



Union
Theological
College

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Postgraduate Academic Integrity Procedures

This Procedure should be read in conjunction with the Academic Integrity Policy

Introduction

1.1 It is an academic offence for a student to commit an act whereby they gain or attempt to gain an unfair advantage. Where an academic offence is suspected to have been committed by a student the following Procedures may be invoked.

General Principles

Confidentiality

1.2 All staff and students who become involved in the College process are required to respect the integrity of the process and the confidentiality of information arising from it both during and after the conclusion of the process, unless there is an overriding reason to disclose information.

Information will only be released to those who need it for the purpose of investigating or responding to a matter; no third party will be told any more about the investigation than strictly necessary in order to obtain the information required from them.

The College reserves the right, in cases involving candidates for the ministry, to report the outcome of an investigation into a suspected academic offence to the Ministerial Students Development Council.

1.3 Where a statement of complaint has been made about a student or a member of staff, that person will normally be provided with a copy of the statement. Any person who makes a statement of complaint will be advised of this accordingly.

Communication

1.4 The College will normally communicate by email with anyone involved in the process.
Notification of decisions

1.5 Unless otherwise stated, notification of a decision will be sent to the student and copied to relevant persons normally within five working days of the decision being taken. If there is a delay in the decision being made, the student will be advised.

Defamatory or derogatory comments

1.6 Students should be careful not to make unsubstantiated or defamatory allegations or comments about students, members of College staff or any other person. If the College considers that an allegation or comment may be deemed to be defamatory, it may require it to be retracted or deleted before permitting the investigation to continue. If a student



refuses to do so, the offending material may be deleted by the College and the student may also be referred for investigation under the College Discipline Procedures.

Duty of Candour / Fabricated Evidence

1.7 It is expected that any person involved in any College process will treat all others involved with respect and courtesy and will behave honestly and with integrity throughout the process. It is also expected that evidence (written or oral) provided to the College by any person will be true to the best of that person's knowledge.

1.8 Any student considered to have acted dishonestly or to have provided fabricated or falsified evidence may be referred for investigation under the College Discipline Procedures.

Evidence

1.9 The College reserves the right to request and consider further evidence, including medical evidence, as it deems appropriate.

Right to Be Accompanied

1.10 At any interview and/or meeting the student is permitted to be accompanied by a registered student of the College or a member of the College staff or friend or family member. However, the role of the person accompanying the student is one of support, not representation and legal representation will not be permitted.

Anonymous reports

1.11 Anonymous reports of concerns will not normally be considered. However, where the report raises issues of serious concern, the College may take steps to investigate the matter.

1.12 Only in exceptional circumstances will the identity of the person reporting a concern be permitted to remain confidential, provided this is consistent with the rules of natural justice.

Concerns raised close to or after graduation

1.13 Where a concern about a student's conduct is raised immediately prior to graduation, the College may not permit the student to graduate. In such circumstances, graduation will be deferred pending the outcome of any investigation under this Procedure.

1.14 Any offence that comes to light after a student has graduated shall be investigated under this Procedure.

Equality, Diversity and Fair Treatment

1.15 The College has a legal, as well as a moral duty, to treat all students fairly. The College values and promotes equality and diversity and will seek to ensure that it treats all individuals fairly and with dignity and respect.

1.16 No person who is subject to investigation under this Procedure will be treated less favourably as a result. Victimisation shall be grounds for a further, separate complaint.



1.17 At all times, the principles of natural justice shall be observed and the standard of proof shall be on the balance of probabilities.

Deadlines/Timescales

1.18 The College will endeavour to meet all timescales set out in this Procedure. It may however prove impossible to meet these timescales when key staff are on leave, or otherwise indisposed, or where the complexities of the case warrant extended scrutiny. Where it is not possible for the College to meet the deadlines, for whatever reason, the student will be informed.

1.19 Appeals received after the specified deadlines will not be considered unless the student can evidence circumstances beyond their control (e.g. hospitalisation).

Scope of the Procedure: Minor and Major Offences

1.20 An offence shall normally be designated as 'minor' if the piece of work where it occurs counts towards one third or less of the assessment for the module. Suspected minor offences shall be dealt with at Department level under the procedure set out in paragraphs 1.43 – 1.58 below.

1.21 An offence shall be designated as 'major' if the piece of work where it occurs counts towards more than one third of the assessment for the module. Suspected major offences shall be dealt with under the procedure set out in paragraphs 1.59 – 1.83 below.

1.22 Any incident of research misconduct by a postgraduate taught student shall be deemed to be a major offence.

1.23 Any incidents of plagiarism or duplication in unpublished work submitted by a postgraduate research student for assessment (via Annual Progress Review or oral examination) shall be deemed a major offence.

1.24 Any repeat or multiple offences shall be deemed to be a major offence.

1.25 Cheating in an examination or class test or online assessment shall be deemed to be a major offence.

1.26 Contract cheating shall be deemed to be a major offence.

Definitions of Academic Offences

The following is not exhaustive; where the conduct of a student does not fit any of the following definitions, the student may be found to have committed an academic offence if they have gained or attempted to gain an unfair advantage or facilitated or attempted to facilitate another student to do so.

Cheating

1.27 The term 'cheating' normally describes behaviour that takes place in an examination or class test or an online assessment. It is considered to be cheating for a student to:



- Have any form of notes, or any items or texts other than those that are specifically permitted for that examination or class test, at their desk in an examination hall during an examination or in a classroom during a class test. It is the student's responsibility to establish what the permitted items are for each examination or class test.
- Make use or attempt to make use of unauthorised items as described above and/or any form of technology, including mobile telephones, smart phones, earpieces (though not authorised hearing aids), cameras or other devices.
- Copy or attempt to copy from another student's examination script or class test script.
- Obtain or attempt to obtain assistance from another student or from any other person which leads to an unfair advantage.
- Impersonate another student, or to allow themselves to be impersonated during an examination or class test or an online assessment.
- Provide or attempt to provide unfair assistance to another student.
- Permit another student to copy from their examination script or class test script.
- Knowingly assist any student to make use or attempt to make use of unfair means in an examination or class test or online assessment.

1.28 Plagiarism: the presentation of the work of others as the writer's own.

1.29 Duplication: using or re-using significant, identical, or nearly identical portion(s) of their own work where such work has been previously submitted for credit within the College or at another institution.

1.30 Copying or Permitting Copying: copying or permitting another student to copy their work submitted for assessment. Both parties will be dealt with in accordance with these procedures.

1.31 Collusion: where two or more students work together on an assignment that is meant to be done individually. It is expected that the work being assessed, unless specifically designated as a group assessment, shall be the work solely of the student submitting it.

1.32 Fabrication: where a student claims to have carried out interviews or any form of research which they have not in fact carried out or where they invent or falsify data, evidence or experimental results. It is also an offence for a student knowingly to make use of falsified data as described above.

1.33 Contract Cheating: where a student commissions or seeks to commission (either paid or unpaid) another to perform academic work on their behalf.

1.34 Research Misconduct: behaviour by any student in the conduct of research, whether intentional or not, that falls short of good scholarly standards. Misconduct in research covers inappropriate behaviour as well as misconduct in the course of research. Misconduct includes, but is not limited to:

- Plagiarism
- Duplication
- Collusion
- Fabrication

- Falsification
- Misrepresentation of data and/or interests and/or involvement
- Breach of legislation
- Failure to follow accepted procedures or to exercise due care in carrying out responsibilities for avoiding unreasonable risk or harm to research participants.
- The proper handling of privileged or private information on individuals collected during the research
- Failure to ensure the appropriate ethical approval has been granted prior to commencing research
- Contract cheating

1.35 Honest error (which is not due to negligence), or differences of interpretation, are not included as misconduct in research. However, poor research practice may be considered misconduct, particularly where individual negligence results in harm or potential harm to research collaborators or participants.

Discovery of Suspected Academic Offence

Cheating in an Examination

In this section, any reference to examination shall also include class test and online assessment.

1.36 An invigilator who suspects a student of cheating in an examination or who is made aware that a student may be cheating shall observe the student and make appropriate notes for a report.

1.37 The invigilator shall inform the student that they are suspected of cheating and that a report shall be made. The invigilator shall record the incident on the student's examination script and shall remove and retain as evidence any unauthorised material in the student's possession. The student shall then be allowed to finish the examination. This procedure applies both to a student who is suspected of cheating and to any student who is suspected of having allowed their work to be copied or of having provided any form of unfair assistance.

1.38 At the end of the examination the invigilator shall ask the student to remain and shall offer them the opportunity to explain their conduct and shall take a record of the discussion. The student will be informed that a report will be made to the Principal. Failure to co-operate with the invigilator may be deemed to be a disciplinary offence.

1.39 The invigilator shall make a written report to the Principal within one working day of the examination.

Other Offences (see 1.28 -1.34)

1.40 A member of staff who discovers possible plagiarism; duplication; fabrication; copying or permitting copying; contract cheating; collusion; or research misconduct in work that does not count towards the assessment of the module, or in drafts of work that have not yet been submitted for assessment, shall normally deal with this informally. This will involve re-advising the student of the academic conventions with regard to referencing, etc,



applying in the discipline.

1.41 A member of staff who discovers possible plagiarism; duplication; fabrication; copying or permitting copying; contract cheating; collusion or research misconduct in work submitted for assessment shall report the suspected offence in writing to the Head of Department immediately.

1.42 The Head of Department shall arrange for the alleged offence to be investigated. The procedure set out in paragraphs 1.43 – 1.58 below shall be used for alleged minor offences. The procedure set out in paragraphs 1.59 – 1.83 below shall be used for alleged major offences. In the case of postgraduate research students in respect of any academic offence other than plagiarism or duplication the Head of Department will report the offence to the Principal who will arrange a separate investigation under College Discipline Procedure.

Procedure for Dealing with Allegations of Minor Offences

1.43 Allegations of minor offences shall normally be dealt with as an academic matter within the Department, the main aim being to provide the student with the necessary advice and guidance to ensure that the problem does not reoccur. However, a penalty from among the list set out in paragraph 1.85 below may be imposed, where appropriate.

1.44 The Head of Department shall nominate another member of the Faculty or adjunct Faculty to carry out an investigation. The investigation will include:

- Scrutinising the piece of work, and any documentary evidence provided by either the member of staff or the student.
- Consulting the member of staff who discovered the alleged offence.
- Informing the student in writing that they are suspected of committing an academic offence. This communication shall specify the nature of the alleged academic offence, identify the module or part of a module concerned, and include a copy of the Academic Misconduct Procedure and a copy of any documentary evidence of the case against the student.
- Interviewing the student about the alleged offence. The College shall normally give the student at least five working days' notice of the date and time of the meeting in writing. This period may be reduced during the examination period or at other times when tight time-scales apply. Another member of the College's academic or administrative staff who is not directly involved in the case shall attend the interview to observe proceedings. At this interview, the student shall be re-advised of the academic conventions with regard to referencing, reporting of results, etc., applying in the discipline. A record will be kept of the interview and the student shall receive a copy upon request.

1.45 If the Head of Department decides that the offence appears to be a major one they may refer it to the Principal with the recommendation that the procedure for dealing with major offences be invoked.

1.46 If the alleged offence relates to collusion, all the students involved shall be interviewed, following the procedure set out in paragraph 1.44 above.

1.47 The Head of Department shall provide the Principal with a report on the case. This will remain on the student's file until they graduate.



Head of Department: Decision and Penalty

1.48 The Head of Department will consider the case and come to a decision, taking account of the criteria outlined in paragraph 1.84 below.

1.49 The Head of Department may:

- Find that no academic offence has been committed and dismiss the case
- Find that an academic offence has been committed and impose one of the penalties for minor offences from the list set out in paragraph 1.85 below
- Refer the case to the Principal to be considered under the procedures for major offences.

1.50 The decision of the Head of Department shall be communicated to the student in writing, giving reasons for the decision. The Head of Department will also advise the student of their right of appeal and will specify a deadline by which any appeal must be submitted. The stipulated date shall be ten working days after the date of notification of the decision of the Head of Department.

Appeals Against the Decision of a Head of Department

1.51 A student may appeal to the Faculty against a decision of the Head of Department with the exception of the decision to refer the case to the Principal to be considered under the procedures for major offences

1.52 An appeal against a decision of the Head of Department will be heard by a Faculty Appeals Panel.

Faculty Appeals Panel

1.53 The Faculty Appeals Panel will consist of two members of Faculty or adjunct Faculty. No member of the Panel shall have had any previous involvement with the case. Minutes shall be taken and retained as a formal record of the meeting.

1.54 The student will be invited to attend the meeting in person to present their case. The student must receive at least five working days' notice in writing of the date and time of the meeting. The student has the right to be accompanied. The student may make a written submission to the Faculty Appeals Panel and may submit supporting documentary evidence, in addition to appearing in person.

1.55 The Head of Department shall be invited to attend the meeting or to nominate a member of the Department to attend in their place to explain the reasons for the decision. The student and the Departmental representative shall be present while the other is speaking.

1.56 Where a student is not based in Northern Ireland, the meeting may be held by Skype or equivalent. Where a student fails to attend the meeting without good cause, the Panel may consider the case in the absence of the student and without further notice. It is the responsibility of the student to establish good cause to the satisfaction of the Panel.



1.57 The Faculty Appeals Panel will consider the case and come to a decision taking account of the criteria outlined in paragraph 1.84.

- To uphold the appeal and rescind the penalty imposed by the Head of Department;
- To confirm the penalty imposed by the Head of Department;
- To impose a different penalty from among those set out in the list of penalties open to the Head of Department. This penalty may be more or less severe than the original penalty imposed by the Head of Department.

1.58 There is no further appeal.

Procedure for dealing with major offences

Investigation stage

1.59 In the case of an allegation of a major academic offence, the Head of Department shall refer any report of an alleged major offence to the Principal.

1.60 Within five working days of receiving a report on an alleged offence, the Principal shall arrange for a College Academic Offences Panel, consisting of at least two members of Faculty or adjunct Faculty and a representative from the College Management Committee, to investigate the case and to meet the student to discuss the alleged offence. No member of the Panel shall have had any previous involvement with the case. The College shall give the student at least five working days' notice of the date and time of the meeting with the Panel. The student shall be informed of their right to be accompanied. The student may make a written submission to the Panel and submit supporting documentary evidence, in addition to appearing in person.

1.61 Where the student is suspected of contract cheating, the Panel may require the student to undergo a short viva voce with a member of staff with knowledge of the subject area in order to determine the students' level of knowledge of the subject area. The student should also be asked to submit drafts of their work to show progression. Work previously submitted by the student may be compared to the piece of work in which the contract cheating is suspected in respect of writing style. The member of staff shall prepare a report for the Panel which will be shared with the student prior to the Panel meeting.

1.62 In circumstances where the alleged major offence, other than those covered in 1.25, is discovered during the revision or assessment period, the student shall be informed of the alleged offence in writing normally within two days of their last examination, after which the case shall be dealt with as set out below.

1.63 The student shall be informed in writing that they are suspected of committing a major academic offence. The student will be informed of the nature of the alleged offence and the module or part of a module concerned and shall be provided with a copy of the Academic Misconduct Procedure and a copy of any documentary evidence of the case against the student. During the examination period, when tight time constraints apply, the period of notice may be reduced and initial contact with the student may be by means other than in writing, provided this is followed up in writing.

1.64 The student will be required to attend the Panel meeting. Where the student is based outside Northern Ireland the Panel meeting may be held by Skype or equivalent. Where a student fails to attend the Panel meeting without good cause, the Panel may consider the case and forward a recommendation to the Faculty in the absence of the student and



without further notice. It is the responsibility of the student to establish good cause to the satisfaction of the Panel.

1.65 The Panel shall have the right to call for such papers, examine such witnesses and conduct such other relevant enquiries as appear necessary. Where witnesses are called, they may be subject to examination, cross-examination and re-examination by the parties.

1.66 Having completed its investigation, the Panel shall make a written report to the Faculty to be accompanied by all supporting documentation (including any provided by the student). This report shall clearly state the Panel's findings that:

- No offence has been committed, that the Panel has dismissed the case and that no further action shall be taken. The Panel shall inform the Faculty that the case has been dismissed and that the student's assessment result can be dealt with in the normal way; or
- An offence has been committed and that the Panel recommends a penalty from among the list of penalties for major offences, as set out in paragraph 1.85 below

The Faculty: decision and penalty

1.67 The Faculty shall consider the College Academic Offences Panel's report and shall consult as necessary.

1.68 Following this consultation, the Faculty shall do one of the following:

- Dismiss the case, notwithstanding the finding and recommendation(s) of the Panel;
- or
- Confirm the finding and the penalty recommended by the Panel; or
 - Confirm the finding and impose a different penalty from among those set out in the list of penalties, as set out in paragraph 1.86.

1.69 The decision of the Faculty shall take into account the criteria outlined in paragraph 1.84.

1.70 The decision of the Faculty shall be communicated to the student in writing within five working days of the decision being made. This communication shall set out the allegations against the student and the Faculty's decision relating to each allegation, giving reasons for the decision.

1.71 The Faculty will also advise the student that they may appeal and will specify a deadline by which any appeal must be submitted. The stipulated date shall be ten working days after the date of notification of the decision.

Appeals against a decision of the Faculty

1.72 A student may appeal against the decision of the Faculty including a decision that an offence, which is denied by the student, has been committed. The appeal must be submitted within ten working days of the written notification of the decision of the Faculty. The student must set out the grounds of appeal and include their contact details (address, email, telephone number). Any supporting documents should be attached.

1.73 Students may appeal on any of the following grounds:



- New evidence has become available which could not have been provided for consideration by the College Academic Offences Panel. Evidence which was withheld from the College Academic Offences Panel will not normally be deemed to constitute new evidence.
- The finding of guilt was based upon an error in the interpretation of the Academic Misconduct Procedure.
- There was a procedural irregularity in the conduct of the investigation.
- The decision of the Faculty following the recommendation of the College Academic Offences Panel was against the weight of the evidence.

1.74 A meeting of the Academic Offences Appeals Committee will be convened to hear the appeal.

Academic Offences Appeals Committee

1.75 The membership of the Academic Offences Appeals Committee shall be drawn from the College Management Committee. There will be a quorum of four members. No member of the Committee shall have had any previous involvement in the case. Minutes shall be taken and retained as a formal record of the meeting.

1.76 The student will be invited to attend the meeting in person to present their case. Where a student is based outside Northern Ireland the meeting may take place by Skype or equivalent. The student must receive at least five working days' notice in writing of the date and time of the meeting. The student has the right to be accompanied. The student may make a written submission to the Committee and may submit supporting documentary evidence, in addition to appearing in person.

1.77 The Principal, or nominee (as appropriate), shall be invited to attend the meeting or to nominate a member of the Faculty to attend in their place to explain the reasons for the Faculty's decision. The student and the Faculty's representative shall be present while the other is speaking.

1.78 The student will be required to attend the meeting of the Academic Offences Appeals Committee. Where a student is not based in Northern Ireland, the meeting may be held by Skype or equivalent. Where a student fails to attend the meeting without good cause, the Committee may consider the case in the absence of the student and without further notice. It is the responsibility of the student to establish good cause to the satisfaction of the Committee.

1.79 In considering appeals, the Committee shall not attempt to re-assess student's work or to question the examiners' academic judgement.

1.80 The Academic Offences Appeals Committee will consider the case and come to a decision taking account of the criteria outlined in paragraph 1.84.

1.81 The options available to the Academic Offences Appeals Committee are as follows:

- To uphold the appeal and rescind the penalty imposed by the Faculty;
- To confirm the penalty imposed by the Faculty;
- To impose a different penalty from among those set out in the list of penalties open to the Academic Offences Committee. This penalty may be more or less severe than



the original penalty imposed by the Faculty.

1.82 There is no further appeal.

1.83 The Principal shall inform the Board of Examiners to ensure that the student's assessment results are dealt with in accordance with the Committee's decision.

Penalties for Academic Offences

Criteria

1.84 At all stages, the following criteria will be taken into account in deciding the level of penalty to be imposed or other action to be taken:

- The extent of the plagiarism or other academic offence.
- The degree of intent.
- The level of study and previous educational background of the student.
- Any previous history of plagiarism or other academic offences.
- The extent of the student's knowledge and understanding of the concept of academic misconduct and of the correct procedures for referencing in the discipline; and
- The impact of the penalty on the student's progress or award.

Minor offences: penalties available to the Head of Department and the Faculty Appeals Panel

1.85 After following the procedures set out in the paragraphs above the following penalties may be applied:

- A written warning to the student.
- Award a mark of zero for the piece of work concerned and permit the student to re-do it with no further penalty (i.e. the full mark obtained for the re-sit is allowed to stand).
- Award a mark of zero for the piece of work concerned and permit the student to re-do it for a maximum of the pass mark; or
- Award a mark of zero for the piece of work concerned but not permit the student to re-do it.

Major offences: penalties available to the College Academic Offences Panel/Faculty and the Academic Offences Appeals Committee

1.86 After following the procedures set out in the paragraphs above the following penalties may be applied:

- A written warning to the student; or
- Award a mark of zero for all or part of the module and permit a re-sit with no further penalty (i.e. the full mark obtained for the re-sit is allowed to stand); or
- Award a mark of zero for all or part of the module and permit a re-sit for a maximum of the pass mark; or
- Award a mark of zero for all or part of the module but do not permit the student to re-sit; or
- Award a mark of zero for more than one module being taken by the student at that time and permit the student to re-sit those modules with no further penalty; or
- Award a mark of zero for more than one module being taken by the student at that



time and permit the student to re-sit those modules for a maximum of the pass mark; or

- Award a mark of zero for more than one module being taken by the student at that time and not permit the student to re-sit those modules; or
- In the case of a postgraduate research student, refer the matter back to the Department to provide the student with support and guidance; or
- In the case of a postgraduate research student, direct that the offending material be removed from the work submitted and that the student carries out such further work as is necessary to replace it;
- In the case of a postgraduate research student, recommend to the examiners that no degree be awarded; or
- Suspend the student; or
- Require the student to withdraw from the College.

Note: where a student is found to have committed an academic offence in two or more modules in the same session, the Committee has the right to impose different penalties for different modules where appropriate.

Monitoring

1.87 The Principal shall provide the Management Committee with an annual report, in October each year, of all major and minor offences dealt with in the College under this Procedure.