University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg   S2003/351B
                                        Replacing S2002/2038 and S2002/2039

Plagiarism Policy

Section One: Context of policy and procedures

1   PREAMBLE

Senate has approved the following policy on plagiarism. A set of procedures for the implementation of the policy is appended along with examples, and a suggested format for use by schools for a statement that student work has been unaided except where explicitly stated otherwise.

Effectively the documents attempt to answer the following broad questions and concerns:

- What is plagiarism and is it different from copying/cheating?
- What position should be taken on plagiarism – should it be handled as an offence or a developmental issue or a combination of these?
- What approach should be used for managing plagiarism at Wits University?

2   OVERVIEW

Plagiarism is an issue of general concern that requires a standard University response that is sensitive to differences between academic disciplines and that provides sufficient developmental focus to ensure that students are given adequate opportunity for induction into the conventions of the academic community.

This policy proposes that:

- All academic staff should ensure that students are inducted into the values and practises of their discipline with respect to the conventions associated with acknowledging the work of others.
- All schools are responsible for ensuring that adequate information, and opportunities to assimilate the information, are provided to new students.
- Plagiarism in all its forms should be dealt with developmentally first, at school and individual academic level but that it is important that repeated or serious plagiarism be handled as a disciplinary offence.
- A structured approach to plagiarism offers the best protection for the student and the best protection for the rights and thoughts of others.
- All students should be required to sign a declaration that the work they have submitted is their own unaided work and acknowledging that plagiarism is unacceptable in academe.[1]

---

[1] Schools or faculties can best decide when to get such a signed acknowledgement from their students.

3   PLAGIARISM

The use of the ideas of others without appropriate acknowledgement is an ongoing concern within the academic enterprise. The extent of the debate about plagiarism is as varied as the practices involved.   Some incidents clearly involve deliberate dishonesty (such as the purchase or inappropriate use of material off the internet) and require a particular disciplinary management process. Other incidents reflect the lack of understanding of the need to attribute source (as a result of poor schooling or poor induction to tertiary study) and require attention to the teaching and learning practises of the University. Others are less clear and are politically harder to manage (such as copying from classmates with their consent or off the internet) – there are serious disputes about what constitutes plagiarism and what are simply the inappropriate attempts of an academic elite to claim ownership of knowledge over which they have no right. This is particularly pertinent when plagiarism involves the use of secondary sources – especially those that deal with areas of academic knowledge that have become increasingly part of what is commonly known and understood (for instance it is acceptable practise in psychology to refer to the id without referencing Freud or in physics to make use of Newtonian concepts without referencing Newton). The line between plagiarism and rote learning and reproduction of concepts, ideas or thoughts of others is not always a clear one.

This policy proposal focuses on plagiarism as the "failure to acknowledge the ideas of another" or "presentation of the ideas of another as one's own" and should be read to cover intentional and unintentional failure to acknowledge the ideas of others. The School of Economic and Business Sciences uses the following definition:

> Plagiarism refers to the copying of passages in the written work of other people (e.g. authors of books or articles, other students) without acknowledgement. An essay or other assignment that is substantially copied from one or more sources, with little or no original contribution from the student submitting it, is plagiarised and represents a dishonest effort.

Plagiarism does thus not incorporate poor or incomplete referencing – these are issues of convention (each referencing style requires very different amount of information from the user) and they are discipline related. Academic schools will need to manage inadequate referencing by the rules of fair administrative procedure – the expectations need to be made clear to students in written form in a document to which all students have access (such as a course outline or rule book) and the penalties for not conforming should also be stipulated (and enforced). With respect to the management of referencing individual schools and faculties will need to satisfy themselves that students have enough information (and training) to take on the conventions set out. If this is done then the schools will be in a stronger position to impose penalties (usually related to deduction of marks or refusal to mark work until it is properly referenced). Penalties are often on a continuum depending on the extent to which the referencing does not conform to requirements.

Clearly the year of study of a student is particularly pertinent in this regard and postgraduate students who do not reference adequately should be handled with less leniency. Again, this should be based on the certainty that all students (especially those who are new to Wits) are given enough information to enable them to comply.

The secondary school experience of the majority of students would not have adequately equipped them with an understanding of what plagiarism is and why it is considered problematic. Even those students who have been exposed to referencing conventions are rarely exposed to the more subtle use of unattributed ideas.

Clearly the process of inducting a student into academic conventions (such as giving credit for the use of the ideas of others) is the responsibility of the academic staff members who are required to make known to the student the conventions of referencing. In addition, academic staff are expected to make clear to students why the use of unattributed material is unacceptable from a collegial academic perspective – academic teachers have to model and instil both correct practise and an understanding of the issues of ownership of ideas and the ethics associated with acknowledging the work of others. The under preparedness of students (both in the conventions and also in issues of language) for academe conducted in English further complicates the ability of students to make sense of what is plagiarism and it is thus absolutely vital that each academic in each discipline takes full responsibility for engaging students in the discourse of their discipline. Without this engagement the conventions may or may not be adopted but their relevance and value will definitely not be appreciated and thus they are unlikely to be transferred to other elements of academic writing.

There is concurrence that Wits has an educative developmental responsibility to induct students into these conventions and their underlying principles. There is however less consensus on how much effort and time should be involved in this induction and at which point it is reasonable to expect a student to have taken on board the necessary practices. Deciding on the point at which the student is accountable is important and this decision underpins the possibility of any disciplinary response to plagiarism.

Intent is central to the debate. It is argued by some that once the students have been inducted (about half of their first year) any plagiarism in unacceptable and is an offence. Intent is no longer an issue as long as the student has been given time, information and practise opportunities with feedback. Others argue that some students – because of their educational backgrounds will take much longer to incorporate the values that mitigate against plagiarism and thus that intent to "steal" the work of others has to be proved for any incident of plagiarism to be considered an offence.

This point of view would in a sense be the *status quo* because current management of plagiarism, using the definition of misconduct from the Rules for Student Discipline, would suggest intent as a defining point.

The "gap" between these positions appears to be whether claimed ignorance of the rules of academic writing (and therefore possible lack of intent) constitutes the dividing line between an offence and a bad habit.

Irrespective of the personal or discipline position on the continuum, the management of plagiarism within the University is a common faculty concern and this is an attempt to develop a policy which could be used for the management of the perceived increasing incidence of plagiarism.

This policy and procedure proposes that:

> A school based committee (which could be a committee of one) considers allegations of plagiarism brought to its attention by academics within the school. The committee is tasked with ensuring that appropriate developmental opportunities are offered to students and that penalties have a developmental element. Their greatest sanction would be awarding a student 0% for a piece of work. For any plagiarism incident in which the school committee felt that there may have been intent to use the work of another without giving appropriate recognition the matter would be referred to the student disciplinary committee through the normal channels. School committees would keep records that would enable the school and faculty to track the kind of incidents reported and this would assist in ensuring the appropriate kind of developmental teaching within the school.

4   CURRENT WITS POLICY (PRIOR TO THIS POLICY)

Plagiarism (intentional failure to acknowledge the ideas of another) is currently handled under the misconduct rule in the Rules for Student Discipline. The definition of misconduct appears in Rule 18 of the Rules for Student Discipline and states as follows:
 "Misconduct comprises behaviour within or without the precincts of the University, without just excuse, which
1) constitutes a breach of any statute, regulation or rule of the University; or
2) constitutes a failure or refusal to comply with any punishment or order imposed under these rules; or
3) constitutes a failure or refusal to obey a lawful order; or
4) constitutes conduct that tends to bring the University or any part of it or a member of its staff or a student or any part of its student body into contempt or disrepute; or
5) interferes with the governance and proper administration of the University; or
6) interferes with the conditions necessary for teaching learning and research."

Items 1), 4), 5) and 6) cover failure to acknowledge the work of another.

5   WHAT OTHERS ARE DOING

Many South African Universities have policies in place, most have taken a more structured approach to plagiarism recently and many now require students to submit a declaration with all written work that it is their own work (a practice we have at Wits). The range of approaches is significant and it is thus difficult to take guidance from them[2].

Some universities use the ordinary student disciplinary committees to handle plagiarism while others have set up committees that deal only with plagiarism. The

---

[2] The proposed system for Wits has emerged from a range of discussions. The idea of a committee focused on handling incidents of plagiarism occurs in the Rhodes University policy but this is a central University committee.

problems associated with having a special committee include the management of an additional structure plus the risk of different standards of fairness/ administrative justice being applied to students. Clearly, keeping within the existing system once the matter is handled as a disciplinary one makes sense but it does not address the real difficulties currently being experienced as a result of the time scale for completion of enquiries through the current system. In the case of plagiarism, matters need to be handled quickly so that the next academic work of the student can reasonably be expected to be free of plagiarised content or so that fair decisions can be made about examinations and reregistration without undue delays.

University of the Witwatersrand   S2003/351A

SECTION TWO: SENATE POLICY ON PLAGIARISM

1.   Plagiarism

Plagiarism is the "failure to acknowledge the ideas or writing of another" or "presentation of the ideas or writing of another as one's own" and should be read to cover intentional and unintentional failure to acknowledge the ideas of others. In this context "others" means any other person including a student, academic, professional, published author or other resource such as the internet. The University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg believes that failing to acknowledge the use of ideas of others constitutes an important breach of the values and conventions of the academic enterprise.

2.   Academic staff and school responsibility

Academic staff, especially those that work with first year students, are responsible for a process of induction into their disciplines. This includes an induction into what constitutes acceptable use of the ideas of other people.

Schools should engage in a developmental process with their students that at least includes making explicit information available to students in first lectures and tutorials, publishing requirements with respect to referencing conventions, providing opportunities for students to practise the conventions, providing limited opportunities for students to resubmit work if the conventions are not followed. It is the responsibility of the school to ensure that there is as little ambiguity as possible within the above process and that members of the school staff adhere to the same level of expectations with respect to all of the above.

The aims of this process are to ensure that:

- Students understand the concept of plagiarism – by explaining what it is and by outlining what kinds of practises constitute plagiarism in the discipline concerned.

- Students know what conventions to use when using material from other people, books, journals or the internet.

- Students are provided with training (with structured feedback) on the use of these conventions within the context of real assignments for the discipline.

- Students sign an appropriate declaration (see appendix) to be submitted with all written work or to be submitted annually after registration for each discipline.

3.   Management of suspected cases of plagiarism in the first instance

In all instances of dealing with plagiarism it is the responsibility of the individual academic to initially assess the seriousness of the infringement – this could be done in consultation with others. Action is dependent on the seriousness – first, minor infringements should be managed developmentally while serious or repeat offences should be handled with more gravity. In all instances, a record of the infringement and of the action taken should be kept within the school and forwarded to the student registry. This will ensure that students who have been given appropriate developmental opportunities are held accountable for future infringements. Wits recognises that plagiarism is a serious threat to academic quality but that many students initially commit plagiarism as they do not have the information or skills they need to negotiate the academic context.

4.   **Levels of infringements**

Level One: Minor, first time

A Level One infringement is an infringement of pre-published academic conventions that involves the unacknowledged or inaccurately acknowledged use of the ideas and/or writing of others.

These infringements are minor and are first offences and are considered to have been unintentional. The staff member concerned, who may impose a penalty of up to 100% of the mark for the work in question and may require the student to resubmit the work concerned, handles these infringements. Should the student wish to appeal the penalty a written account of the penalty should be given to the appropriate committee but if the student is willing to accept the penalty no records are required.

Level Two: repeated minor or first time major offences that may not have been intentional

This level refers to repeated offences of a minor nature, or to first time, major offences. These are handled in the first instance by a School Plagiarism Committee (SPC), provided that they deem the offence not to be such that it might suggest a penalty more severe than the loss of a DP, and requires that records be kept of the decision and offence. These decisions are subject to appeal to the Dean who may refer the matter back to the SPC or to the University central disciplinary process.

Level Three: repeated offences and/or major offences that are possibly intentional or are serious enough to suggest collusion or deliberate dishonesty

These are serious offences, which the SPC has deemed as requiring consideration by a University disciplinary committee. These are major offences and/or repeat offences that indicate that the penalties imposed by the SPC have not had the intended effect of curbing the behaviour. All plagiarism at postgraduate level (except for the initial assignments, usually in the first quarter, of any taught postgraduate programmes) is considered to occur at Level Three.

5.   **School Plagiarism Committee**.

5.1.   Rationale for committee

A school based plagiarism committee will provide the disciplinary (subject) experts to assess offences and to allow students fair and consistent administrative process. It is also argued that while this "escalates" the seriousness with which these matters are handled it avoids flooding the central disciplinary structures with relatively minor cases and protects individual academics from making subjective decisions. As the limit of the penalty that this committee will be able to impose is refusing a student permission to write the examination for a subject and as the decision will be subject to usual appeals a school based committee could act in the best interests of the students and academe. The school committee may refer the matter to a central disciplinary committee if in its judgement there appears to be or have been the *intent* to commit plagiarism.   Thus a full disciplinary process (with the possibility of a formal outcome being recorded against a student's disciplinary history) would only be conducted by the normal university disciplinary structures.

5.2.   Membership of committee

Normally, this is a committee of at least three academics and one student chaired by a senior academic (senior lecturer or above).   This committee considers reported infringements (reactive role) and scrutinises the publication of conventions within the school to ensure clarity (proactive role). Periods of service on the committee should not exceed three years and should be staggered to ensure continuity. The membership of these committees should be reported on an annual basis to the faculty board. Where it is considered more appropriate, a school may have a "committee of one" where one senior academic is delegated by the school executive structure to monitor the implementation of the plagiarism policy.

5.3.   Brief of committee

The brief of the committee is to:

- Note the nature of minor infringements and penalties imposed by academic staff members and refer patterns to the Head of School and individual academic staff members for attention. This information could be of value to education development staff.
- Monitor that accurate records are kept as needed.
- Consider appeals against the decisions of individual staff members.
- Consider whether or not to hear a particular infringement themselves or refer the matter on immediately to the University process
- In reaching this determination the committee may request to see the student file to ascertain if there are other similar decisions recorded with respect to the student.

6.   **Procedure for School Plagiarism Committees and academic staff**

6.1.   A staff member who is of the opinion that a plagiarism offence at Level One has been committed, should manage the situation themselves by ensuring that a

developmental approach is taken which can include requiring resubmission of the work and/or penalties of up to 100% of the mark. If the student accepts the penalty the matter ends there. (Guidelines as to the extent of the loss of marks must be published by Schools and be made available to the students).

6.2. If a student wishes to appeal the penalty imposed by an individual staff member he or she may do so by referring the matter to the *SPC*.

6.3. If the staff member is of the opinion that the offence is a repetition of a minor infringement, or that the infringement is major he or she should refer the matter to the SPC.

6.4. If it can be established that the infringement, although major, was unintentional (Level Two), the SPC can impose a penalty of loss of marks up to a maximum of 100%, plus refuse the student permission to write the examination or equivalent (loss of DP) and record the offence and penalty on the student record. Similarly, evidence of repeated minor offences could be handled with the same penalty. The record of any student appearing before an SPC should be consulted as a prior record of unintentional major and/or repeated plagiarism will enable the determination that the infringement in the instance before the SPC is not unintentional. It would be essential that the record of earlier infringements was accurate and detailed.

6.5. If it is suspected that the offence is a Level Three offence (serious, or repeated or clearly intentional), the case shall immediately be referred to the appropriate University processes.

6.6. In all cases falling into Level Two (and appeals against Level One decisions) the student concerned must be asked if he/she wishes to appear before the School Committee, and shall be provided with written reasons for any sanctions imposed on them. If the committee considers the offence to be a Level Three offence they may refer the matter to the University committee, do not have to ask the student if he/she wishes to appear before them but must provide the reason for referring the matter to the University committee to the student in writing.

6.7. If after hearing an appeal by a student against the penalty imposed by a staff member, the School Committee is satisfied that an offence has in fact not been committed, the Committee shall withdraw the penalty and advise the staff member who laid the complaint accordingly. The decision of the committee with respect to these Level One offences is final.

6.8. In the handling of Level Two offences a student may request that a University committee handle the matter in the first instance and not by the school. Students must be informed of this right and must waive it in writing if they choose to do so. A school committee is only empowered to penalise students up to 100% of their marks, require resubmission of the work, remove the DP for that course and record the penalty and offence at central level OR refer the matter to a University Committee.

6.9. Appeals against the decisions of the SPC are made to the University committee. Decisions of the University committee on these appeals are final.

6.10. Suspected Level Three offences must be referred to the University committee.

7.   **Managing serious plagiarism incidents centrally**

Serious incidents are referred to the existing disciplinary structures that function in terms of the procedures laid down in The Rules for Student Discipline with particular reference to sections 7 and 8. The penalties that can be imposed will be in line with section 6.5 of The Rules.

A student shall have the right to appeal to the Appeals Committee of the University (Section 8 of The Rules).

8.   **Publication of information**

The Student Handbook and the General Rules Book should in future include general information about the nature of plagiarism and about the University's policy with respect to plagiarism and should indicate that plagiarism is considered a serious offence. Individual schools are responsible for ensuring that students fully understand the nature of legitimate academic practice in the disciplines concerned as these vary. The schools and individual academics must manage plagiarism consistently – it is the responsibility of academic leaders to ensure that information is available, that academic staff understand the consequences of an inconsistent management of the issue and that appropriate developmental strategies are in place for first year students.

University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg

SENATE PLAGIARISM POLICY APPENDICES

APPENDIX ONE

Possible wording of a declaration by students

(Annually per course or per piece of submitted work)

I _____ (Student number: _____) am a student registered for _____ in the year _____. I hereby declare the following:

- I am aware that plagiarism (the use of someone else's work without their permission and/or without acknowledging the original source) is wrong.
- I confirm that the work submitted for assessment for the above course is my own unaided work except where I have explicitly indicated otherwise.
- I have followed the required conventions in referencing the thoughts and ideas of others.
- I understand that the University of the Witwatersrand may take disciplinary action against me if there is a belief that this in not my own unaided work or that I have failed to acknowledge the source of the ideas or words in my writing.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX TWO

Examples of Plagiarism

Individual schools should develop course materials/handouts that are discipline specific so that students are given concrete examples of the practices, which are to be encouraged or discouraged. Given the range of disciplines at Wits no one set of examples is going to be acceptable.

The material below is off the Princeton University website – *it should probably not be used in its current form as it assumes for instance that all users are first language English speakers.* This extract is included only to provide illustrative material with respect to how schools can develop material that teaches students about plagiarism within their discipline.

The following examples from the website at Princeton University provide a range of plagiarism from verbatim copying to thorough paraphrasing. The examples and comments offer guidance to Princeton students about how a source may be used and when a source must be cited[3].

This kind of information should be included in school and faculty handouts but discipline specific examples, that are not excessively nuanced, and that are thus accessible to second language speakers, should be used instead of this generic set which is not intended for inclusion in any faculty booklet or course document without careful consideration of the extent to which it actually contributes to understanding of the issue by the students concerned.

EXTRACT OFF PRINCETON UNIVERSITY WEBSITE

Original source:

From: Alvin Kernan, *The Playwright as Magician.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979, pp.102-103.

From time to time this submerged or latent theater in *Hamlet* becomes almost overt. It is close to the surface in Hamlet's pretense of madness, the "antic disposition" he puts on to protect himself and prevent his antagonists from plucking out the heart of his mystery. It is even closer to the surface when Hamlet enters his mother's room and holds up, side by side, the pictures of the two kings, Old Hamlet and Claudius, and proceeds to describe for her the true nature of the choice she has made, presenting truth by means of a show. Similarly, when he leaps into the open grave at Ophelia's funeral, ranting in high heroic terms, he is acting out for Laertes, and perhaps for himself as well, the folly of excessive, melodramatic expressions of grief.

---

[3] While these examples (unchanged) off the Princeton webside indicate "when and what" it must be remembered that many students will have to master more than one referencing/ attribution convention – for instance in the Humanities it is quite conceivable that a student will have to have mastered both the APA referencing conventions and those as set down in the Harvard system. Academics who publish widely in a range of journals will have some sympathy for how difficult it is to master more than one convention. For this reason it is argued that inaccurate referencing (breaking rules of convention) should not be handled as plagiarism at Wits.

1. Example of verbatim plagiarism, or unacknowledged direct quotation (lifted passages are underlined):

Almost all of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* can be understood as a play about acting and the theatre. For example, there is <u>Hamlet's pretense of madness, the "antic disposition"</u> that <u>he puts on to protect himself and prevent his antagonists from plucking out the heart of his mystery.</u> <u>When Hamlet enters his mother's room,</u> he <u>holds up, side by side, the pictures of the two kings, Old Hamlet and Claudius, and proceeds to describe for her the true nature of the choice she has made, presenting truth by means of a show. Similarly, when he leaps into the open grave at Ophelia's funeral, ranting in high heroic terms, he is acting out for Laertes, and perhaps for himself as well, the folly of excessive, melodramatic expressions of grief.</u>

Comment: Aside from an opening sentence loosely adapted from the original and reworded more simply, this entire passage is taken almost word-for-word from the source. The few small alterations of the source do not relieve the writer of the responsibility to attribute these words to their original author. A passage from a source may be worth quoting at length if it makes a point precisely or elegantly. In such cases, copy the passage exactly, place it in quotation marks, and cite the author.

2. Example of lifting selected passages and phrases without proper acknowledgement (lifted passages are underlined):

Almost all of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* can be understood as a play about acting and the theatre. For example, in Act 1, Hamlet adopts a <u>pretense of madness</u> that he uses <u>to protect himself and prevent his antagonists from</u> discovering his mission to revenge his father's murder. He also presents <u>truth by means of a show</u> when he compares the portraits of Gertrude's two husbands in order <u>to describe for her the true nature of the choice she has made.</u> And when he leaps in Ophelia's open grave <u>ranting in high heroic terms,</u> Hamlet is <u>acting out</u> <u>the folly of excessive, melodramatic expressions of grief.</u>

Comment: This passage, in content and structure, is taken wholesale from the source. Although the writer has rewritten much of the paragraph, and fewer phrases are lifted verbatim from the source, this is a clear example of plagiarism. Inserting even short phrases from the source into a new sentence still requires placing quotations around the borrowed words and citing the author. If even one phrase is good enough to borrow, it must be properly set off by quotation marks. In the case above, if the writer had rewritten the entire paragraph and only used Alvin Kernan's phrase "high heroic terms" without properly quoting and acknowledging its source, the writer would have plagiarized.

3. Example of paraphrasing the text while maintaining the basic paragraph and sentence structure:

Almost all of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* can be understood as a play about acting and the theatre. For example, in Act 1, Hamlet pretends to be insane in order to make sure his enemies do not discover his mission to revenge his father's murder. The theme is even more obvious when Hamlet compares the pictures of his mother's two husbands to show her what a bad choice she has made, using their images to reveal the truth. Also,

when he jumps into Ophelia's grave, hurling his challenge to Laertes, Hamlet demonstrates the foolishness of exaggerated expressions of emotion.

- **Comment:** Almost nothing of Alvin Kernan's original language remains in this rewritten paragraph. However the key idea, the choice and order of the examples, and even the basic structure of the original sentences are all taken from the source. Although it would no longer be necessary to use quotation marks, it would absolutely be necessary to place a citation at the end of this paragraph to acknowledge that the content is not original. Better still would be to acknowledge the author in the text by adding a second sentence such as"Alvin Kernan provides several examples from the play where these themes become more obvious"and then citing the source at the end of the paragraph. In the case where the writer did not try to paraphrase the source's sentences quite so closely, but borrowed the main idea and examples from Kernan's book, an acknowledgment would still be necessary.