Good academic practice: Guidance for staff

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UNIVERSITY OF ST ANDREWS

ACADEMIC GOOD PRACTICE AND HOW TO DEAL WITH ACADEMIC MISCONDUCT ALLEGATIONS

GUIDANCE FOR STAFF

1. How should I use these FAQs?

These FAQs are merely advice concerning the [Policy on Good Academic Practice](#), which has been approved by the University's Learning and Teaching Committee.

All staff are expected to be aware of this policy and to abide by it at all times.

The Policy on Good Academic Practice must be taken as the definitive source of information.

2. Why do I need to read these FAQs?

As a member of academic staff you should be aware that the University of St Andrews takes academic misconduct very seriously and that there are strict processes to follow in the case of suspected academic misconduct.

3. What is good academic practice and why is it important?

All work submitted by undergraduate and postgraduate students is expected to represent good academic practice. As outlined by the University's Training in Good Academic Practice:

> Good academic practice is about approaching and completing your academic work with integrity. Fundamental values of academic integrity include honesty, responsibility, fairness, justice, and (self) respect for your work, learning and ultimately your degree. These are the values promoted by the University of St Andrews, the academic community of which you are a member. As a member of this community you are accessing, sharing and discussing others' works, concepts and ideas, from which you will develop your own knowledge.
>
> It is important that within this community all members are judged on their individual academic abilities, and that no student is allowed unfairly to take advantage over others, to affect the security and integrity of the assessment process, or to diminish the reliability and quality of a St Andrews degree. In short, it is important that no

student participates in any form of academic misconduct but that, instead, they develop good academic practices which promote integrity, character and a work ethic worthy of the awarded degree. (University of St Andrews, 2018)

Good academic practice is therefore the responsible use of data, sources, evidence and other information, however derived, in academic work. It includes proper citation and referencing in written work, responsible use of experimental data, acknowledgement of sources, etc. Good academic practice is important in the wider academic community. Students have a duty to others to acknowledge their input to works that they produce, and should not be seeking to claim credit for the ideas or analysis of others.

Therefore at this level of education the University expects 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.

4. Why is addressing academic misconduct important?

We have a duty as members of staff in the University of St Andrews to educate our students in the values of the academy, which include adherence to good academic practice. If we fail to address potential cases of academic misconduct we are failing our students.

Academic integrity is fundamental to the values promoted by the University. It is important that all students be judged on their ability, and that no student be allowed to gain an advantage unfairly over others to affect the security and integrity of the assessment process, or to diminish the reliability and quality of a St Andrews degree. All matriculated students of the University sign up to the *Sponsio Academica* and Honour Code, undertaking to read and abide by this policy.

5. How do my students learn about good academic practice?

All students matriculated in the University of St Andrews must complete the on-line training in good academic practice and any School specific training or materials available. Members of staff should be familiar with any School specific requirements and be able to refer students to the School Academic Misconduct Officer for more detailed advice.

6. Who in my School will know more about academic misconduct?

All Schools have a nominated Academic Misconduct Officer who is responsible for dealing with allegations of Academic Misconduct in the School. If the AMO is unavailable then the Director of Teaching will also be familiar with the policy and its implementation.

7. What is academic misconduct?

Some major areas of academic misconduct identified in the Policy on Good Academic Practice are:

- plagiarism;
- false citation;
- aiding and abetting;
- falsification of data;
- multiple submission;
- cheating in exams and;
- contract cheating.

8. Is it not reasonable to expect students to know about academic misconduct from previous education?

Students come to St Andrews with a wide variety of earlier educational experience. Practices that were deemed acceptable at lower levels of education or in a different cultural context may not be acceptable in the University of St Andrews. We cannot therefore assume a full understanding of the nature of academic misconduct on the part of students entering the University at either postgraduate or undergraduate level. For this reason there is compulsory on-line training for all matriculating students.

9. What is plagiarism?

Plagiarism is the submission of someone else's work as though it were one's own. 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. Close paraphrase of a source might also count as plagiarism if there is no proper acknowledgement. A piece of work that contains plagiarised material may be subject to a penalty even if there were no intention to plagiarise. It is consequently very

important for students to understand how to avoid producing work that contains plagiarised material.

10. What is false citation?

Sources should be cited accurately, fully and in accordance with disciplinary conventions. False citation is the use of incorrect citation or acknowledgment of a source. It includes the citation of sources that were not used to prepare the academic work in a bibliography or other list of references.

11. What is aiding and abetting?

Aiding and Abetting is a form of academic misconduct in which a student provides any form of assistance to a fellow student which enables the fellow student to have an unfair advantage over his/her peers. Aiding and abetting includes:

- collusion with another student during an examination or class test
- providing one's own work to another student in a form that could be submitted for marking
- providing material gained from another source including the unauthorised distribution of recorded material
- writing an essay for a student (either an entire essay or part of an essay)

A student who allows someone to copy their work also commits an offence under this University's policy, so both the copier and the original 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.

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. However, allowing someone to copy work for submission and submit it as though it were their own is likely to give rise to an offence by both parties.

It is very important for staff to indicate clearly to students what level of collaboration is acceptable particularly in a group work context.

12. What is falsification of data?

Falsification of data is the inclusion of falsified, invented, or fictitious data or information in a submission, or the deliberate concealment or distortion of the true nature, origin, or function of such data or information. In any academic study the integrity of the researcher is vital. Any data 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.

It is also unacceptable to conceal data in order to improve the outcome of research.

13. What is multiple submission?

Work prepared for assessment should be submitted once and once only. Submitting the same material for more than one assessment task is academic misconduct. This applies to substantial portions of previously submitted work as well as to whole assignments.

Submitting work prepared for a different purpose outwith University study, without appropriate citation, may also constitute multiple submission.

On occasion assignments within a module may intentionally build on each other, such as submitting an outline before submitting a report. Staff constructing such an assessment should indicate clearly to students what is acceptable.

Given rules about multiple submission, schools have a duty to construct patterns of assessment that do not encourage students to engage in this practice.

14. What is contract cheating?

Contract cheating is where a student commissions or seeks to commission another party (either paid or unpaid) to perform academic work on their behalf. The Quality Assurance Agency defines contract cheating as follows:

> "'Contract cheating' happens when a third party completes work for a student who then submits it to an education provider as their own, where such input is not permitted. It is distinct from collusion, as the student contracts the third party to provide the assessment, usually a company or individual using a website to

promote themselves and receive orders. Such companies have become known as 'essay mills', even though they supply more than just essays. The common approach is for the work to be outsourced once again by the mills to individual writers."

Regardless of whether a student is successful in commissioning the work, or eventually submits the commissioned work for assessment, the act of seeking to commission work is considered contract cheating.

Even asking a friend, family member, or another individual to complete any aspect of assessed work is considered as contract cheating as a student is contracting that work out to a third party to complete it on their behalf. This does not preclude the legitimate use of proof readers by students. Students who are found to be offering essay-writing services will be dealt with under the non-academic misconduct policy.

15. What is cheating in exams?

Any attempt to gain improper advantage in the course of a University examination is academic misconduct.

An extensive list of materials permitted in examinations is maintained by the Examinations Office and may be viewed on the web:

https://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/media/teaching-and-learning/policies/examrules.pdf

If in any doubt, please speak to the Chief Invigilator of the examination venue.

16. How might staff detect plagiarism, multiple submission and contract cheating?

When marking submitted work staff should be alert to the possibility of academic misconduct. The University makes plagiarism detection software available to Schools. Staff should be aware of and follow the policy of their School for using this.

Using plagiarism detection software students may be asked to submit their work directly or via MMS, and staff may submit student work directly for checking. MMS can be set up so that all submitted work is automatically processed using plagiarism detection software. Plagiarism detection software normally keeps a record of submitted work for checking against future submissions (this record keeping can be disabled).

17. What should I do if I suspect academic misconduct?

Undergraduate (UG) and Taught Postgraduate (PGT) Students

The University has a detailed policy for ensuring fair adjudication of all cases of suspected academic misconduct. A staff member who suspects academic misconduct should draw his or her suspicion to the attention of the School Academic Misconduct Officer (AMO) who will be responsible for any further action.[1] The staff member should not in any circumstances raise the allegation directly with the student. At the point academic misconduct is suspected in a piece of work, assessment of that work should cease until investigation is complete. It is acceptable to tell the student at this stage that their work is under investigation. Cases of suspected misconduct can be considered after a grade has been formally reported and communicated to the student.

The AMO will determine:

1) if there is a case to answer;

2) if so, whether the case can be dealt with by a written warning issued by the AMO, or;

3) if not, whether it should be referred to a School or University Board.

If the AMO finds there is no case to answer, no further action is taken, and the allegation can form no part of any future investigation into academic misconduct.

Postgraduate Research (PGR) Students

Research work that has been submitted for examination or for purposes of progression (progress review, upgrade) may be the subject of an allegation of academic misconduct. Work submitted by research students for other purposes (e.g. draft chapters) cannot be dealt with under the formal procedures.

In the case of work that has been submitted for compulsory assessment prior to final submission and examination of the thesis (eg progress review), at the point academic misconduct is suspected, assessment of that work should cease until investigation is complete. Where academic misconduct is suspected by an Examining Committee in the

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[1] Schools may, with the knowledge of the relevant Dean, delegate this responsibility to Departmental level Academic Misconduct Officers.

process of examining a thesis, the examination must be suspended, and the AMO will investigate and decide if there is a case to answer.

If a research student is suspected of academic misconduct in work relating to progression (upgrade or progress review), the person raising the allegation should alert the AMO, and the following procedure will be taken by the AMO:

The AMO will determine:

    1) if there is a case to answer

    2) if so, whether the case can be dealt with by a written warning issued by the AMO, or;

    3) if not, whether it should be referred to a School or University Board.

If the AMO finds there is no case to answer, no further action is taken, and the allegation can form no part of any future investigation into academic misconduct.

If misconduct is suspected prior to the viva taking place then the viva is to be put on hold whilst the AMO investigates and decides if there is a case to answer.

18. What should I do if I suspect academic misconduct post-award?

Where academic misconduct is suspected after the award of the degree, the matter should be reported to the relevant Dean of Faculty. The Dean will then instruct either the AMO (for undergraduate and taught postgraduate awards) or an appointed investigating officer (for postgraduate research awards) who will consider the evidence and report to the Dean their findings.

19. What should I do in the case of poor academic practice, which might not amount to academic misconduct?

Distinguishing poor academic practice from academic misconduct can be difficult; if you are in doubt consult your AMO.

However, staff will regularly encounter poor academic practice which is clearly not serious enough to be defined as academic misconduct as, for example, use of a non-standard referencing system or representing accurate data with a poor choice of graph. In such instances staff should draw the issue to the attention of the student either in written feedback or through oral feedback sessions, and explain clearly what good academic practice would look like in that context. It may be appropriate to award a lower mark to reflect the poor practice.

20. Where can I get further advice?

Ultimate responsibility for the University's Good Academic Practice policy lies with the Deans. Within each School, the Head of School and the Director of Teaching have responsibility for the implementation of the policy. However, for most issues the AMO will be the most appropriate first contact.

21. Where can students go for help?

The Academic Skills Advisor in the University's central Learning and Teaching Service (CAPOD) has produced guidance on how to avoid committing academic misconduct. This material is available online as a Moodle course called Training in Good Academic Practice. There are also links to various academic writing web sites from the Study Support area of the CAPOD web pages.

22. Where can I get more help?

The Deans of Arts and Science and the Associate Deans are happy to give further guidance on any aspect of this policy and its implementation.

There are various useful sources of online guidance on plagiarism and other academic misconduct issues, collated and provided by CAPOD:

https://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/capod/students/studyskillsandadvice/

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