

Guidance on Dealing with Instances of Possible Academic Dishonesty by Students

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Guidance on dealing with academic dishonesty and examples of different types of academic dishonesty and potential sanctions.

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Please contact the Education Strategy Team (educationstrategy@strath.ac.uk), if you have any queries.

Guidance on Dealing with Instances of Possible Academic Dishonesty by Students

FOREWORD

Academic staff have been dealing effectively with instances of academic dishonesty for many years. However, developments on the internet and in technology, the fact that students can now purchase work from essay banks and ghost-writing services, the expansion of off-campus learning and the growth in the use of group work and assessed coursework rather than unseen examinations have increased the opportunities for academic dishonesty. In addition, many of the students who face disciplinary procedures as a result of academic dishonesty state either that they had not intended to be dishonest or had not understood that what they had done constituted academic dishonesty. In order to deter such practices it is important that we encourage academic integrity and good academic writing throughout the student body and identify and deal appropriately with incidences of academic dishonesty when they occur.

Use by departments, schools and faculties of these central guidelines should facilitate a fair and consistent approach to dealing with academic dishonesty across the whole University.

Examples of different types of academic dishonesty are given in Appendix 1.

1. PREAMBLE

The following guidance is intended to facilitate a fair and consistent approach to dealing with alleged instances of academic dishonesty. Fortunately the University normally only has to deal with relatively few serious instances. For the most part, minor offences are dealt with effectively by authorised staff in departments/schools and the production of these guidelines is not expected to lead to more cases being reported. Rather it is intended to encourage a consistent approach across the University, particularly for offences that are ultimately dealt with in a formal manner through the University's Student Discipline Procedure.

2. UNIVERSITY POLICY IN REGARD TO ACADEMIC DISHONESTY

2.1 Prevention

First and foremost it is important to promote a general climate of academic integrity within the student body from the outset of the course. Students should be made aware that, as members of the academic community, they are responsible for ensuring that their work abides by the conventions and rules of that community. The integrity of the student's final award depends on adherence to these conventions. It is expected that all staff will ensure that students are aware what constitutes appropriate academic scholarship and the importance of this in the context of maintaining the quality and standard of awards within the University.

Given this context, the University regards academic dishonesty as a serious matter and it can, in some cases, lead to formal proceedings being brought against a student under the University's Student Discipline Procedure. As such, it can carry heavy penalties and it is therefore important that staff inform students about what is expected (or not expected) of them as part of the academic community and about what constitutes academic dishonesty.

- 2.1.1 Information about academic dishonesty and how to avoid it should be included in relevant handbooks and materials provided to all undergraduate and postgraduate students.
- 2.1.2 Course Teams should cover the subject of academic dishonesty in lectures and tutorials in the first year of study to give students the opportunity to discuss and identify academic dishonesty using discipline specific examples. Course teams should consider the potential benefits of returning to the issue of academic integrity at appropriate stages in later years of study. Specific considerations should be given to PGT courses where, for some students, the course may be the first experience of the UK culture of academic scholarship and the expectation that go with it.
- 2.1.3. Course Teams should encourage a culture of academic scholarship that addresses the challenges for a generation of learners who have had easy access to the Internet and to electronic articles and books, and for whom the distinction between individual thought and drawing on others work may have become blurred. This includes clarity about the fact that it is unacceptable to copy and paste others' work and then to change and modify it until electronic detection software would no longer identify the work as being plagiarised. This approach to writing essays or projects is not good scholarship and the importance of independent thought from the very beginning of drafting an essay or a piece of written work should be stressed.
- 2.1.4 Course Teams should make it clear to students what constitutes good practice regarding group work and what constitutes collusion

- 2.1.5 Course Teams and Research Supervisors should also consider whether there is a need to remind students about the importance of academic integrity issues prior to the submission of assignments or theses, or the submission of articles to journals and at other strategic points in their studies.
- 2.1.6 Staff should inform students about the penalties which can be applied in cases of proven academic dishonesty (See the University's Student Discipline Procedure and Appendix 4 below).
- 2.1.7 Staff are encouraged to permit students to submit their work to Turnitin on a voluntary basis as this can be a useful learning tool to enable them to improve their academic writing skills. This should not be seen as an exercise in using Turnitin to test when a piece of plagiarized work stops being plagiarized because sufficient changes have been made for the work not to be detected by the software.
- 2.1.8 Where a professional body, such as the Law Society, requires reporting of instances of academic dishonesty this should be made known to the students at the start of the course.
- 2.1.9 Professional bodies should not be informed until the University's procedures have run their course so that the penalty applied to the student can be reported and to avoid unnecessary reporting where an allegation is not upheld.
- 2.1.10 In setting assessed assignments of whatever form, staff should, actively consider how to minimise the opportunities for students to act dishonestly.

[Examples of good practice in setting assignments can be found in the University's: *Good Academic Practice and the Avoidance of Plagiarism, Good Practice Guide for Staff.*]
- 2.1.11 Students should be clearly informed about the rules governing specific types of assignment such as individual work and group projects.
- 2.1.12 Students should be clearly informed that it is their responsibility to check that the particular piece of written work that is being submitted is the final version of the document. The piece of work that is submitted by the student is the version that will be considered as final from a subsequent detection perspective. It should be made clear to students that it is not an option to submit plagiarised work and then, if this is detected, to say that the submission did not represent the final version of the written work and for a case of defence to be built around this argument.

2.2 Detection

Scrutiny of academic work should be such that instances of academic dishonesty, or poor scholarship, are detected at an early stage and brought to a student's attention.

- 2.2.1 The primary responsibility for detecting all forms of academic dishonesty rests with teaching staff, though, on occasion, it may be detected or substantiated by others, such as an invigilator or external examiner.
- 2.2.2 The University has access to Turnitin plagiarism detection software. Turnitin saves academic staff time by checking students' work and highlighting sections which duplicate material held on its database much more quickly than staff can do themselves using a search engine.

- 2.2.3 Staff should request electronic submission of most, if not all, written work and process an agreed sample/percentage of that work through Turnitin, rather than just using the software on an ad hoc basis when plagiarism is suspected. Use in this way will ensure a fairer and more consistent approach to detection and will make it clearer to students that most, if not all, work can be thoroughly checked for instances of academic dishonesty.
- 2.2.4 Staff should inform students that plagiarism detection software is being used, for example through a rubric on the top sheet signed by the student at the time of submission of an assignment.

2.3 Investigation of an Allegation

Academic staff can deal with minor incidences of suspected academic misconduct by first or second year students with no aggravating circumstances by means of an informal meeting, referring them for further advice on good academic practice and, where appropriate, cautioning them.

- 2.3.1 Staff are required to report all major incidences of suspected academic misconduct and all minor incidences of suspected academic misconduct by students in the later years of study to the relevant Head of Department/School (or nominee) who will decide how to proceed.
- 2.3.2 Offences should be assessed on a case by case basis. For all forms of academic dishonesty, care should be taken in determining whether an offence has actually been committed.
- 2.3.3 Disciplinary action under the University's Student Discipline Procedure may be appropriate in some cases. The existence of intention is important in determining whether or not disciplinary action should be taken. (See Appendix 3 for examples of when formal disciplinary procedures may be initiated.)
- 2.3.4 In all cases relevant aggravating and mitigating factors must be taken into consideration.
- 2.3.5 The burden of proof used by the University in cases of alleged academic misconduct is that of balance of probability. Balance of probability is used in civil law, and relates to the likelihood of an offence having been committed by the defender.
- 2.3.6 Where it is felt that the allegation is of a sufficiently minor nature (e.g. the student is in the early years of an undergraduate degree programme and the level of severity of the offence is low) then a relevant member of academic staff should meet informally with the student. The student may be referred for further advice on good academic practice and, where appropriate, cautioned and informed of the potential penalties for future instances.
- 2.3.7 Where the allegation is deemed to be of a more serious nature or where the student denies the allegation then the Head of Department (or equivalent) should be notified and formal proceedings may be considered under the University's Student Discipline Procedure.
- 2.3.8 Where a *prima facie* discipline case is detected, the assignments in question should be given a provisional mark taking no account of possible academic dishonesty but reflecting poor scholarship as appropriate. Under subsequent Disciplinary Procedures and depending upon the severity of the incident an authorised

Disciplinary Officer or the Senate Discipline Committee may impose appropriate academic sanctions if a case of academic dishonesty is found to be proven.

3. MONITORING

The University recognizes that in order to ensure that guidelines, policies and procedures remain effective and appropriate, they need to be regularly monitored and reviewed and that there need to be clear reporting procedures on the implementation of University policy.

- 3.1 this guidance will be reviewed every four years or when there are relevant new developments in either or both of the internal and external context.
- 3.2 In cases where an allegation of minor academic misconduct is dealt with informally without the need to instigate formal proceedings under the Student Discipline Procedure there must be a written note of any meetings between the member of academic staff or examiner and the student. This must be agreed with the student and a copy should be kept on the student's departmental file so that it can be taken into account in the event of related disciplinary action or in determining aggravating factors should there be any further instances of academic dishonesty by the student.
- 3.3 The Head of Department/School, as the Disciplinary Officer authorised under the Student Discipline Procedure, must provide the Manager of the Quality Assurance Committee with formal notification of all incidents of academic dishonesty dealt within Departments/Schools and all incidents referred to the Chief Operating Officer. This enables appropriate monitoring and recording to take place, and other administrative procedures to be properly applied.
- 3.4 The Committee Manager to the Quality Assurance Committee must be informed of the outcome of all cases dealt with under the Student Discipline Procedure.
- 3.5 So that appropriate action can be taken, the Committee Manager of Quality Assurance Committee will prepare an annual report on:
 - 3.5.1 the types, frequency and distribution across the institution of major instances of academic dishonesty;
 - 3.5.2 whether plagiarism detection software was used;
 - 3.5.3 the penalties applied in each case; and
 - 3.5.4 significant trends over time, including where there are either extremely low or extremely high incidences of academic dishonesty;
- 3.6 A report should be made annually to the Quality Assurance Committee on whether University policy and procedures in this area have been followed.

APPENDIX 1: EXAMPLES OF ACADEMIC DISHONESTY

Cheating in written examinations:

- illicit copying or communicating;
- possession of prohibited materials;
- unapproved use of electronic devices to store and retrieve information.

False candidature or impersonation:

- impersonating another student in an examination or engaging someone else to take one's place in an examination;
- undertaking a piece of coursework for another student or engaging someone else to undertake a piece of coursework in one's place.

False declaration

- making a false declaration in order to receive special consideration by an Examination Board/Committee or Appeals Committee or to obtain extensions to deadlines or exemption from work.

Fabrication or falsification of data/experimental results/statistics/references

- presentation of data, experimental results, statistics or references in laboratory reports, essays, projects, presentations, dissertations, theses or other assessed work which have been invented or altered by the student.

Plagiarism

- using someone else's work (ie words, ideas, results, tables or diagrams) whether taken from print, electronic or internet sources without acknowledgement whether by direct copying, paraphrasing or summarizing.

Duplication

- submitting the same piece of work for two different assignments/degree programmes. – even though it is the student's own work which is being reproduced this is a form of plagiarism and should be treated as such.

Collusion

- agreeing with another student either to submit work produced collaboratively or to copy the other student's work. This is a form of plagiarism in which the individual whose work is being plagiarised gives consent for this to happen. In such cases both parties are committing an offence.

APPENDIX 2: EXAMPLES OF MINOR INFRINGEMENTS

Every case of academic dishonesty is potentially serious. Each case should be considered on its own merits taking all mitigating and aggravating circumstances into account.

Examples of incidences of academic dishonesty which might be considered as minor infringements because of the circumstances are given below:

PLAGIARISM

Level of Study/Lack of Understanding

In his or her first assignment, a first year student fails to put quotation marks around a passage taken from another author, or to cite that author in the text, but does give the reference in the bibliography.

This could be seen as an example of poor scholarship and the student could be referred to the Department/School/Faculty for advice on good academic practice.

A number of students have discussed their first piece of group work and several use the same arguments and examples without acknowledging that these were developed collectively.

This could be the result of not understanding how the particular piece of group work is to be assessed and the students could be referred to the Department/School/Faculty for further training on group working and peer group assessment.

The inclusion by a student at the start of second year of a table taken from the slides provided by the lecturer without acknowledgement.

It could be that the student has not understood that plagiarism applies also to diagrams and tables and not just to text and he or she could be referred to the Department/School/Faculty for advice on good academic practice.

BUT

Similar instances of poor scholarship in the work of students in their third or fourth year of study, or in the work of students, at whatever stage of study, who have already been called in for a discussion of similar issues will require a greater penalty.

Scale and Extent

The student has included a few short extracts (one or two lines) which are not cited or in quotation marks and which are not in the bibliography, but the bulk of the work is properly referenced.

This could just be sloppy scholarship resulting from inadequate note taking or oversight and the student could be referred to the Department/School/Faculty for advice on good academic practice

BUT

The inclusion of whole paragraphs, extended sections of texts, tables and diagrams without acknowledgement will require a greater penalty

CHEATING IN EXAMINATIONS

A student has brought unauthorized material into the exam hall. This has been placed in full sight on the desk and there is no evidence in the examination script that the student has referred to it during the course of the examination, and no evidence that the student intended to deceive. This could just be an oversight and the student could be admonished and reminded of the regulations governing attendance at examinations.

BUT

If the student has attempted to conceal the unauthorized material and there is evidence in the examination script that it may have been referred to then that will require a greater penalty.

APPENDIX 3: EXAMPLES OF CASES WHERE FORMAL DISCIPLINE PROCEDURES MAY BE INITIATED

- i. In the case of a **first minor infringement/offence** which could be explained as poor scholarship or misunderstanding of citation/referencing rules by a student in the **first or second year of study**, after speaking with the student, academic staff, in consultation with the Head of Department (or equivalent) may decide to caution the student, mark only that part of the assignment which is deemed to be the student's own work, and refer him or her to the Department/School/Faculty for advice on academic writing and how to avoid plagiarism, but take no formal action.
- ii. In the case of a **second minor infringement/offence** committed by a student in the **first or second year of study**, or where a student denies any allegations of academic misconduct, the Head of Department (or equivalent) has authority to caution a student and refer him or her to the Department/school/Faculty for advice or to initiate formal proceedings under the Student Discipline Procedure. The potential penalties that may be imposed are described in the Student Discipline Procedure.
- iii. In the case of a **minor infringement/offence by a student in a later year of study** the Head of Department (or equivalent) has authority to deal with the matter informally by cautioning the student and referring him/her to the Department/School/Faculty for advice on academic writing and how to avoid plagiarism Alternatively, they may initiate formal proceedings under the Student Discipline Procedure. The potential penalties that may be imposed are described in the Student Discipline Procedure.
- iv. in the case of **major infringement** or of **repeated minor infringements**, after speaking with the student, the Head of Department (or equivalent) will normally initiate formal proceedings under the Student Discipline Procedure.

APPENDIX 4: PENALTIES IMPOSED RECENTLY BY THE SENATE DISCIPLINE COMMITTEE

Example 1

It was alleged that coursework submitted by a *first year undergraduate student* for two classes had substantial elements plagiarised from identified sources. The student, who had admitted to both cases of plagiarism stating lack of time as the explanation for this, did not attend the hearing. Noting that the student had not submitted information about any mitigating circumstances the Committee upheld the case and resolved that:

- The marks for the two pieces of coursework be set to zero
- The student be formally reprimanded
- The student be suspended from the course for the following session

Example 2

It was alleged that coursework submitted by a *third year part-time undergraduate student* for two classes had substantial elements plagiarised from identified sources. The student did not attend in person but was represented by the Ask Advisor from USSA who circulated a statement from the student including details of mitigating circumstances. Although the Committee was sympathetic to the student's circumstances it upheld the case and resolved that:

- The mark for the two pieces of coursework be set to zero, and
- The student be required to withdraw from the course.

Example 3

It was alleged that coursework submitted by a *third year undergraduate student*, for two classes had elements plagiarised from identified sources. The student attended the hearing and admitted copying the work of others but averred lack of awareness that this constituted plagiarism. The Committee upheld the case and resolved that:

- The marks for the assignments in question be set to zero
- The student be not permitted to proceed to Honours year
- Should the student's academic record require re-attendance at the current year of study, the Department/School/Faculty should ensure that the student received personal tuition regarding plagiarism.

Example 4

It was alleged that the dissertation submitted by a *final year undergraduate student* had elements plagiarised from identified sources. The student attended the hearing. The student did not dispute the allegation but stated that the method used for note-taking had led inadvertently to the use of text from a book as the student's own work. The Committee resolved that:

- The mark for the dissertation should be set to zero
- The student should not be awarded an honours degree.

Example 5

It was alleged that the project submitted by a *taught postgraduate student* had substantial elements plagiarised from identified sources. The student attended the hearing with three representatives and gave details of mitigating factors. The Committee upheld the case and resolved that:

- The student be formally reprimanded
- The mark for the assignment be set to zero

Given the mitigating factors presented, the Committee also resolved that:

- The student be permitted to resubmit the assignment and that the subsequent mark be recorded as a second attempt
- Prior to resubmission, the student should meet with the department/School/Faculty to confirm the content of the resubmission, the rules on academic dishonesty and the timescale for resubmission
- This instance of academic dishonesty should not bar progression to the masters qualification which should be judged on academic merit.

Example 6

It was alleged that the final dissertation submitted by a *distance learning taught postgraduate* had substantial elements plagiarised from identified sources. The student did not attend the hearing and declined the use of video-conferencing facilities. Consideration was given to aggravating circumstances. The Committee upheld the case and resolved that:

- The student not be permitted to graduate with the Masters award but be considered for the maximum award of Postgraduate Diploma
- The student be formally reprimanded.