



Prevention, detection and treatment of
plagiarism in education
Guidelines for lecturers

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Plagiarism is not a new phenomenon in university education. However, the digital revolution has made it easier to access and reproduce information and led to a considerable increase in the number of plagiarism cases detected in assignments at all levels of university education. Since plagiarism directly violates the rights of authorship, it can be prosecuted and legally sanctioned. Moreover, it is an ethically reprehensible act that tarnishes the professional reputation of the offender, damages the reputation of the institution, and undermines the quality of education the institution provides.

The Universitat Rovira i Virgili (URV) therefore deems it necessary to raise awareness among students and faculty about the importance of not engaging in voluntary or involuntary acts of plagiarism and to establish mechanisms to prevent, detect and treat it. These actions are fundamental elements of the nuclear curriculum for all URV students. Specifically, the prevention and treatment of plagiarism is currently described in core competence C3 (on managing information and knowledge) and new transversal competence CT2 (on managing information and knowledge through the efficient use of ICT), depending on the student's curriculum.

To accomplish its objectives in this area, during the 2017-18 academic year the URV is launching its Plan for the Prevention, Detection and Treatment of Plagiarism in Education. One of the actions contained in this plan is to provide guidelines for students, lecturers, deans and directors of the URV's departments, schools and faculties on how to prevent, detect and treat plagiarism. These specific guidelines addressed to lecturers describe what plagiarism is, what the URV considers plagiarism to be, what the major causes of plagiarism are, how to prevent and detect it, what the academic consequences of plagiarism are, and what action protocol should be followed when cases of plagiarism are detected.

What is plagiarism?

Plagiarism is considered a form of academic dishonesty. However, its definition, particularly in terms of the types of behaviour that may constitute it, is open to discussion (O'Dwyer et al., 2010).

In the context of university education, plagiarism is a lack of academic ethics (Sutherland-Smith, 2010) that is often described using terms such as "lack of honesty", "misdemeanour", "intellectual theft" or "cheating" (Sutherland-Smith, 2010).

According to Williams & Carroll (2009), plagiarism occurs when "students copy other people's work and presents it as their own."

"Plagiarism is the use of another's ideas and/or words without a clear acknowledgement of the source of the information" (Glucksman Library, University of Limerick, 2007). In university education, this behaviour is considered a very serious academic offence.

At the URV plagiarism is considered to be any action carried out by a student in which he or she passes off as their own work ideas, concepts, data, information or arguments, etc. from other sources or passes off as original any works or parts of works that have been presented previously.

Behaviours that are considered plagiarism

- ✓ **"Copying** text [or data] [from any source] and inserting it into a document without proper citation" (O'Dwyer et al., 2010). This is also known as **word-for-word** or **verbatim plagiarism**. It includes copying and translating a text before inserting it into one's own document.
- ✓ **Summarising** or **paraphrasing** someone else's work without properly referencing the original author. Paraphrasing means "expressing the author's work in your own words" (Glucksman Library, University of Limerick, 2007).
- ✓ **Submitting someone else's work as one's own**. "Taking someone else's work and presenting it if it were your own" (University of Huddersfield). Submitting as one's own work an exercise one has bought, found (on the Internet, for example), or asked another person to complete.
- ✓ **Basing one's work on someone else's ideas** without properly referencing the original author. This includes using the same or a similar structure or arguments. It involves making the same points, using the same data or stating the same conclusions as someone else without clearly identifying the full extent of the original author's contribution.
- ✓ **Mosaic** involves copying texts from various sources before combining them, slightly modifying them, or changing a few words or sentences in order to link them together without clearly acknowledging all the sources used. Mosaic is "pick-n-mix" type behaviour.
- ✓ **Self-plagiarism** involves re-submitting an exercise (or part of an exercise) one has prepared for one university course for a different course without making this clear and without obtaining the consent of the lecturer involved. One cannot receive two grades for the same assignment (O'Rourke & Booth, University of Sheffield, 2010).
- ✓ **Collusion** occurs when two or more students jointly prepare an individual assignment (or part of an assignment) and then each student submits the same (or a slightly modified) exercise as the fruit of their own individual effort. This is not at odds with the idea of collaboration between students since work presented by any student should be the fruit of their own reflections.

What is considered plagiarism at the URV?

In postgraduate studies the following behaviours are also considered plagiarism:

✓ **Not clearly identifying one's sources according to conventions.** It is important to cite information properly in accordance with the conventions of one's discipline (University of Oxford, *What is plagiarism*, 2011). Citations should enable the reader to locate the sources of information the student has used to prepare his or her work.

✓ **Not linking precise points in the text to their corresponding references.** This means not clearly identifying in one's text the sources of information on which individual ideas or points are based. It may also involve adding a list of bibliographical references at the end of the text without linking each reference to the specific part of the text to which they correspond.

✓ **Citing articles one has not read.** For example, a student may have read article X and this article cites a series of other articles (A, B, C) that they have not read but have cited in their work anyway. A cited article implies that one has read it and taken it into account in one's work. Students should not cite articles they have not read.

Also considered plagiarism is any other type of behaviour that is included in the definition given in section (*What is plagiarism?*).

Intentionality

Plagiarism is considered to be independent of **intentionality**. Given that training information is available to all students, students are responsible for informing themselves about what is considered plagiarism and for taking all the necessary steps to avoid it.

Revising

Interpreting and revising the concept of plagiarism at the URV is the competence of the **Teaching, Students and University Community Committee**.

What are the most common causes of plagiarism?

Knowing why students plagiarise can greatly help to prevent it. This section identifies the main reasons why students become involved in cases of plagiarism.

✓ **A lack of awareness of the concept of plagiarism.** Sometimes students plagiarise unintentionally because they do not know what plagiarism is and are unaware of the importance of properly citing the sources of information they have used (Comas and Sureda, 2008; Gullifer and Tyson, 2010). Similarly, students' lack of knowledge regarding the academic consequences of plagiarism can also lead them to plagiarise. It is important, therefore, that students are informed about plagiarism.

✓ **The normalisation of plagiarism.** Sometimes lecturers as well as students normalise plagiarism. This serious problem is ultimately a matter of academic honesty. We recommend that you should be aware of the importance of plagiarism and that you work to prevent it by following the advice provided in the relevant section below.

✓ **Easy access to information on the Internet.** One of the main reasons for plagiarism among students is the vast amount of information that is readily available on the Internet (Pickard, 2006; de Jager and Brown, 2010) and is extremely easy to copy and paste. We recommend that you encourage your students to search for information in sources other than the Internet, such as books and scientific articles, etc.

✓ **The attitude of lecturers.** The fact that lecturers do not seem interested in or concerned about avoiding plagiarism can influence the propensity of students to plagiarise (Badge, Cann and Scott, 2007; Broeckelman-Post, 2008). It is important that you demonstrate zero tolerance towards plagiarism.

✓ **Lecturers only evaluate results.** Sometimes lecturers focus on evaluating the final result instead of evaluating the whole process. This makes it easier for students to plagiarise. We recommend that you design assessment activities that enable you to monitor progress.

✓ **The design of the activities.** How activities are designed plays an important role in preventing plagiarism. Repeating assignments across several academic years, designing relatively unstructured evaluation activities, and focusing on very general topics, etc. can make it easier for students to plagiarise.

✓ **The attitude of peers.** The frequency of plagiarism among students in a class influences the propensity of their classmates to plagiarise. It is important that you use all the mechanisms at your disposal to avoid plagiarism among students.

✓ **Low sense of belonging to the University.** Students who feel less integrated into the institution tend to plagiarise more (Caruana, Ramasehan and Ewing, 2000; Gullifer and Tyson, 2010).

✓ **Time pressure.** Students often feel under pressure when they have to prepare a large number of assignments in a short space of time and so plagiarise to save time (Park, 2003; Marcus and Beck, 2011). We should point out that this pressure is often the result of poor time management on the part of students (Park, 2003; Marcus and Beck, 2011). It is important that you set assignments or exercises well in advance so that the students have the time they need to complete them properly.

✓ **Students are not focused on learning.** Students often plagiarise because they want to pass or get a better grade (Park, 2003; Razera et al., 2010) but are not aware that this negatively affects their learning process. We recommend that you should emphasise to students the importance that doing the work properly has on their learning process.

✓ Other reasons why students may become involved in a plagiarism situation include lack of motivation (Park, Park and Jang, 2013), lack of interest (Razera, 2010), fear of failure (Yazici, Yazici and Erdem, 2011) and high family expectations (Sheard, Markhan and Dick, 2003).

This section provides guidelines on what you can do to prevent or avoid plagiarism.

It is important that **you** understand what plagiarism is and what behaviours are considered plagiarism at the URV (see section 1) and that you attend any training sessions that are organised.

With regard to your **subjects**, we first recommend that you should design your assignments in a way that makes it difficult for students to plagiarise. You could ask students to do some work in the classroom under your supervision, encourage students to provide original ideas or points of view, ask them to submit drafts of their work on a regular basis, divide the work up into various components for students to submit progressively, design assignments in a highly structured way, plan activities that encourage participation, creativity and originality, and work on current issues that have not been studied so much, etc. (Austin and Brown, 1999; Von Dran, Callahan and Taylor, 2001; Hard, Conway and Moran, 2006; Caldwell, 2010; Ramzan et al., 2012; Gómez-Espinosa et al., 2016).

Secondly, we recommend that you do not repeat work across academic years as doing so makes it easier for students to plagiarise (Comas and Sureda, 2008; Batane, 2010).

Finally, you could include information about plagiarism in the teaching guide (Austin and Brown, 1999; Lim and Coalter, 2006; Samuels and Bast, 2006; Broeckelman-Post, 2008; Ramzan et al., 2012) or in the evaluation criteria for the assignment.

It is important that you demonstrate zero tolerance with any plagiarism committed by students (Chapman et al., 2004; Lim and Coalter, 2006; Levy and Rakovski, 2006) and that you show a good example by including any sources of information you have used to prepare your notes for the subject or present practical cases, etc. (Beute, van Aswegen and Winberg, 2008; Bennett, Behrendt and Boothby, 2011). We recommend that at the beginning of the semester you should discuss with your students the concept of plagiarism, the concept of common knowledge and the importance of properly referencing sources of information and seeking help from bibliographic assistants (Austin and Brown, 1999; DeVoss and Rosati, 2002; Leask, 2006; Ramzan et al., 2012). Finally, you could also ask students to sign a declaration stating that the information contained in their assignments has been duly referenced. This will force students to make sure they have not committed plagiarism before they submit their work.

How is plagiarism detected?

As part of its teaching mission, the URV has integrated a software tool into the virtual classroom to detect matches in assignments submitted by students.

Any assignment submitted to the virtual classroom is compared with over 20 million documents owned by the software, all previous assignments submitted by URV students, over 100 million open-access books, articles, journals and newspapers, and over 3,000 databases of external publishers. The software generates a report (available to the lecturer via the virtual classroom) which shows the percentage of text in the assignment that already exists in these comparison sources and identifies each part of the assignment that matches an original source.

By default, students are able to see what percentage of matches with existing sources are contained in their assignment but they do not see the full report that identifies the original sources. As the lecturer you can decide whether to allow the student to see the percentage of matches.

A good practice when using this tool is as follows:

- ✓ For each assignment the lecturer determines the percentage of “existing text” the student is allowed to include (for example, 15%).
- ✓ The student can see this percentage and the lecturer allows the student to re-submit the assignment until they reach the permitted percentage, provided this is done before the deadline for submission. We advise you to inform the students from the outset how this operates and what percentage is permitted so that they can deliver their work as early as possible and re-submit it before the deadline.

For more information on how to use this software tool, see the virtual classroom documentation.

As well as via this software tool, you can detect plagiarism in other ways, such as by browsing the Internet (Austin and Brown, 1999; Sutherland-Smith, 2005) or by monitoring the document’s writing style (Larkham and Manns, 2002) and noting any changes of format or lack of consistency etc.

This section describes the academic consequences for students involved in a plagiarism situation.

Students will be affected by their plagiarism when their course lecturer assesses its impact on their work and evaluates their work in function of this assessment. The lecturer may award the student a zero grade (see article 6 of the URV's Academic and Registration Regulations).

The lecturer may also propose the commencement of disciplinary proceedings that may lead to disciplinary measures being taken against the student concerned. The penalty incurred will depend on whether the student's behaviour is considered a major or a minor offence.

Minor offences

Minor offences are any actions considered to be plagiarism that do not affect a significant amount of the work or exercises presented as part of a student's studies.

✓ **Disciplinary measure.** The student will lose the right to be evaluated on all or part of the subjects on which he or she is enrolled at all examination sittings scheduled for the academic year and as a consequence will lose his or her matriculation rights or the right to be evaluated at ordinary examination sittings for one or more subjects.

Major offences

Major offences are total plagiarism or plagiarism of a significant part of an intellectual work of any kind. A significant part of a work is deemed to be one that affects the evaluation of the submitted work or exercise. When plagiarism occurs in the context of a subject, the weight the plagiarised part may have in the evaluation of the assignment and in the final grade for that subject will be taken into account.

✓ **Disciplinary measure.** A major plagiarism offence will result in temporary expulsion from the University. This will entail loss of matriculation and course rights for the duration of the sanction and a ban on the transfer of his or her academic transcript for the academic year in which the sanction is issued.

Sanctions involving loss of the right to be evaluated also entail a ban on the transfer of the student's academic transcript during the same academic year.

Disciplinary measures for major and minor offences may also lead to total or partial and to permanent or temporary loss of grants or other benefits awarded by the University (consult the regulations on the disciplinary procedures for URV students and instructions on how these regulations are applied).

The action protocol to be followed once plagiarism is detected depends on whether the evaluation or disciplinary route is taken.

✓ **Evaluation route.** The lecturer assesses the impact of the plagiarism and evaluates the student's work in function of his or her assessment. A zero grade may be awarded. The lecturer therefore evaluates the assignment by taking into account the extent of the plagiarism and assesses the student's work accordingly.

✓ **Disciplinary route.** If a serious case of plagiarism is detected, as well as failing the student via the evaluation route, the lecturer may contact the dean of the school or faculty and request that they ask the rector to begin disciplinary proceedings. Once the disciplinary proceedings have been followed, the disciplinary measure to be implemented will depend on the seriousness of the case (see previous section).

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