Plagiarism and misappropriation

TRANSCRIPT

Research Ethics Online Course

1. What is plagiarism and misappropriation - behind is a basic concept of presenting other people's ideas, words, images or products…

2. …as your own.

3. So why does it matter if we present other people's work as our own? First of all it is like theft - it is taking what is someone else's without their permission and using it as if it was your own. Our social sense of justice strongly opposes that. For any group to function, there has to be rules about ownership and plagiarism and misappropriation form one set of those rules for the research community. To protect against this theft, we have formal rules of copyright, intellectual property rights and misconduct procedures. These are fundamental to the research enterprise as being able to claim your work as your own and not any one else's is a key for academic careers and all research writing.

4. In research the second reason for taking plagiarism and misappropriation seriously is to guard research integrity and reliability. Only those who understand the work should be the ones presenting it. This way, if there are questions, further ideas, applications, or doubts, they lead to the source and are considered by those who actually understand the work. When someone pretends to have done the work without being intimately involved in it, mistakes will become more prevalent and it would soon become impossible to figure out what information one could trust. Plagiarism would thus erode the very foundation of research work.

5. Let's have a look at some examples of plagiarism which is presenting work of others as your own. To begin with let's look at the most familiar form of presenting as your own printed or presented work of others without appropriate references. The simplest format is copy&paste type of plagiarism and it is easy to see that is misconduct. The challenge with this type of plagiarism is to establish boundaries of what can and cannot be copied. We can present common knowledge without a reference like that the Earth is round, Finnish language does not have gendered pronouns or antibiotics kills bacteria. In every field there are well-known truths that do not require you to trace down to their origin, which is sometimes impossible to find anyway. But where do we draw the line of what needs to be referenced and what cannot be assumed. This may require quite delicate knowledge of the field of study and its traditions.

6. It is even more complicated to identify and avoid plagiarism of ideas which is called misappropriation in the Finnish guidelines for Responsible Conduct of Research. The research process is often a creative and collective, particularly at the early stages of planning and it may not be easy to know what idea belonged to whom. Thus unintentional misappropriation is always a risk to be conscious of.

7. On the other hand, using well formed ideas and the presenting them as your own from conference papers, funding applications or students' work is clearly misappropriation and if one would end up using the the words in which these ideas were presented directly, it would fall under plagiarism as well. Dealing with images and sounds made by others is even more challenging as we cannot paraphrase them, so using them without appropriate reference to original source is almost always likely to be plagiarism.

8. Plagiarism also includes using your own words and images more than once. The foundation for this type of action to be understood alongside plagiarism is that it in a similar manner misleads the reader about the originality of the work. If you present your work as original twice, you are not being honest with the reader. While self-plagiarism does not include similar risks around reliability as plagiarising from others, it does provoke concerns for integrity. Self-plagiarism has also got repercussions on fairness as reproducing the same work would unduly inflate the publication record which in turn is used as a measure of ability in funding and career decisions.

9. It is ok to refer to your previous work, as long as it is clear where the work was originally published and there is no confusion around what is original and what is old news.The grey area around falsification is usually easy to recognise in your own field. So stop and think what are the areas of risk for you and your colleagues? Is it the use of statistics in a way that distorts the real findings, is it dealing with such large datasets that with careful selection almost anything could be proven to be true, is it rich qualitative data that would allow your subjective interpretation to influence analysis greatly or could it be managing research conditions in a way that allows you to get the results you want while claiming to have had a different set-up or methodology? Listen to senior researchers in your field and ask them, they can probably identify the risk quite easily - every research area has their unique pattern and risk factors.

10. As Wilhelm Barner-Rasmussen said, keeping notes is your first line of defence against plagiarism - keep notes of planning, discussions, your reading and thoughts. And hold onto those notes as projects often last for years and memories of events become less and less reliable.

11. A second good way to avoid plagiarism is to use the available plagiarism detection software. Most universities in Finland have subscribed to detection software like TurnItIn or Urkund as ways to detect plagiarism. These can be used to check drafts for unintended plagiarism as well as student work. All major journals now use plagiarism

detection of all submitted papers, so it makes good sense to double check you have not missed anything before you submit.