



# UNDERSTANDING PLAGIARISM: A GUIDE FOR LECTURERS

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## Why worry about plagiarism?

Plagiarism has long been a problem but has grown explosively with the advent of ICT and the Internet. In universities, plagiarism seems to be prevalent and pernicious, putting academic integrity under threat. It indicates the students' failure to observe good writing habits and ethics.

Having an academic integrity policy is not enough. It must be communicated to all students. The university – that is you, me and all who inhabit the teaching and learning space, must accept, adhere to, articulate and apply plagiarism policies consistently and seriously. If we do not stand up and address this, we would have failed future generations of graduates in ethics, professionalism and values.

In the fight against this growing problem, lecturers are the most important group in shaping students' behaviour and attitudes. Lecturers can limit the scope for plagiarism in various ways; for example – design assessments that require reflection and thinking, lower the motivation to plagiarise – be reasonable with assessments, increase the risk of detection – use ICT to detect and deter culprits and raise the costs of plagiarism – take stern action in cases of intentional plagiarism.

## What research says about plagiarism among students

Every research finding or observation indicates that academic dishonesty (including plagiarism) is on the rise and, in many cases, dramatically so. A review of studies (McCabe et al., 1993, 1997, 2001, 2006; Park, 2003; Walker, 1998; Wideman, 2008) suggests that there is a significant to sharp increase in plagiarism since the 1990's. Nearly 50% of the students in a UiTM Plagiarism Survey (2010) admitted to having plagiarised and almost all know of others who have. Assignments are most tainted by plagiarism.

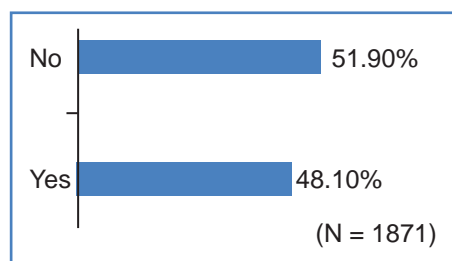


Figure 1: Students admitting to have plagiarised  
Source: UiTM Plagiarism Survey, 2010

Since the studies are based mostly on self-report, the actual incidence may be much higher than reported. In addition, due to the simplistic understanding of plagiarism among students, the actual incidence can be expected to be decidedly higher still.

Peer behaviour is one of the key factors in inducting and inducing students into plagiarism. The more fellow students are seen engaging in this, the less seriously academic integrity is viewed and the greater is the motivation to do likewise. This institutional context constructs a different reality of academic integrity than what the university envisages.

Institutional context is another key factor in understanding plagiarism. Shared understanding of the academic integrity policies and rules of the university creates a strong normative environment that raises the cost of academic dishonesty. This shared understanding is too often taken for granted.

Academic integrity must be cultivated among academics and students. Continual and systematic communication and reinforcement is necessary to make real this institutional value.

Students learn much about the university from their lecturers. The lecturers' interest in monitoring students' behaviours and their attitudes and dispositions in dealing with cases of academic dishonesty, are some of the key factors that can reduce the tendency to plagiarise.

Deterrence Theory suggests that plagiarism, like other misconducts, is a result of conscious calculation on the part of students. The severity of the penalty and the chances of being noticed and reported play a big part in plagiarism.

## Why do students plagiarise?

There is a general convergence in research findings on why students plagiarise. They do it because they see others doing it and getting away with it. Within a competitive institutional context, students believe that plagiarism helps them perform better and stay ahead of the pack. They do it because they see that lecturers are not alert to detect it or seem not to take it seriously or let perpetrators off lightly. This attitude among lecturers lowers the risk of getting caught and redefines the seriousness of the misconduct.

There are also personal reasons why students plagiarise. Among the common reasons stated are – just too many assignments to complete. The OBE-based curriculum should cause a rethinking in the number and type of assessments in the light of assigned student learning time. Students complain that there is too little time to do all the assignments and maintain a healthy social life. They want to get better grades but their poor command of the English language is a major hindrance. Some students also believe that everything on the Internet is public domain and hence, is there for the taking! In countries and cultures where property rights are not entrenched, plagiarism is normal practice. The UiTM Plagiarism Survey reports similar reasons for this behaviour (see Figure 2).

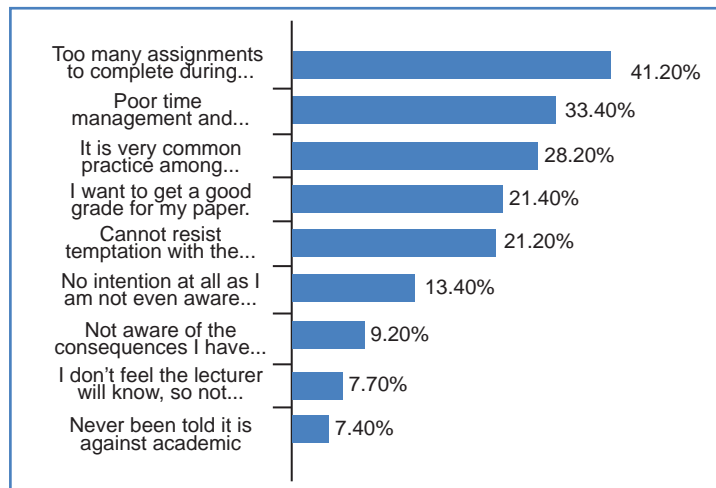


Figure 2: Reasons for Plagiarising (N=1871)  
Source: UiTM Plagiarism Survey 2010

Many students (and also staff) are unaware of the different types of plagiarism. They view plagiarism simplistically as a “cut-and-paste” issue. Hence, they translate, summarise and paraphrase without acknowledging the original source.

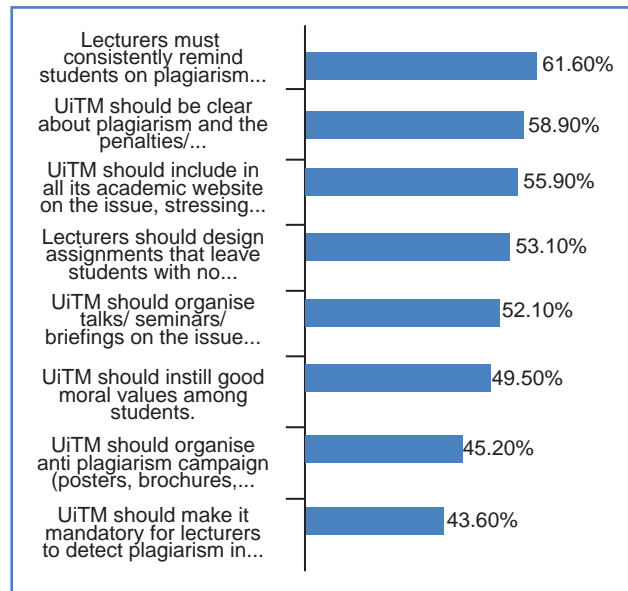


Figure 3: Actions to check plagiarism – student’s viewpoint (N=1871)  
Source: UiTM Plagiarism Survey 2010

Most of the factors cited by students as motivating them to plagiarise can be dealt with by lecturers (see Fig. 3). Outcome Based Education presents a timely opportunity to seriously rethink the quantity of assessments within and between courses. Student’s learning time should enable lecturers to be realistic with their time demands.

Providing a clear explanation of plagiarism and the right way to utilise the vast store of knowledge in all fields of study will reduce most unintentional plagiarism among students, an idea supported by students themselves.

Above all, the readiness to act firmly, fairly and consistently on any cases of plagiarism will send a message to the students that academic integrity is a very serious matter. An important corollary to this is the need for academic administrators to support this attitude among the lecturers.

## **Understand UiTM's plagiarism policy**

UiTM Plagiarism policy (see Appendix A) expands on Section 8A of the Education Institutions (Discipline) Act 176 (which came in force in December 2010) and outlines different types of plagiarism. Plagiarism includes using the work of others (and also one's own previous work) without appropriate acknowledgement or citation or permission; paraphrasing, translating, resubmitting one's own work, claiming work done by others (including for a fee) as one's own; fabricating data and doctoring data.

It is important to recognise that paraphrasing, summarising, translating, quoting etc. are important writing skills to have. But these skills must be exercised without seeking to appropriate ideas, opinions of others without acknowledgement (See Appendix A for further information).

## **Educate students in proper academic writing**

Most of the students in your class probably have not been tutored in good academic writing. Schools have not taught them academic writing and most of those entering the university do not have the benefit of such a course within the university. Much depends on you.

Most students will stay away from plagiarising if they know it (Brown & Howell, 2001). Teach the students the right way to use the works of others and introduce them to the citation convention that is required by the course, programme, faculty, discipline or UiTM.

The students will realise that citation and referencing skills are important skills to do well in their courses (McCabe, 2004). The Student Plagiarism Guide, 2012 provides guidance on two popular citation conventions – APA & IEEE.

Educate the students on different forms of plagiarism and the applicable citation and referencing convention and point to resources where they can get more information. This will go a long way to reduce unintentional or accidental plagiarism.

Lead by example in applying these conventions in all your handouts, notes and modules. This will reinforce the importance of citations and set a very good example for the students to follow. Never appear to ignore your own preachings! Students are always watching and look at the cues from your behaviours. "Do as I say but not as I do" devalues your role as a teacher.



## Deter plagiarism - attitude & assessment

Students' attitudes and behaviours are, to varying extent, shaped by what their lecturers individually and collectively expect, require, demand, reinforce, reward and penalise. Lecturers must communicate the importance of and the need for observing plagiarism policies at all times and in all their work.

You can show commitment to academic integrity by doing some or all of the following:

- Include information about plagiarism (e.g. plagiarism policy and penalties) in your course information documents provided to students (Kudos to all those who have done this).
- Spend time in the first meeting to explain plagiarism policies and your own attitude and expectations about the quality of student's work.
- Refer students to their student plagiarism guide.
- Inform students about the processes involved and the penalties that can be imposed for plagiarising.
- Consider including a standard declaration of originality in all submissions to sensitise students to the need to be honest.
- There are always tell-tale signs of plagiarism and the list below gives some of the common signs :
  - few or no in-text citations, references or direct quotes
  - unusual formatting or discontinuities in formatting style
  - use of American spelling only
  - poor introduction and conclusion that is inconsistent with the body of the assignment
  - different styles for in-text citations and references; bibliographies with two or more styles
  - no up-to-date references, citations of foreign authors only, out-dated information, references to past events as if they are current
  - going off the topic
  - showing differences in expression and style throughout the paper
  - having markers that indicate alternative ownership of the paper.

(From: Academic Integrity at Curtin University: Staff Guidelines for Dealing with Student Plagiarism. p.10)

The teaching role will be severely compromised if lecturers, who are faced with a high workload, fail to examine all submissions for plagiarism. Remain alert and ask questions about sources and meanings which might suggest plagiarism. The evidence of plagiarism is quite often too glaring to miss!

One of the contributors to plagiarism is the reusing of tests, assignments and projects by lecturers. This almost always invites students to “recycle” old submissions with or without changes. Lecturers can proactively limit plagiarism by revising their assessment activities every session. In revising and also thinking about assessment activities, please consider the Learning Outcomes and frame these assessments to require critical thinking, evaluation, synthesis, reflection etc. Assessment of knowledge and understanding should best be carried out as tests within controlled conditions – examinations.

There is a thin line that separates collaboration from collusion. Be very clear when collaboration is allowed or required and when work is to be individual. When collaboration is required, include process evidence to deter “free riders” and assert your right to grade students’ performance in group work based on actual contributions.

Do not be afraid to take action if evidence of plagiarism is clear. But always exercise care in ensuring that actions taken are commensurate with the seriousness of the act. Education should always be the first course of action. Lecturers should refer to the penalty guidelines and also the guidelines for determining the seriousness of plagiarism. Above all, always remain consistent, firm and fair in dealing with plagiarism.

### **Detect plagiarism - software**

As the enrollment increases, lecturers’ capacity to scrutinise all assignments and projects for plagiarism will certainly be challenged. You can either subject all or a sample of the students’ work to a plagiarism test using plagiarism software. Evidence shows that plagiarism drops by about 70% by the 4th year of use of a detection device (Turnitin.com, 2011).

Use the university-provided tools to detect plagiarism. Currently, Turnitin is available for post-graduate lecturers, supervisors and students. There are also many free online tools like Viper ([www.scanmyessay.com](http://www.scanmyessay.com)), Plagiarism Checker ([www.dustball.com/cs/plagiarism\\_checker](http://www.dustball.com/cs/plagiarism_checker)), Duplichecker ([www.duplichecker.com](http://www.duplichecker.com)), Docop ([www.doccop.com/](http://www.doccop.com/)), Copytracker ([copytracker.org/](http://copytracker.org/)), Copyscape ([www.copyscape.com](http://www.copyscape.com)) etc. which can be used on suspected cases. Encourage students to use these tools to avoid accidental or unintentional plagiarism.

The lecturers who have used these tools successfully to curb plagiarism should volunteer their experiences to colleagues at the faculty. Faculties should facilitate the sharing of in-house experiences to promote plagiarism detection within the assessment system.

## **How to Use Turnitin**

*Turnitin* is an online text matching software. It checks assignments or papers against the materials available in the Internet, books and databases. It locates and provides complete citation of the sources of all the materials used or referred to in an assignment. Plagiarised materials will be detected as the sources are likely to be identified.

Turnitin provides an Originality Report which indicates the extent to which the ideas contained in a paper or assignment are culled from other sources. A high Similarity Index suggests less original ideas in the assignment.

While students should be encouraged to read widely for their assignments and appropriately cite the sources of their ideas, developing and expressing original thinking is a higher order skill all programmes seek to achieve. A high or low Similarity Index does not automatically suggest plagiarism or otherwise. Lecturers must study the originality reports and provide feedback to students and not rely solely on the index as proof of plagiarism.

To use Turnitin, lecturers must register as users with local administrators, create classes, provide students with Class ID and Password and have all assignments uploaded to this site for a plagiarism check. Allow and encourage students to check their work for plagiarism before final submission. Self-regulation rather than policing is the most effective way to combat plagiarism. For more information please visit <https://turnitin.com/static/index.php>

## **Sanctions for plagiarism - penalties**

When students unintentionally commit plagiarism, they must be educated on the full meaning of plagiarism and ways to avoid it. However, if students knowingly commit plagiarism or when evidence of intentional plagiarism is overwhelming, action is required to correct behaviour and maintain academic integrity. Do not feel powerless – lecturers have the duty to assess every assignment/test/ project fairly including penalising appropriately for plagiarism.

Get to know the guidelines on penalties for plagiarism and share them with students. These are NOT confidential documents. In fact, students felt that clearer information on penalties for plagiarism is one way to stamp out plagiarism.

Use the criteria in ascertaining the seriousness of the offence (see Appendix B). The guideline applies four criteria in evaluating the seriousness of any alleged plagiarism. First, the experience of the students – 1st semester student, has no training in ethical writing, has not been briefed about plagiarism, an undergraduate etc. The second, the nature of plagiarism – involves a few sentences, inappropriate citation, copying the entire work, fabricating sources or data. Third, the extent of plagiarism - involves a few sentences or codes, chunks of texts, etc. Fourth, evidence of intention – student's act is deliberate and shows an attempt to conceal the act.

When in doubt, consult your Head of Studies or colleagues, and be prepared to give the benefit of the doubt to your students. Take immediate action if intentional plagiarism is evident.

## **How to deal with detected cases - process**

UiTM guidelines identify three levels of plagiarism. Level 1 plagiarism relates to minor violations and is for first timers, new students, when there appears to be no intention to cheat and when students clearly have little knowledge of the full meaning of plagiarism. Lecturers should take appropriate and consistent action, which should include counselling to avoid similar incidents in future. The lecturers must report such actions to the Head of Studies (Ketua Pusat Pengajian) for purposes of record.

Level 2 plagiarism relates to repeat offenders, more senior students who have been informed of the policy, where the scale of plagiarism is greater and plagiarism suggests intention to cheat. These cases should be referred to the Head of Studies for action.

Level 3 plagiarism refers to very serious forms of plagiarism. It often involves senior students, post graduate students, where plagiarism is extensive with more serious forms of plagiarism – submitting someone else’s paper, purchasing assignments from paper mills and fabricating or doctoring data. Lecturers must report this to the Deputy Dean or Deputy Rector (Academic Affairs) to consider and commence disciplinary committee, if need be.

The flowchart in Appendix C describes the processes involved in taking action against students caught plagiarising. Just follow the process and mete out the penalties or take remedial actions as appropriate. Your Head of Studies and Deputy Dean or Deputy Rector will be briefed and be aware of the procedures in dealing with levels 2 and 3 plagiarism offences.

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## **APPENDIX A PLAGIARISM POLICY**

### **Introduction**

Ethics and academic integrity are central principles guiding the educational mission of this university. Any violation is serious and will be dealt with in accordance with the guidelines, prescribed process and procedures.

### **Objective**

The objective of the plagiarism policy is to outline the acts that are deemed plagiarism in this university and will cause action to be taken in accordance with defined procedures. This plagiarism policy expands on, and provides clarity to the plagiarism provisions in the academic regulations of the university.

### **Definition of Plagiarism**

Plagiarism includes the acts stated below.

- **Copying and submitting** the work of others (including books, articles, theses, unpublished works, working papers, seminar, conference papers, research data, internal reports, lecture notes or tapes, music, computer source code, website content, creative or visual artifacts, designs or ideas) **without due acknowledgment**
- **Too closely paraphrasing** sentences, paragraphs or themes without due acknowledgment

- **Translating** the work of others without due acknowledgement
- **Presenting work** produced by someone else as one's own (e.g. allowing or hiring another person to do the work for which student claims authorship)  
[Includes outsourcing of whole or part of the assessment to others (knowledgepreneurs). For example, students get others to analyse data and write the analysis or do their project or buying assignments from paper mills]
- Submitting **one's own previously assessed** or published work without appropriate acknowledgement (self-plagiarism)  
[Includes assignments/projects submitted for other courses and theses developed and/or submitted to another university]
- In the case of group projects, **falsely representing or claiming individual contribution** of the collaborating partners.
- **Fabricating** (creating data) or **doctoring** data (changing data) as part of the submission

**Note:**

Adapted from Curtin University Plagiarism Policy.

Source: <http://academicintegrity.curtin.edu.au/students/> Retrieved on 30th June 2011



## APPENDIX B DETERMINING THE SERIOUSNESS OF PLAGIARISM: LEVEL I, II OR III

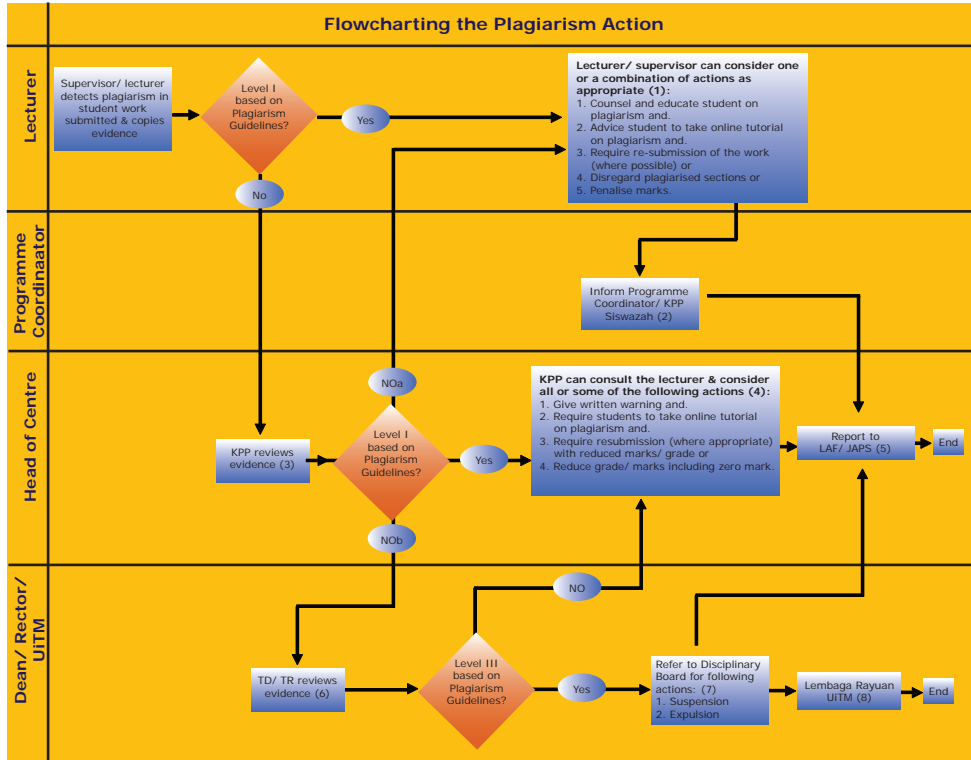
Criteria	Low	Medium	High
<b>Experience of the student</b>  Our expectation of the student's awareness of the offense	← For example:  First year students or firstsemester students  No instruction in ethical writing or plagiarism.	For example:  Students after first semester of programme but before final year  Having received information on plagiarism  Postgraduate students in the process of writing their thesis	For example: →  Final year, experienced students who can be expected to know about plagiarism and exhibit academic integrity  Post-graduate final thesis drafts or submitted thesis
<b>Nature of plagiarism</b>  The specific form of plagiarism	← For example:  Citation of work is not clear or adequate, or has numerous errors  Inappropriate paraphrasing	For example:  Fail to provide reference and/ or cite adequately  Copying parts of other students' work  Inaccurate indication of contribution to group work  Copying from websites, book or other publications  Resubmitting all or parts of previously submitted assignments/ work	For example: →  Fabricated references or citations  Fabricated/ doctored data  Whole work copied (from students or other sources)  Assignment written for a fee  Stealing work of others
<b>Extent of plagiarism</b>  Extent of work that is copied	← For example:  Few sentences, one paragraph, - one (minor) graphic  Few elements of computer source code or image	For example:  Two or three paragraphs or a segment of the work  Segments of computer source code	For example: →  More than 10% of the work is copied  Significant appropriation of ideas or artistic work  Multiple pages or sections of text or graphics copied
<b>Intention of student to plagiarise</b>  Was there intention to deceive?	← For example:  Plagiarism appears unintentional or due to lack of knowledge  Intent to cheat is unlikely or doubtful	For example:  Plagiarism appears intentional or the result of negligence  Intent to cheat is probable but cannot be clearly substantiated  Two or more students involved	For example: →  Plagiarism appears deliberate and planned  Actions contravene clear instructions  Intent to cheat is evident and can be substantiated
<b>Decision</b>  <b>Outcome/ determination</b>	LEVEL I offence	LEVEL II offence	LEVEL III offence

This table should be used to determine the alleged act of plagiarism and to submit to Faculty for further action.

**Note:**

The table is based substantially on the plagiarism document from Curtin University, Australia. It has been modified for clarity, brevity and also relevance.

## APPENDIX C FLOWCHART



**Note:**  
Numbers 1 to 8 in the flowchart indicate records associated with the process described

**Legend:**  
NOa: Not deemed level II plagiarism  
NOb: Deemed level III plagiarism

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