

UNIVERSITY OF ST ANDREWS

AVOIDING ACADEMIC MISCONDUCT ALLEGATIONS

STUDENT GUIDE

There are some activities by students in higher education that most people would find easy to identify as "cheating". For example these might include someone writing notes in their pencil-case to carry into an examination, someone buying work over the internet to submit as coursework, and someone submitting for assessment as their own work an essay that their brother wrote two years before. These, we hope, are obviously dishonest. At this University these actions are covered by the University's Academic Misconduct Policy. In such cases, serious penalties would be likely to be imposed if the student were found guilty. But what about less obvious and possibly inadvertent misconduct that might be regarded as "cheating", and in particular the issue of plagiarism? The notes below are intended to provide some guidance.

The University revises its policy from time to time, and these guidance notes are written following the 2009 revisions. As these guidance notes are intended to be of use to students with regard to avoiding allegations of plagiarism in general, there has been little need to change the contents of these notes with the advent of the new policy. However, we have taken the opportunity to explain some issues more fully. The policy covers misconduct in both examinations and course work, and apply to both undergraduate and postgraduate students. In particular, students should note that a claim of ignorance of the University's expectations on academic conduct is not an acceptable defence.

Plagiarism

Intentional plagiarism, i.e. the deliberate submission of someone else's work as though it were one's own, is dishonest. But plagiarism may occur unintentionally through poor work practices, as students may for example submit work that contains the words or ideas of others without realising that they need proper acknowledgement. The University's Academic Misconduct policy refers to actions rather than intent, and a piece of work that contains plagiarised material will be subject to a penalty irrespective of whether or not there was an intention to plagiarise. It is consequently very important for you to understand how to avoid producing work that contains plagiarised material.

Guide for Students

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The avoidance of plagiarism is also important in the wider community. We have a duty to others to acknowledge their input to works that we produce; we should not be seeking to claim credit for the ideas or analysis of others. One of the difficulties we have in higher education is in defining the line between plagiarism and the creative use of material from multiple sources.

Copying and pasting material from a web site or book into a piece of written work is likely to be regarded as plagiarism, even if it is just one sentence that is copied. While students are certainly expected to read the work of others, their written work should be in their own words, and the sources of information they are using should be acknowledged in a footnote, specific reference list, or bibliography depending on the subject's requirements. Merely changing a word here and there through a copied paragraph is not enough either, and nor is taking the structure of another person's article and rephrasing the argument (known as paraphrasing). At this level of education we expect students to take ideas and information from various sources and work them up along with their own ideas and interpretations into an original piece of writing, documenting the sources they have used and distinguishing their own ideas from those of other people.

If you wish to include material from one of your sources word-for-word, then it should be included within quotation marks and have its source clearly stated. This gives credit where it is due, and allows the reader to follow up the material presented. (This is quite normal practice in some disciplines, but is much less widely used in others). If you wish to use a picture or diagram from one of your sources, and if this is allowed by copyright law, then this is acceptable within the University's Academic Misconduct policy as long as you specifically acknowledge the source. For some disciplines, at least, this acknowledgement should be in the figure caption.

Earlier in your education it may have been entirely acceptable to find information from one or more sources and to copy these out with a few linking sentences into a report of some form. At University this approach is no longer acceptable. Most pieces of written work that you may be asked to tackle will involve some analysis or explanation from you, helping you to develop the higher-level skills of synthesis of an argument and explaining concepts to others. If at any stage you are not sure about what is allowable, please ask those teaching staff associated with the assignment for advice. We urge students to take care to understand how the staff in their Schools interpret plagiarism in their subject areas.

Plagiarism is not confined to inappropriate copying of the work of known authors. Plagiarism can also occur if students copy material from one or more other students. We point out that allowing someone to copy your work is also an offence under this University's policy, so both the copier and the original

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author may face proceedings. This misconduct could take the form of copying results of a laboratory experiment, part of an essay, or part of a computer program, for example. Here again there may be "grey areas". In many instances students are encouraged to discuss their work with other students, and such discussions may lead to modification in their own work, to their legitimate benefit. There may also be occasions where students are asked to work in a group and to submit the results of collaborative work.

We note that different disciplines have different conventions on how referencing should take place. In some disciplines the Harvard referencing system is used, in others numbers are inserted into the text to refer to the literature. Using the "wrong" referencing system for your discipline may reduce the grade you receive for your work, but it should not normally give rise to an allegation of academic misconduct.

On occasion students may find it difficult to manage their time. This may lead to a temptation to take "short cuts" in the preparation of work rather than risk a penalty for late submission of work. Such short cuts might include not keeping notes of the sources of their material, or even submitting a piece of work copied from a book, internet source, or another student. However, it should be borne in mind that the possible outcomes for cases of academic misconduct can be much more serious than for late submission of work. Please do remember that if work has to be submitted late for a good reason you can always approach a member of staff about this.

If you are ever in doubt as to what is allowed, please ask the teaching staff associated with the assignment.

Aiding and Abetting

As noted above, allowing someone to copy your work can be an offence under the University's policy. There are occasions where collaborative work is requested and is desirable. However, allowing someone to copy your work for submission and submit it as though it were their own is likely to give rise to an offence by both parties.

Falsification

In any academic study the integrity of the researcher is vital. Any data that are used in a lab report, population study, or economic report should be real and representative. It is entirely unacceptable to fabricate or alter data to fill in a gap in a graph, or to invent results of an experiment and then report them as genuine measurements.

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Procedures and Penalties

You should be aware that the University may use a variety of means to try to detect cases of plagiarism, including the “Turnitin” software tool. Students may be asked to submit their work to Turnitin directly or via WebCT or MMS, and staff may submit student work directly to a Turnitin system for checking. Turnitin may keep a record of submitted work for checking against future submissions.

Some years ago the University’s response to cases of alleged plagiarism depended on the “intent” of the student. This is no longer the case. “Not being aware that this is an offence” or “you were not aware that the piece of work was not referenced correctly” is no longer a defence that can be used successfully.

First cases of academic misconduct will often be handled by an adjudication board at School level, and penalties for students found “guilty” can range from a written warning to a grade of zero for that piece of work. Major or repeated cases of misconduct will be taken to a University board, and there the penalties for those found “guilty” can be as significant as discontinuation of studies at the University. At these adjudication boards (School and University) a student has the right to be accompanied by a representative who may be a person who is either presently matriculated as a student, or is an employee of the University Court of the University of St Andrews or who is elected as a sabbatical officer or is an employee of the Students' Association of the University of St Andrews. There is a right of appeal against all decisions, provided it is within the terms of the agreed University procedures.

Further Information

June Knowles at the University's central Learning and Teaching Service (SALTIRE) has produced guidance on how to avoid committing academic misconduct. This material is available online as a WebCT course called SOAR, which is in your list of available courses when you log in to the WebCT system. There are also links to various academic writing web sites from the Study Support area of the SALTIRE web pages.

Ian Cupples as education advocate for students at the Students' Association can give advice to students and may be able to accompany them to academic misconduct hearings. His contact details may be found at www.yourunion.net/people/content/196785/education_advocate/

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The Students' Association joins with the wider University in trying to assist students to avoid behaving in a way that might lead to allegations of academic misconduct. The Association has web pages on this topic at www.yourunion.net/content/37605/academic_misconduct_student_guide/

There are various useful sources of online guidance on plagiarism and other academic misconduct issues. Sources that students may find useful include the following from the Universities of Edinburgh, Leeds, and Alberta:-

- www.acaffairs.ed.ac.uk/Administration/GuidanceInformation/AcademicBestPractice/Plagiarism/StudentGuidance.htm
- www.ldu.leeds.ac.uk/plagiarism/
- www.library.ualberta.ca/guides/plagiarism/handouts/index.cfm

The Leeds University Library also has useful pages on different styles of referencing:-

<http://library.leeds.ac.uk/info/200232/referencing>

Please note that the guidance notes above are merely advice concerning the Academic Misconduct policy last revised in late December 2009 and approved by the University's Teaching Learning and Assessment Committee. All students are expected to be aware of the policy and to abide by it at all times.

www.st-andrews.ac.uk/students/rules/academicmisconduct/

The Academic Misconduct policy must be taken as the definitive source of information, not this guidance note.

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