

University of St Andrews

AVOIDING ACADEMIC FRAUD

There are some activities in higher education that most people would find it easy to identify as "cheating". For example these might include someone writing notes in their pencil-case to carry into an examination, and someone submitting for assessment as their own work an essay that their brother wrote two years before. These are obviously dishonest. At this University the first example would be covered by the University's examination and discipline procedures, and the second example by the plagiarism section of the Academic Fraud procedures under 'Categories of Fraud'. In both cases, serious penalties would be likely to be imposed if the student were found guilty. But what about less obvious and possibly inadvertent "cheating"? The notes below are intended to provide some guidance.

Plagiarism

Plagiarism, ie the passing off of someone else's work as one's own, is dishonest. The avoidance of plagiarism is also important in the wider community. We have a duty to others to acknowledge their input to works that we produce; we should not be seeking to claim credit for the ideas or analysis of others. One of the difficulties we have in higher education is in defining the line between plagiarism and the creative use of material from multiple sources. We urge students to take care to understand how the staff in their Schools interpret plagiarism in their subject areas. We do not wish students to be the subject of a claim of academic fraud through not being aware of the issues involved.

Copying and pasting material from a web site or book into a piece of written work may be regarded as plagiarism, even if it is just one sentence that is copied. While students are certainly expected to read the work of others, their written work should be in their own words, and the sources of information they are using should be acknowledged in a footnote, specific reference list, or bibliography depending on the subject's requirements. Merely changing a word here and there through a copied paragraph is not enough either, and nor is taking the structure of another's article and rephrasing the argument (known as paraphrasing). At this level of education we expect 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.

If you wish to include material from one of your sources word-for-word, then it should be included within quotation marks and have its source clearly stated. This gives credit where it is due, and allows the reader to follow up the material presented. (It is quite normal practice in some disciplines, but is rare and often inappropriate in the sciences). If you wish to use a picture or diagram from one of your sources, and if this is allowed by copyright law, then this is probably acceptable as long as you specifically acknowledge the source.

Earlier in your education it may have been entirely acceptable to find information from one or a few sources and to copy these out with a few linking sentences into a report of some form. This is no longer the case. Most pieces of written work that you may be asked to tackle will involve some analysis or explanation from you, helping you to develop the higher-level skills of synthesis of an argument and explaining concepts to others. If at any stage you are not sure about what is allowable, please ask those teaching staff associated with the assignment for advice.

Plagiarism is not confined to stealing the work of known authors. Plagiarism can also occur if students copy material from one or more other students. We point out that allowing someone to copy your work is also an offence under this University's Academic Fraud regulations, so both the copier and the original author may face proceedings. This cheating could take the form of copying results of a laboratory experiment, part of an essay, or part of a computer program. Here again there may be "grey areas". 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.

As suggested above, if you are in doubt as to what is allowed, please ask the teaching staff associated with the assignment.

Falsification

In any academic study the integrity of the researcher is vital. Any data that are 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.

Procedures and Penalties

Cases of academic fraud will usually be handled at School level, and penalties can range from deduction of marks to loss of Permission to Proceed. Major or repeated cases of fraud will be taken to a University panel, and there the penalties available include refusing permission to graduate with an Honours Degree and termination of studies. At these occasions you will have the right to be accompanied by a representative who may be a person who is either presently matriculated as a student, or is an employee of the University Court of the University of St Andrews or who is elected as a sabbatical officer of or an employee of the Students' Association of the University of St Andrews. There is a right of appeal against all decisions, provided it is within the terms of the agreed University procedures.

Further Information

June Knowles at the University's central Learning and Teaching Service (SALTIRE) has also produced guidance on avoiding accusations of academic fraud. This material is

available online as a WebCT course called SOAR, which will appear in your list of available courses when you log in to the WebCT system. There are also links to various academic writing websites from the Study Support area of the SALTIRE webpages.

The links below go to potentially useful material from the JISC Plagiarism Advice Service. The first is particularly recommended for students to read, the third may be of more direct relevance to teaching staff.

Avoiding Plagiarism, Advice for Students - web-based advice to students on plagiarism from Dr. Hugh S Pyper of the School of Theology and Religious Studies at the University of Leeds, provided by JISC Plagiarism Advice Service. This is a useful document that gives good guidance.

Academic/Teaching Practice - web-based advice to teaching staff from the JISC Plagiarism Advice Service

Please note that these guidance notes are a commentary on the Academic Fraud regulations approved by Academic Council in April 2005 (see <http://foi.st-andrews.ac.uk/PublicationScheme/servlet/core.generator.globserv?id=1030>). These regulations must be taken as the definitive source of information.

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