

UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN
PLAGIARISM IN POSTGRADUATE RESEARCH
A GUIDE TO EXAMINING BODIES

Note:

- This guide is to be used for all postgraduate degrees, by research, or having a research component, other than the PhD. There is a separate guide ("Guide to Committee of Assessors") to assist the Faculty COAs and the DDB for PhD degrees.
- For Faculty Higher Degrees Committee (FHDC) please read "FHDC or equivalent".

Introduction

From time to time an allegation of plagiarism or academic dishonesty¹ will arise in the process of examining a dissertation submitted by a candidate for a postgraduate degree². This note is intended to help the Faculty Higher Degrees Committee (FHDC) or the Faculty Examinations Committee (FEC) deal with such cases. It is critical to an understanding of this note that the process in the FHDC /FEC be recognised as independent of and quite different to any disciplinary process before a student disciplinary tribunal. It is the role of the FEC/FHDC to determine a result when a candidate is examined. The FEC/FHDC does this under Senate's authority. It is the role of the disciplinary tribunals to try students for alleged breaches of the code of conduct for students. The disciplinary tribunals do this under Council's authority.

Procedures

The FEC/FHDC must do three things.

1. First, it must assess the evidence and decide whether the candidate has failed to make the appropriate attribution, or to cite and reference sources, in an isolated, unimportant, or insignificant case, or whether the candidate is guilty of substantive plagiarism, by failing to provide appropriate acknowledgement of a crucial or important aspect of the research, and /or where the extent of the unacknowledged material constitutes a significant portion of the thesis. This is an academic judgment.

If the FHDC/FEC finds plagiarism that was not substantial, it must record this and make a decision on the result to be given to the candidate. The FHDC/FEC could decide that the candidate not be failed. In such cases, the FHDC/FEC might, in recording the plagiarism to the FEC, require a revision – an edit or a re-work and re-submission - by the candidate to take account of this finding.

2. If the FHDC/FEC finds substantive plagiarism or academic dishonesty, the FHDC/FEC must record this and decide on the result to be given to the candidate. In such cases, the FHDC/FEC would ordinarily decide that the candidate be failed.
3. The FHDC/FEC has a third responsibility. Plagiarism has two consequences:
First, it may lead to a decision by the body having academic jurisdiction to fail the candidate (see above).

Secondly, plagiarism or academic dishonesty constitutes a breach of the rules for students, and therefore a Committee of Assessors, which finds evidence of plagiarism or academic dishonesty, must report the matter for adjudication in terms of the University's Rules on Disciplinary Jurisdiction and Procedures (Rule DJP 1.1.) (The FHDC/FEC may take advice from the legal counsel in the Office of the Registrar on how to do this.) In essence, the FHDC/FEC is required to make a report to the Vice Chancellor, or the Vice Chancellor's nominee, who will then determine whether to institute a prosecution before the University Student Disciplinary Tribunal.

The processes of examining, on the one hand, and of assessing the student's guilt in terms of the disciplinary rules for students on the other, are independent of each other.

Where the FHDC/FEC, on the assessment of the evidence, records and decides a course of action it should not wait for the outcome of the hearing on the allegation of a breach of the rules for students before the Student Disciplinary Tribunal. The issues are separate. It is thus theoretically possible for the FEC to fail a candidate, and the Student Disciplinary to acquit the student.

Hugh Amoore Registrar
5 February 2002
amended 27 March 2015

¹ Examples of academic dishonesty include: collusion (representing a piece of group work as one's own work), commissioning (submitting contracted work done by another as one's own work); duplication (the inclusion of unacknowledged previous work); false declaration (to the university in order to attain special consideration); falsification of data. Plagiarism, intended or unintended, involves non-acknowledgment of sources or the ideas/data of others, copying, and inappropriate paraphrasing.

² Supervisors are encouraged to require that their students submit the final draft of their thesis to Turnitin, or a similar plagiarism detection programme. Hopefully this will reduce the number of incidents of plagiarism.