



POLICY ON PLAGIARISM

POLICY REFERENCE: SEN/005

Office responsible:	Director: Teaching, Learning & Staff Development		
Approved by:	COUNCIL		
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1. Background

The university is responsible for developing and promoting academic integrity and improving trust in scholarly work, and for preventing plagiarism in educational and research material.

2. Purpose and rationale

Plagiarism constitutes a breach of academic integrity and compromises and undermines the values and processes by which knowledge is created, shared and evaluated. Such breach not only casts suspicion upon the integrity of the individuals involved, but also damages the reputation of the academic community. The university therefore has a responsibility to uphold academic integrity and to promote trust in scholarly work undertaken at the Institution and to prevent plagiarism within the Institution.

The Policy's premise is that acts of plagiarism do not necessarily stem from dishonesty and therefore adopts a nuanced approach that allows for formative, corrective and punitive approaches depending upon the particular circumstances. Effective policy implementation

will also enhance the university's image as a quality academic institution. It is therefore important that a set out processes and procedures be drafted for creating awareness of plagiarism issues, for educating and monitoring, and for acting upon transgressions in a uniform manner across the Institution.

The Policy is necessary for the following reasons:

- a) To get a shared and clear understanding of the nature of plagiarism
- b) To emphasise the need to educate the university community about plagiarism and its impact on them and the Institution
- c) To provide for monitoring, detection and prevention mechanisms and processes
- d) To establish uniform procedures for dealing with instances of plagiarism that comply with the principles of natural justice
- e) To contribute to academic integrity within the Institution
- f) To improve the quality of research at the university
- g) To augment the attributes of the university's graduates
- h) To enhance the university's academic reputation

The Policy should be read together with institutional codes of conduct, the Research Ethics Policy and the Disciplinary Code for students¹. Referencing conventions within a particular academic discipline should also be considered.

3. Scope

This Policy applies to all persons who perform academic and administrative work at or on behalf of the university, where such work can reasonably be seen to be associated with the university and where the act of plagiarism has impacted or has the potential to impact upon the university's academic and administrative reputation and/or standing. Without limiting its scope, the Policy has particular relevance to the conduct of academic assistants and tutors, research fellows and associates, staff of entities affiliated or associated with the Institution, and undergraduate and postgraduate students.

¹ Some of these policies are being developed

4. Definitions

- a) **“Category A Transgressions”** First-time, minor infringements, often associated more with incorrect citation and referencing. Such instances usually stem from ignorance or lack of academic maturity and are seldom intentional. Such cases are usually restricted to undergraduate students in their first or second years of study.
- b) **“Category B Transgressions”** Repeated Category A offences, or to relatively minor offences at a more senior academic level than second year; (b) first-time, more serious offences, irrespective of a student’s year of study, where the offence would not attract a penalty of more than the loss of a Duly Performed (DP) certificate; (c) first-time minor offences perpetrated by postgraduate students. Category B offences are not necessarily committed intentionally.
- c) **“Category C Transgressions”** Major, serious infringements by students; in circumstances where they acted intentionally or negligently.
- d) **“Ethics”** A set of principles of correct conduct, in this instance, in the academic environment of teaching and learning and research. It involves morality and specific moral choices to be made by a student, lecturer or researcher. Ethics are reflected in rules and standards directing the actions and conduct of a person or the members of the university.
- e) **“Plagiarism”** Plagiarism is the act of submitting or presenting work, study material, assignments, research work or inventions of someone else, irrespective of its source, as one’s own creation; in some instances, even where credit or acknowledgement is given to the original source.² Plagiarism where a researcher makes use of his or her own previously-published work, without proper reference to the original work, is called self-plagiarism. (Note that fault is not part of the definition. A person’s intention, negligence or innocence is not relevant to determining whether conduct constitutes plagiarism.³)
- f) **“Plagiarism Detection”** Processes and procedures used to identify acts of plagiarism with the assistance of relevant detection tools such as anti-plagiarism software.
- g) **“Plagiarism Prevention”** Steps that reduce acts of plagiarism through education, creation of awareness, prevention and monitoring.

² Examples of conduct that may fall within the definition include:

- Using the direct words of another without using quotation marks (even where the passage is referenced)
- Unacknowledged copying of a sentence or two of text; or copying more extensive blocks of text
- Syndication of a single piece of work by more than one student (except where the assignment task is a legitimate group assignment)
- Borrowing and using another person’s assignment (with or without his or her knowledge and permission)
- Submitting an entire essay from another person or from the Internet; or infringing copyright

- h) **“Postgraduate student”** A student registered to do a postgraduate diploma, or an Honours, Master’s or doctoral degree, irrespective of whether it is a coursework or research qualification.
- i) **“Researcher”** A person who researches at the university and/or who produces research output in the name of or under the auspices of the university, irrespective of whether he or she is a staff member or student and could include Research Fellows, research associates, collaborators, co-authors and external supervisors of postgraduate students.
- j) **“Undergraduate student”** A student who is not a postgraduate student.
- k) **“Copyright”** is the specific intellectual property right, which an author acquires in accordance with the Copyright Act, No. 98 of 1978 in respect of a protected work. Copyright infringement includes the infringement of the economic rights of the right holder and the moral rights of the author

5. Guiding principles and values

The following principles govern the university’s approach to the identification and management of plagiarism and will inform any decisions and processes taken to ensure compliance with this Policy:

- a) The university has a responsibility to uphold academic integrity and to promote trust in scholarly work undertaken at the Institution.
- b) Academic activity within the Institution shall be conducted with scholarly integrity and excellence. Plagiarism constitutes a breach of academic integrity and compromises and undermines the values and processes by which knowledge is created, shared and evaluated.
- c) Instances of plagiarism cast suspicion not only upon the integrity of the individuals involved, but also upon the reputation of the university and its academic community.
- d) Plagiarism is not only an issue in the academic sphere. The principles apply equally for ensuring that administrative work is conducted with integrity.
- e) Acts of plagiarism do not necessarily stem from dishonesty. In a society where preparation for academic endeavour is inadequate, different levels of academic maturity should be recognized and policies and rules should cater for such different situations by taking in to account, in appropriate instances, possible lack of awareness of applicable standards and inadequate academic preparation in respect of the referencing protocols.
- f) In a learning institution, the obligation for creating awareness and educating students about plagiarism/copyright and its impact on them and the institution is paramount. Although plagiarism prevention is a group effort, academic staff members have a particular obligation to in this regard.

- g) Plagiarism cases are not all the same and circumstances may dictate that ostensibly the same conduct should be treated differently.

³However, these factors become material when determining the nature of any remedial or punitive action.

- h) A nuanced developmental approach should be adopted in formulating remedial action and it must at all times be borne in mind that in a learning environment space should be made to accommodate mistakes and/or breaches of rules.
- i) The precepts of the Constitution and the principles of natural justice must govern procedures for acting upon transgressions. Accordingly, rules and the consequences of their breach must be certain, clear and known to the alleged transgressor; and compliance and remedial standards and procedures shall be uniform, transparent and evenly applied.
- j) Compliance oversight should be conducted in a spirit of promoting research endeavours and the dissemination of results.
- k) **In a learning institution, there is to ensure that students understand the core concepts of plagiarism, intellectual property, copyright and fair dealing.**

6. Structures for overseeing compliance of this policy

- a) The university's research ethics oversight structures comprise the following:
- Senate
 - The University Research Ethics Committee (UREC). (*Senate in the absence of this committee*)
 - Faculty Boards (*Senate in the absence of this committee*)
 - Faculty Research Ethics Committees (FRECs) (*Senate in the absence of this committee*)
 - Committees and Tribunals constituted in term of this clause
- b) The structures mentioned in clause above (a) operate as a collective and any of them may, without derogating from their overall responsibilities, perform certain of their functions and obligations through other committees, or special ad hoc committees or tribunals set up for specific purposes.
- c) The committees established to implement this Policy have discretion to deviate from strict application of the relevant ethical guidelines where exceptional circumstances or common

sense dictate, provided that the basic principles underlying this Policy are not compromised.

- d) Senate and the committees that oversee plagiarism focus primarily on research conducted at the university and the degrees and/or programmes that the university offers. They have the usual powers associated with dealing with academic matters. Where findings may impact upon contractual relations between the university and the person involved, additional processes in terms of the appropriate codes would have to be instituted.
- e) Senate has overall oversight in respect of research integrity, but may delegate this function, in terms of this and other policies⁴, to the Research Ethics Committee (UREC) and other committees that are accountable to that Committee [e.g. Faculty Research Ethics Committees (FRECs)].
- f) The university Research Ethics Committee (UREC) implements, oversees and monitors research integrity at the university, including plagiarism, and shall
- Provide guidance on the interpretation and implementation of this Policy
 - Receive faculty reports regarding Category A and B plagiarism in their faculties
 - Act upon Category C transgressions
 - Constitute ad hoc Plagiarism Tribunals to deal with specific instances
 - Where necessary and/or appropriate, constitute ad hoc Plagiarism Tribunals to deal with specific instances
 - Annually report to Senate on matters concerning plagiarism
 - Periodically review the content and the implementation of this Policy
- g) Departmental Plagiarism Committees are committees constituted by Heads of Department to oversee and implement this Policy within a department, and to deal with Category A transgressions. The membership will vary according to the size and needs of the Department.
- h) Faculty Research Ethics Committees (FRECs) oversee and implement this Policy within faculties, receive departmental reports regarding Category A plagiarism cases and act upon Category B transgressions.

- i) The Chairperson of the UREC shall constitute a Plagiarism Tribunal to deal with Category C transgressions.

- j) A person who has been found guilty of a Category C transgression, may appeal the Plagiarism Tribunal's decision. In such instances a Plagiarism Appeals Tribunal shall be constituted comprising the Vice-Chancellor or a Deputy Vice-Chancellor as the Chairperson and two members of the Senate Plagiarism Panel who were not part of the original decision. The Plagiarism Appeals Tribunal shall report its findings to Senate via the UREC. Subject to the overriding authority of Senate, its decisions shall be final and no further appeals shall be entertained.

⁴ For example, the Research Ethics Policy (need to be developed).

7. Roles and responsibilities

7.1 Academic staff

Academic staff members are responsible for creating awareness and for putting preventative measures in place.

All lecturers must be able to use and apply programs used to detect plagiarism

Acts of plagiarism must be reported to the Deans of Faculties (Programme Heads) and the Deans (Programme Heads) will ensure that the Plagiarism Policy and procedures are duly implemented.

Supervisors of postgraduate students and their research work are expected to follow the university policy on postgraduate supervisory practice and should, when reviewing drafts of students' work, be vigilant in identifying potential plagiarism; and insist on students attending workshops that will familiarize them with best practice and the use of plagiarism detection software and databases.

Place copyright and plagiarism warnings prominently in learning material.

7.2 Students

During the first two years of study students must follow orientation and awareness programmes to educate them about plagiarism.

All postgraduate students should follow the procedure to check scholarly work for possible plagiarism where after a Plagiarism Declaration Form must be completed.

7.3 Academic support

The Library and Information Services Division and the Information Communication Technology Division will co-operate to ensure availability of orientation sessions, information guides and programmes, as well as software licensing and maintenance of approved detection programmes. The Library shall also place copyright and plagiarism warnings prominently in study printing areas.

7.4 Faculty and Departmental Plagiarism Monitoring and Prevention

FRECs are responsible for overseeing and coordinating awareness and preventative activities within their faculties and shall liaise with the designated persons in each department to ensure that appropriate steps are taken to implement this Policy.

8. Dealing with plagiarism

8.1 Awareness and training

- a) Staff and students must be made aware of plagiarism/copyright and its consequences and the importance that the university attaches to the detection and prevention of plagiarism. The educational role is an on-going and shared one and it is incumbent upon University and faculty managers, Programme Heads, lecturers, supervisors and tutors to make a concerted and sustained effort to make the university community aware of their obligations.
- b) It is particularly important that students are alerted to the nature of plagiarism, are informed that it constitutes a serious offence, and are informed about the disciplinary procedures that are in place for dealing with suspected cases. Such information should not only be provided to them at the beginning of their studies, but there should be constant reminders afterwards.
- c) The following specific tasks should be undertaken:
 - The Research Office and Library staff shall conduct regular plagiarism and copyright workshops for staff and students
 - Faculty Research Ethics Committees shall supplement the university workshops with faculty-specific programmes

- Faculties shall expose students (at all levels) to the concept and the consequences, and train them on the citation, referencing and presentation conventions applicable to their disciplines.
- Faculty and departmental student handbooks and study guides must contain information on plagiarism/copyright and its consequences, and how material from such sources as books, articles, the Internet and the work of other students, may and may not be used in the preparation of assignments, dissertations, publications and theses.
- All postgraduate students must attend at least one workshop on plagiarism and the contents of this Policy during the course of their studies towards a postgraduate degree, which shall become a prerequisite (DP requirement) for obtaining a postgraduate degree.
- Ensure that every student has a copy of the university's plagiarism policy. These can be obtained from all the library.

8.2 Preventative measures

- a) The university will purchase the rights to use acceptable and lawful text-matching, similarity-checking software, or to use an internet-based text-matching database to assist staff and students in cross-checking material and identifying situations where submitted material matches previously-submitted material or previously-published sources.
- b) Members of staff are compelled, in terms of their professional commitment to best academic practice, to be on the lookout for cases of plagiarism, and to deal with any such cases in accordance with this Policy and its procedures. Staff should be open to various detection and monitoring approaches.
- c) Monitoring and detection material should not be used only to detect possible plagiarism in final products. In line with the developmental and educational purpose of this Policy, such mechanisms should also serve to assist student authors to improve their writing and referencing skills and to prevent instances of plagiarism in the final product.
- d) In compliance with this principle of promoting academic integrity, all postgraduate material submitted for final examination must be accompanied by a statement not

only that the material constitutes the author's original work, but preferably also that it had been subjected to the university's text-matching and/or similarity-checking procedures to confirm that the work is original.

8.3 Punitive measures

- a) The principle of legality, a standard principle underpinning punitive action, must be applied in all cases. In terms of this principle, a person should not be sanctioned in respect of rules that did not exist at the time the conduct was perpetrated, or that are not known to that person. It is therefore important, before punitive steps are taken, that the entire University community, staff and students, are made aware of this Policy, the plagiarism concept and the consequences of committing an act of plagiarism.
- b) In compliance with the principles of natural justice, punitive action must be uniform, consistent, impartial and equitable in their application. In addition, given the academic nature of the offence, punitive action should have a strong developmental focus, while not ignoring the other disciplinary objectives of punishment, which are to reprimand and discipline the individual, to regulate that person's behaviour and the behaviour of the university community generally, and to deter the person and others from engaging in such conduct in future.
- c) In line with the purpose of this Policy's, a gradual, incremental approach to punishing acts of plagiarism should normally be followed, determined by the nature of the offending conduct and the academic maturity of the individual involved.

9. Record-keeping and reporting

- 9.1 All academic departments shall keep records of all cases of plagiarism that have occurred in their departments.
- 9.2 Each department shall ensure that
 - a) The names of students involved in Category A cases
 - b) The plagiarism findings of category B and C cases and copies of documents associated with the cases are reported and/or delivered to the Research Office immediately upon finalization of such cases.
 - Plagiarism Tribunals and Plagiarism Appeals Tribunals shall similarly report their findings to the Research Office.

- The Registrar shall inform the Research Office of any decisions of Senate and Council regarding plagiarism matters.
- The Research Office shall record all cases on a database set up for this purpose.
- This database may be accessed by Heads of Department (or their authorised nominees) to allow departments to ascertain whether a student has committed serious plagiarism before.
- In February of each year, the Research Office shall compile a report, to be submitted to UREC and thereafter, Senate, on incidences of Category B and C plagiarism across the university in the previous academic year.
- In appropriate instances, the Registrar's Division and the Director, Human Resources, shall endorse student academic records and staff personal files and maintain the records on file.

10. Implementation and oversight responsibilities

- a) The project owner of this Policy is the Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Research and Innovation or Academic, who shall ensure that the Policy is presented for revision and review at the appropriate time.
- b) Oversight and implementation of this Policy vests in the UREC and the FRECs, but Senate has overarching oversight responsibility.
- c) Management and administration of this Policy and rests with the Office of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Research and Innovation and the Research Office.

11. Policy review

- a) Council shall review the Policy on a three-yearly cycle.
- b) On recommendation of the Research Ethics Committee, Senate may review and amend this policy at any time, in which event, the amendments take effect on the date of the Senate approval.
- c) The Policy owner may review or amend annexures that contain or illustrate forms or documents for effective administration and/or management at any time.
- d) All persons affected by the Policy must be notified of any amendments.

- e) Nothing in this clause shall prevent Council from reviewing this Policy at any time prior to the stipulated three-year cycle, in which event a new cycle shall commence from the date of such review.

12. Acknowledgements and references

This document draws from similar policies developed at Rhodes University, Fort Hare and the University of Zululand all of which were authored by Professor Rob Midgely current DVC Research at the University of Zululand.

Inter Academy Council Responsible Conduct in the Global Research Enterprise: A Policy Report (2012)

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