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Student Guidelines on Academic Integrity (2026)



Faculty of Arts and
Social Sciences (FASS)

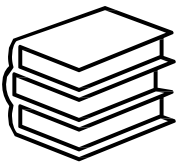
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The Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences values academic integrity. To have integrity means that you behave in a way that is honest, respectful, fair, responsible and accountable. As a student, you will be exposed to the ideas and material of others, and you will be tasked with incorporating ideas and material into your own academic work in a way that is transparent and appropriate. The Faculty takes responsibility for teaching students how to use the ideas and words of others appropriately *and* for adjudicating instances where a student is believed to have *not* acted with integrity. This document offers some guidelines for students on how to act with integrity, and it outlines the processes that are followed if it is believed that a student has plagiarised or used generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools in an unethical way.

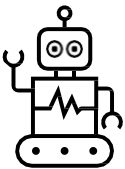
The Faculty's approach to plagiarism and permissible AI usage is based on the following four documents which are available on the Teaching and Learning Committee's website (<https://arts.sun.ac.za/teaching-and-learning-committee>):

- Policy on Plagiarism (in support of academic integrity), 2016 (henceforth referred to as "the SU Policy on plagiarism")
- Procedure for the investigation and management of allegations of plagiarism, 2016
- Draft interim SU guidelines on allowable AI use and academic integrity in assessment
- SU's Position Statement Ethical Use of Artificial Intelligence in Research and Teaching-Learning-Assessment

- ✓ You are required to familiarise yourself with the documents listed above. This document does not repeat what is in those documents but explains the Faculty's process for dealing with breaches of academic integrity.



Plagiarism is a type of copying and typically involves the use of another writer's ideas and/or language, without crediting the original author. Plagiarism also includes a wide range of practices that vary from the wholesale appropriation of another writer's work to the inadequate use of referencing to reflect the sources of your ideas. While acts of plagiarism involve a breach of academic integrity, at undergraduate level they also frequently reflect inadequate understanding of academic texts and the conventions associated with academic writing.



The emergence of publicly available **generative AI** in 2022 marked a turning point in the history of teaching and learning at universities. This development presents numerous challenges lecturers are still grappling with. At the extreme unethical end of this spectrum, the use of AI resources overlaps with plagiarism-like activities. For example, a student could feed the topic for an undergraduate essay assignment into ChatGPT or a similar generative AI chatbot and submit the generated output as their own work. This use of AI is akin to asking a third party (typically another student or an "essay mill" website) to write the assignment.

Similarly, a student could use AI to generate an image and then submit it as their own creative work. This is not the only kind of AI use that is unethical, however, and any infringement of the rules for allowable AI use in a given module is a violation of academic integrity and will be treated as such.

The Faculty's approach to dealing with plagiarism and unethical AI use involves three steps:



Educating

Learning to avoid plagiarism and unethical AI use involves more than instruction on referencing, but also the acquisition of skills associated with the development of an "academic voice." For this reason, the conventions of academic reading and writing are taught in Knowledge Skills 172 and in most undergraduate modules.

- ✓ You are required to attend all lectures and tutorials on these topics to acquire the necessary understanding and skills.

In addition to this, most academic departments have guidelines on their disciplinary writing practices or writing conventions.

- ✓ You must be aware that conventions differ from discipline to discipline and department to department, and you are responsible for familiarising yourself with the conventions of the disciplines/departments where you are registered.

Additionally, the following procedures apply to all undergraduate modules in the Faculty:

- ✓ This document will be posted on all SUNLearn module sites. **It is your responsibility to make sure you have read and understood the document.**
- ✓ The lecturer/module coordinator will discuss the process followed for plagiarism and unethical AI use with students and locate this discussion within a broader discussion about forms of assessment used in the module. **It is your responsibility to attend these lectures and ask questions if clarification is needed.**
- ✓ If a lecturer permits AI use in the module and for assessments, this will be communicated in the module outline. **It is your responsibility to note that the rules of engagement with AI may differ across modules, and it is your responsibility to read and implement the correct rules for a specific module. If a lecturer does not make explicit mention of AI, it must be assumed that AI is not allowed.**
- ✓ **Where the use of AI is permitted, you are required to keep a record of your interaction with AI as it pertains to the assignment (including search history and prompts).** Even if you are not required to submit this documentation along with your assignment, you must keep it in the event your lecturer suspects you did not use AI with integrity
- ✓ **You must read and sign the plagiarism declaration (see Appendix 1), and AI declaration (see Appendix 2) prior to the submission of any assessment.**

Evaluating plagiarism and unethical AI use

Lecturers use Turnitin as one of several tools to assess the originality and integrity of student work. The Turnitin similarity report may provide evidence of potential plagiarism, but it is not conclusive on its own. Lecturers are expected to exercise professional judgment when interpreting similarity scores, taking into account the context, nature, and purpose of the assignment.

Where concerns arise, lecturers may also consider other indicators—such as writing style consistency, referencing practices, or oral verification of understanding—to form a comprehensive assessment of the integrity of the student's work.

All suspected cases are managed according to the Faculty's Educate–Evaluate–Adjudicate process, which promotes academic integrity through education, fair evaluation, and transparent decision-making.

Adjudicating instances of plagiarism

The process of adjudicating cases of plagiarism involves the gathering of evidence and an assessment of the "blameworthiness" of the person suspected of plagiarism or unethical AI use. The SU Policy defines blameworthiness as follows:

Blameworthiness (intent or negligence) of the person committing plagiarism: Did the person commit plagiarism knowingly (intentionally), or in circumstances indicating that he/she should reasonably have known of the plagiarism (negligently)? A state of blameworthiness (either intent or negligence) is required to make a finding of plagiarism (SU Policy, Section 7.1).

The University's plagiarism documents make provision for two broad categories of plagiarism: "less serious cases" and "more serious cases":

- "Less serious cases [which may include first time offenders, more junior students, limited extent of plagiarism, negligence rather than blatant intent], as determined in accordance with the factors set out in the Policy, are dealt with at department or faculty level, where appropriate and according to internal faculty processes which must be approved by the Dean or Faculty Board and documented in writing for reporting purposes." (SU Procedure, section 5.1.2);
- "More serious cases [which may include repeat offenders, extensive evidence of plagiarism in a significant piece of work such as a thesis, post graduate students especially those at Masters and PhD level, academic staff, evidence of gross negligence or blatant intent, etcetera], as determined in accordance with factors set out in the Policy, must be referred by the faculty to Student Discipline (Legal Services) for investigation in terms of the Student Disciplinary Code, unless a decision is taken to follow the Procedure for the Investigation of allegations of breach of research norms and standards instead of this Procedure." (Section 5.1.3)

In all cases of suspected plagiarism, whether minor or serious, the student shall be notified by the lecturer, module coordinator, or Head of Department. The form "Documenting Breaches of Academic Integrity" (Appendix 3) must be completed and retained within the department. Where appropriate, the form may be submitted to Student Discipline (Legal Services) for further action.

Adjudicating instances of unethical AI use

As with plagiarism, the process of adjudicating cases of unethical use of AI involves the gathering of evidence and an assessment of the “blameworthiness” of the person. The Faculty makes provision for two broad categories of unethical AI use: “less serious cases” and “more serious cases”:

- Less serious cases [which may include first time offenders, more junior students, limited use of AI, negligence rather than blatant intent] are dealt with at department or faculty level. The penalty may include the deduction of marks or an alternative assessment (for, example, an oral examination) to test the student’s knowledge. The student may also be asked to submit a record of their interaction with AI (i.e. search history and prompts).
- More serious cases [which may include repeat offenders, extensive evidence of unethical AI, evidence of gross negligence or blatant intent, etcetera] may be referred by the faculty to Student Discipline (Legal Services) for investigation.

In all cases of suspected plagiarism, whether minor or serious, the student shall be notified by the lecturer, module coordinator, or Head of Department. The form “Documenting Breaches of Academic Integrity” (Appendix 3) must be completed and retained within the department. Where appropriate, the form may be submitted to Student Discipline (Legal Services) for further action.

Appendix 1

Student plagiarism declaration

All students will be required to read and sign the plagiarism declaration prior to the submission of written assignments, or be required to sign an electronic equivalent of the declaration on SUNLearn:

- ✓ I have read and understand the Stellenbosch University Policy on Plagiarism and the definitions of plagiarism and self-plagiarism contained in the Policy [Plagiarism: The use of the ideas or material of others without acknowledgement, or the re-use of one's own previously evaluated or published material without acknowledgement or indication thereof (self-plagiarism or text-recycling)].
- ✓ I also understand that direct translations are plagiarism.
- ✓ Accordingly, all quotations and contributions from any source whatsoever (including the internet) have been cited fully. I understand that the reproduction of text without quotation marks (even when the source is cited) is plagiarism.
- ✓ I declare that the work contained in this assignment is my own work and that I have not previously (in its entirety or in part) submitted it for grading in this module/assignment or another module/assignment.

Appendix 2

Student AI declaration

All students will be required to read and sign the AI declaration prior to the submission of assignments, or be required to sign an electronic equivalent of the declaration on SUNLearn:

- ✓ This assessment product is an indication of my own learning, knowledge, skills, and understanding, and I am able to provide evidence to support this claim.
- ✓ Where the use of AI tools was explicitly not allowed, I can say with integrity and honesty that I did not use any such tools.
- ✓ Where the use of AI tools was permitted, I have documented the use of such tools and I am prepared to talk about the process I used and what it contributed to my learning and insights.
- ✓ I am aware that the lecturer can ask me to demonstrate my learning, for example through explaining the choices I made in terms of approach, content used, literature selected, conclusions drawn, etc. through an additional assessment like an oral.
- ✓ I understand that if I am not able to agree to the above points, my academic behaviour may be deemed unethical and might lead to a disciplinary case being brought against me on the grounds of cheating or plagiarism and that the standard procedures for such behaviour will be followed.
- ✓ As per the Disciplinary Code of SU (par. 10.2.1 and 10.2.2) I understand that I take responsibility for the integrity of my work, which includes the obligation to ask for clarification from an academic member of staff if I am unsure of anything, and that I strictly adhered to all instructions received in the course of the academic assessment by relevant and authorised staff (whether the instruction is in oral or written format).
- ✓ I understand that when AI-tools were not allowed in the assessment, or where I am not able to document and declare my use of such tools, this behaviour will be deemed as cheating in examinations and assessments (Disciplinary Code 1.1 c.) as I referred to "unauthorized notes, books, electronic devices or other reference material".

Appendix 3

Form documenting breaches of academic integrity

This form is used to document cases of plagiarism or unethical AI use. It must be completed by the lecturer or module coordinator, reviewed with the student involved, and submitted to the Head of Department for approval. Once signed by the Head of Department, the form may either be forwarded to Student Discipline (Legal Services) or retained on file within the department for record-keeping purposes.

Student name and surname:

Student number:

Module:

Lecturer:

Lecturer's description of the case:

Lecturer's assessment of the level of plagiarism/unethical use of AI:

A	More serious case: to be referred to Student Discipline (Legal Services) for investigation in terms of the Student Disciplinary Code.	
B	Less serious case: to be determined within the Department.	

Case A Process

Where the lecturer/module coordinator (in consultation with the head of department) has determined that the incident constitutes a "More serious case" of plagiarism or unethical use of AI, the student must be informed, and the case referred to Student Discipline (Legal Services) for investigation in terms of the Student Disciplinary Code.

Signature of lecturer/module coordinator:

Case B Process

Where the lecturer/module coordinator has determined that the incident constitutes a "Less serious case" of plagiarism or unethical AI use, the student has the right to either accept this judgement or have the case referred to Student Discipline (Legal Services) for investigation in terms of the Student Disciplinary Code.

Student Declaration: I acknowledge that a "Less serious case" of plagiarism or AI use has been made, with respect to work that I submitted in the abovementioned module. My decision regarding this case is as follows:

B1	I would like the case to be referred to Student Discipline (Legal Services) for investigation in terms of the Student Disciplinary Code.	
B2	I agree that this is a "Less serious case" of plagiarism and accept the sanction outlined below. I also acknowledge that, in selecting this option, I relinquish my right to legal representation.	

Lecturer/Module coordinator's decision on the appropriate sanction:

Signature of student:

Signature of module
coordinator/lecturer:

Date: