



UNIVERSITY of the
WESTERN CAPE

UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN CAPE (UWC)

PLAGIARISM POLICY

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University of the Western Cape Plagiarism Policy

1. Definition of plagiarism

The following definition of plagiarism and the policy provisions below are applicable to all members of the university academic community, including undergraduate students, postgraduate students and staff.

Plagiarism is (a) the appropriation of formulations, ideas or words from the work of another person without acknowledging the author(s) and the source; and (b) the appropriation of work from someone else's assignment, thesis, test or research paper without acknowledging such other person and/or source.

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Examples of plagiarism to illustrate this definition are given in Section 4 below.

2. The extent and causes of plagiarism amongst students

All of the sources consulted suggest that under-preparedness and the disjunction between school and university are factors of great importance in understanding plagiarism. In South Africa it has become well understood that students are not made aware of the issue of plagiarism at school and may even be encouraged to engage in practices that constitute plagiarism.

In the international literature on the subject there is now "a growing concern that the complexity of plagiarism must be recognised and met in a variety of ways," and "a reliance on a traditional, single strategy approach of providing students with information about the rules and sanctions relating to plagiarism has not been a successful deterrent" (McGowan 2005:288). The complexities concerning plagiarism follow from the fact that there are various types of plagiarism and differing reasons for plagiarising, including the fact that cases of inadvertent plagiarism do occur.

McGowan proposes an "apprenticeship of students into the academic culture and its conventions of engagement with the literature" and she suggests "that an initial focus on the rules and strategies on their own may be no more than mechanical training for repetitive behaviour and encourage a surface approach to learning" (2005:289-292). This is a telling point to be made against a purely formal approach consisting only of, say, definitions, rules and penalties. What students will be inclined to do then is to adopt compliance behaviour without a true understanding of academic culture and how knowledge and ideas are generated and shared.

At UWC the approach to be adopted towards this problem cannot therefore be only punitive; it must also be developmental in its overall aim. This means that efforts to

prevent plagiarism should include training for all students in how to avoid plagiarism in their written and oral work. The need to resort to disciplinary measures should be minimised by the adoption of developmental and preventative practices.

3. Principles and practices In a developmental approach to plagiarism

3.1 Establish the unacceptability of plagiarism

The first point is to establish clearly that plagiarism is unacceptable and that consequences will follow from plagiaristic practices. This needs to be emphasised in student and staff orientation and regularly thereafter. It needs to be understood that there are two main grounds for this unacceptability, the one educational and the other ethical and legal:

- Plagiarism is inimical to learning and it enables students to obtain credit where they have not learned anything. This has the effect of reducing the value of a university degree and is thus a threat to the whole of the higher education system, as well as to those social sectors in which graduates need to be usefully employed.
- Secondly, plagiarism constitutes dishonesty and it can have serious legal implications. Universities are institutions that need to be at the forefront in promoting integrity amongst both staff and students and in protecting intellectual property.

3.2 Develop sound assessment methods that are plagiarism resistant

Assessment practices should not only be aligned with broad learning outcomes; they should also be aligned with learning *processes*. Designing assessment tasks that pay no attention to the processes required in order to complete them, especially high stakes assessments that have no explicitly formative aspects to them, are likely to result in a high incidence of plagiarism. Whenever necessary the appropriate teaching and learning expertise should be consulted concerning the design of assessment tasks.

3.3 Promote a self-evaluative attitude amongst the students

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(Students need to be empowered to do self monitoring, so that they can judge when their essays and other assignments are ready for submission. If they can do this quite independently of the lecturer, this can reinforce their sense of being in control of their own academic destinies.

3.4 Develop the university's relationship with the students

It is important to remove as far as possible perceptions that students' relationship with the university is an adversarial one, and to foster the perception that it is a partnership in which the legitimate rights and duties of each partner are well understood.

There should be help from the student leadership in getting the student body as a whole to understand the university's culture of enquiry and the ethos that goes with it. To undermine this will ultimately be to undermine the socially perceived value of the qualifications that students obtain from the university.

3.5 Use the plagiarism prevention software regularly and effectively

Students must receive training in using the software in at least one module per semester. The responsible head should allocate the task of providing this training to specific staff members. For postgraduate students, all major assignments must be submitted through the anti-plagiarism system prior to submission in hard copy. In order to check that this has been done satisfactorily, a lecturer may require a student to submit the electronic version of an assignment.

However, it is important to note that anti-plagiarism software, despite its established benefits, will not necessarily 'solve' the problem of plagiarism on its own, and it is not effective in certain types of plagiarism, such as copying from books that are not electronically stored in the database. It is thus important that lecturers be alert to signs of plagiarism from such sources, for example sudden changes in writing style in a student's assignment, or a style of written work that suddenly reflects a much higher level of sophistication than normal at the particular level of study. In such cases the lecturer needs to follow up, either by checking for a possible source, or directly with the student to check his/her ability to explain and paraphrase what has been written.

3.6 Treat cases of plagiarism fairly, consistently and moderately

In all cases where serious and blatant plagiarism occurs, students should be treated equally and there should be an appropriate definition of 'offence' and 'first offence'. A first offence should never be a case of inadvertent plagiarism. The latter should instead be treated as a case of poor scholarship, rather than as an offence, to be reflected in the grading rather than result in a disciplinary procedure. Genuine offences, once proven, need to be placed on record in a central register. Since the nature of offences may vary across disciplines (e.g. sharing data as opposed to downloading essays) the definitions of offence and first offence need to be *disseminated at faculty level*.

3.7 Treat all students as researchers in training

This means understanding from day one that enquiry is what a university is all about. A student who plagiarises is depriving him/herself of the ability to acquire and present genuine knowledge. This message must be conveyed to students in language they can understand during orientation and regularly reinforced by lecturers and supervisors.

4, Examples of plagiarism

The following are common examples of plagiarism and are thus entirely unacceptable:

1. Copying from texts on the Internet and submitting these, either whole or in part, as one's own work.
2. Copying passages from a textbook or from a book found in the library and inserting these into one's own work without acknowledgment.
3. Using ideas or data from a specific sources found in the public domain without any acknowledgment of this source. This applies to research reports and theses as well as undergraduate assignments.

4. Buying, borrowing or copying an assignment from a fellow student and submitting it as one's own.
5. Buying, borrowing or copying an assignment from a fellow student and submitting it as one's own after making small changes, such as replacing some of the words by synonyms, reordering some of the sentences and paragraphs, etc.
6. Using data that has been generated by a fellow student or colleague, where the data generation was meant to be, and is presented as, an integral part of one's own research, whether this is in an assignment, postgraduate thesis, article or book.
7. A supervisor publishing or otherwise disseminating the data of his/her student as if it were his/her own data and without the knowledge of the student concerned.

Note: Cases where data have been presented, ostensibly as a result of research, but which have been *made up* by the individual, do not strictly speaking constitute plagiarism. However such cases do constitute an equivalent form of academic dishonesty and, where they can be proved, should be treated in just the same way as plagiarism.

5. Plagiarism sanctions

In a survey done at Northumbria University, which canvassed the views of both staff and students on the sorts of plagiarism that they thought were common, the most important finding was that students provided a higher estimate of the incidence than staff did in each and every category of plagiarism. Secondly, they gave an especially higher estimate than staff did for the most egregious types of cheating, such as downloading or buying a whole essay, or making up data. The discrepancy between student and staff views indicates the extent to which students may be able to cheat the system without staff being aware of it.

Thus it is unavoidable that strict sanctions need to be applied as a deterrent, particularly in cases of the most serious forms of plagiarism, and where all other measures have failed to prevent such incidences. At UWC sanctions will be applied in those cases where the lecturer is satisfied that the student has been given sufficient guidance on how to avoid plagiarism. However disciplinary sanctions should not normally be applied during the first semester of the first year.

In clear cases of plagiarism a lecturer/supervisor may decide to record a zero mark. An example here would be a case where a whole paragraph, consisting of a number of linked sentences, has been copied verbatim from published works or from another student without acknowledgment. This will be regarded as an offence, recorded in a central register, and, if it is found that it is not the first offence of its kind for the particular student, it will result in a disciplinary enquiry. *Repeated offences will result in the suspension of the student from the university.*

In cases where plagiarism is thought to have been mostly inadvertent, or to have resulted more from incompetence than dishonesty, and if time and resources permit, the lecturer

¹ Cited in Hart and Friesner (2004:90).

may allow the student to redo an assignment, provided that a maximum mark of 50"/c, is awarded for the resubmitted assignment. Such cases include those where the skills of the student in paraphrasing, citing and/or referencing sources are still inadequate and the message needs to be reinforced that greater effort is needed to improve these. Such cases need not be placed on record in the central register.

Plagiarism in postgraduate theses or in staff publications are disciplinary offences. It is incumbent on all postgraduate students and staff members to know how to avoid plagiarism.

6. Electronic anti-plagiarism resources

While there may be some cases where plagiarism detection software does not identify plagiarism in student writing for technical reasons, the experience, both internationally and at UWC, is that there are great benefits in using a good anti-plagiarism package. The identification of instances of student plagiarism is greatly enhanced, and the great merit of this is the formative effect it has on students. The more aware and the more confident students become about their own abilities, the more they appreciate this kind of resource.

Lecturers can also be made more aware of students' difficulties in choosing the appropriate language for citing and indicating the use of sources, and they can use this feedback to provide more effective guidance to the students.

These benefits are obviously in line with the kind of developmental approach that is favoured by UWC and it is therefore university policy that the best available electronic resource should be used for this purpose. However it may be that such a resource is not as effective in detecting very minor instances of plagiarism, and detecting these minor infractions should not become a major preoccupation at the expense of other aspects of teaching, learning and assessment. It also cannot detect plagiarism from purely print-based materials.

One of the major aims of using this software should be to build up trust between staff and students so that core university business can remain in focus. Ultimately plagiarism is a human relations issue and it is the human relations that need to be developed.

7. Conventions for citing and using sources

Each faculty should have a strategy in place and some basic materials to demonstrate to students how to quote from sources and to give the in-text reference, including date and page number where applicable. All lecturers who mark written assignments must insist that the faculty-approved conventions are *always* observed by students.

The conventions for referencing will tend to be specified by the lecturer, supervisor or journal to whom the written work is being submitted. However, it is important to note that students doing a number of subjects may be confused by being required to use different conventions for each of these subjects. A faculty should therefore at least consider the feasibility of using one standard set of conventions for the whole faculty.

All students must be made aware of online resources that they can consult in ensuring compliance with the adopted conventions. The preferred style and convention (including examples) should be incorporated into all study guides.

8. Responsibilities for implementation of this policy

8.1 Faculties

It is the responsibility for all faculties to ensure that their academic staff are familiar with this policy, that they understand it and that they are able to use the anti-plagiarism software. Training in any aspect of the policy should be arranged for staff wherever needed. It is especially important that staff have a good understanding of how and when sanctions should be applied and how to record offences in the central register. Staff also need to be trained in assessment methods that are plagiarism resistant (see 8.8 below). The definitions of 'offence' and 'first offence' need to be formulated and disseminated at faculty level.

8.2 Lecturers and supervisors

All academic staff are to monitor the writing of their students and to make sure that they strongly discourage student plagiarism. They are also to ensure that their own practices in writing and research are entirely free of plagiarism. They need to ensure that they and their students are able to use the anti-plagiarism software provided by the university. They should seek guidance from their departmental heads if they are unsure in the matter of applying sanctions.

8.3 Heads of departments

Heads have the responsibility to ensure that every undergraduate student is getting practice at submitting and checking for plagiarism before the due date for assignment submission. They should make sure that they are able to guide staff members in their departments on how to deal with cases of plagiarism when such guidance is required, especially by less experienced staff.

8.4 Students

All students have the responsibility to make themselves familiar with the policy and to develop their writing, with the help of staff, with a view to avoiding plagiarism entirely. This includes knowing how to use the anti-plagiarism software provided by the university and knowing the approved techniques for citation and reference. They will be required to attach a declaration to all substantive assignments and theses asserting that their work is their own and free of plagiarism.

8.5 *E-learning and information literacy experts*

The Learning team and the Information Literacy team (Library) share responsibility for responding to training requests and requests for information concerning the use of the anti-plagiarism software. Information literacy training needs to incorporate allied processes of working with published texts, such as note-taking, quotation and paraphrasing. Online tutorials on referencing conventions will be available through the Library website and evidence of their completion may be made a DP requirement.

8.6 *Writing consultants*

Anti-plagiarism efforts should be backed up by guidance from the writing consultants/coaches in the Writing Centre and in the Division for Postgraduate Studies.

8.7 *Committees*

Responsibility for university oversight in all these matters rests with

- The Senate Teaching and Learning Committee (for undergraduate studies)
- The Senate Higher Degrees Committee (for postgraduate studies)
- The Senate Research Committee (for staff research)

8.8 *Teaching and learning specialists*

The specialist Teaching & Learning staff in the university need to see it as part of their responsibility to provide training for academics in assessment methods that are plagiarism resistant. The traditional academic essay may sometimes be especially unsuited to this goal, particularly in the first year, and smaller, more tightly defined tasks that are focused on learning processes should be encouraged as a way of preventing plagiarism.

9. Works consulted in the formulation of this policy

In addition to plagiarism policy documents of the Universities of Cape Town, Stellenbosch, Witwatersrand and Cape Peninsula University of Technology, the following works were consulted:

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