

THE UNIVERSITY OF HONG KONG**Policy on Student Plagiarism in Undergraduate and Taught Postgraduate Curricula****1. Scope**

- 1.1 This policy on plagiarism applies to all students enrolled in the University's undergraduate (Ug) and taught postgraduate (TPg) curricula with respect to all forms of assessment (including dissertations and projects).
- 1.2 This policy sets out the University's definition of plagiarism and principles underpinning its approach towards plagiarism. It also outlines an institutional framework for dealing with plagiarism, including disciplinary action, teaching and learning strategies to provide students with proper education and guidance on issues of academic integrity, and roles and responsibilities in the handling of alleged cases.
- 1.3 Outgoing exchange students may also be subject to the host institution's policy on academic integrity and plagiarism. Similarly, students who are enrolled on a joint/dual degree offered in collaboration with another institution or institutions may also be subject to the corresponding policy of the partner institution(s) in accordance with the agreed collaboration arrangements.

2. Definitions

- 2.1 Plagiarism is defined as the use of another person's work (including but not limited to any materials, creations, ideas and data) as if one's own without due acknowledgement, whether or not such work has been published and regardless of the intent to deceive. Self-plagiarism is defined as the reuse of one's own work without acknowledging that such work has been submitted elsewhere.¹

3. General principles

- 3.1 The University adopts the following principles towards plagiarism:
 - (a) Plagiarism is a breach of academic integrity. The University is committed to upholding the highest standards of academic integrity as articulated in the educational aims and institutional learning outcomes for its curricula. All staff and students must undertake not to commit, or assist or encourage others to commit, plagiarism.
 - (b) The University regards plagiarism as a serious offence. All allegations of plagiarism must be properly addressed.

¹ In all other parts of this policy, the term 'plagiarism' shall be read to include 'self-plagiarism'.

- (c) It is the responsibility of all students to seek guidance from their teachers on, and familiarize themselves with, proper academic practice of writing, citation and referencing.
- (d) Students who have committed plagiarism shall be subject to educative, academic and/or disciplinary consequences as appropriate.
- (e) Intent and the extent of plagiarism are irrelevant when it comes to the definition of plagiarism.
- (f) Ignorance of the University's definition of plagiarism, an assertion of acceptance of plagiarism elsewhere, linguistic weaknesses, difficulty with time or task management, or illness cannot be used as defences against the offence of committing plagiarism.

4. Consequences of plagiarism

4.1 Allegations of plagiarism shall be handled on a case by case basis. Students who have committed plagiarism may be subject to one or more of the following consequences:

- (a) educative measures to be applied by course teachers to alert students about proper academic practice;
- (b) academic consequences to be determined by the relevant examiners and Boards of Examiners (BoEs); and
- (c) disciplinary actions to be imposed by the Disciplinary Committee (DC) as applicable in respect of cases referred to it for investigation.

Operationally BoEs and DC are separate and independent of each other.

4.2 Course teachers may take appropriate educative measures in individual cases of plagiarism, e.g. a requirement to rewrite and resubmit the work concerned, an oral or written warning, additional guidance about proper academic practice of writing, citation and referencing, *etc.*

4.3 Individual BoEs, which are sub-committees of the Senate, are obliged to determine students' assessment results on the basis of their academic performance. Course teachers should assess students' work according to their academic merit. Where plagiarism is identified in a piece of work, the assessment result should be determined on the basis of any of the student's original work therein and in accordance with the prescribed assessment criteria, but not as a means of disciplinary action. In accordance with Regulation G9 of the General Regulations, there shall be no appeal against the results of examinations and all other forms of assessment.

4.4 Statutes XXX and XXXI provide for DC to take disciplinary action against a student who is found to have committed any of the offences stipulated thereunder, including offences of an academic or non-academic nature. The Council deals with appeals from students against DC decisions in accordance with these statutes. The commission of plagiarism is a violation of the Regulations Governing Students'

Academic Conduct Concerning Assessment, whereby constituting an offence under the provisions of paragraph 2(1)(g) of Statute XXXI, which reads:

‘an offence in connection with degree, diploma, or certificate examinations, including violation of any of the regulations of the Senate governing conduct at examinations or otherwise’

- 4.5 The powers, composition and operation, including the proceedings of hearings, of DC are governed by Statutes XXX and XXXI and the Disciplinary Committee Regulations. While there is no prescription or restriction as to who can lodge a complaint with DC, any such complaint shall be addressed in writing to the Registrar, who will inform the Vice-Chancellor of the complaint. The Vice-Chancellor shall then decide whether or not a charge is to be brought against the student before DC.² DC investigates and makes findings upon any complaint ordered to be brought before it by the Vice-Chancellor. Where a student is found to be guilty of any of the offences, DC may order the imposition of penalties including a reprimand, a fine, withdrawal, suspension and expulsion.³ For a student who has graduated, DC may report the offence to the Council and the Senate, and the latter may if they think fit recommend to the Chancellor the deprivation of any degree, diploma, certificate or other academic distinction already conferred upon the student.⁴ A student who is found guilty by DC of an offence shall have a right of appeal to the Council within 14 days. The appeal process shall be conducted in accordance with the Regulations Governing the Hearing of Appeals from the Disciplinary Committee.
- 4.6 For the hearing of each case, the Committee is constituted with five members, three from a Senate panel and two from a student panel. Normally no charge shall be brought before the Committee unless the complaint leading to the charge is made within one month of the time when the matter of such complaint arose.⁵ Each case brought before DC will be treated on its own facts and merits. In determining the penalty to be imposed where applicable, DC may take into account any record of previous misconduct by the student, impact on the student's progress of studies and other mitigating circumstances. Where no appeal has been made to the Council by the end of the specified period, a record of the findings will be lodged in the student's official record but will not appear on the transcript. An offence under the provisions of paragraph 2(1)(g) of Statute XXXI shall also be reported to the relevant examiners (see paragraph 4.4). Further details can be found in the relevant statutes and regulations.

² If the Vice-Chancellor decides not to refer a complaint to the DC, he/she will determine what course of action should be pursued based on the specific circumstances of the case.

³ A penalty of 'withdrawal' imposed on a student refers to the withdrawal of any academic or other University privilege, benefit, right or facility other than the right to follow courses of instruction and present himself for examinations. 'Suspension' means the withdrawal of all academic or other University privileges, benefits, rights and facilities and during the period of suspension the student shall not be entitled to enter or remain on any property or premises of the University.

⁴ This applies to any such offence which falls within the provisions of paragraph 2(1)(g), (h) or (i) of Statute XXXI and has been committed in connection with a degree or other academic distinction conferred upon the student – see paragraph 4.4.

⁵ Statute XXXI.2(3) and Regulation 1(a) of the Disciplinary Committee Regulations refer. The 'one-month rule' is intended to ensure that the complaint is lodged in a timely fashion, i.e. within one month of the commission of the plagiarism (usually the date when the work was submitted for assessment), if possible. However, if the plagiarism was discovered too late by the complainant, i.e. discovered after one month of the commission of plagiarism, there is a proviso in Statute XXXI.2(3) which enables DC to still handle the complaint (which reads 'Provided that if it is proved to the satisfaction of the Committee that the material facts relating to the complaint were or included facts of a decisive character which were at all times outside the knowledge (actual or constructive) of the complainant until a date which was after the end of the period of 1 month referred above, a charge may be brought before the Committee notwithstanding the expiry of the said period of 1 month').

- 4.7 The student against whom a complaint is being made is advised to approach the Dean of Student Affairs for advice as to the procedure to be followed and action to be taken in connection with the hearing before DC, and may be represented or accompanied by a person including a legal practitioner at the hearing.
- 4.8 In determining the appropriate course of action to take in each case, including whether or not a complaint is to be lodged with DC by writing to the Registrar for the Vice-Chancellor's consideration (see Section 6), deliberation should be given to pertinent factors including but not limited to the following:
- (a) severity of the case which may be assessed in terms of the nature and extent of plagiarism (e.g. quoting substantially from a source without citation may in general be more serious than poor referencing in a minor part of the work);
 - (b) specific circumstances of the student such as intent, any previous record of the offence, reaction and attitude towards the allegation (e.g. a student who is found to have a deliberate intent to deceive, or has committed plagiarism before, or does not show remorse for having committed the act, may in general be subject to more severe consequences); and
 - (c) consistency with precedent cases.

5. Teaching and learning

- 5.1 The University educates students about academic integrity and plagiarism by multiple means, both University-wide and discipline-specific.
- 5.2 The Vice-President and Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Teaching and Learning) writes to all teaching staff at the beginning of each academic year drawing their attention to the University's commitment to upholding the highest standards of academic integrity and its policy towards student plagiarism in Ug and TPg curricula.
- 5.3 All newly-enrolled students are expected to consult the University website 'What is plagiarism?' and complete an online course on plagiarism developed by the Libraries. The website and the online course outline issues and consequences related to plagiarism. In addition, the online course enables students to demonstrate their ability to recognize and avoid plagiarism through short quizzes. It also provides useful information and tools on citation and referencing styles. The website appraises students of other relevant resources.
- 5.4 As a compulsory first-year course for all Ug curricula, the Core University English (CUE) course run by the Centre for Applied English Studies (CAES) provides guidance along with practical exercises on writing, citation and referencing skills.⁶ CAES also organizes open workshops to help students develop the language skills required to avoid plagiarism.

⁶ Candidates who have achieved level 5 or above in English language in the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education Examination, or equivalent, are exempted from this requirement, and Core University English is optional. Those who do not take this course should take an elective course in lieu, see Regulation UG 6.

- 5.5 TPg curricula often admit students from diverse educational backgrounds. These curricula are required to provide students with educative materials and, if necessary, ‘top-up’ training on proper academic practice at the beginning of and at other appropriate times during their studies. Individual curricula are encouraged to consult with CAES and organize relevant courses or workshops, subject to prevailing costing arrangement.
- 5.6 Each Faculty should promulgate its discipline-specific practice on writing, citation and referencing, preferably together with illustrative examples, among students at the beginning of and at other times throughout their studies. The information can be disseminated by electronic and other means such as the Faculty academic advising system. Each Faculty should also provide students with clear guidance on its discipline-specific practice and any specific requirements regarding group/collaborative work in its courses e.g. through course syllabuses and instructions for course assignments. All discipline and course-specific guidance should be consistent with the University policy.
- 5.7 As a matter of good practice, course teachers are encouraged to design or apply assessment tasks that would minimize opportunities for plagiarism, e.g. by renewing questions for assessments so that students’ assignments cannot be reused.
- 5.8 Course teachers may use plagiarism detection software to help detect plagiarism in students’ works. While software such as Turnitin can be employed as an assistive tool to identify textual matches and the relevant original sources, course teachers should nonetheless use discretion to evaluate whether a student has committed plagiarism in a given piece of work. The Libraries provide online materials as well as face-to-face training sessions for teachers and students on how to use Turnitin.

6. Roles and responsibilities in handling cases of alleged plagiarism

- 6.1 Allegations of plagiarism should in the first instance be handled within the Faculty offering the course concerned, according to principles of fairness, transparency and efficiency.⁷ Individual Faculties may develop relevant guidelines within the institutional framework to facilitate the handling of allegations of plagiarism.
- 6.2 Detecting and identifying plagiarism is first and foremost a judgement by the course teacher. If plagiarism is suspected in a student’s work, the course teacher should identify the relevant section(s) as well as the source(s) thought to have been copied, incorrectly referenced or insufficiently attributed; inform the student of the suspected plagiarism; and if necessary, interview the student. The course teacher should then make a judgement as to whether there is a case of plagiarism.
- 6.3 Section 4 outlines the major options available when plagiarism is judged to have taken place. For example, the course teacher may alert the student through an informal meeting or a warning letter to the proper academic practice and consequences of plagiarism, in addition to directing the student to relevant educative materials; a fail grade may be given for the plagiarized work as determined based on

⁷ In Section 6, ‘Faculty’ shall be read to include other units charged with overseeing the operations of programmes/courses that are not hosted by Faculties, e.g. the School of Chinese and CAES in respect of the Chinese and English language enhancement courses, and the Common Core Curriculum Committee in respect of the Common Core courses.

its academic merit and the prescribed assessment criteria (see paragraph 4.3); and a complaint may be lodged with DC by writing to the Registrar for the Vice-Chancellor's consideration. The course teacher has discretion to pursue one or more of these options in each individual case with due consideration given to the pertinent factors.

- 6.4 The Head of Department (or equivalent) should be informed in cases where a warning letter is issued.⁸ A warning letter may be issued by the course teacher or another party as appropriate (see sample letter at Annex I).
- 6.5 As noted in Section 4, a complaint to DC may be submitted by the course teacher or another party where this is considered suitable to address the case. In cases where the course teacher decides that a DC referral may be necessary, the case should be brought to the attention of the Head of Department (or equivalent).
- 6.6 In cases described in paragraphs 6.4 and 6.5, the Faculty Office as well as the student's home Faculty (if it is different) should be notified of the processing of the case.
- 6.7 Where group/collaborative work is concerned, the students involved should be dealt with as individual cases, even though the cases of suspected plagiarism may be connected.
- 6.8 Each case should be handled in a timely manner. Specifically if a complaint is to be lodged with DC by writing to the Registrar for the Vice-Chancellor's consideration, the 'one-month rule' should be observed (see paragraph 4.6).
- 6.9 Upon receipt of reports of the occurrence of plagiarism cases arising in courses offered by the Faculty (see paragraph 6.6), the Faculty Office should transfer the relevant data to a central register through the Academic Support and Examinations Section of the Registry. This central register is maintained to record all reported cases of student plagiarism (including those reported by Faculties and cases where the students are found to be guilty of plagiarism by DC). It will be accessible to designated persons so that the University can discharge its roles and functions in regard to student discipline, which may include identifying repeat offenders in the handling of alleged plagiarism cases (see paragraph 4.8).

October 2018

⁸ The equivalent of Head of Department may include Division Heads or Area/Discipline Coordinators in unitary Faculties, Programme Directors, a designated person or persons in the relevant unit, *etc.*