



ACADEMIC HONESTY AND PREVENTING PLAGIARISM POLICY FAQ'S

Prepared by the Student Advisory Service, February 2008

Source: Academic Honesty & Preventing Plagiarism Policy
<http://wcf.vu.edu.au/GovernancePolicy>

1. What is the University's Academic Honesty & Preventing Plagiarism Policy?

This is an official policy of the University developed for the purpose of ensuring a consistent approach to academic fairness and honesty.

All members of the academic community, students and staff alike are responsible for the integrity and originality of their work. The policy aims to establish an educative and culturally informed framework for the shared responsibility of staff and students to prevent plagiarism and academic misconduct. A strong motivation behind this policy is to have incidents of alleged plagiarism addressed locally and initially in an educative - as opposed to punitive - manner.

2. Why is academic "misconduct" such a big deal?

The University community and future employers need to have confidence that students holding qualifications have the knowledge and skills matching their credentials.

Academic misconduct is dishonesty with the intention of gaining an "unjust" academic advantage therefore "bringing the University into disrepute" (section 3.3 p 3).

Such dishonesty can take the form of "ghost writing", which is writing under the name of someone else. An example is when a sports star has a publicist ghost write a book or newspaper article for them. This practice is unacceptable in academic writing.

"Recycling" of your own work for a new unit of study - or when repeating a unit - is also considered academic dishonesty.

3. What is plagiarism?

The Policy defines plagiarism as the practice of using another person's "intellectual output" and presenting it as one's own "without appropriate acknowledgement" (s. 3.11 p 4)

4. Can you give me some examples of plagiarism?

- **Word for word copying** of sentences/paragraphs in an assignment without acknowledgement (s. 3.11.1 p 4)
- **Downloading ('ripping') portions of essays or assignments** from the web and presenting these for assessment as your own work (s. 3.11.2 p 4)
- **Presenting other students' work** or research data as your work (s. 3.11.4 p 4)
- **Copying without acknowledging the source** (from any written or spoken text) (s. 3.11.4 p 4)
- **Paraphrasing** without acknowledging someone "else's concepts, experimental results, or conclusions drawn from analysing evidence or arguments without acknowledging the originator of the idea(s) or conclusion(s)". Therefore, putting someone else's ideas in your own words can still be plagiarism if you don't reference appropriately. (s. 3.11.5 p 4). An excellent learning tool to assist students in learning acceptable and unacceptable paraphrasing is at the end of the policy itself (refer "Student Handout 2 – How much do you have to change a piece of writing to avoid plagiarism?" p 49).

5. What are my rights when accused of plagiarism or academic misconduct?

The policy is built on the principles of "procedural fairness". For example, an investigation into your conduct/work must occur before any allegation of plagiarism is levelled and consequences imposed.

(s. 3.12 p 5) Also, the policy states that any evidence of plagiarism or academic misconduct must be "disclosed" (shown) to you "prior to the hearing" so the "students may have full knowledge of the nature and substance of all allegations". (s. 3.12 p 5)

6. I've heard about different levels of plagiarism. What are they and what do they mean?

The policy recognizes that breaches of plagiarism are not identical and that there are various degrees of severity and premeditation in each case. Thus there is a framework for classifying incidents of plagiarism according to their seriousness. These categories of plagiarism are: **Levels 1, 2 and 3.**

PLEASE NOTE: Students in the first year of study of their course are considered to be in an "**academic apprenticeship**" period. Therefore, plagiarism breaches during this period are often considered at Level 1 and remedial rather than punitive sanctions are imposed. "VU does not leave these important learning processes to chance and will provide training in acceptable processes for borrowing another person's words." (s. 5.2.1 p 6)

7. How does the University decide what level of plagiarism has occurred?

Your teacher/tutor will make a preliminary assessment after conferring with the Course Coordinator/Program Manager

Level 1 Plagiarism

What is Level 1 Plagiarism?	What will happen?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Inadequate or misleading: citing, referencing or paraphrasing arising from a student's limited knowledge about plagiarism or how to conform to academic conventions". • At this level, it is considered that plagiarism is more a result of "carelessness or neglect rather than the intention to deceive" This may include a lack of learning about plagiarism. (Associated Procedure 6.3, s.2.2.5 p 21) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If evidence supports Level 1 Plagiarism your teacher/tutor and the Program Manager/Course Coordinator will meet with you to determine the allegations and appropriate remedy or penalty (Associated Procedure 6.3, s.2.2.6 p 21) • At the hearing, your teacher/tutor will complete the Plagiarism Checklist (refer <i>Attachment 3, p 36</i>).

Level 2 Plagiarism

What is Level 2 Plagiarism?	What will happen?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "This plagiarism is more serious than Level 1 It is plagiarism that includes fraudulent acts or works arising from a student's ignorance of academic conventions (where adequate knowledge would have been expected) and where the intention to deceive an assessor...or (to) cheat is apparent". • Level 2 is often applied to students who have passed their "academic apprenticeship" period (refer Question 6 above for definition). The student's level of support during their academic apprenticeship is relevant. • It is also often a charge when more than 10%" of material/content has been reportedly plagiarised. (Associated Procedure 6.3, s.2.2.5 p 21) 	<p>Level 2 plagiarism is considered to be of a more serious nature. Therefore, it is handled at the Head of School/Head of Department level. The Head of School will convene a Plagiarism Panel comprising:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Head of School/Department (Chair) • Course Coordinator/Program Manager • one other staff member from the relevant teaching area • staff member who identified the possible plagiarism. (Associated Procedure 6.4, s.1.1.8 p 27)

Level 3 Plagiarism

What is Level 3 Plagiarism?	What will happen?
<p>"This is more serious than Level 2 Plagiarism and includes copied or appropriated work arising from the clear intention to deceive, or premeditated cheating by way of plagiarism." In this context "the effect of the plagiarism is considered to seriously compromise the assessment process. Level 3 Plagiarism is considered to be academic misconduct." (Associated Procedure 6.3, s.2.2.5 p 21)</p>	<p>The seriousness of this level means that the Executive Dean/Associate Director shall convene a small panel comprising:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Executive Dean (Chair) • Chair or Deputy Chair of the Education and Research Board (or nominee) • Faculty Associate Dean/TAFE Senior Educator with responsibility in that School. (Associated Procedure 6.4, s.1.1.12 p 27)

9. I have been called to attend a Plagiarism Panel what should I do?

The Student Advisory Service strongly recommends that you prepare a written submission addressing the allegation/s of plagiarism made against you. For assistance in writing your submission refer to Appendix **Guidelines for Writing a Submission to Your Plagiarism Panel** (p 4). The Student Advisory Service can also assist you through the process.

10. What will happen when I meet the plagiarism panel?

There will be an investigation into the allegation of plagiarism. You will be asked questions and then have a chance to respond. You have the right to bring a support person who you have arranged prior to meeting with the panel. This can be anyone, including a Student Advisor from Student Services or a parent. Questions can also be asked by you (or through your support person).

You should have a chance to sum up your case at the end before leaving briefly so the decision makers can confer and make a decision. On returning, you will be informed of the remedial action given and any sanctions imposed. These decisions will be confirmed in writing. At the conclusion of the hearing, the Chair will complete the **Plagiarism Checklist**, which needs to be signed by the student, and the Chair.

11. What are the penalties and remedies I could face if found to have plagiarised?

The penalties and remedies imposed depend on the level of plagiarism established. For example, the penalties can be **re-submission** of an assignment (with a capped mark of 50%), **overall failure of the unit of study** and/or **exclusion** from the course (in cases of serious academic misconduct). For a complete list of penalties possible for each level refer to: Attachment 1: Schedule of Penalties and Remedies and Who Can Impose Them (pp 31-33).

12. If I am found guilty where is it recorded? Who gets to see the panel's outcome?

A record is kept on your Faculty student file in case there is any other allegation of academic misconduct.

13. How can I learn more about avoiding plagiarism?

- Consult your tutor/lecturer or your Course Coordinator/Program Manager (check contact times on their doors or e-mail them for a brief meeting)
- The VU guides to citation and referencing conventions can be found at: <http://w2.vu.edu.au/library/infolink/webref/style.htm>
- Contact VU Student Learning Support on 9919 4744

14. Can I appeal a decision?

Appeals can only be made on the basis of: a) an unfair process (s. 3.12 p5) b) where due process has not been followed as per the policy or c) on the introduction of new evidence. Appeals are made to the **University Discipline Committee** who will review the decision and has the power to change the previous decision. Please write the grounds for appealing and attach your original written submission and send it to: Mr Tony Vlahandreas, Senior Policy Coordinator, VU Governance and Policy at tony.vlahandreas@vu.edu.au.

15. Am I responsible for plagiarism by a colleague in a group assignment?

Every time you submit an assignment at VU, you are required to sign an **Assessment Declaration** that it is your own work (refer Attachment 2 p34). When submitting a group assignment, this means you are all signing that you are aware of the sources of information of all the members of your small group. Therefore, it is strongly suggested that you make clear that it is everyone's responsibility to bring and show original sources before submitting the assignment. This can happen at one of the face-to-face group meetings.

Each student is entitled to an individual investigation into their actions (or inactions) in their group. This may result in varying penalties and remedies for each group member.

16. Where can I get help when charged with Plagiarism or Academic Misconduct?

The Student Advisory Service can assist you in the preparation of a written submission for the plagiarism panel and support you during the hearing. The Student Advisory Service strongly recommends that you prepare a written submission. Please refer to the writing guidelines below. For further assistance, please contact the Student Advisory Service on 9919 4360 or email your draft submission to studentadvisors@vu.edu.au.

Appendix

GUIDELINES FOR WRITING A SUBMISSION TO YOUR PLAGIARISM PANEL

IF YOU BELIEVE YOU HAVE NOT PLAGIARISED

- Explain why not and attach any evidence

WHERE YOU HAVE PLAGIARISED

- Offer **genuine and substantiated reasons** for making a poor choice (we all make them, and when we do, it is about taking responsibility and learning)
- Explain what you understood about academic honesty before this charge

It is suggested that you refer directly to the policy (see below) to determine the criteria for writing your submission. The Plagiarism Panel will need to take into account any relevant considerations "prior to imposing any penalty or making a decision on remedial action". (Associate Procedure 6.4, s. 1.2.7 p 29)

Therefore, frame your written submission using the following considerations:

- **"any previous offences; "**
If this is your first offence, suggest ways you can learn from this experience
- **"any adverse consequences for the student resulting from a finding of guilt or from the imposition of a particular penalty. For example, loss of residency, professional/workplace retention, cultural implications;"**
Furthermore, that failing the unit of study may have a major impact on the timeframe for completing your course eg delay by an academic year leading to economic/social costs.
- **"the level of remorse or co-operation exhibited;"**
Responding to the following key questions can help you show remorse by demonstrating insight into the implications of your academic dishonesty.

Why are you sorry (beyond being sorry for having been caught)? Why is it not fair on your fellow students? Can a future employer trust you have the knowledge and skills reflected in your academic transcript? Do your actions potentially undermine the value of your VU degrees in the market place? Who do you feel you owe an apology to (via a hand written letter or e-mail)?
- **"the offender was under duress;"**
Outline reasons which would have led you to such an action, for example stress or group dynamics in a group assignment – provide evidence where possible.
- **"if the offending work was in final draft thesis material or in a submitted thesis;"**
- **"degree of pre-meditation;"**
Were you stressed and cut corners due to other responsibilities? Substantiate any time constraints with documents such as pay slip/s, a rent agreement or Health Care Card.
- **"the nature and the extent of plagiarism;"** (The software program "Turnitin" found at turnitin.com, calculates the percentage sameness between an essay and multiple sources. This tool is used in the identification of plagiarism in universities around the world. You can ask for a copy of any such report prior to making your written submission (refer "procedural fairness" in question 5 of the FAQ sheet).