

# Procedures in Case of Academic Fraud at the University of Vaasa





# PROCEDURES IN CASE OF ACADEMIC FRAUD AT THE UNIVERSITY OF VAASA

This is a translation of the original document “Vaasan yliopiston ohjeet vilppitapausten käsittelyssä”. In case of conflict between the original and the translation, the original document applies.

## 1 PURPOSE OF THESE GUIDELINES

The purpose of these guidelines is to prevent academic fraud and provide the procedures in cases of suspected fraud.

These procedures are applied to the basic degree studies of the University of Vaasa, and where applicable, to non-degree studies, Open University studies, and continuing education studies. The guidelines apply also to exchange students. Post-graduate research is mainly subject to the guidelines for responsible conduct of research and handling misconduct by the Finnish Advisory Board on Research Integrity.

The university is committed to follow the guidelines of the Advisory Board on Research Integrity (<http://www.tenk.fi/en/responsible-conduct-research-guidelines>). Suspicions of academic fraud not connected to scientific research that are made against post-graduates are dealt on the basis of these internal guidelines of the University of Vaasa.

Plagiarism checker software is used in both basic and post-graduate degree programmes as defined in the guidelines of the university.

## 2 ETHICAL GUIDELINES

### 2.1 Good Scientific Practices

The University of Vaasa follows the guidelines of the Advisory Board on Research Integrity that aim to advance good scientific practices and prevent scientific dishonesty. The Advisory Board has defined the principles of good scientific practices from the aspect of research ethics. In addition to research, the practices are applied in teaching and supervision, and in expert tasks of the study fields, both within the scientific community and elsewhere.

The commitment to the Advisory Board's guidelines requires that familiarisation to scientific practices and teaching research ethics are an integral part of basic and post-graduate degree education in the university.

## 2.2 Good Practices at Studying

In addition to research, the guidelines on research ethics also govern teaching and studying where applicable.

Study ethics are discussed throughout the study programmes. Special attention is paid to ethical issues of studying already when the students are introduced to the university studies and community. Teachers and supervisors shall ensure that the students have clear and sufficient instructions on the acceptable methods. The requirements of good practices are emphasised in group and thesis work. Working online requires particular attention and guidance on the use of sources and material.

Education on ethics is included in the curriculum of the university for both basic and postgraduate degrees. Sufficiently clear guidelines must be available also on the website. Teachers are offered continuing education and other material to support teaching, supervising, and detecting and dealing with fraud.

A university student is required to take independent responsibility in following the ethical guidelines. The students shall follow the law and understand the basic principles of what is allowed and what is not (cheating in examinations, plagiarism, completing course work in behalf of others, and so forth).

Teachers shall intervene immediately in any misconduct they detect.

## 3 VIOLATIONS OF THE ETHICAL GUIDELINES

The violations defined in this section are based on the guidelines of the Advisory Board on Research Integrity, the University of Turku, and Aalto University.

The Advisory Board on Research Integrity classifies the violations of good scientific practices into

- ▶ Research fraud
- ▶ Disregard for the responsible conduct of research.

### 3.1 Fraud in Research and Studies

Fraud is presenting and spreading false data and results. Fraud is also misappropriating other researchers' work and representing other researchers' work as one's own. Research fraud is classified into four categories: fabrication, falsification, plagiarism, and misappropriation. The following definitions are from the guidelines by the Advisory Board on Research Integrity.

- ▶ Fabrication is presenting invented observations to the research community. Fabricated observations have not been obtained in the way or by using the methods as claimed in the research report. Presenting invented results in a research report is also fabrication
- ▶ Falsification of observations refers to modifying and presenting original observations deliberately so that the results based on those observations are distorted. Falsification of results refers to modification or selection of research results that is not scientifically justifiable. Omitting results or information that is essential for the conclusions is also falsification.
- ▶ Plagiarism, in other words unacknowledged borrowing, refers to presenting another author's research plan, manuscript, article, other text or part of it, visual material, or translation as one's own. Both direct copying and adapted copying are plagiarism.
- ▶ Misappropriation refers to presenting or using another author's research result, idea, plan, observation or data unlawfully as one's own.

Fraud in an examination refers to using forbidden means or tools in an examination. Examples include copying other students' work, talking in an examination, or participating on behalf of another. An attempt to cheat is also academic fraud.

### 3.2 Disregard for Good Scientific Practices

Disregard refers to negligence or carelessness at different stages of research. Disregard includes underestimating the role of other researchers

in publications, careless or misleading reporting, inadequate reporting of results or data, or publishing the same research results more than once as seemingly new.

## 4 CONSEQUENCES OF VIOLATIONS

Study attainments are failed if the student is found guilty of fraud while obtaining the attainments. Also, the Dean may issue the student a written or oral caution.

The official disciplinary methods are stated in the Universities Act (45§): *A student may be cautioned if (s)he ... acts under false pretences or otherwise breaks order at the university. ... If the act or neglect is serious or if the student carries on the inappropriate behaviour ... after having been cautioned, (s)he can be suspended from the university for a fixed period of one year at the outside. ... The decision to give a written warning to a student shall be made by the rector of the university and the decision on suspension by the board of the university.*

The table 1 presents typical cases of fraud and procedures that are followed. The procedures must be as uniform as possible in the university. When applying the table, it must be taken care of that the consequences are in proportion to the act.

A suspicion of fraud may arise also after grading or crediting a study attainment. Also in these cases, fraud may lead to revoking an earlier decision and to disciplinary actions. Suspicions that concern accepted and graded Master's, Licentiate, or Doctoral theses are processed on the basis of the guidelines by the Advisory Board on Research Integrity.

After a study attainment is failed, the student has to agree with the teacher on how (s)he shall proceed in the studies. If there is no examination for the course within the academic year, the teacher is not obligated to arrange an extra examination. However, the severity of the fraud and the student's overall situation must be taken into consideration when evaluating the situation.

Table 1. Forms of fraud, actions, and disciplinary actions (based on UTA guidelines).

<i>Fraud</i>	<i>The party who detected the act</i>	<i>Immediate action</i>	<i>The preparing party and procedures</i>	<i>Disciplinary actions</i>
<b>Examinations</b>				
Talking in an examination	Invigilator	Remove the student from the examination. A written report to a representative of study affairs. In obvious cases only a report, see the instructions.	A representative of study affairs in the faculty; procedures as in the instructions.	Rejection of the examination work. In flagrant cases, a caution by the Dean
Helping someone else or reading someone else's paper in an examination	Invigilator/ examiner	As above	As above	Rejection of the examination work and an oral or written caution by the Dean
Prepared and repeated cheating in an examination	Invigilator/ examiner	As above	As above	Rejection of the examination work and an oral or written caution by the Dean/warning by the Rector. Fraud by an exchange student is reported to the International Office, which contacts the home university.
Examining on behalf of someone else	Invigilator	as above	As above	as above
<b>Exercises, essays and other comparable course work</b>				
Using the same course work entirely or partly for two or more courses without agreement with the teacher	The teacher responsible for the course	A written report to a representative of the study affairs	As above	Rejection of the examination work and an oral or written caution by the Dean/warning by the Rector. Fraud by an exchange student is reported to the International Office, which contacts the home university.
Copying a work, or a part of it, that affects the grade, or providing work for someone else to be copied, being aware of its use in intent to cheat	The teacher responsible for the course	As above	As above	Rejection of the examination work and an oral or written caution by the Dean/warning by the Rector. Fraud by an exchange student is reported to the International Office, which contacts the home university.
Repeatedly copying a work entirely or partly	The teacher responsible for the course	As above	As above	Rejection of the study attainment and warning by the Rector/ suspension for a fixed period by the Board's decision. Fraud by an exchange student is reported to the home university.
<b>Theses</b>				
Copying a part of a thesis (also plagiarism due to insufficient referencing).	Thesis supervisors	A written report to a representative of study affairs if needed.	Representative of study affairs in the faculty; procedures as in the instructions.	Editing/rejecting the thesis/an oral or written caution by the Dean.
Copying a significant part of a thesis (plagiarism).	Thesis supervisors	A written report to a representative of study affairs	As above	Rejection of the thesis and a warning by the decision of the Rector.
Copying an entire thesis (flagrant plagiarism) or presenting a thesis written by someone else as one's own.	Thesis supervisors	As above	As above	Rejection of the thesis and suspension for a fixed period by the decision of the Board.
Distorting or forging information on studies attained elsewhere.	Contact person on the studies attained elsewhere	As above	As above	As above
Plagiarism connected to post-graduate work.	Thesis supervisors or other party	As above	As above. Also, the guidelines by the Advisory Board are applied.	The guidelines by Advisory Board on Research Integrity are applied.

## 5 PLAGIARISM DETECTION SOFTWARE

The universities are obligated by the Universities Act to organise their activities so that the ethical principles and good scientific practices are followed in their research, training, and education. Commitment to these principles shall be observable in all activity. Ensuring the originality of study attainments and published research results is a part of the quality assurance of education and research. The University of Vaasa improves this by using plagiarism detection software based on global information search and comparison.

### 5.1 Plagiarism Detection for Dissertations

Theses written at the University of Vaasa, including Bachelor's, Master's, Licentiate's and Doctoral theses, undergo a plagiarism check based on plagiarism detection software before the theses are accepted.

A certificate of the plagiarism check must be attached to Doctoral dissertations before the theses are submitted for pre-evaluation. In cases of other theses, the plagiarism check is made in a similar manner before the final evaluation.

The interpretation of the results provided by the software is the teacher's task. Supervisors and teachers are obligated to use the electronic check procedure as of August 1<sup>st</sup> 2014. The teacher supervising the work is responsible for the check and interpretation of the results. The procedure is reported in the evaluation form and to the student register.

### 5.2 Plagiarism Detection for Other Study Attainments

Electronic plagiarism check is recommended to be used also in the various stages of basic, intermediate, and advanced studies to the extent that the ethical practices require. The plagiarism detection is not a separate form or method of instruction or grading, but a tool for normal instruction and grading processes.



### 5.3 Rights and Obligations of the Student Regarding Plagiarism Detection

The use of the plagiarism detection software is a part of the grading of study attainments. All evaluated texts are entered to the software, but saving the work to the database permanently requires the student's consent. By allowing the work to be saved to the database, the student supports the ethics of science and protects his/her work from fraud. The consent is archived with the study attainment.

When the course involves group work, the plagiarism detection software may not be applied only to a part of a group. If the teacher suspects that a member of a group is guilty of plagiarism, the written attainments of the entire group are to be checked with the software.

### 5.4 Process in Case of Suspected Plagiarism

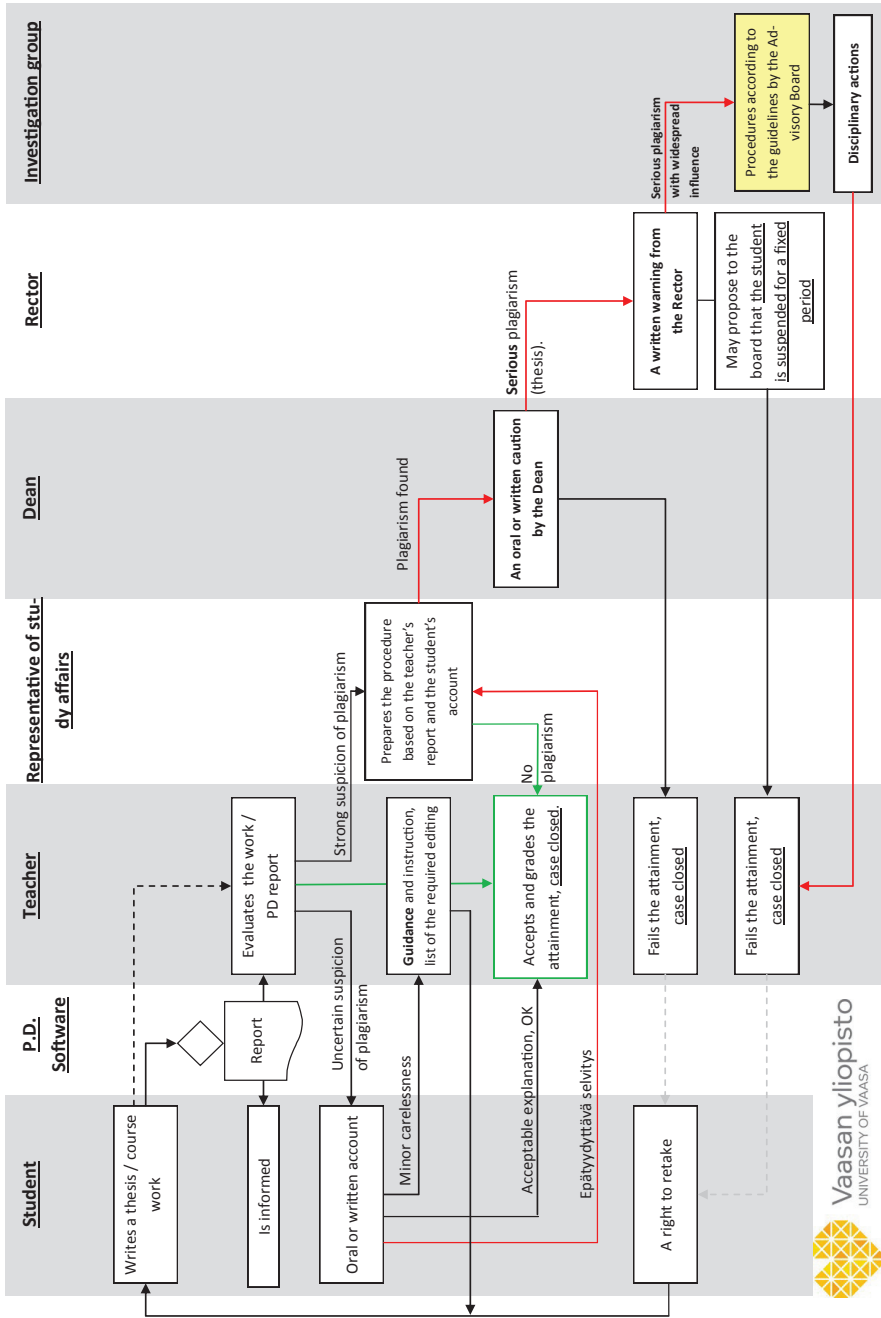


Chart 1. Procedures in cases of suspected plagiarism. The roles are defined in section 6.

## 6 PROCEDURES IN CASE OF FRAUD

### 6.1 Students' Legal Protection

Good administrative practices must be employed when processing a student's misconduct. The issue is processed without undue delay and the student is given an opportunity to be heard before any decisions are made. The student is informed that (s)he may bring a support person to the hearing or other meeting on the issue.

The process is not public, but the documents reporting the decision usually are. During the process, the matter is informed only to the parties involved and to those whose duties the matter is connected to or who may provide additional information. The student shall be informed of the development of the progress.

The student must always be given a chance to be heard, by requesting a written statement, by organising a hearing, or by doing both. This chance is the student's opportunity to give a statement on the issues brought forward. The student must be clearly informed what (s)he is suspected of and be given an opportunity to see the evidence presented in the case. The student must also be informed that (s)he has the right to bring a counsel to the hearing.

Usually the student, teacher who presented the suspicion, the Head of the Unit or Study Programme, and a representative of study affairs are present in a hearing in the faculty. Additionally, the student has the right to bring a support person to the hearing.

### 6.2 The Procedure

A teacher cannot fail a study attainment on base of fraud unless an investigation of the fraud has been made in accordance with these guidelines. The grading of the study attainment is not finished before the suspicion has been processed.

### ***The teacher / the teacher in charge of the course / the supervisor of the thesis***

In unclear cases, the teacher first informs the student of the suspected fraud and gives the student a chance for a written or oral explanation. If the teacher considers the case to be a minor negligence or misunderstanding, the teacher instructs the student on the appropriate practices and returns the assignment to the student for editing.

If fraud or negligence of good scientific practices cannot be ruled out, the teacher informs a representative of the study affairs and hands in a written report on the matter. A suspicion of fraud is always reported to the Head of the Study Programme or Unit. The study attainment is not graded before the investigation has been completed. If the investigation finds the student guilty of fraud, the teacher shall fail the study attainment. In that case, the student may appeal against the decision in the same way as against grading of a study attainment (Degree Regulation 17). Even if an investigation is underway, the teacher shall evaluate the study attainments of other students within the deadline specified in the regulations.

Also other study attainments in addition to a thesis may be failed if the student is afterwards found guilty of fraud. The decision to fail has to be made within six months after the study attainment.

### ***Invigilator of an Exam***

The invigilator must intervene with suspected cheating, other fraud, or other activity that violates the guidelines on examination proceedings. If the student is suspected of fraud in an examination, the invigilator interrupts the student's examination, confirms the student's identity, obtains all material connected to the examination, and advises the student to leave the examination. The invigilator writes the cause of the interruption down in the invigilation report and in the student's examination papers, and records the possible explanation by the student, and the invigilator's account of the case. In cases of suspected fraud, the study attainment may be failed. It may also be failed if the fraud is found after the examination. To ensure the student's legal protection, the student has the right to appeal against the grading as usual after the results are published.

### ***Representative of study affairs / Head of Study Affairs***

The representative of study affairs is the Head of Study Affairs of the Faculty or study field, or other expert in the study affairs administration. The representative's duties include counselling the teacher and other parties on the procedures, collection of reports and other documents, organising the student's hearing, informing the parties, and preparation of the investigation to the Dean when necessary. The Head of Unit shall always participate in the hearing and in the investigation of the suspected fraud. The investigation is carried out in the Faculty where the case occurred.

If the case is a fraud found in a thesis for advanced studies, a licentiate research, or doctoral dissertation that is left for evaluation, the Dean is responsible for the investigation.

### ***Dean***

When the case is brought to the Dean, (s)he decides on the measures to be taken based on the account provided by the representative of the study affairs. If the Dean decides that the suspicion has been unfounded or the misconduct minor, the Dean returns the assignment to the teacher for grading.

If the Dean decides that the student is guilty of fraud, the study attainment is failed and the student is given an oral or written caution. The written caution is delivered to the student via the Registrar.

If the act cannot be considered to be minor, the Dean proposes to the Rector that possible disciplinary actions are taken. At least the severity and reoccurrence of the fraud are taken into consideration.

If the Dean considers that the fraud has occurred in research activity, the Dean proposes to the Rector that an initial investigation following the Advisory Board on Research Integrity guidelines is set in motion. In that case, the possible disciplinary actions are not decided before the initial investigation is concluded.

## **Rector**

In the University of Vaasa, disciplinary actions and procedures following the guidelines by the Advisory Board on Research Integrity are centralised. The procedure is initiated when the Dean proposes to the Rector that disciplinary actions are needed. The Rector and the Head of Study Affairs, who also organises the hearing of the student and other parties when necessary, are responsible for the measures.

The Rector decides if the guidelines by the Advisory Board on Research Integrity should be applied in the case and an initial investigation launched.

The Rector decides if a warning as defined in the Universities Act is given. If a warning is to be considered too light of a consequence, the Rector proposes to the Board that the student is suspended for a fixed period. (Universities Act 558/2009, §45)

After the Rector or the Board has processed the case, it is returned to the faculty, where the study attainment is graded or failed and other necessary measures are taken.

## **7 COMPILING, ARCHIVING AND PUBLICITY OF DOCUMENTS**

The phases of the procedure are recorded in the minutes compiled during the process. The document is opened by the representative of study affairs. A separate memo is written on the hearings recording the essential issues. The documents are archived in the Registrar (Arkistosäntö, "Archive Regulations"). The minutes and possible decisions on further measures are delivered to the student, the teacher involved, the Dean, and other parties when necessary. The Dean and the representative of study affairs at the student's home faculty are also informed of the decision, if the home faculty is not the same as the faculty directly involved in the case.

The administrative language of the university is Finnish (Universities Act 558/2009, §35). The parties involved are given a translation of the document if needed.

The decisions are public unless they, exceptionally, contain the student's personal affairs or verbal evaluation on the student's attainments.

## 8 INFORMING THE PARTNER UNIVERSITY

All new exchange and joint degree contracts need to agree on the notification policy of violations of ethical regulations, or it must be otherwise ensured that incoming exchange students are aware of the policy. The principle is that if a student is found guilty of academic fraud, the case is reported to the home university. The home university is informed by the International Office.

A sanction given to a student in a joint degree programme can also be reported to the partner university, if such policy is agreed upon. The issuer of the sanction decides whether or not the home university is informed.

## 9 ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The Finnish Advisory Board on Research Integrity: Good scientific practice and procedures for handling misconduct and fraud in science (<http://www.tenk.fi/en/advise-publications>).

The Ethical Guidelines of the University of Vaasa



**Vaasan yliopisto**  
UNIVERSITY OF VAASA