

The University of the West Indies

Policy on Graduate Student Plagiarism

School for Graduate Studies and Research*

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Introduction

Plagiarism represents the very antithesis of the goals of the academy. It infringes the intellectual property rights of the person whose work is plagiarized and exemplifies sloppiness at least, and intellectual dishonesty at worst, on the part of the perpetrator. This is the context in which the UWI policy outlined in the remainder of this document is set.

Definition of Plagiarism

Plagiarism is defined as the **unacknowledged use** of the words, ideas or creations of another. The principal categories of **unacknowledged use** are *unacknowledged quotation*, which is failure to credit quotations of another person's spoken or written words; and *unattributed borrowing*, which is failure to credit another person's ideas, opinions, theories, graphs or diagrams. Unattributed borrowing also includes the failure to credit another person's work when paraphrasing from that work. *Cosmetic paraphrasing* is also plagiarism. This occurs when, even with acknowledgement, the words are so close to the original that what is deemed to have been paraphrased is, in fact, a modified quote, but is not presented as such. A more technical form of plagiarism is *wrongly attributed borrowing*, where one does not acknowledge the work from which one obtained an idea, but quotes, instead, the original source without having read it. This may well convey a broader research effort than that actually expended and may perpetuate misinterpretation.

Many courses at the UWI encourage teamwork by students. However, if a student, knowing or having reason to know that an assignment, or part thereof, was intended to be the product of the student's individual effort, nonetheless presents as his or her own work, without due acknowledgement, the work of others in a group, this also constitutes plagiarism. The intention is not to prohibit team work by students, but to prohibit students presenting as their own work the work of others without appropriate attribution.

Categories of Plagiarism and Associated Penalties

For the purposes of this policy, there are two categories of plagiarism: Level One and Level Two.

Level One

Level One cases are those in which only a small amount of the work is affected, and in which the breaches are minor. They therefore include borderline situations, cosmetic paraphrasing, negligent referencing or a few incorrect or missing citations.

In the case of written papers and project reports, Level One Plagiarism, if substantiated, shall result in a deduction of marks. Resubmission after appropriate correction, as an educational opportunity for the student, may be required.

In the case of theses, Level One Plagiarism, if substantiated, shall result in return of the submitted work to the student for revision and resubmission after a period of suspension deemed to be sufficiently punitive, given the severity of the offence. The period of suspension will be not more than one year. Resubmission in this situation will not be regarded as a failure.

Level Two

Level Two cases are those which involve extensive plagiarism, with clear indication of academic dishonesty. They include situations where a significant amount of material is borrowed or directly quoted or cosmetically paraphrased with no attribution at all, or attribution insufficient to indicate that the borrowed material is not the work of the student. Moreover, even where the unacknowledged use of material appears in only a minority of an assignment, the unacknowledged material may be so central to the assignment that the breach is considered to merit Level Two plagiarism.

For written papers and project reports, a student found guilty of Level Two Plagiarism shall, at a minimum, receive a grade of zero for the assignment in which plagiarism has been identified. Depending on the severity of the offense, such a student could also receive a grade of zero for the course in which that assignment was submitted or could be expelled from the University, with or without the possibility of re-entry. In determining the severity of the penalty, consideration should be taken of the circumstances of the particular case, including the level of seniority of the student and whether this is the student's first or a repeated incidence of substantiated plagiarism.

Theses in which Level Two Plagiarism has been substantiated shall be treated as "inadequate" (see *Regulations for Graduate Diplomas and Degrees*, Section 3, Reg. 26), which permits resubmission of the revised thesis for examination within eighteen months

of the date of notification; or, if the offense is particularly severe, shall result in expulsion of the student from the University, with or without the possibility of re-entry.

In determining the severity of the penalty, consideration should be taken of the circumstances of the particular case, including the seniority of the student and whether this is the student's first or a repeated incidence of substantiated plagiarism.

Procedures for Detecting and Treating with Charges of Plagiarism

All written course papers, projects and research theses, prior to submission for examination, shall be vetted for plagiarism by the student who must make a written declaration that the work is free of plagiarism. In the case of theses and major project reports (comprising more than 25% of the total credits for the programme), this vetting by the student should be done before presentation to their supervisors for approval to submit for examination.

On submission for examination, all such works as indicated above shall be vetted for plagiarism by the Faculty Office, or other appropriate body, on behalf of the Campus Committee for Graduate Studies and Research, prior to being sent to the Examiners.

When suspected plagiarism is detected, whether through the processes outlined above or subsequently during the course of examination, the persons detecting the suspected plagiarism must make an initial judgment of which Level of plagiarism the matter may fall within, since there are different procedures for dealing with the different Levels of plagiarism (see below).

Procedures for Level One Plagiarism

For written papers and minor project reports, all charges of Level One Plagiarism shall be assessed by the course examiners. The First Examiner shall inform the Head of Department and the Faculty Board of Examiners of the outcome of the assessment and the penalty levied, should the student be found guilty of plagiarism. If the First Examiner is the Head of Department, the Dean shall be informed of the action taken. The Head of Department, or the Dean if the Head is First Examiner, shall inform the student and the Campus Registrar of the outcome of the assessment and the penalty levied. The right of appeal for students charged with Level One Plagiarism will be to the Head of Department or the Dean, if the Head was First Examiner. In these circumstances, the decision of the Head or the Dean is final. This principle of appealing to the next highest level of

authority in the event that the stated level is compromised by being involved in making the judgment being appealed, shall apply in all cases.

In the case of theses and major projects, Level One Plagiarism shall be reported to the Campus Coordinator who will investigate the charge in collaboration with the Assistant Registrar/Senior Assistant Registrar (Graduate Studies). The outcome and the penalty levied shall be reported to the Board for Graduate Studies and Research. The Campus Coordinator shall inform the student and the Campus Registrar of the outcome of the assessment and the penalty levied. Students may appeal the findings of the Campus Coordinator to the Board for Graduate Studies and Research. In these circumstances, the decision of the Board is final.

Procedures for Level Two Plagiarism

All suspected cases of Level Two Plagiarism must immediately be reported to the Campus Coordinator for Graduate Studies and Research, who shall inform all relevant parties (student, Examiners, Head of Department, Dean) once satisfied that there is a case to be answered. The Campus Coordinator can also determine that a case brought to it as Level Two Plagiarism would best be treated as Level One, and rule accordingly. Staff members who allege Level Two Plagiarism but have the case treated as Level One on the decision of the Campus Coordinator can appeal the decision of the Campus Coordinator to the Board for Graduate Studies and Research. In these circumstances, the decision of the Board is final.

The Assistant Registrar/Senior Assistant Registrar (Graduate Studies), on behalf of the Campus Coordinator for Graduate Studies and Research, shall present the necessary documentation to the Campus Registrar who will officially communicate the charges to the student and provide the student with all documentation relevant to the charge. Official notification of the student by the Campus Registrar must occur within one month of the suspected case first being reported to the Campus Coordinator. At the time of notifying the student, the Campus Registrar shall request that the Chair of the Board for Graduate Studies and Research set up a Committee of Inquiry within one month of the student's notification. At the Inquiry, the student may be accompanied by a person of their choice who may be a friend or legal practitioner whose expenses will be borne by the student. However, the Committee of Inquiry is a University Committee and not a Court of Law; the person accompanying the student may therefore observe proceedings and advise the student but may not engage directly with the Committee. The Chair of

the Inquiry shall inform the Campus Registrar of the outcome of the Inquiry and the penalty imposed. The Campus Registrar will in turn inform all relevant parties (student, Campus Coordinator, Assistant Registrar/Senior Assistant Registrar, Dean, Head of Department, Examiner) within one week of the date of the Inquiry.

The right of appeal for students charged with Level Two Plagiarism will be to the University Senate *via* the University Registrar. The appeal must be made within one month of the student being informed by the Campus Registrar of the outcome of the Inquiry. A student appealing the decision of the Board for Graduate Studies and Research shall have the right to access to all relevant documentation, including the report of the Committee of Inquiry.

Plagiarism constitutes fraudulent misrepresentation, and as such, if a case of Level Two Plagiarism is identified after the granting of a degree, the University reserves the right to revoke the degree or diploma under the authority provided to the Senate of the University in Statute 15 of the University's Charter. Statute 15 allows for revocation of degrees or diplomas previously awarded to individuals who are subsequently convicted of a crime or found guilty of what in the opinion of the University constitutes dishonourable or scandalous conduct.

A Summary of Procedures for Dealing with Cases of Plagiarism

1. When suspected plagiarism is detected, whether before the work is submitted to Examiners or during the course of examination, the persons detecting the suspected plagiarism must make an initial judgment of which Level of plagiarism the matter may fall within.
2. For written papers and minor projects, all charges of Level One Plagiarism shall be assessed by the course examiners. The First Examiner shall inform the Head of Department and the Faculty Board of Examiners of the outcome of the assessment and the penalty levied, should the student be found guilty of plagiarism

In the case of theses and major projects, Level One Plagiarism shall be reported to the Campus Coordinator who will investigate the charge in collaboration with the Assistant Registrar/Senior Assistant Registrar (Graduate Studies). The outcome and the penalty recommended shall be reported to the Board for Graduate Studies and Research.

3. All suspected cases of Level Two Plagiarism must be reported to the Campus Coordinator for Graduate Studies and Research who, once satisfied that there is a case to be answered, shall inform all relevant parties and forward the necessary documentation to the Campus Registrar. The Campus Registrar shall officially inform the student of the charge, provide the student with all documentation relevant to the charge, and request that the Chair of the Board for Graduate Studies and Research set up a Committee of Inquiry to hear the case within one month of the student's official notification. The Chair of the Inquiry shall inform the Campus Registrar of the outcome and of the penalty imposed. The Campus Registrar will then inform all relevant parties.
4. The person(s) responsible for determining the penalty in all cases outlined above shall impose penalties for Level One or Level Two Plagiarism within the range of penalties identified in this policy, but within these ranges, shall apply penalties based upon their judgment of the severity of the offense.
5. Students have a right of appeal with respect to the outcome of Inquires and the penalties imposed, as outlined in this document.

Student Education and Accountability

In implementing this policy on plagiarism, the University will provide avenues for educating students and staff about plagiarism and the fact that it represents the very opposite of the ideals of the academy. Course outlines will provide the requisite information on plagiarism. Students will also be required to submit a signed declaration with each item of work submitted stating that the work being submitted is their own work, that they understand what constitutes plagiarism and that they have not plagiarised. Students will also be required to submit assignments in electronic form and to license the University to allow their work to be analysed using plagiarism detection technology. A register of all students found guilty of plagiarism, and the level of the offence and penalty levied, shall be kept by the Office of the Campus Registrar.