The Åbo Akademi University Directives for

THE HANDLING OF SUSPECTED CHEATING IN EXAMINATIONS OR OTHER COURSEWORK

Approved by the Rector on 11 October 2013

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THE ÅBO AKADEMI UNIVERSITY REGULATIONS

The general rules concerning procedures for handling educational disciplinary matters at a university are stipulated in the Universities Act (558/2009) and the Universities Decree (115/1998). Åbo Akademi’s Administrative Instructions define the University’s decision-making bodies and their duties. The Degree Regulations define coursework and the rules concerning the planning and effectuation of education. The Instructions for Post-Graduate Education stipulate the structures and conditions of postgraduate education. The rules for completing coursework are stipulated in the Examination and Assessment Instructions. The procedures for handling educational disciplinary matters are stipulated in two directives; one on the procedures for handling cases of suspected plagiarism and one on the procedures for handling suspected cases of other forms of cheating in coursework. According to these procedures, the University transfers the right to assess cases of suspected cheating from the teacher to the Head of Department. These regulations pertain to all kinds of coursework completed at Åbo Akademi University, with the exception of Licentiate and Doctoral theses. The investigation of these theses follows the specific guidelines given by the Finnish Advisory Board on Research Integrity. Accepted Master’s theses are also investigated according to these guidelines. On the initiative of a student, an investigation of a Master’s thesis which has not been accepted can also follow the guidelines given by the Advisory Board. Entrance examinations
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written in the course of student admissions do not constitute coursework, but an investigation of suspected cheating in such an examination may follow the guidelines whenever applicable.

All statutes are found on the Åbo Akademi website for statutes www.abo.fi/personal/forfattningar

DEFINITION OF CHEATING

The Finnish Advisory Board on Research Integrity has categorised and defined various types of research misconduct. Based on these, Åbo Akademi University has established a definition of cheating.

Cheating means that a student uses unauthorised methods or material in order to pass an examination or other coursework.

The Guidelines for Responsible Conduct of Research set by the Finnish Advisory Board on Research Integrity http://www.tenk.fi/sv/god-vetenskaplig-praxis-anvisningar

Åbo Akademi University Examination and Assessment Instructions https://www.abo.fi/personal/stuforf

Examples of cheating in an examination

- Taking unauthorised material into an exam (e.g. written or recorded key words; please note stricter conditions in electronic examinations)
- Having unauthorised course literature or technical equipment directly available during the examination (e.g. a course book or mobile phone in an open bag next to one’s place of writing)
- Contact with external sources (e.g. internet access through a mobile phone, tablet computer or other technical equipment)
- All forms of undue communication between examinees or between an examinee and an external person (e.g. sending notes, undue hand signals, undue oral – one-sided or reciprocal – communication)
- Reading the examination answers of other students
- Writing an examination in somebody else’s name

Examples of cheating in other coursework

- Using invented material or observations in a presentation or laboratory report
- Deliberately modifying or excluding results that are essential for the analysis (e.g. excluding observations that do not support one’s conclusions)
- Submitting written assignments in somebody else’s name

THE PROCESS STEP BY STEP

The handling of suspected cheating consists of two processes. The first is an investigation into whether cheating has taken place, and the second is an assessment of whether cheating which has
been verified is to result in further disciplinary action in addition to coursework being assessed as a fail. Please note that there are separate instructions for handling cases of suspected plagiarism, see http://www.abo.fi/personal/stuforf.

1. Investigation of the Occurrence of Cheating
This process replaces the students’ obligation to make an appeal to the examiner in cases where they are dissatisfied with the assessment of coursework (in cases of cheating the coursework is assessed as a fail). The process requires that suspected cheating is always investigated as soon as possible after the occurrence, while observations are fresh in the memories of those involved. The Head of Department will conduct the investigation to ensure the legal protection of the parties concerned.

1.1. Reporting Suspected Cheating
For each instance of coursework there is an examiner. The examination itself has an examination coordinator. Practical supervision to ensure appropriate conduct during an examination is allocated to one or several invigilators. The examination coordinator may be an invigilator.

If an invigilator suspects an instance of cheating during an examination, he or she is to immediately discontinue the examination of the suspected student. All relevant material is to be collected and the student asked to leave the examination room. The invigilator writes a report of the incident as soon as possible after it has taken place (preferably using the form Report of Suspected Cheating). The report is handed to the examination coordinator without delay. Within three days of the examination, the examination coordinator reports the matter to the department arranging the course by submitting the report and possible appendices. In the case of electronic examinations, the report is to be submitted within three days of the investigation of the video recording.

If an examiner detects possible cheating during the assessment process, he or she is to report the matter. The report and possible appendices are to be submitted within three days of the detection (preferably using the form Report of Suspected Cheating) to the department concerned.

The report is sent, preferably by e-mail, to the Head of Studies of the department. If the incident takes place at an independent institution, the report is sent to the secretary appointed to handle investigations of cheating at the institution. In unclear cases the report may be submitted to the Registrar of Åbo Akademi University. The Registrar forwards the report to the department concerned. A submitted report always leads to an investigation.

Contact information of the departments http://www.abo.fi/institution/sv
Contact information of the independent institutions https://www.abo.fi/stodenhet/
The Åbo Akademi University Registrar: e-mail registrator@abo.fi
Postal address: Åbo Akademi University Registrar, Domkyrkotorget 3, 20500 Åbo

In addition to those mentioned above, other persons may also submit a report for the investigation of suspected cheating. This pertains to situations where
a) a student or a third person detects suspected cheating. During an examination the report is initially to be made to the invigilator, either immediately or directly after the examination.
b) **a suspected student** wants to investigate insinuations of non-reported cheating. The report is made by submitting a description of the incident (preferably using the form *Report of Suspected Cheating*), as well as possible appendices to the department concerned or to the Åbo Akademi University Registrar within three days of the detection (for contact information, please see above).

The **Head of Studies/the appointed secretary** is responsible for communicating

a) to the reporting person that the report has been received by the department (check that the report has actually been submitted by that person)
b) to the Head of Department/Director that a report has been submitted
c) (if necessary) to the examiner that assessment of the coursework is to be discontinued
d) to the student about the allegation of cheating and about the continued process

The student under suspicion is allowed to continue his or her studies during the process. The student has, for example, the right to participate in a retake of the examination of the coursework under investigation. However, a degree thesis cannot be accepted if either the thesis itself or the maturity examination is subject to an investigation of cheating. In addition, the basic assumption is that a student cannot graduate from Åbo Akademi University while the investigation of an allegation of cheating is ongoing.

If the department receives an anonymous report the Head of Department/Director decides on how the matter is to be handled. The commencement of an investigation requires such an allegation to contain strong evidence of the alleged cheating.

**1.2. Departmental Investigation**

The inquiry into the matter is conducted at an investigation meeting summoned under the auspices of the Head of Department. The department that administers the course concerned carries out the investigation. **The Head of Department** (at independent institutions the Director) acts as investigator. The Head of Department appoints a secretary, preferably a member of staff within student affairs administration. The Head of Department and the secretary must follow the rules for disqualification. The Head of Department may delegate the investigation to the Vice Head of Department (e.g. if the Head of Department represents the same subject as the teacher reporting the case).

The department summons the author of the report, the suspected student and the Secretary of Educational Affairs from the Student Union of Åbo Akademi University to the investigation. Having conducted a preliminary discussion with the Secretary of Educational Affairs, the student may ask for another person to represent him or her at the investigation meeting. If necessary, additional persons who might support the investigation can be invited to the meeting. The meeting should be held at a time most suitable for all parties. Technical equipment can be used if somebody cannot physically attend the meeting.

The invitation is preferably sent by e-mail to the parties’ addresses at abo.fi, since the Åbo Akademi e-mail system fulfils the legal requirements on identification and data security. The invitation should
include a description of the incident (and possible appendices) by the person making the allegation, as well as these directives. The material is sent as an attachment to the e-mail message or a reference is given to the address where the material is available in electronic form. The invited persons are asked to confirm that they have received the e-mail message and are able to read the material. If an invited person does not answer, the secretary tries to reach the person by phone the day before the meeting at the latest. At the discretion of the Head of Department, the meeting may be held even if an invited person does not attend.

In principle the initial departmental meeting concerning the investigation should take place at the earliest seven days after the invitation has been sent. This will allow the parties enough time to familiarise themselves with the matter. If all parties agree however the investigation meeting may be held earlier than this. The investigation is to be conducted within 60 days after the matter has been reported to the department.

The Head of Department opens the meeting by explaining the definition of cheating. The author of the report describes the evidence that has caused the allegation of cheating. The student is given the opportunity to respond to the allegation. If several students are involved, they are heard separately. The representative and other possible persons invited are given the opportunity to give their comments. The investigation meeting is closed with a summary by the Head of Department of the statements of the parties, emphasising the importance of discretion as to whom and what has been discussed at the meeting. The parties are not covered by professional secrecy.

The secretary writes the minutes of the meeting on the form Departmental Investigation. The secretary sends the minutes of the investigation to all parties by e-mail. The parties are given the opportunity to suggest amendments and additions to text in writing within seven days after the minutes have been distributed. The Head of Department decides what amendments and additions are made to the text. Substantial suggestions that are refused are noted. A party who does not respond is regarded as having accepted the terms of the investigation as outlined in the minutes.

1.3. Decision by Head of Department
The Head of Department makes a decision on the matter based on a presentation which is delivered at the latest within 14 days of the minutes of the investigation having been sent to the parties. The decision is made on the form Departmental Investigation/Decision by Head of Department.

In cases where the Head of Department decides that
a) the allegation of cheating is unfounded, and if the coursework has already been completed and submitted prior to the allegation, the examiner is to assess the student’s coursework. If the allegation has led to a discontinuation of unfinished coursework, the student is to be given the opportunity to complete it without any delay. If an examination was discontinued, a further opportunity is to be arranged for the student to answer new questions of the same degree of difficulty. The aim is that the acquitted student should be able to continue his or her studies with the least possible inconvenience.
b) **cheating has taken place**, the coursework is assessed as a fail. All coursework with the same course code submitted by that student will be assessed as a fail. The maturity examination is regarded as a separate piece of coursework despite having the same course code as the degree thesis. **The Head of Studies** is responsible for the deregistration of any credits that have been entered into the study register. The deregistration is done only after the time limit for the process of appeal has passed, or alternatively after the continued process of appeal has been finished.

If the Head of Department decides that cheating has taken place, **the matter is always passed on to the Rector for a disciplinary decision.** The matter is forwarded to the Rector by sending all documents to registrator@abo.fi. The secretary also sends the decision of the Head of Department and the accepted investigation by e-mail to all parties in the matter. In the e-mail message the party is asked to confirm by e-mail that he or she has received and accepted the binding administrative decision in electronic form. If no answer is received **within seven days**, the decision is sent by letter; to the student to the home address he or she has given to the study register; to Åbo Akademi staff by internal mail to their place of work. The date of distribution is noted.

The documents are filed at the department and handled according to the statutes in the Åbo Akademi University Archives Regulations. The material of the investigation is public, but should be handled with discretion; that is, the actual investigation is discussed by decision-making or advisory bodies, or published or distributed only if there are weighty reasons to do so. A copy of the decision by the Head of Department and the investigation is always sent to the address kvalitet@abo.fi.

**1.4. Parties’ Right to Lodge an Appeal**

All parties in the matter may lodge an appeal with the Examination Board against the decision made by the Head of Department and the investigation. The appeal should be made in writing (preferably using the form **Appeal to the Examination Board**). The signed appeal is submitted to the Åbo Akademi University Registrar, Domkyrkotorget 2, 20500 Åbo, or a scanned copy is sent to the e-mail address registrator@abo.fi.

A party should lodge an appeal **within 14 days** of receiving the decision. A party is regarded as having received the decision when he or she **verifies the e-mail message, or in unverified cases, seven days** after the letter containing the decision has been sent to the party. The time limit may be extended if a party is able to prove circumstances because of which he or she has been prevented from receiving the decision.

**1.5. Consideration of Appeals by the Examination Board**

The Examination Board should meet within 30 days of a matter being submitted to the Board. The time is counted from the date when the matter was registered by the University’s Registrar.

In the course of the Examination Board investigation into the matter, the parties are offered the opportunity to express their differing views concerning the decision made by the Head of Department and/or the investigation, and to present new evidence. The Board may decide to hear a
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party in person, particularly if he or she has been unable to participate in the departmental investigation meeting.

The Examination Board makes its decision based on a presentation. The decision may be a confirmation or a correction of the decision taken by the Head of Department.

In case the Examination Board decision is

- a confirmation, the decision by the Head of Department is not changed. The Examination Board may clarify and/or present further reasons for the decision taken by the Head of Department and for the investigation.

- a correction of the decision by the Head of Department, the Examination Board changes the decision taken by the Head of Department. The decision has the same consequences as a decision by the Head of Department in the corresponding instances: the allegation of cheating is either deemed to be unfounded or the occurrence of cheating is confirmed (see 1.3 a/b).

The decision made by the Examination Board closes the investigation into the occurrence of cheating. Appeals against the rulings of the Examination Board cannot be lodged within Åbo Akademi University, or to an administrative court (Universities Act, section 84).

2. Åbo Akademi University Disciplinary Investigation

The investigation of the occurrence of cheating determines whether the coursework concerned is to be assessed as a fail or not. The disciplinary investigation determines whether a student who has been caught cheating is to receive an additional disciplinary punishment. The disciplinary investigation is started only after the first investigation process is closed, either by the time limit for the lodging of an appeal coming to an end or by the Examination Board making a decision on the matter.

2.1. Student’s Hearing

Section 45a in the Universities Acts stipulates that the accused should be demonstrably informed of the offence he or she is charged with, and also given an opportunity to be heard concerning the matter before a decision on disciplinary consequences is made. Usually the hearing is conducted as a written process, but if necessary, the investigator can call the student and his or her representative to a meeting.

2.2. Decision by the Rector

The Rector takes a decision in the matter based on a presentation. The decision taken by the Rector may be: no disciplinary action; a written reprimand; or transfer for consideration by the University Board.

The Rector decides to
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- **take no disciplinary action** in cases where the Rector finds that failing the student’s work is a sufficient punishment considering the nature and/or extent of the offence. The decision is filed in the Åbo Akademi University Archives.

- **issue a written reprimand** in cases where the Rector finds this to be justified considering the nature and/or extent of the offence. The decision is filed in the Åbo Akademi University Archives.

- **transfer the matter to be considered by the Board** in cases where the Rector finds the matter to be of fundamental importance, or the nature and/or extent of the offence might justify a withdrawal of the student’s right to study at the University for a certain period of time. The decision is filed in the Åbo Akademi University Archives.

2.3. **Decision by the University Board**

The Board makes a decision on the matter on the basis of a presentation. The matter is prepared by the administrator whom the Rector has appointed to handle disciplinary decisions. The decision taken by the Board may result in: no disciplinary action; a written reprimand; or exclusion.

The University Board decides to

- **take no disciplinary action** in cases where the Board finds that failing the student’s work is a sufficient punishment considering the nature and/or extent of the offence. The decision is noted in the minutes of the Board meeting. The minutes of the Board meeting are kept in the Åbo Akademi University Archives.

- **issue a written reprimand** in cases where the Board finds this to be justified considering the nature and/or extent of the offence. The decision is noted in the minutes of the Board meeting. The Board minutes are kept in the Åbo Akademi University Archives.

- **exclude the student from the University for a certain period of time**, at most one year, in cases where the Board finds this to be justified considering the nature and/or extent of the offence. The Student Office removes the student from the study register (the studies are registered as being discontinued) for a period of time decided by the Board. The student does not have the right to complete any coursework at the University during the period of exclusion. Exclusion does not lead to an extension of study time. The decision is noted in the minutes of the Board meeting. The Board minutes are kept in the Åbo Akademi University Archives.

2.4. **Communication and Registration of a Disciplinary Consequence**

The administrator handling the matter sends the decision taken by the Rector or the Board and the accepted investigation to all parties involved in the matter by e-mail. In the e-mail message the party is asked to confirm by e-mail that he or she has received and accepted the binding administrative decision in electronic form. If no answer is received within seven days, the decision is sent by letter; to the student to the home address he or she has given to the study register; to Åbo Akademi staff by internal mail to their place of work. The date of distribution is noted.
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The documents are filed in the Åbo Akademi University Archives according to the statutes in the Åbo Akademi University Archives Regulations. The material of the investigation is public, but should be handled with discretion, that is, the actual investigation is discussed in decision-making or advisory bodies, published or distributed only if there are weighty reasons to do so.

Decisions on disciplinary actions taken by the Rector and the Board are saved on a specific register. A disciplinary action is kept on the register for five years. If, during these five years, the student commits a new offence, the prior offence is regarded as an aggravating circumstance when a new disciplinary consequence is being considered. The register is not public.

2.5. Lodging an Appeal against a Disciplinary Decision
The student’s right to lodge an appeal against a decision on disciplinary actions (reprimand or exclusion) taken by the Rector or the Board is stipulated in section 84 of the Universities Act. The student may lodge an appeal against the University’s decision in the Åbo Administrative Court. Further information and instructions on the appeal process in included in the decision by the Rector or the Board. The appeal process is regulated in the Administrative Judicial Procedure Act. The general instructions on appeals at Åbo Akademi University are found at the web address https://www.abo.fi/personal/forfattningar