

Academic Integrity Policy - *for staff use*

Owned by:	Academic Registrars Department
Maintained by:	Quality and Standards
Last updated:	1 May 2020
Approved on:	24 June 2020
Effective from:	1 August 2020
Review date:	1 April 2023
Current version:	1.0

Academic Integrity Policy for Staff

1. Precepts

- 1.1 As an academic community, all students and staff at the University of Westminster are expected to demonstrate the highest standards of academic conduct.¹
- 1.2 The University's expectation is that all grades obtained by students must result from the student's own efforts to learn and develop. Credit is awarded as a result of assessments which are designed to demonstrate that a (given) student has fulfilled the learning outcomes in a module. For all individual assessments, the work completed must demonstrate the student's own learning. For group assessments, the expectation is normally that students should indicate the extent of their involvement in a given project.
- 1.3 There are specific examination regulations which define acceptable behaviour in formal scheduled examinations and other time-limited assessments. These are set out in [Section 10](#) and [Section 7](#) of the Handbook of Academic Regulations.
- 1.4 The overarching principles set out in this policy apply to all forms of assessment, and the specific requirements relating to referencing and plagiarism refer specifically to coursework and other forms of written assessment.
- 1.5 Any academic work which is not completed in accordance with these guiding principles and regulations may be defined as poor scholarship, or academic misconduct.
- 1.6 This Academic Integrity Policy – for staff seeks to draw a clearer distinction between poor scholarship (e.g. incorrect or inadequate referencing as a result of students' lack of understanding) and academic misconduct (e.g. copying sections from sources in a way which presents them as a student's own work, buying essays, taking notes into exams), and there is also an emphasis from "offence" to "good practice" and from 'catching' to 'educating'.
- 1.7 The Policy provides a framework within which Colleges have considerable flexibility in precisely how they approach the detection of academic misconduct. The policy also includes some requirements with which all Colleges must comply, including, for example, the use of referencing guides and text matching systems with students at an early point in their course.

2. Plagiarism: Poor Practice or Intention to Cheat?

- 2.1 The University's Academic Regulations define various types of Academic Misconduct. Of these, Plagiarism is by far the most significant, making up the majority of all reported cases.

¹ See also QAA Code of Practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education Section 6: Assessment of Student – September 2006

- 2.2 Plagiarism (see definition in Section 10 Academic Misconduct) is an aspect of academic misconduct that has grown in significance with advances in online technologies and publishing. If carried out intentionally, cheating and plagiarism have the objectives of deceiving examiners and this threatens the integrity of the assessment procedures and the value of the University's qualifications. It is unethical to try to gain an unfair advantage over other students, and for this reason the University imposes strict penalties on those students who intentionally contravene the Assessment Regulations, which includes students shown to have plagiarised.
- 2.3 However, unlike other forms of misconduct (e.g. exam cheating) there are more complex issues related to plagiarism. It is not always a student's intention to cheat, even if they are technically found guilty of plagiarism and the extent of plagiarism (therefore, the seriousness of any 'offence') can vary considerably from one case to another.
- 2.4 In addition, the high profile that plagiarism has is often too focused around 'plagiarism detection systems' (text-matching software) and associated punitive measures. However, there are other aspects of plagiarism clearly linked to learning and teaching which must be addressed at institutional and local level and these include most particularly:
- ensuring consistent provision of guidance on referencing to students on all courses;
 - supporting students in raising their understanding of plagiarism;
 - assessment design to minimise the likelihood of plagiarism arising.
- 2.5 The University considers plagiarism to be a serious issue but takes the view that an educational approach to prevention is the priority, with detection mechanisms necessary but forming only part of an overall formative approach to an understanding of plagiarism in the early stages of an undergraduate course. Accordingly, the University is committed to:
- helping students to understand plagiarism through a programme of education and support starting in the months before they are due to start at the university and continuing after they join the institution.
 - tailoring support to international students, who may bring different understandings of good academic practice from different educational cultures;
 - using text-matching software to assist the educational process and where appropriate to highlight potential instances of plagiarism that might lead to disciplinary action;
 - ensuring students are treated equitably and consistently in relation to University policy on plagiarism and assessment offences;
 - ensuring that staff have a clear and common understanding of policy and procedure, and that implementation is consistent with institutional policy.

3. Supporting students to avoid plagiarism

- 3.1 Support for students can be provided in a number of ways (e.g. through the provision of tutorials (face to face and online), clear and consistent information (online text based and oral) and through the use of text-matching services² which show where students' assignments include text which is identical to that in another document.

² the university has 2 coursework submission and marking systems (Turnitin and Blackboard Assignment) that offer different functionalities (e.g. one has superior tools for group work

- 3.2 The University has already made available an online course on plagiarism and referencing. This course is regularly updated, and all module and course handbooks **must** make reference to it through the standard handbook plagiarism statement (see 3.4 below). Students can access the plagiarism course once they start their studies at the university anytime under the 'Learning Resources' tab in Blackboard. Prior to arriving at the university students will have access to a broader online course about Academic Success. This course includes a section on academic integrity that includes an introduction to plagiarism.
- 3.3 Academic integrity is addressed as part of induction and orientation in all courses at all levels of study, is inbuilt as part of the curriculum in taught courses and is considered as part of annual progress reviews for research students.
- 3.4 All module handbooks and course handbooks **must** contain the agreed standard statement about the University's policy on plagiarism (see Appendix 1).
- 3.5 The use of text-matching software (Turnitin or SafeAssign) potentially provides a means for students to be educated about plagiarism and how to avoid it.
- 3.6 The use of text-matching software provides a valuable opportunity to demonstrate to students the way in which the University expects their work to be referenced and to demonstrate the type of un-attributed text which may prove problematic. At Westminster all students on taught courses (Levels 3 – 7) **will** be exposed to text-matching software in their first year as part of the formative stage of their course (including the online tutorial referred to in 3.2) to help them understand plagiarism and to monitor the quality of their own work. This will encourage students' sense of ownership and autonomy as learners.
- 3.7 Turnitin and Safe- Assign, text-matching systems used by the University, may be used in a formative, developmental way to assist students in understanding the appropriate use of sources and raising awareness of plagiarism. This may help students to develop their authorial voice, particularly when students discuss Turnitin originality reports with tutors, supervisors or other academics.

4. Supporting staff in assessment design

- 4.1 It is anticipated that teaching teams would wish to use assessment strategies that discourage plagiarism. A clear picture of the alignment between what students should learn (the learning outcomes), teaching and learning approaches and assessment, helps in efforts to 'design out' opportunities for plagiarism. Variety in assessment types and seeking very individual submissions should allow students to demonstrate what they have learned and how it relates to them in their specific learning context. Online guides in support of assessment can be found at:
- PlagiarismAdvice.org, initially known as the Plagiarism Advisory Service - Resources <http://www.plagiarismadvice.org/resources>
 - The University also recommends the following key text:

assessment and moderation of work that is marked online). Each system has its own text match checking tool.

- Carroll, J. 2013, A Handbook for Deterring Plagiarism in Higher Education – Second Edition, OCSLD ISBN 1 873576 74 9

5. Approaches to the detection of plagiarism

- 5.1 The University acknowledges that a number of approaches may be used by individual staff in detecting potential instances of plagiarism. For example, in some cases a marker may recognise specific passages from books or articles (hard copy or online) and/or may use the Google search engine (or equivalent) to check for previous publication of assessment item content.
- 5.3 The University uses the term ‘text-matching software³’ because these systems are only a tool to detect potential plagiarism; they are not ‘plagiarism detection systems’. Academic judgment is required to determine whether or not a student may have plagiarised.
- 5.4 Where text-matching software is used, it should be used for entire cohorts within a course or module, rather than being used to check the work of individual students.
- 5.5 Guidance for staff on creating and marking assessments via Turnitin is provided via online via Blackboard click on [Help and Support](#).
- 5.6 In order to ensure that the University can reassure itself that a consistent approach to the detection of plagiarism is being taken, in addition to those representatives nominated to investigate allegations of plagiarism (see 7.2 below), each College Teaching Committee should identify one member with particular responsibility for College policy on guidance to students and the detection of plagiarism.

6. An educational approach to ‘first time plagiarism’

- 6.1 The University recognises that many students may need time to learn new referencing conventions at an early stage in their course and that, other than in the most explicit cases of cheating, it may not always be appropriate to penalise students severely on the first occasion that they are found to have plagiarised in an assessment.
- 6.2 An educational approach to first-time cases of plagiarism is better for the student and for the University in the long term. The Table of Penalties has been devised to ensure all first offences are treated equally.
- 6.3 It remains for the Module Leader to determine whether the work constitutes poor scholarship (in which case it would be marked on its merits, discounting the poorly referenced/plagiarised sections) or plagiarism (in which case it is dealt with as an academic misconduct case and would have a penalty applied).

7. Reporting Plagiarism & Penalties for Plagiarism

³ the university has 2 coursework submission and marking systems (Turnitin and Blackboard Assignment) that offer different functionalities (e.g. one has superior tools for group work assessment and moderation of work that is marked online). Each system has its own text match checking tool.

- 7.1 The University's approach to plagiarism prevention, detection and reporting should be consistent across all Colleges, both to ensure that the University's academic standards are maintained and in order to ensure fair treatment for students on all courses.
- 7.2 The responsibility for detecting and reporting plagiarism resides with the markers for each assessment. However, once reported to Academic Standards it is the joint responsibility of the Academic Standards team to record the allegation and to conduct any investigation which may be necessary.
- 7.3 The University's Academic Regulations set out the process to be followed and the potential penalties which may be applied in cases where a student is found guilty of academic misconduct.
- 7.4 The penalty imposed on a student found guilty of plagiarism may depend on one of the following factors:
- The extent of the plagiarism within the piece of assessed work;
 - Whether the student had previously been warned about plagiarism or found guilty of plagiarism on a previous occasion;
- 7.5 In order to ensure that reported allegations of plagiarism are handled consistently and fairly across all Colleges a Table of Penalties has been devised for use by academic staff and representatives responsible for handling cases of alleged plagiarism.
- 7.6 The Academic Standards team should deliver staff development sessions to College representatives nominated to investigate alleged cases of plagiarism.

Appendix 1 – Student Guidance on Plagiarism for Course Handbooks

Academic Conduct, Plagiarism and referencing

As an academic community, all students and staff at the University of Westminster are expected to demonstrate the highest standards of academic conduct. The University's expectation is that all grades obtained by students must result from the student's own efforts to learn and develop. If carried out knowingly, cheating and plagiarism have the objectives of deceiving examiners and gaining an unfair advantage over other students. This is unethical. It also threatens the integrity of the assessment procedures and the value of the University's academic awards.

While you are studying here, your academic performance will be assessed on the basis of your own work. Anyone caught cheating in exams/in-class tests or through coursework assignments will be subject to formal investigation in accordance with Section 10 of the [University's Handbook of Academic Regulations](#).

It is your responsibility to ensure that you are not vulnerable to any allegation that you have breached the assessment regulations. Serious penalties are imposed on those who cheat. These may include failure in a module or an element of a module, suspension or exclusion from your course and withdrawal of academic credits awarded previously for modules which have been passed.

The Library runs regular workshops on how to reference correctly and information on how to avoid plagiarism is available on the Library and IT Services website: westminster.ac.uk/referencing-your-work. In addition, you can access an interactive tutorial all about understanding plagiarism via Blackboard by clicking the tab 'Avoiding Plagiarism' at the top of any Blackboard page.

For more information and details of what is considered an assessment offence can be found here: westminster.ac.uk/academic-misconduct