

# Dealing with Plagiarism by Graduate Students

## Guidelines for Handling Alleged Cases

### Definitions

Plagiarism is intellectual theft. It occurs when an individual submits or presents the oral or written work of another person as his or her own. This definition, taken from the *UBC Calendar*, applies to draft work and oral presentations as well as to final submissions. Failing to properly cite the work of another also constitutes plagiarism, even if it is accidental.

### Accountability

Plagiarism constitutes serious academic misconduct. The College of Graduate Studies is responsible for holding all graduate students in its graduate programs to the highest possible standards of academic conduct. This duty applies to the full spectrum of student academic activities, from coursework (both graduate and undergraduate) to the dissertation. The *UBC Calendar*, in its chapter on Policies and Regulations\*, assigns certain responsibilities to the "Dean's Office": for graduate students, these tasks come to the Dean's Office in the College of Graduate Studies. Therefore *every case of suspected plagiarism must be reported to the College of Graduate Studies, following the outline below.*

### Investigating and Documenting Plagiarism

Appendix A, below, describes some resources for investigating suspected cases of plagiarism, and outlines the documents the Faculty of Graduate Studies would like to receive along with notification in every case.

### General Principles

Any instructor who detects or suspects plagiarism in course work should act quickly to gather evidence. Appendix A describes some useful tools for this. When the evidence seems to support plagiarism, the instructor must notify the student as soon as possible about his or her concerns, and invite the student to meet to provide their side of the story. At this early stage in the process, it is important for the instructor to be prepared to receive information from the student (and others) with an open mind.

Every case of plagiarism, whether in coursework, a thesis, or a dissertation, must be brought forward to the Dean (or designated Associate Dean) of the Faculty of Graduate Studies. It is important that notification be made even if the instructor considers the incident minor, as this may help to identify a pattern of misconduct.

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## Plagiarism in Course Work: Academic Responses

An instructor who detects or suspects plagiarism in course work must notify, in writing, as soon as possible,

1. the student (who should be invited to meet the instructor),
2. the student's academic supervisor, and
3. the graduate advisor (or department head) in the student's graduate program.

If, after giving the student an opportunity to respond to the allegations of plagiarism, the instructor is satisfied that the student has committed academic misconduct, the instructor may make an academic response to the student's offence.

For plagiarism in a course assignment or examination, the instructor may, for example, require the student to re-do the assignment, or assign a mark of zero to the offending paper or examination. However, an instructor cannot give the student a zero on the entire course unless the plagiarism occurs in an assignment or examination that is worth 100% of the final grade. Also, the instructor cannot “discipline” the student with a suspension or expulsion from the university. Only the President has the authority to discipline students.

The instructor should consult and inform the graduate advisor (or department head) and the student's supervisor about the instructor's response, and the matter must be reported to the Dean of the Faculty of Graduate Studies.

## Plagiarism in Theses or Dissertations

Anyone who detects or suspects plagiarism in a draft or final version of a student's thesis or dissertation must notify, in writing, as soon as possible,

1. the graduate advisor (or department head) in the student's graduate program, and
2. the student's academic supervisor.

If the College of Graduate Studies has not yet sent the student's dissertation to an external examiner, the graduate advisor (or head) and the supervisor must notify the student of the allegations of plagiarism and provide the student with an opportunity to meet. Then they should refer the case to the College of Graduate Studies, as outlined below.

Special care is required when apparent plagiarism is discovered after a PhD student's dissertation has been submitted for final examination or after the student's program has been completed. In such cases the alleged plagiarism must be immediately reported to the Dean of the College of Graduate Studies. The Dean (or designated Associate Dean) will collaborate with the Graduate Program to determine an appropriate course of action.

## The Role of the College of Graduate Studies

In the steps outlined below, “The Dean” means “The Dean of the College of Graduate Studies (or designated Associate Dean)”.

1. The Dean will inform the student about the allegations of plagiarism and schedule a meeting to discuss them. The Dean will alert the student's disciplinary faculty (through the Associate Dean responsible for graduate education) that an investigation has begun.

2. The Dean will interview the student and possibly others, including the course instructor, the graduate program advisor and the student's supervisor. The interview should produce answers for all the questions on the "Statement of Case" form prescribed by the President's Advisory Committee on Student Discipline (PACSD), and such other questions as seem relevant to the case. The student may bring a witness or advocate to the meeting. The student will be asked to provide a written response and explanation to the Dean shortly after the meeting.
3. The Dean may then choose to refer the case to the President's Advisory Committee on Student Discipline (PACSD) for a formal disciplinary hearing. The next paragraph offers some information on the ensuing process. In other cases, the Dean may consider a letter of warning to the student to be an adequate response. The College of Graduate Studies will then inform the PACSD of its decision (with rationale); copies of the letter of warning will be sent to the PACSD, the Dean's office in the student's disciplinary faculty, the graduate advisor responsible for the student's program, and the student's academic supervisor.

## The President's Advisory Committee on Student Discipline

The President's Advisory Committee on Student Discipline makes findings of fact as to what has occurred and whether it constitutes plagiarism. Where plagiarism is found, the President then determines what penalties, if any, will be imposed given the circumstances of the case. Members of the PACSD are appointed by the President on the recommendation of University Counsel. The Committee usually sits in panels of five (including one graduate student). The most important circumstance considered by the Committee is the student's state of mind at the time of alleged plagiarism. The Committee must decide whether the misconduct was intentional or due to ignorance and, if it was intentional, whether there were any potentially extenuating circumstances.

Penalties may be imposed singly or in combination. The most lenient penalty is a letter of reprimand from the President. Other more severe penalties consist of a mark of zero in a course, a notation on the transcript that academic discipline has been imposed, a period of suspension and, in exceptional cases, permanent expulsion from UBC. Students can apply to have transcript notations removed two years after graduation. Suspensions vary in length. The Committee reports its findings and recommendations to the President, who then provides a decision to the student in writing.

## Procedural Fairness

An allegation of plagiarism is extremely serious, so all steps taken in this process must be fair, both in appearance and in fact. Here are some principles and suggestions to help with this.

1. **Clarity:** Clear and timely notice to the student is very important. Notice should be in written form, but if you decide that it is best to contact the student in person or by phone to arrange a meeting, follow-up with an email.
2. **Impartiality:** When investigating your suspicion that plagiarism has occurred, keep an open mind. Pursue avenues of information that might lead you to a different conclusion than your initial suspicions.
3. **Factuality:** When meeting with student, clearly present the allegations to the student by reporting the facts. Do not include any editorial comment or judgments about the student's character. Allow the student to provide you with their side of the story – prompt them for information or documentation that might support what they are telling you. Explain the process that will follow

and ask them if they understand.

4. Timeliness: Delay can be fatal to any process. Make sure you act quickly upon first identifying the suspicion and then keep the process moving until you can hand it over to the next phase. Respond to student inquiries and requests promptly.
5. Documentation: Keep a written record of all communications.

## **APPENDIX A: Investigating and Documenting Suspected Plagerism**

Online tools like Turnitin and Google can be very helpful in determining the extent of copying of the work of others. Anyone accusing a student of plagiarizing written material is encouraged to use them.

### **Verbatim Copying**

The online service Turnitin does a strict comparison of text, revealing identical words, phrases, and sentences in documents you supply. It may also suggest other sources that have significant overlap with the student's submission. UBC has a site license for Turnitin so instructors can use it at any time.

To apply Turnitin, obtain electronic copies of the student's course assignment or thesis/dissertation and the original document(s) from which he/she is alleged to have plagiarized. Then go to <http://turnitin.com> and create an account.

For more information, consult

[http://www.turnitin.com/static/support/guides\\_manuals.html](http://www.turnitin.com/static/support/guides_manuals.html)

Once you have authenticated your session, you can upload your electronic documents for checking. (Occasional users will benefit from Turnitin's "Quick Submit" option, which a user must turn on explicitly by modifying his/her personal profile. Turnitin's standard mode receives incoming documents from students in courses, which calls for administrative overheads not required by a single scan.) The electronic scan takes time to complete: a list of pending and completed jobs is available on-screen, and the Originality Report becomes available after some time.

### **Re-phrased Work**

If the student has re-phrased someone else's work, Turnitin may not detect it. You will need to go through the student's work and the suspected source document(s), and highlight areas, paragraphs, and/or sections that are similar.