. Robert J. Lahm, Jr.

Assistant Professor of Entrepreneurship

Jones College of Business

Middle Tennessee State University

Plagiarism: Just How Bad Is It?

- ▶ According to *Publishers Weekly* and other sources, a student had reportedly received a \$500,000 advance for her book deal (while she was still in high school) from publisher Little, Brown & Company (Deahl & Milliot, 2006; Finkelstein, 2006). The student apparently plagiarized from a book published by Crown Publishing Group in over 40 instances.

Plagiarism: Just How Bad Is It? (continued)

- ▶ NBC recently severed its ties with a freelance “producer who plagiarized passages from “ the popular television series, ‘The West Wing’ (Freelance Producer, 2006).
- ▶ Nitterhouse (2003) cited a series of previous studies which indicated several professional disciplines have reported plagiarism problems, including marketing, computer science, journalism, nursing, and science (p. 215).

Reason for Exploratory Paper

- ▶ After a series of searches in the academic literature, the need for this paper became evident.
- ▶ Search attempts conducted on *ProQuest* revealed that research specifically as it pertains to plagiarism and business plans is lacking in the literature.

Combinations Used

- ▶ “entrepreneurship AND plagiarism”
- ▶ “business plan AND plagiarism”
- ▶ “business plan AND cheating”

These combination produced no returned results.

Similar searches using the *Eric* database were also conducted, again with zero results

Combinations Used (continued)

- ▶ A *Google* search was done also on the terms “business plan” and “plagiarism.” This produced hits that were typically linked to entrepreneurship courses and their corresponding syllabi and plagiarism policy statements.

Note: The author recognizes the inherent instability, bias, and lack of precision associated with commercial search engines.

Review of Existing Literature on plagiarism and business plans

- ▶ An article in *U.S. News and World Report* declared: “Academic fraud has never been easier. Students can tamper electronically with grade reports, transmit quiz answers via pager or cell phone, and lift term papers from hundreds of Web sites” (Kleiner & Lord, 1999).
- ▶ A study by Duke University’s Center for Academic Integrity (CIA) reported results that “on most campuses, 70% of students admit to some cheating”; 40% admitted to Internet plagiarism; and 44% of faculty “who were aware of student cheating in their course...never reported a student for cheating to the appropriate campus authority” (McCabe, 2005).

Plagiarism Cases and Business Plans as an Impetus for this Paper

- ▶ During the three semesters immediately preceding the development of this paper, its author observed apparent problems with plagiarism while delivering an entrepreneurship course at a public AACSB accredited university (which enrolls approximately 22,000 students).

Confirmed Plagiarism Cases

Class Size	Cases	Term	Time	Days
29	4	Spring 2006	12:40-2:05	M-W
26	1	Spring 2006	2:20-3:45	M-W
26	5	Spring 2006	4:30-7:30	M
81	10			
Percent		12%		
17	1	Fall 2005	6:00-9:00	W
17	1			
Percent		6%		
31	3	Spring 2005	9:40-11:05	T-Th
27	0	Spring 2005	11:20-12:45	T-Th
20	4	Spring 2005	4:30-7:30	T
78	7			
Percent		9%		

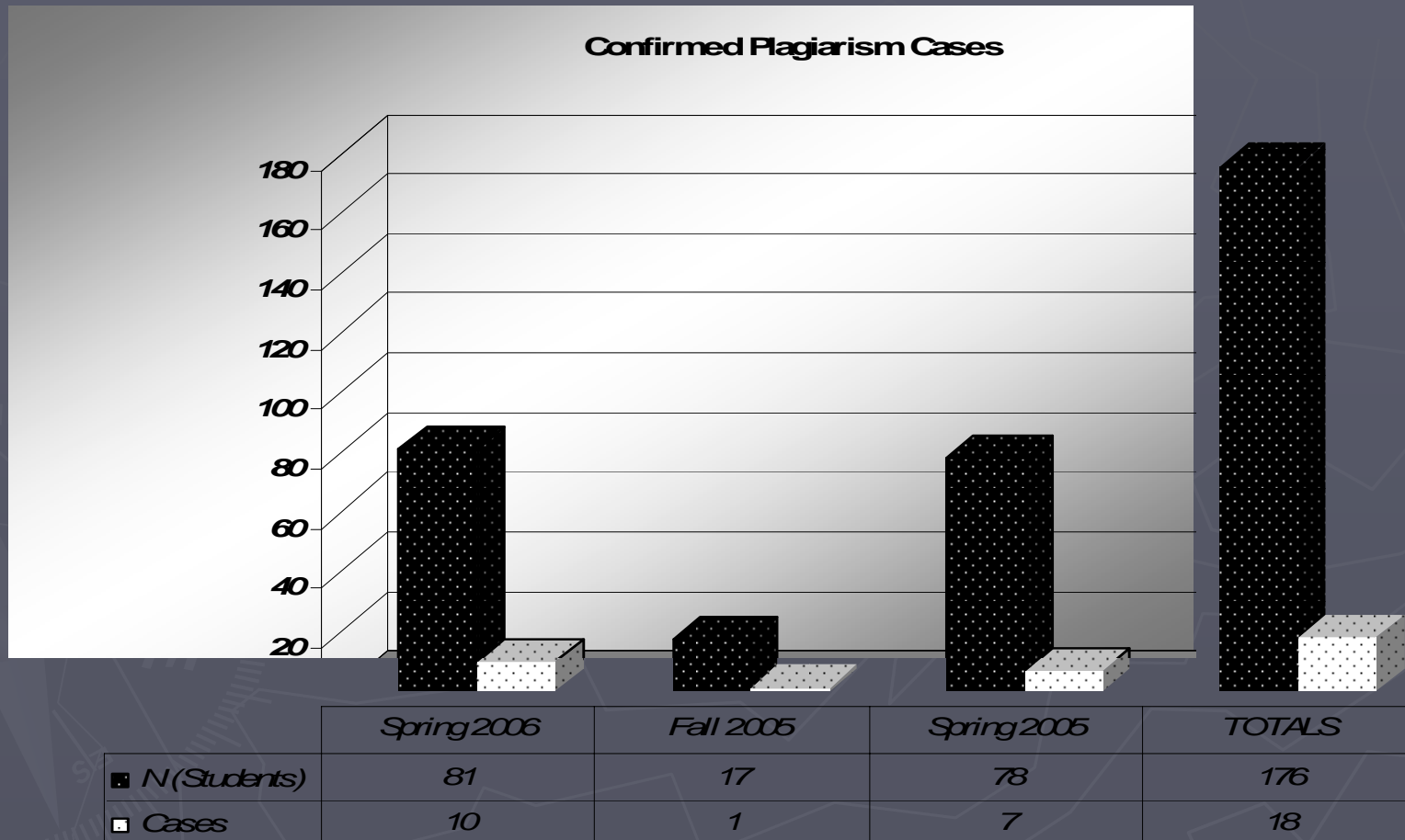
Confirmed Plagiarism Summary

Total Cases During Observation Period

Term	N (Students)	Cases	Sections
Spring 2006	81	10	3
Fall 2005	17	1	1
Spring 2005	78	7	3
TOTALS	176	18	
	Percent	10%	0.102272727

Cumulative data reporting number of students, semesters, sections, and cases from course records and findings from Judicial Affairs wherein students were determined to be "responsible."

Distribution of Confirmed Cases



Preventative Measures

- ▶ Some researchers have suggested the implementation of an honor code (Kidwell, Wozniak, & Laurel, 2003), and accrediting bodies (Peppas & Diskin, 2001) as well as trends in business school curricula indicate increasing interest in ethics courses and content.
- ▶ Individual faculty need to clearly express – preferably during their opening remarks at the beginning of a course – that they are either contractually or morally obligated to curtail plagiarism.

Preventative Measures (continued)

- ▶ Academic integrity policies should be distributed in written form: course syllabi, a faculty Website, and institutional brochures, statements, etc.
- ▶ Faculty should make clear what the consequences will be.

Methods of Detection

- ▶ Changes in the writer's tone or style may be a tip-off that he or she is copying from other sources.
- ▶ Beyond style, passages that switch back and forth from clean, well written text, to text that is riddled with errors is often another indication.
- ▶ Plans that are "too perfect," and too complete, also tend to raise suspicions.

Methods of Detection (continued)

- ▶ The use of terms that seem beyond the grasp of the student's level of writing proficiency can be an indicator (Owings, 2002).
- ▶ All prosecuted cases from charts were originally detected using either search strings on popular Internet search engines; side-by-side comparison with plans submitted by classmates; and comparison with sample business plans in Business Plan Pro software.

Looking the Other Way

- ▶ Keith-Spiegel and Tabachnick, et al (1998) employed a factor analysis in research which suggested reasons why cheating might be ignored; these reasons were reported as:
 - “insufficient evidence”- the most frequent
 - “emotional reasons”- described as either due to ‘stress’ or ‘lack of courage’
 - “difficult reasons”- referring to “extensive time and effort required to deal with cheating students”
 - “fear reasons”- concern about retaliation or a legal challenge
 - “denial reasons”

Looking the Other Way (continued)

- ▶ Some faculty may be concerned over career consequences as a result of student retaliation through ratings systems.
- ▶ However, faculty who share similar concerns might be advised that one should systematically document all threats and instances of cheating.

Conclusion

- ▶ Research, as it pertains specifically to business plans and plagiarism (cheating, et al), is either limited or has not been aggressively pursued by entrepreneurship scholars, to date.
- ▶ Educator's have their own choice in battling the plagiarism problem.
- ▶ While some faculty may ignore this phenomenon, others may simply be unaware that their perceptions may differ from those of students (Kidwell, Wozniak, & Laurel, 2003)....

Questions

