Student academic misconduct: An introduction

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What is academic misconduct?

Student academic misconduct is a general term used at SCU to describe deliberate breaches of academic integrity.

Student academic misconduct happens when:

- students understand how to practise academic integrity and,
- fail to acknowledge when they use others’ work in assignments and exams.

Student academic misconduct is taken very seriously at SCU and can result in significant penalties. At university, whether you are completing assignments or exams, it is essential to always show when you use others’ work (sources) in your writing. This is usually achieved via correct and consistent referencing.

What if I don’t know how to practice academic integrity?

Southern Cross University recognizes that the idea of academic integrity, and how to practise it, needs to be learnt (Southern Cross University, n.d.b). At this university it is understood that the idea of academic integrity can seem mysterious to new students, and it takes time to develop the skills needed to practise academic integrity according to disciplinary conventions.

Students are provided with information and teaching about how to practise academic integrity in their discipline or course.

- ASD Quick Guides about academic integrity provide a general introduction to the ideas and writing skills you will need to practise academic integrity when completing assignments and exams.
- Your teachers will explain how to use sources effectively in your writing, and how to acknowledge sources in assignments via referencing. Assessment support resources and assessment feedback are important places to look for guidance from your teachers about practising academic integrity. Your teachers will also direct you to the referencing style guide you should use.
- Many courses at SCU provide an ‘Assignment Writing Guide’ or access to a Blackboard learning site containing guidance about writing assignments according to disciplinary or course conventions.
- Referencing style guides used in each School at SCU are provided on the Library intranet site (http://www.scu.edu.au/library/index.php/14).

It is the university’s responsibility to provide information and teaching about academic integrity to students. It is your responsibility, while studying at SCU, to access and use learning support about academic integrity and how to use sources effectively in assignments and exams. Learning how to write assignments at university takes time and effort. If you have questions make sure you ask your teachers for guidance.
Penalties for academic misconduct

Deliberately breaching academic integrity is called academic misconduct, and can result in serious penalties for students (Southern Cross University, n.d.c).

At SCU penalties for academic misconduct can include:
• resubmitting the assessment task
• losing some marks for the affected assessment task
• being awarded zero marks for the affected assessment task
• failing the unit
• being excluded from the course.

Penalties for academic misconduct depend on a number of factors including:
• the experience of the student
• the seriousness of misconduct
• whether previous acts of academic misconduct have been committed by the student.

Academic misconduct can affect more than your grades

The impacts of academic misconduct can reach beyond your time studying at SCU. Students who are investigated and found to have committed academic misconduct have their names recorded on the Academic Integrity Register (maintained by the Academic Standards Officer).

Graduates may be asked to disclose their record in relation to academic misconduct to prospective employers. Instances of academic misconduct can be viewed as a negative indication of your character (honesty and fairness) when applying for jobs.

The seriousness of academic misconduct for Legal and Justice Studies students can be especially acute. For Legal and Justice Studies students seeking entry to the bar, a record of academic misconduct during their university studies can have a serious, negative effect on career opportunities. This is because a recorded instance of student academic misconduct can be construed as detracting from ‘good character’.

Common forms of student academic misconduct: cheating, collusion, and plagiarism

The next part of this resource explains what cheating, collusion, and plagiarism mean, gives concrete examples, and identifies strategies you can use to avoid these forms of academic misconduct.

Being familiar with various types of academic misconduct can help you to avoid them. It is important to read and understand the Academic Misconduct Guidelines (Southern Cross University, n.d.c).

Cheating

Cheating is perhaps the most obvious type of academic misconduct. At school, and in life, cheating is understood as dishonest, and poor behaviour, which should be avoided. Cheating is also seen this way at university. Most new students understand cheating is not OK, and that it is very important to follow examination rules carefully.

Examples of cheating
The following examples are considered to be acts of cheating and should be avoided:
• copying the work of fellow students in exams
• breaking examination rules (e.g. bringing in notes to a closed-book exam)
• getting someone else to sit the exam in your place.
**Avoiding cheating**

**To avoid cheating:**

- follow examination rules and instructions carefully
- put in the effort and submit your own work for assessment.

**Collusion**

Collusion is a very serious type of academic misconduct. New students are often shocked to find out that they have unintentionally colluded when they were only trying to help out a friend. Even experienced students are sometimes surprised to find out it is collusion to give their old assignments to other students.

**What is collusion?**

**It is an act of collusion to:**

- copy the work of a fellow student and submit it as if it is your own work
- allow a fellow student to copy your work (who then submits it as their own effort).

The student who lets their work be copied, and the student who does the copying then submits the work as their own, both participate in collusion. This is a serious type of academic misconduct.

It is collusion even if only a few sections of the assignment are copied, and the student writes the rest of the assignment themselves. This is because practising academic integrity means:

- submitting your own work for assessment,
- clearly showing when you do use the work of others.

**Examples of collusion**

The following examples are acts of collusion and should be avoided:

- copying a few paragraphs from an old assignment submitted by a student in the previous year and submitting the assignment as your own work
- letting a friend copy sections of your assignment and then submit it as their own work
- copying an entire assignment from a fellow student and submitting it as your own work
- allowing a student to copy your entire assignment and submit as their own work

**Avoiding collusion**

**To avoid collusion:**

- submit your own work in assignments and exams
- don't let fellow students copy even part of your work and submit it as their own work.

**What about collaborative learning and group assignments?**

At university you will be encouraged to discuss unit topics, set readings, and assignments with students in your class. Collaborating with other students in tutorials, online, in study groups, and at the coffee shop, is a really important part of learning at university. Often, it is by talking about ideas with others, and hearing other points of view that we learn most deeply.

It is important to understand that collaboration and collusion are not the same. Collaboration involves sharing and exchanging ideas, understandings, and points of view. You might collaborate about assignments by discussing readings, your ideas, and approach to the task. In contrast, collusion involves:

- copying a fellow student’s work and submitting it as your own
- allowing your work to be copied by another student.

**Group-work assignments and collusion**

Group-work assignments are popular at university, in part because team-work skills are highly valued in the work place and community. Some new students find group work assignments confusing because they are worried about collusion.
Your teachers will clearly outline how group assignments should be completed, and how students should collaborate.

If in doubt, check with your teacher and ask yourself:

- Have I put in the effort expected of me for this assignment?
- Have I followed assessment guidelines?
- Have I clearly shown where my work ends and the work of others begins?

Plagiarism

Plagiarism is the most common form of academic misconduct.

What is plagiarism?

Deliberate plagiarism is a serious type of academic misconduct. At SCU plagiarism is defined as "the act of taking and using another's work, including unattributed material in whatever form and from whatever source, as one's own" (Southern Cross University, n.d.a).

Using the work of others without careful acknowledgement is plagiarism. Inconsistent referencing and poor paraphrasing are the most common ways students plagiarise in assignments.

Examples of plagiarism

The following examples are considered to be plagiarism and should be avoided:

- using ideas or information from sources without acknowledgement via referencing
- using words (direct quotations) from sources without referencing
- inconsistent and incorrect referencing
- poor paraphrasing where the original phrasing is kept and only a few words have been changed
- buying an essay from an online essay mill and submitting as your own work
- submitting an assignment for assessment which has already been submitted to another unit (submitting the same assignment to different units is a type of 'self-plagiarism')
- a family member or friend writing part, or all, of an assignment.

Avoiding plagiarism

Avoiding plagiarism means submitting your own work in assignments and exams, and correctly and consistently referencing to show when you use the work of others.

To avoid plagiarism:

- consistently and correctly follow the required reference style
- use referencing to clearly show the reader where your work ends, and the work of others begins
- put the meaning of sources into your own words when paraphrasing (DON’T just change a couple of words and leave the phrasing the same).

Summary: Student academic misconduct and how to avoid it

1. Academic misconduct is a deliberate breach of academic integrity, which can result in serious penalties for students.
2. Students found to have committed academic misconduct have their names recorded on an Academic Integrity Register. A record of academic misconduct can impact career opportunities for graduates if their employers ask them to disclose any incidents. This can be an especially serious matter for Law graduates hoping to practise law.
3. Deliberately cheating, colluding, and plagiarising are all types of academic misconduct. These acts all involve claiming credit for someone else's work by submitting it for assessment as if it is your own work, or allowing others to take credit for your work by submitting it as their own.
4. To avoid breaching academic integrity:
   - understand what counts as cheating, collusion and plagiarism at university
- always put in the effort needed to complete assignments and exams
- carefully show when you use others’ work in assignments and exams
- don’t allow other students to copy your assignments or exams
- closely follow examination rules
- learn the academic writing skills needed to complete assignments in your discipline.

Related Quick Guides
Student academic integrity: An introduction, Student academic integrity: Know your rights and responsibilities, Practising academic integrity: An introduction to referencing

References