Åbo Akademi University

Procedures for handling cases of plagiarism in undergraduate studies
Approved by the Senate: June 5th, 2008

The University Act and the University Decree stipulate the comprehensive regulations concerning procedures for handling disciplinary matters within a university. The Degree Regulations of Åbo Akademi University and the Examination Instructions give a detailed account of how Åbo Akademi University handles disciplinary matters. Translations of the essential, national regulations and Åbo Akademi University Codes of Conduct are presented on the website Statutes (http://www.abo.fi/public/en/forfattningar).

DEFINING PLAGIARISM
The National Advisory Board on Research Ethics has defined and categorised different types of misconduct and fraud in science. Åbo Akademi University complies with the guidelines of the delegation, also for undergraduate studies at the university.

The definition of plagiarism is presenting academic works, results, manuscripts or articles produced by another person as one’s own.


In the procedure for handling cases of plagiarism at Åbo Akademi University a distinction is made between the incautious use of material and actual plagiarism. Depending on the category the case belongs to, the action taken varies.

Incautious use of material
Incautious use of material refers to a situation where a student unintentionally presents material produced by another person as his/her own work. The criteria for incautious use of material is met in cases of misunderstanding the nature of the work task, negligence or perceptible inexperience in the correct use of quotations and/or other referencing techniques by the student.

Plagiarism
Plagiarism refers to a situation where a student intentionally presents material produced by another person as his/her own work. The criteria for plagiarism is met in cases where a student knows or should know that the reproduced material has been created by another person, or where the student has neglected to follow the teacher’s instructions for avoiding incautious use of material.

THE PROCEDURE FOR HANDLING CASES OF PLAGIARISM
In cases of suspected plagiarism, the teacher or supervisor (hereafter, only the term teacher will be used) should initially decide if the offence can be considered as incautious use of material or actual plagiarism. The teacher shall base his/her decision on a comprehensive assessment of the work in question, taking into account the student’s level of development, experience in academic studies and previous work. Åbo Akademi University regards plagiarism a serious matter. In cases that are not clear, the matter should be assessed as suspected plagiarism, thus assuring a careful investigation.
In cases of group work, the teacher shall establish whether the members of the group are responsible for separate sections of the work. If the responsibility for the section where the irregularity occurs cannot be clearly determined, the investigation procedure must apply to the whole group.

In addition to the teacher, other parties can request that a case of suspected plagiarism is investigated. This applies to situations where the teacher has not noticed the plagiarism or chosen not to report the matter. An unnoticed case of plagiarism is reported to the teacher who assesses/has assessed the work, or directly to the Dean. A request for investigation of an unreported case shall be directed to the Dean. An unreported case is, for example, a statement by a teacher that throws suspicion on a student’s work. A request for an investigation into a case of plagiarism submitted by another party always leads to a preliminary investigation by the Faculty.

The procedure for handling incautious use of material

1. The teacher contacts the student. The teacher informs the student about the error or errors in the work and about ethical principles, as well as refers the student to information concerning misconduct and fraud, for example the Learning Centre’s website – in Swedish only (https://www.abo.fi/student/infohantering_stud).

2. The teacher requests that the student supplements his/her work. If the student thinks that the error has occurred because of the teacher’s imprecise instructions, the Head of Department (HoD, ämnesansvarig) shall be consulted. If the teacher in question is both the teacher and the HoD, the Dean shall be consulted. The consulted person decides on further actions in the case (supplementary work/academic assessment/other directives).
   Even if the teacher has not given explicit instructions for the work in question, the rules on citing and other referencing techniques must always be followed.

3. The student submits a new, corrected version of the assignment/work

4. If there is no longer any suspicion of incautious use of material, the teacher assesses the academic merits of the work.

The procedure for handling cases of plagiarism
The procedure consists of an academic process (steps 1-3) and a disciplinary process (steps 4-6).

1. Request for investigation
   The teacher reports his/her suspicions concerning plagiarism to the Dean. If the error occurs in a course at one of the Independent Institutions the teacher reports his/her suspicions to the Director of the Institution (hereafter only the terms Faculty and Dean will be used). A person other than the teacher can also request an investigation of suspected plagiarism. The request shall be directed to the teacher who assesses the work, or to the Dean.

2. The preliminary investigation by the Faculty
   The Dean summons the teacher, the student, a representative for the student and a secretary to the preliminary investigation of the Faculty. The representative is a person appointed by the Student’s Union of the Åbo Akademi University, primarily the Secretary of Educational Affairs, unless the accused student asks for another person within the university to act as his/her representative.
another party has reported the matter, the Dean also summons the reporting party to the inquiry. If the Dean is biased, the Vice Dean conducts the preliminary investigation. In the summons proceedings, the Dean shall refer to the website where this document and its appendices (http://www.abo.fi/public/en/ordnregl) can be found. The Dean can decide that the inquiry is held even if one party fails to show up.

In the beginning of the preliminary investigation, the Dean clarifies the definition of plagiarism. The teacher/claimant gives an account of the evidence that has given cause for suspicion of plagiarism. After that, the student has the opportunity to answer the charges. If more than one person is suspected, each person is given an opportunity to be heard concerning the matter. Subsequently the student representative has an opportunity to give a statement on the case. The Dean summarising the different party’s statements and giving his assessment of the matter concludes the preliminary investigation.

The secretary records the minutes of the preliminary investigation on the form that has been created for this purpose (http://www.abo.fi/public/en/ordnregl). The Dean shall give all the parties the opportunity to correct the minutes as well as to submit written statements of a dissenting opinion. The statements are to be submitted within a reasonable time after the preliminary investigation. The approved minutes, with the signatures of all those present, are filed at the Faculty. The filing of the minutes and possible appendices follows the rules in the Archiving Statutes of Åbo Akademi University. The material from the preliminary investigation is not public. The summoned parties, as well as the student’s teacher tutor, all get a copy of the minutes.

The assessment of the Dean can be that the case is an unfounded accusation, a case of incautious use of material or plagiarism.

- If the assessment of the Dean is that the accusation is unfounded, the teacher is requested to assess the academic merits of the work.

- If the assessment of the Dean is that the work contains incautious use of material, the student is requested to supplement the work according to the instructions of the teacher. If suspicion of incautious use of material no longer exists, the teacher assesses the academic merits of the new version. In cases where the student has obviously neglected to follow the instructions of the teacher, the teacher shall report the new version to the Dean as a suspected case of plagiarism. Directly after the preliminary investigation, the student can request that the academic merits of the work are to be assessed without any supplementary work. Incautious use of material does not automatically mean that the work is failed.

- If the assessment of the Dean is that the work contains plagiarism, the Dean always submits the matter to the Rector for a disciplinary procedure. The matter is reported to the Rector by sending the minutes of the preliminary investigation to the Rector’s office. The teacher gives the student’s work a fail grade. If the work is a significant part of the overall course work then a fail grade is given for the whole course. The administration office removes any possible study points that have been recorded in the Student Register after the disciplinary process (step 4-6) has been concluded.

Besides the Dean, other parties involved in the process can submit the matter to the Rector for a disciplinary investigation. The matter is brought to the Rector by sending a written request for an
investigation to the Rector’s office. The minutes of the preliminary investigation are to be attached. The request shall be made within a reasonable time after the parties have received the minutes of the preliminary investigation.

3. **The student’s appeal for re-assessment of the academic merits**
   An appeal shall be presented within 14 days of the results announced, during which the student has had the opportunity to consider the assessment and the criteria on which the work has been evaluated. An appeal made in the case of a thesis within advanced studies shall be presented in writing to the Faculty Council. A student, who is dissatisfied with the grading of course work, can make an appeal either orally or in writing, to the teacher who gave the grade. The teacher is required to review his/her original assessment and make a rectification decision, which is recorded on the submitted work. The decision can either be that the original evaluation remains unchanged or that the teacher makes an adjustment to the evaluation. An adjustment made to the disadvantage of the student requires the approval of the student.

   The student can submit the adjusted decision of the Faculty Council or the teacher to the Examination Board for re-examination. The request for a re-examination shall be submitted in written form to the University’s administration office, either in Åbo or Vasa, within 14 days from the time the student has received the adjusted decision. The decision of the Examination Board in the matter is final and cannot be appealed.

4. **Rector’s hearing**
   The Head of Administration appoints a presenting officer to be in charge of handling disciplinary matters. This officer handles cases of plagiarism. When preparing the case, the officer must give the student an opportunity to be heard concerning the matter. The decision of the Rector can be no disciplinary action, a warning or transference of the case to the Senate for consideration.

   - The Rector makes the decision that there shall be no disciplinary action if the Rector considers that no plagiarism exists or that giving a fail grade to the student’s work is a sufficient punishment in consideration of the characteristic of the offence and/or the extent of the offence. The decision is recorded and filed in the archives of Åbo Akademi University. If the Rector deems that the suspicion of plagiarism is unfounded, the teacher shall re-assess the academic merits of the work. If the Rector considers that incautious use of material is present, the student is given the choice of either supplementing the work according to the teacher’s instructions, or submitting the work unaltered for a new academic assessment.
   
   - The Rector decides to give a warning if the Rector considers a warning justified with reference to the characteristic of the offence and/or the extent of the offence. The decision is recorded and filed in the archives of Åbo Akademi University.
   
   - The Rector transfers the case to the Senate if the Rector considers that the case is fundamentally important or that the nature and/or extent of the offence justifies depriving the student of his/her study rights at the University for a specified time. The decision is recorded and filed in the archives of Åbo Akademi University.
5. **The Senate’s hearing**

The Head of Administration appoints a presenting officer to be in charge of handling disciplinary matters. This officer handles plagiarism cases. When preparing the case, the officer must give the student an opportunity to be heard concerning the matter. The decision of the Senate can be *no disciplinary action, a warning or a suspension*.

- The Senate decides that there shall be no disciplinary action if the Senate considers that no plagiarism exists or that giving a fail grade to the student’s work is a sufficient punishment in consideration of the characteristic of the offence and/or the extent of the offence. If the Senate considers that the suspicion of plagiarism is unfounded, the teacher shall re-assess the academic merits of the work. If the Senate considers that incautious use of material is present, the student is given the choice of either supplementing the work according to the teacher’s instructions, or submitting the work unaltered for a new academic assessment. The decision is recorded in the minutes of the meeting. The minutes of the Senate’s meeting are filed in the archives of Åbo Akademi University.

- The Senate decides to give a warning if the Senate considers a warning justified with reference to the nature of the offence and/or the extent of the offence. The decision is recorded in the minutes of the meeting. The minutes of the Senate’s meeting are filed in the archives of Åbo Akademi University.

- The Senate decides to suspend a student for a specified period of time, a maximum of one year, if the Senate considers a suspension justified with reference to the nature of the offence and/or the extent of the offence. The Administration Office removes the student from the Student Register (the studies are registered as discontinued) for the period determined by the Senate. During the suspension, the student does not have the right to complete course work at Åbo Akademi University. The Senate’s decision is recorded in the minutes of the meeting. The minutes of the Senate’s meeting are filed in the archives of Åbo Akademi University.

6. **Appeal procedures regarding a disciplinary decision**

Students have the right to appeal the decision by the Rector or the Senate concerning disciplinary actions (a warning or a suspension). This right is stipulated in the University Act. A student can submit an appeal regarding a decision by the University to Turku (Åbo) Administrative Court. Further information and directions regarding the appeal process can be found in the Administrative Judicial Procedure Act [http://www.abo.fi/public/en/nationforf](http://www.abo.fi/public/en/nationforf).
Procedures for handling cases of plagiarism in undergraduate studies
The academic process

The student produces a degree thesis or other academic work

Submission of examination work for assessment

The teacher (supervisor) starts assessing the work. If a problem of plagiarism becomes apparent the teacher contacts the student.

The student produces a new version.

Request for investigation
In addition to the teacher, other parties can request that a case of suspected plagiarism is investigated. The request is made to the teacher or the Dean. The request always leads to a preliminary investigation by the Faculty.

Another party than the teacher can request for an investigation of an unreported accusation. The request is made to the Dean. The request always leads to a preliminary investigation by the Faculty.

The teacher requests that the student supplement the work. In unclear cases the Head of the Department (ämnesansvarig) is consulted.

Incautious use of material

The Faculty’s preliminary investigation
The Dean summons the teacher, the student and the appointed student representative to a hearing. The Dean reviews the facts presented by the involved parties and makes a judgement on the matter. A secretary writes minutes of the meeting.

The Dean’s evaluation

Incautious use of material
The student is given the choice of supplementing the work or sending it for academic assessment.

Suspected plagiarism

The Dean submits the matter to the Rector for disciplinary judgement.

No indication of plagiarism

Incautious use of material

The academic merits of the work are assessed

Appeal for reassessment by the teacher (Faculty Board)
The student may request that the teacher reviews the assessment of the work. Following the reassessment, the teacher makes a rectification decision either confirming the original assessment or adjusting it.

Åbo Akademi University Examination Board
The student can submit the rectified assessment to the Examination Board for re-examination. The decision of the Examination Board is final and cannot be appealed.
Procedure for handling cases of plagiarism in undergraduate studies
The disciplinary process

Faculty’s Preliminary Investigation
If the investigation shows proofs of plagiarism, the Dean always submits the case to the Rector for a disciplinary investigation.

Request for disciplinary investigation
Besides the Dean, other parties involved in the case can submit the Faculty’s preliminary investigation to the Rector for a disciplinary investigation.

Rector’s hearing
The Rector makes his/her decision based on a report by a presenting officer. The disciplinary procedure provides that the accused student is contacted. The student must be informed of the suspected offence and given an opportunity to be heard concerning the matter.

Rector’s decision

No disciplinary measures

Plagiarism established
The Rector gives a warning

The Rector transfers the case to the Senate

The Senate’s hearing
The Senate makes its decision based on a report by a presenting officer

The Senate’s decision

No disciplinary measures

Plagiarism established
The Senate gives a warning

Plagiarism established
The Senate decides on suspension. The student can be suspended for a maximum of one year.

Plagiarism established
No further punishment

Unfounded accusation
Returned for a new academic process

Unfounded accusation
Returned for a new academic process

Incautious use of material
Returned for a new academic process

Incautious use of material
Returned for a new academic process

The actions of Åbo Akademi University in the disciplinary matter are closed

Turku (Åbo) Administrative Court
The student have the right to seek change of a suspension decision. The appeal shall be directed to the Administrative Court of the region where the University is registered.