



UNIVERSITY OF THE  
WITWATERSRAND,  
JOHANNESBURG

# POLICY DOCUMENT

## PLAGIARISM

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### POLICY

#### Version Control

Version	Lead author(s)	Date	Description
S2002/2038 and S2002/2039		2002	Early version of the policy
S2003/251B and S2003/351A		2003	Current version
2.1	RLD	March 2020	Working version of major re-write
2.2	RLD	May 2020	Inputs from SGSC
2.3	RLD	Sep 2020	Major re-write after inputs from LO

## Table of Contents

1. CONTEXT.....	3
2. DEFINITIONS .....	4
3. PURPOSE OF THE POLICY .....	4
4. SCOPE .....	5
5. PRINCIPLES .....	5
6. DEVELOPMENTAL RESPONSIBILITY OF THE UNIVERSITY .....	5
7. PROCESS AND PROCEDURE .....	6
8. SCHOOL PLAGIARISM COMMITTEE.....	8
9. COMMENCEMENT, REPEAL AND TRANSITIONAL MATTERS.....	8
10. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	9

Policy Title	Student Plagiarism Policy
Policy Officer	R Muponde and R L Drennan
Date Approved	
Date Effective From	
Last Updated	2003

## 1. CONTEXT

- 1.1. The University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg (Wits, or the University) is a research intensive university that strives for excellence in all aspects of scholarly endeavour, including teaching, research and academic service. Knowledge, which is at the core of scholarship, is inherently associated with understanding, truth and discovery. The intertwined principles of integrity and honesty form the foundation on which scholarship is built.
- 1.2. Integrity, when associated with knowledge, is manifested in a wide array of behaviours, conventions and conduct. Illustrative examples include approval of ethical research, honest management of experimental data and information, selection and use of appropriate research methodologies, principled teaching according to appropriate curricula, and the declaration of conflicts of interest; all of which is covered by the Wits Research Integrity Policy. Of particular relevance to this Policy is the dishonest behaviour of plagiarism which constitutes a misconduct in terms of the University's rules, regulations, procedures and policies.
- 1.3. Plagiarism results in damage to the reputations of individuals and the University. It is a serious form of academic dishonesty and will harm the quality of the scholarship to which the University aspires.
- 1.4. Plagiarism can be committed by any student. Given the breadth of concern and the impact of the risk to the University, it is vital that the University has a consistent approach, which is sensitive to differences between academic disciplines and levels, whilst providing the reasonable developmental opportunities set out in this Policy for students to learn and practice the conventions of academia, including how to appropriately and correctly reference the work of others and avoid plagiarism.
- 1.5. This Policy is to be read in conjunction with the Wits Code of Conduct<sup>1</sup>, the Wits Research Integrity Policy<sup>2</sup> and the Rules for Student Discipline<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> HRG/26, C2006/482, Code of Conduct, 2006 (<http://intranet.wits.ac.za/exec/registrar/Policies/HRG26%20-%20Code%20of%20Conduct.pdf#search=code%20of%20conduct>)

<sup>2</sup> Research Integrity Policy (2020) rrr

<sup>3</sup> C2017/627A, Rules for Student Discipline, Version number 01, 2017 ([http://intranet.wits.ac.za/exec/registrar/Policies/Rules%20for%20Student%20Discipline%20\(2018%20-%202005\).pdf](http://intranet.wits.ac.za/exec/registrar/Policies/Rules%20for%20Student%20Discipline%20(2018%20-%202005).pdf))

## 2. DEFINITIONS

Key concepts used in this Policy are defined here to give specific and appropriate meaning.

- 2.1. **Plagiarism** is the failure to acknowledge the ideas and writings of others and/or the presentation of others' ideas or writings as one's own. This definition includes intentional and/or unintentional failure to acknowledge the ideas or writings of others.
- 2.2. **Others** refers to any persons, living or deceased, including students, academics, professionals, lay people, published authors anywhere in the world using any medium, or any other person to whom works, ideas, presentations or writings may be attributed. The recording of their ideas may be in any form, including but not limited to writing (including text messages and other electronic or digital messages), coding, formula, graffiti, film, performances, video, as recorded in books, journals, magazines, and anywhere on the internet.
- 2.3. **Self-plagiarism** is the same as plagiarism, but in instances of self-plagiarism the term "other" includes the plagiarising author and the failure to acknowledge one's own ideas that have been previously published, presented or submitted.
- 2.4. **Policy** means this Student Plagiarism Policy.
- 2.5. **Students** refers to registered and visiting (in the form of an inbound exchange) undergraduate and postgraduate students as defined in the Rules of the University, and who are students at the time of the conduct.
- 2.6. **SDC** means the Student Disciplinary Committee, as defined in the University Rules for Student Discipline.
- 2.7. **SPC** means the relevant School Plagiarism Committee, whose responsibilities are set out in more detail in this Policy.

## 3. PURPOSE OF THE POLICY

The purpose of this Policy is to ensure that all students are informed and aware of the risks and consequences of plagiarism, with the intention to completely avoid the behaviour. More specifically, the Policy sets out:

- 3.1. The responsibilities of students in relation to plagiarism;
- 3.2. The principles which reinforce the University's approach to plagiarism, as underpinned by its responsibility to teach;
- 3.3. The responsibilities and duties of the Schools in relation to plagiarism; and

- 3.4. The processes, procedures and responses which are applied by the University in respect of instances of detected plagiarism.

## **4. SCOPE**

The scope of this Policy includes all students as defined in clause 2.5.

## **5. PRINCIPLES**

- 5.1. Plagiarism is a serious form of academic dishonesty which cannot be permitted by the University.
- 5.2. It is the responsibility of the student to understand the risks and consequences which result from plagiarism. This responsibility increases as the student progresses through their academic training at the University.
- 5.3. Whilst this context of student responsibility is central to the University's approach to plagiarism matters, the University recognises its role to facilitate adequate understanding and to provide learning opportunities and information in order to avoid plagiarism.
- 5.4. Plagiarism does not require intention and a lack of intent is not a defence to plagiarism. However, it may be a factor to consider when determining the level at which the plagiarism will be managed and/or the sanction which may be handed down should there be a finding against the student in the relevant forum.
- 5.5. All students should be required to sign a declaration that the work they have submitted is their own unaided work, acknowledging that plagiarism is unacceptable behaviour and declaring that they have not plagiarised.
- 5.6. In some instances, plagiarism may amount to copyright infringement in terms of the Copyright Act 98 of 1978. Nothing in this Policy precludes the owners of the rights in the plagiarised work from pursuing a separate copyright infringement claim.

## **6. DEVELOPMENTAL RESPONSIBILITY OF THE UNIVERSITY**

- 6.1. Notwithstanding the ultimate responsibility that a student has in relation to plagiarism, this Policy recognises the developmental role that the University has in educating students about plagiarism, as well as being vigilant in considering

work both prior to and post it being submitted for assessment.

- 6.2. University staff implement this Policy by detecting instances of plagiarism and managing them in line with the provisions of this Policy. There is no limitation to methods of detection of plagiarism and such may include both manual and electronic resources and systems.
- 6.3. In order to meet the responsibilities placed on University staff, reasonable measures must be put in place throughout the course of a student's academic career to ensure that they have a clear understanding of plagiarism and the consequences which result from such conduct. These measures include introducing students to and familiarising students with the conventions used in the relevant School for referencing and acknowledging the ideas, work and writings of others and take into account the student's level of study.
- 6.4. In order to enforce these measures, staff must necessarily familiarise themselves with these conventions, as well as the expectations of their respective disciplines. It is the responsibility of the School to ensure that there is as little ambiguity as possible in respect of the principles and processes set out in this Policy and that the School adheres to the same level of expectations in this regard.
- 6.5. The duties imposed by the University on its staff and the School in this Policy are duties owed to the University, not to any student(s). Where these duties are not discharged, it is a matter between the University and that staff member(s) which will be ventilated in the appropriate forum. This failure by the staff member does not constitute any defence for students accused of plagiarism.

## 7. PROCESS AND PROCEDURE

- 7.1. This Policy sets out the different levels into which plagiarism can be classified and how each level of plagiarism should be managed and, where appropriate, sanctioned. The decision relating to the determination of the level of plagiarism may take into consideration *inter alia* the nature and extent of the plagiarism, the year of study and experience of the student, intention and whether the most appropriate remedial action should be education-focused or follow a formal disciplinary process.
- 7.2. It is the responsibility of the relevant academic staff member to initially establish whether plagiarism has taken place and assess the seriousness of the infringement – this may be done in consultation with others.
- 7.3. The recognised levels of plagiarism, together with the appropriate disciplinary forums of first instance and appeal are set out in the table below:

Level	Description	Disciplinary Forum	Appeal Forum
1	First time or minor infringement in work, including assignments, class tests, semester and end of year exams, reports, essays, proposals, that is submitted or presented but will not be published.	The relevant academic staff member who may: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Require the work to be amended as instructed and resubmitted for grading; or</li> <li>- Impose a penalty of up to 100% of the mark for that work.</li> </ul>	SPC which may: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Uphold the decision of the academic staff member; or</li> <li>- Set aside or amend the decision of the academic staff member to a lesser penalty.</li> </ul> <p>The decision of the SPC is final.</p>
2	Significant first time or repeated infringements in work, including assignments, class tests, semester and end of year exams, reports, essays, that is submitted or presented but will not be published.	SPC which may: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Impose a penalty of up to 100% of the mark for that work but not more severe than the loss of Duty Performed (DP);</li> <li>- Require the work to be amended as instructed and resubmitted for grading; or</li> <li>- Refer the matter to the SDC.</li> </ul>	Faculty Dean who may: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Uphold the decision of the SPC;</li> <li>- Set aside or amend the decision of the SPC to a lesser penalty; or</li> <li>- Refer the matter to the SDC.</li> </ul> <p>The decision of the Dean is final.</p>
3	Significant first time or repeated infringements in work, including assignments, class tests, semester and end of year exams, reports, research reports, essays, dissertation, theses that is submitted or presented and which may be published.	SPC who must: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Consider the merits of the matter; and</li> <li>- Determine the extent of the offence.</li> </ul> <p>In matters where the merits and the extent of the conduct so warrant, the SPC must refer the matter to the SDC.</p> <p>In all other matters, the sanctions set out above in respect of Level 2 offences may be applied by the SPC in relation to Level 3 plagiarism.</p>	Where matters are referred to the SDC, appeals to that process may be submitted in line with Section 7 of the Rules for Student Discipline. <p>Appeals in all other matters will follow the process for appeals set out at Level 2 above.</p>

7.4. In all instances of plagiarism, a record of the infringement and of the action taken should be kept within the School. This will ensure that students who have been given appropriate developmental opportunities are held accountable for future infringements.

7.5. Nothing in this Policy detracts from the discretion granted to the University in an SDC enquiry to make a determination not to charge a student as permitted in the

Rules for Student Discipline, even where that student has been referred to the SDC by an SPC.

## **8. SCHOOL PLAGIARISM COMMITTEE**

- 8.1. The SPC comprises of at least three academic staff members and one appointed student, and is chaired by a senior academic staff member (senior lecturer or above).
- 8.2. Periods of service on the SPC should not exceed three years for each member and should be staggered to ensure continuity. Membership to the SPC should be reported on an annual basis to the applicable Faculty board.
- 8.3. The SPC considers reported infringements and scrutinises the publication of conventions within the School.
- 8.4. The SPC is required to:
  - 8.4.1. Confirm whether the student concerned wishes to appear and/or make representations before the SPC.
  - 8.4.2. Note the nature and keep a record of minor infringements, as well as the penalties imposed by academic staff members. The SPC should identify trends and patterns and bring these to the attention of the Head of School and individual academic staff members as this information may have value to the educational development of students.
  - 8.4.3. Ensure and monitor that accurate records are kept as needed.
  - 8.4.4. Consider the student's record to ascertain whether there have been previous instances of plagiarism recorded or noted against the student.
  - 8.4.5. Always act within the spirit and principles of this Policy.
- 8.5. The principles of good governance should guide the work and decisions of the SPC. This would include but not be limited to the declaration of conflicts of interest.

## **9. COMMENCEMENT, REPEAL AND TRANSITIONAL MATTERS**

- 9.1. The Policy will come into operation on the date on which it is approved by all the relevant structures of the University and shall replace the Plagiarism Policy that was approved by Senate in 2003 with document number S2003/351B ("the 2003 Plagiarism Policy").

- 9.2. At the date of commencement of this Policy, all matters which were initiated in terms of the 2003 Plagiarism Policy shall be decided and finalised in terms of that policy.

## **10. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

- 10.1. Important note on acknowledgments: This policy is a development of previous policies in the same area. The text used in this policy is a combination of text used before with some original ideas added. Given that policies in the past did not include the names of the authors it is difficult to acknowledge the contributions of these individuals by name. Therefore the best that can be done for now is to acknowledge the contributions of all previous authors that worked on the versions of this policy.