



WESTFÄLISCHE
WILHELMS-UNIVERSITÄT
MÜNSTER

Plagiarism: What is it and how to avoid it

GraSP Workshop, 16 April 2019

Overview

- What is plagiarism?
- Other forms of scientific misconduct
- Types of plagiarism
- How to spot cases of plagiarism
- How to avoid unintentional plagiarism in your own work
- Institutional safeguards against plagiarism

What is plagiarism?

Group discussion

- Define the term “plagiarism” in your own words (no internet!)
- Have you ever encountered plagiarism yourself? How and where?
- What other forms of scientific misconduct do you know?
- Which of these forms do you consider to be most severe in political science?

What is plagiarism? WWU definition

Rules of Good Scientific Practice of the University of Münster, adopted 7 January 2002

Source: <https://www.uni-muenster.de/Senat/en/kodex.html>

“The University of Münster (WWU) is committed to guaranteeing good scientific practice and therefore, in accordance with the resolutions passed by the DFG General Assembly on 17 June 1998 and 4 July 2001, has adopted the following rules:

§ 1

Every academic staff member of the University of Münster is obliged to adhere to the principles of good scientific practice within the scope of his or her field of activity. These principles include that work is carried out according to the scientific standards of one’s respective academic field, data is accurately reported, the intellectual property of others is respected, and the research activities of fellow colleagues are not interfered with.”

What is plagiarism? WWU definition

“In particular, this includes the following:

[...]

- respecting the rights of third parties with regard to copyrighted material or major scientific insights, hypotheses, teachings or research approaches by refraining from
 - unauthorised use under the pretence of authorship (plagiarism)
 - unauthorised exploitation of others’ research methods and ideas, particularly as an assessor (idea theft)
 - pretence of (co-)authorship of another’s academic publication
 - falsification of the content of others’ scholarly work
 - publishing and granting access to scholarly research to third parties without permission, provided the work, finding, hypothesis, teaching or research approach is not yet in the public domain”

Other forms of scientific misconduct: WWU definition

Rules of Good Scientific Practice of the University of Münster, 7 Jan 2002

[Section 1 continued] “...In particular, this includes the following:

- verifiable description of applied methodology
- thorough documentation of all publication-relevant research data
- description of research findings that allows for verification
- correct use of descriptions or illustrations
- [plagiarism, as described above]
- claiming (co-)authorship of another’s academic publication only with their permission
- and in no way hindering the research activity of others, e.g. through sabotage (including damaging, destroying or manipulating literature, archival and source materials, experiments, equipment, documents, hardware, software, chemicals or other items which others require to conduct a research project).”

What forms of plagiarism do you know?

- Source: Weber-Wulff, Debora (2014): *False Feathers: A Perspective on Academic Plagiarism*. Berlin: Springer
- Copy & paste
- Forms of disguised plagiarism
 - Shake & paste collections
 - Translation plagiarism
 - Pawn sacrifice
- Structural plagiarism
- Self-plagiarism
- ...

How to spot cases of plagiarism (in student papers etc.)

- Step 1: read the paper very carefully. Look out for
 - Abrupt changes of style such as
 - unusually elegant next to rather colloquial or clumsy passages
 - unusually correct next to rather faulty passages
 - Unexpectedly brilliant ideas by students who seemed rather mediocre in class/in other written assignments
 - Usage of unusual words or expressions (e.g. unusual loan words)
 - A mix of different citation styles
 - Author names being written differently in different passages
 - Leftover internet links [from online articles like Wikipedia]
 - ...

How to spot cases of plagiarism (in student papers etc.)

- Step 2: Google suspicious passages, ideally in quotation marks: “...”
- Step 3: Use a tool like “similarity texter” if you have a suspicion of a plagiarized source text: <https://people.f4.htw-berlin.de/~weberwu/simtexter/app.html>
- Step 4: If you don’t find something and still have a suspicion of potential plagiarism, consider using a professional plagiarism detection software
 - Caution: very mixed reviews by Weber-Wulff and others
 - Still: such software can point to further potentially plagiarized sources
 - Then: start with step 2 and 3 again
 - Our university’s Social Science Faculty (FB 06) has a licence of a plagiarism detection software (ask Ms Denker in Dean’s Office)



Hard to spot types of plagiarism

- Translation plagiarism
- Plagiarized text from material that is not online (e.g. old books that are not in Google Books; newspaper articles behind paywalls etc.)
- Structural plagiarism
- ...

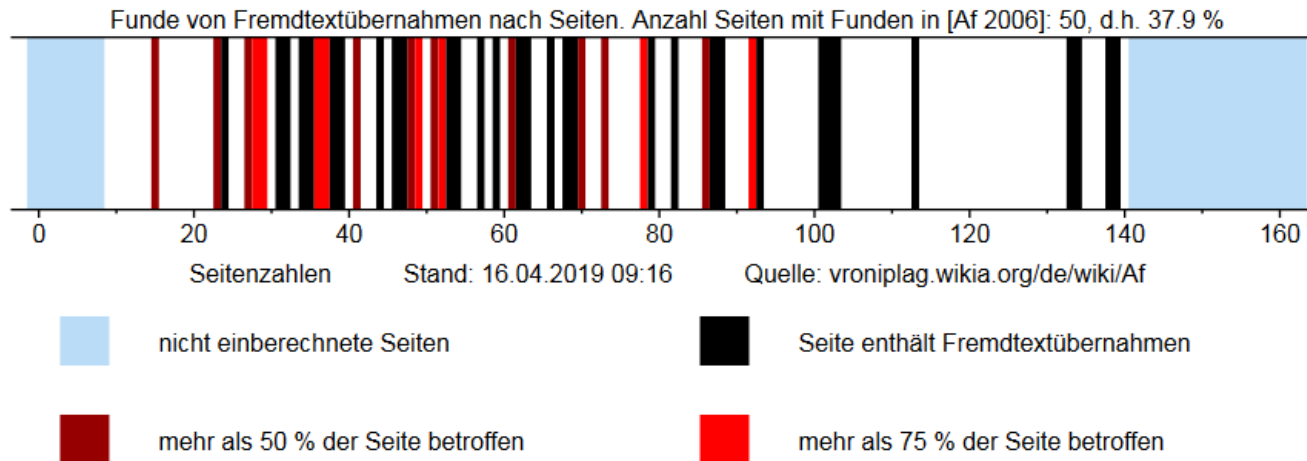
An example from vroniplag

A critical discussion of the thesis by Prof. Amber Ferdoos: Social Status of Rural and Urban Working Women in Pakistan – A Comparative Study

Bearbeiten

Submitted to the [Department of Social Sciences](#) of the [University of Osnabrück](#) in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor in Business and Social Sciences (Dr. rer. pol.). Supervisor: [Prof. Dr. György Széll](#), evaluator: [PD Dr. Birgit Panke-Kochinke](#), doctoral committee members: [Prof. Dr. Carol Hagemann-White](#) and [PD Dr. Carmen Schmidt](#). Thesis submitted according to title page in November 2005, the acknowledgments are dated May 2006. → [Entry in the German National Library](#), → [Download German National Library](#), → [Download University of Osnabrück](#)

→ Entziehung des Doktorgrades Februar 2018 (Mitteilung durch Justitiariat)



Source: <https://vroniplag.wikia.org/de/wiki/Af>

How to avoid unintentional plagiarism in your own work

- Keep track of sources when you write literature or other excerpts
- Keep track of direct and indirect quotations when doing your excerpts
- Think for yourselves and be original – use other people’s work primarily to situate your own argument in the literature, don’t write lengthy literature reviews
 - Try to draft your literature overviews or theory sections without any readings on your desk; but of course: fill in citations afterwards
- Generally
 - Be careful with your sources
 - Be honest

How to avoid unintentional plagiarism in your own work

- But : don't over-reference your texts; there's no need to reference trivial information
- Put yourselves in the shoes of the author: would you be angry when somebody used the idea/piece of information in their text without referring to you?
- Also: don't panic!
 - You are not going to be expelled/your degree will not be withdrawn if somebody finds one (unintentional) case of (minor) plagiarism in your thesis
 - If you do your own research, honestly report the empirical results, and thus make a noticeable contribution to the literature, your thesis is already pretty safe from being accused of plagiarism due to accidental, minor mistakes in citations

What constitutes a “serious” case of plagiarism?

- It's a matter of scholarly (and increasingly: judicial) standards
- If there are cases of plagiarism: does the thesis still make a substantial contribution to the literature if we subtract the “stolen” ideas?
 - If it still presents substantial scientific insights both empirically and theoretically, it is most likely not going to be classified as serious plagiarism
 - If (almost) no original contribution remains: it is very likely to be classified as a serious case of plagiarism
 - Guttenberg, Schavan, probably also Giffey: answer is: there is no noticeable original contribution if you subtract all plagiarized ideas
 - These theses should not have been accepted as PhD theses in the first place

Institutional safeguards against plagiarism

- Plagiarism in a PhD thesis also points to problems in thesis supervision
 - Goal: close supervision of PhD theses; regular contact, regular feedback, clear standards of the scholarly contribution to be made
 - Limited number of supervised PhD theses per professor, avoid non-supervised external PhD projects without close contact to their supervisors
- Towards more peer review
 - Move away from de-facto autonomy of individual supervisors. Ideally, several professors should be involved in supervising a thesis
 - Decoupling the roles of supervisors and evaluators/graders
 - Article-based dissertations
- Combat obsession with academic titles in society: produce less PhDs



Any more questions?