Academic integrity

A core principle of learning that we emphasise throughout your time at UCL is **academic integrity**: this amounts to being honest about your academic work. A failure to maintain academic integrity could be classed as academic misconduct (i.e. cheating). The penalties for academic misconduct can be severe, and repeated misconduct can even result in exclusion from UCL.

As a UCL student, you are expected to familiarise yourself with the University's guidance on maintaining integrity in your work. A good starting point is UCL's Academic Integrity website and you may also find UCL's Library Guide to References, Citations and Avoiding Plagiarism helpful.

What is, and isn't, acceptable will vary from assessment to assessment. Make sure that you know what is expected of you, whether you are working on an assessment outside of class or sitting an exam. Some important pointers:

- Some uninvigilated assessments may require you to work alone on the allocated task, in which case any collaboration with another student, use of essay mills, or any form of contract cheating, is not permitted and could be classed as misconduct. Other such assessments may permit you to work in a group, in which case collaboration between groups is not allowed.

- The use of AI to help with assessments may be prohibited. Make sure that you check the assessment's requirements. Ask the module lecturer if you're not sure what is acceptable. If you use AI then you must acknowledge this appropriately. For more information about AI and academic misconduct, visit UCL's AI in assessment webpage.

- If you are sitting an invigilated exam you should familiarise yourself with exam hall requirements. It is also a good idea to read UCL's policy on what you can bring in to an exam hall (and what you can't), and expected conduct during an exam, which you can find in the Academic Manual, Chapter 6, Section 9.2.

Academic misconduct

There are a number of different types of misconduct that can arise. A list is available in the Academic Manual. Some misconduct types are discussed in more detail below, and examples of cases which have occurred in the Department of Statistical Science are also given.

UCL has a procedure for investigating possible academic misconduct. While some cases can be dealt with by the module lecturer, most will be handled by the Chair of the Board of Examiners in Statistical Science. If, after suitable investigation, the student(s) is (are) found guilty of academic misconduct, UCL's penalty framework will be used to decide on an appropriate penalty.

Different types of academic misconduct are explained below, but note that this is not an exhaustive list; more are described in the Academic Manual.

Plagiarism and collusion

Plagiarism means attempting to pass off someone else's work as your own, while collusion means passing off joint work as your own unaided effort. Both are unacceptable, particularly in material submitted for assessment purposes including take-home papers and coursework that contribute to your overall module mark. Plagiarism and collusion are regarded by the College as academic misconduct and are taken very seriously. UCL uses a sophisticated detection system (Turnitin®) to scan work for evidence of plagiarism and collusion, and the Department reserves the right to use this for assessed work. This system gives access to billions of sources worldwide, including websites and journals, as well as other work submitted to the Department, UCL and other universities. It is therefore able to detect similarities between scripts that indicate unacceptable levels of collusion, as well as material taken from other sources without attribution.

In addition to Turnitin, module staff will have their own procedures to check submissions for plagiarism and collusion. This includes other software-based detection systems for checking the similarity of computer code.

If plagiarism or collusion are suspected, on the basis either of the Turnitin® software or other evidence, [UCL's Academic Misconduct procedures](#) will be used.

Other common forms of academic misconduct

Plagiarism and collusion are not the only forms of academic misconduct. An [extensive list is available in the Academic Manual](#), and here we focus on three other types of misconduct that have occurred in the Department of Statistical Science recently. These are particularly relevant for uninvigilated assessments.

Self-plagiarism is defined in the Academic Manual as 'the reproduction or resubmission of a student's own work which has been submitted for assessment at UCL or any other institution'.

Contract cheating is defined in the Academic Manual as 'commissioning a piece of assessment to be carried out by a third party or knowingly using a commissioned piece of assessment'. This includes, for example, asking someone else to complete parts of an assessed piece of work which you later submit for grading, even if you modify the (part) solutions that you receive.

UCL also have a catch-all category of misconduct that amounts to '**any other conduct that would give an unfair academic advantage to a student**'. This includes any conduct that is not permitted according to the assessment instructions including inappropriate discussion of the assessment or having sight of another candidate's work, or use of AI when this is not permitted.

What isn't acceptable?

Students sometimes find it difficult to know what counts as plagiarism or collusion. The following list is not exhaustive, but gives some indication of what to avoid. It is based on guidelines developed by Nick Hayes of the UCL Pharmacology Department.

You may not:

- Create a piece of work by cutting and pasting material, e.g. texts or figures, from other sources (including websites, books, lecture notes and other students' work).

- Use someone else's work as your own. This includes, but is not limited to:
  - ➢ Making notes while discussing an assessment with a friend, and subsequently using these as the basis for all or part of your submission.
  - ➢ Telephoning another student to discuss how best to carry out a particular piece of analysis.
  - ➢ Employing a professional ghostwriting firm or anyone else to produce work for you.

- Use somebody else's ideas in your work without citing them (this includes AI).

- Ask a lecturer in the Department for help with assessed work, unless you make it clear to them that the work is assessed.

- Help another student with their assessed work. If you do this, you will be deemed to be guilty of an examination irregularity.

What is acceptable?

The following practices do **not** constitute plagiarism / collusion:

- Quoting from other people's work, with the source (e.g. book, lecture notes, website) clearly identified and the quotation enclosed in quotation marks.

- Summarising or paraphrasing other people's work, providing they are acknowledged as the source of the ideas (again, usually this will be via a reference to the book, journal or website from which the information was obtained).

- Asking the module lecturer for help with difficult material, providing it is clear that the question is in connection with the assessment. The lecturer will be able to judge for him or herself what is an appropriate level of assistance.

Some examples

Unfortunately, each year there are some students in the Department of Statistical Science who submit work that goes against the regulations. The consequences can be severe. Below are some examples of recent cases in the Department.

Example 1 Final-year student A had a lot of coursework deadlines in the same week as an important job interview. One of the coursework deadlines was for an extended piece of data analysis, set two weeks previously. Because of his other commitments, student A did not start this piece of coursework until shortly before the deadline at which point he discovered that he did not have enough time to do it. He asked student B for help. The result was that both students submitted essentially identical work using the same computer output. A Departmental panel was convened to investigate the matter. The panel suggested that student B had passed electronic material (computer output and graphics files) to student A, who had used this material in his own submission. Although student A admitted asking student B for help, both students denied exchanging material. They were, however, unable to explain how the similarities in both pieces of work had come about. As a result, the allegation was upheld and both students were penalised. Student A was given a mark of zero for the module in question (this meant that he had no possibility of passing it that year), and student B was given a mark of zero for the coursework component.

Example 2 Students C and D both had to submit some computer code for an assessment, which was worth one third of the total mark for a module. There was considerable flexibility in how to go about the assessment. Although the students submitted code that looked very different, closer inspection revealed that they were carrying out the same procedures in more or less the same order, and that the methods they used to carry out these procedures were essentially the same. Further, these procedures and methods were not used by other students in the class. On investigation, it transpired that the students had discussed the assessment over the phone while sitting in front of their computers. This is unacceptable, and as a result the marks of both students for this piece of assessment were halved.

Example 3 The in-course assessment for a particular module was organised as a multiple choice exam taken via Moodle, to take place outside of lessons. Each student could attempt the one-hour exam at any time of their choosing within a ten day window, but were clearly told that they must work alone. After the exams had been graded, the module lecturer noticed that students E and F had given identical answers to every question (including incorrect answers). Inspection of the Moodle logs revealed that the students had started and finished their attempts at exactly the same time, using IP addresses that were traced to adjacent PCs in the same computer cluster. Students E and F admitted colluding on the in-course assessment and were both given a mark of zero for that component.

Example 4 A student alerted staff to inappropriate discussion that took place during an online open-book exam. The student provided screenshots of solutions to parts of the test paper that had been circulated during the exam via WhatsApp. During the marking process, the module lecturer also noted similarities in the solutions to some questions among a large group of students. The module lead reported the similarity and a large-scale investigation was conducted, which included a departmental panel. Some of the accused students admitted to using the circulating solutions as part of their submissions and penalties applied according to the UCL regulations. The majority of the remaining accused students - who did not admit to using the circulating solutions during the exam – were also penalised as the panel concluded that the similarities in their scripts with the circulating solutions were too striking and on the balance of probabilities did not occur by chance alone.

Example 5 A student who was struggling with a module commissioned a third party to help with completing an online open-book exam. During the marking process, the module lecturer became suspicious of the submission as the questions on the exam paper had been answered in different styles. Given that the module lecturer could not identify any other script with similar style answers to the script in question – making collusion unlikely – the case was forwarded to UCL's central Academic Misconduct panel as a possible case of contract cheating. The panel found the student

guilty, and given the severity of the misconduct, the student was permanently excluded from UCL and did not receive an exit award.

Example 6 Two students, G and H, had an upcoming deadline for a piece of coursework. Both were working individually in the library on their respective submissions on personal laptops at adjacent desks. Student G left their laptop for a few minutes, during which time student H took a picture on their phone of student G's uncompleted coursework. Using the pictures, student H took inspiration from student G's approach to the coursework and altered their work accordingly. During marking, the module lecturer noticed that the approach both students had taken was strikingly similar, and on querying the students, student H admitted to have taken screenshots of student G's work while they were away from their laptop. Student H was penalized according to UCL regulations.

How to avoid plagiarism and collusion

If you are found to have committed an offence of plagiarism or collusion, it makes no difference whether or not you intended to do so. Ignorance is no excuse. To avoid committing an offence, a useful rule of thumb is: if in doubt, don't do it. Make sure that any work you submit is your own unaided effort (unless, of course, the assessment allows groupwork). More specific guidance is as follows:

- Plan your work schedule carefully, to allow enough time to complete each piece of assessment.

- If you have genuine problems in meeting a deadline, don't take the easy way out and borrow a friend's work. Discuss your difficulty with the module lecturer in the first instance.

- If you are stuck with an assessment, don't ask another student for help. Discuss it with the module lecturer.

- If another student asks you for help with an assessment, or asks to see your work, suggest that they approach the module lecturer instead. Remember: if somebody else copies or uses your work, you will be penalised as well, even if you didn't expect them to use your work in this way.

What to do if you suspect academic misconduct

As misconduct is cheating, and it devalues UCL qualifications for students who achieve their results honestly, students suspecting academic misconduct among their peers may want to alert relevant members of staff accordingly. The quickest way of doing this is to approach the relevant module lecturer directly. However, we understand that you may want to retain some level of anonymity. In this case, please contact Karen Leport (k.leport@ucl.ac.uk). Ms Leport can act as a mediator between you and the module lecturer so that your identity is not revealed.

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