

November  
1, 2015**Plagiarism in the historian community | INFO 200  
#5**Posted by Anastasia Finch under **Fall 2015** | Tags: **info 200** |**1 Comment**

Plagiarism is a huge problem in the scholarly/historian community, as it is in the academic world at large. I did some research to see just how bad it could be, and found RL Zangrando's article, *Historians' Procedures for Handling Plagiarism* (1991). According to Zangrando (1991), anywhere from 30-90% of students cheat during their time in school. It doesn't specify if it's plagiarism or any other kind of cheating, but still: those numbers are pretty scary. It's not completely crazy to think that, having gotten into bad habits at school, at least academics continue to practice them once they're graduated, too.

This is an especially alarming idea, as the historian community, by necessity, needs truthful and accurate research in order to thrive. As Zangrando (1991) says, scholarship and learning are dependent upon "honest research, open discourse, verification of sources and methodology, and an even-handed sharing of conclusions, followed by independent critical review" (p. 58). When any one of those fail, the whole system fails, and thus damages the community as a whole.

In response, the historian community has set up certain guidelines to outline professional standards and to handle accusations of plagiarism whenever they crop up. For instance, the American Historical Association (AHA) created a "Statement on Plagiarism" for its guidelines for professional conduct in the mid-1980s. The current Statement on Standards of Professional Conduct (last updated in 2011) can be read in its entirety on the AHA website here; it has an excellent definition of plagiarism, outlines good research habits in order to counteract accidental plagiarism, and talks about the professional responsibilities a historian has to being honest and truthful about one's work.

The AHA's Statement (2011) also talks about what may happen to a historian who is discovered to have plagiarized— mostly centered around professional fallout, such as being fired or removed from an academic program, rather than legal problems. As the AHA (2011) says: "The real penalty for plagiarism is the abhorrence of the community of scholars."

**Archived Entry****Post Date :**

November 1, 2015 at 11:47 am

**Category :**

Fall 2015

Tags: info 200

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## References

American Historical Association. (2011). Statement on Standards of Professional Conduct (updated 2011). Retrieved November 1, 2015, from <https://www.historians.org/jobs-and-professional-development/statements-and-standards-of-the-profession/statement-on-standards-of-professional-conduct>

Zangrando, R. L. (1991). Historians' procedures for handling plagiarism. *Publishing Research Quarterly*, 7(4), 57.

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### ONE RESPONSE TO "PLAGIARISM IN THE HISTORIAN COMMUNITY | INFO 200 #5"

1. Eric M. Sanderson Says:



November 27, 2015 at 2:49 pm

Anastasia,

Reading your post about plagiarism in the historian community was most interesting, as I have encountered writing about plagiarism and copyright violation in my information community, elementary school teachers, as well.

I especially appreciated the link to the statement on plagiarism that is part of the AHA 2011 Statement on Standards of Professional Conduct. I kept returning to two parts of the AHA statement: (1) “. . . every historian will have to depend primarily on vigilant self-criticism” and (2) “Throughout our lives none of us can cease to question the claims to originality that our work makes and the sort of credit it grants to others.” While I agree entirely with the principles articulated in the AHA statement, I would not want any student with whom I work to be rendered “thought-less” by “plagiarism paranoia.” I hope that, as information professionals, we can help students, academics, researchers, and writers at all levels negotiate the challenges of attribution and credit in our information-rich environment.

Thank you, again, for a timely, engaging, and thought-provoking post!

Eric

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