

## **The Department of Government's policy concerning cheating**

### ***1. Background***

In order to maintain both the quality and credibility of the educational programs in the Department of Government, it is vital that we avoid cheating and also take disciplinary actions against students who do cheat and/or plagiarize. The formal provisions that apply are presented in Chapter 8 of the Higher Education Ordinance as well as in the University's regulations concerning the administration of written examinations (Dnr UFV 1999/1300).

The policy described here has two aims:

- 1) *To assist Departmental employees regarding what they should do and when they should act if cheating is suspected as well as what they can do to prevent cheating.*
- 2) *To inform students regarding how we in the Department view cheating and how we deal with it.*

### ***2. What is cheating?***

Chapter 8, Section 1 of the Higher Education Ordinance states that "disciplinary action may be taken against students who... by prohibited aids or other means attempt to deceive during examinations or when academic work is otherwise assessed." The text of the law uses the term "deceive" to designate cheating and plagiarism (which is a form of cheating).

Attempts at deception can occur in various situations, above all in connection with examinations and essay writing. **Examples** include the following:

- To reuse one's own previously examined work in a prohibited manner.
- To copy source material without the proper use of references (plagiarism).
- To "cut and paste" from the web without the proper use of references (plagiarism).
- To use prohibited aids during an examination (books, notes, mobile telephones, calculators when not permitted, etc.).
- To work together with another student or person on an individual test, such as a take home test, *if such cooperation is not permitted*.
- To alter or make additions to written material that has been corrected and returned by the teacher/examiner.

**Intent** is necessary for a violation of regulations to be considered cheating, that is, the student must have undertaken a deliberate attempt to "deceive" the teacher. Intent requires that:

- The student has acted deliberately (not by mistake or from carelessness).
- The student has an adequate knowledge of the rules that apply and is aware that the action in question is prohibited.
- The violation is included in an examination, essay, or other assignment (reading report, seminar presentation) that is being graded. For example, a draft manuscript, preliminary version of a text, etc., used in the preparation

of a term paper/essay is not considered to be an examination. However, the version handed in, or the archival version, is an examination.

Some important issues that apply in determining what can be considered cheating include the following:

- The expression "*attempt to deceive*" implies that it is not necessary for the effort to have been successful. The attempt itself is sufficient to constitute cheating. However, this does not include *preparations* to deceive, such as agreeing with someone to work together in a prohibited manner on an assignment or examination.
- Cheating may be subject to discipline even if it does not affect one's grade. In addition, cheating includes attempts to deceive that affect the student's grade negatively, such as the use of incorrect notes or the plagiarizing of inferior materials.
- The Higher Education Ordinance does not require that cheating be done for one's own sake. Cheating also comprises helping another student in a prohibited manner (providing an essay of one's own, assisting in the downloading of information from the net, etc.) or sharing one's answers on an individual examination.

### ***3. How to deal with suspected cheating***

#### **3.1. Correcting a test when cheating is suspected**

The teacher who will assign the grade of a test or written assignment is the absolute authority when cheating is suspected. Neither the Rector nor the disciplinary board can decide whether the examination in question will be corrected or the grade that may eventually be given.

If the disciplinary board is of the opinion that the student has cheated or committed plagiarism, the teacher may declare the examination to be invalid and refuse to correct it. The teacher may also make her/his own determination concerning whether cheating affected the results and grade the examination even when the board has established that cheating took place. This may be the case when, for example, the attempted cheating was unsuccessful or when it was done for another student's sake. The teacher also has the right to declare the examination invalid in spite of an acquittal by the board, such as when the student's behavior has made the examination appear altogether too easy for him/her. The teacher may then judge the student's performance on the examination to be inadequate for a passing grade. The same determination can be made concerning an essay even if the disciplinary board does not regard the student's use of references and quotations to comprise plagiarism.

However, the teacher may not refuse to grade an examination when the disciplinary board adopts an opposing position, such as when the teacher is convinced that the student has cheated but the board's decision is that the suspicion cannot be proven. In such a case, a refusal to grade an examination may in fact constitute official misconduct on the part of the teacher. It is, nevertheless, the teacher in question who determines the grade on the examination.

If cheating is discovered after the examination, essay, etc., has been graded and the results officially reported, the teacher may review the grade. The formal decision-making authority in such a revision is the same teacher who determined the original grade. In order for the teacher to lower the grade after such a review, it is necessary that the student himself has deceived the teacher, and that the teacher would have declared the examination invalid or issued a lower initial grade if s/he had known the actual circumstances pertaining. The National Agency for Higher Education has explicitly stated that grades may be lowered in such cases.

### **3.2. Dealing with cheating within and outside the Department**

The manner in which cheating is dealt with is based on the formulation given in the Higher Education Ordinance: "*If there is cause to suspect offenses such as are referred to... the Rector shall promptly be notified.*" The word *shall* implies that there is an obligation to notify, and that the failure to do so may be viewed as a violation of one's employment agreement. Moreover, since it is not specified who in particular bears this obligation, it applies to all. In addition, the word *promptly* implies that the matter shall be given high priority and not, for example, await the return of the studies director from vacation.

Within the Department, handling cheating normally occurs in the following manner:

#### **1) The teacher suspects cheating/plagiarism**

- If the teacher's suspicion arises when other students are present, s/he should simply take note of the fact and inform the student that the matter will be taken up later. That is to say that one should not engage in formal discussions concerning the question of intent at that particular time. However, it can be of pedagogical value to take the opportunity to clarify, for example, regulations governing the use of references.
- When the teacher suspects cheating/plagiarism, the situation is dealt with in different ways depending on whether it involves an examination or an essay/report:
  - a) **Examination:** If the teacher suspects cheating on an examination, s/he shall report this to the studies director and determine the consequences of the incident for the grade (see point 2 below).
  - b) **Essays and reports:** If suspicions of impropriety concern an essay or written report that the teacher is supervising, s/he should attempt to prevent cheating on the completed assignment. A teacher or research director who suspects violations in the use of references in an essay or report as it is being written should **immediately contact the student to discuss the matter**. The aim is partly to provide the student with the opportunity to discuss the suspected violations, partly to inform her/him about the Departmental policy concerning cheating and plagiarism. It is also appropriate for the teacher, examiner, or supervisor to provide the student with the opportunity to withdraw the text in question from a planned seminar. An exception to this rule may arise if the time remaining before the seminar is so short that there is no possibility to address or discuss the matter in advance.

- When it is the teacher's judgment that the violations of regulations applicable to the text in question are unintentional, s/he may either fail the essay or make a supplementary assignment. A failing grade on a C or D essay has serious consequences for the student.
- Plagiarism in a *completed* essay/report that the teacher judges to be a deliberate attempt on the part of the student to use information in a prohibited manner normally leads to the text receiving a failing grade and the matter being reported to the responsible authorities (see point 2 below).
- Students who are writing reports/essays in a group are viewed as jointly responsible for the work in question. It is always the author or authors who are solely responsible for the contents of the text, regardless of whether or not the supervisor has read the manuscript as it was being prepared. Opponents should check the important sources in the essay, but they cannot be held responsible if they have not discovered instances of plagiarism.

## 2) The teacher informs the director of studies

- The teacher who suspects a deliberate attempt at deception shall inform the studies director **as soon as possible**. The teacher and director of studies together decide whether the matter should be pursued further.

## 3) The teacher and the studies director investigate whether there has been intent to deceive

- In order to determine if there has been an intent to deceive, or whether it is instead a question of carelessness or an insufficient knowledge of proper procedures, it is as a rule necessary to have a **discussion with the student** prior to any decision to report the matter further. It is the studies director who normally calls the student to a meeting. It may also be necessary to make **other inquiries** in order to determine whether there is cause to suspect a deliberate attempt to deceive. As a rule, the teacher and studies director conduct the **investigation and notify the Rector** jointly. However, since the teacher has final authority for assessing the student's academic work, s/he may also decide on his/her own authority to officially notify the Rector.

**NOTE!** In a case of suspected plagiarism, it is very important to **document the violations** carefully and in detail: Describe the extent and type of plagiarism, specify the lines, paragraphs, and pages in question, and indicate the sources from where the material has been taken. Document all relevant communication with the student, including, if possible, particulars concerning the assignment from the research director and correspondence between the student and research director concerning the essay. The URKUND search engine is one of a number of tools that are useful for checking and documenting the sources of material.

- The sole task of the studies director and the teacher is to examine whether there is indeed cause to suspect cheating. If they determine this to be the case, they **shall always notify the Rector**. The teacher and studies director

shall not attempt to determine the strength of the evidence or whether there are extenuating circumstances.

- Every case shall be **handled promptly** and in the proper manner. The individual's legal rights and integrity shall be upheld. The first discussion with the student should always be conducted in an open-minded fashion – one cannot state that s/he suspects cheating without examining the student's own explanation for what has taken place. Every contact with the various parties involved in the matter should be noted in writing. All verbal and written exchanges with the student shall be objective. The student's identity shall not be unnecessarily disclosed to colleagues who are not directly involved in the matter.

- A student who has been informed that the Department suspects s/he has attempted to cheat may react with shock, which can hinder her/his ability to take in and deal with the information. It is the Department's responsibility that the student be well informed concerning how the matter will be dealt with, and it may be necessary to present the relevant information on more than one occasion, possibly in writing.

#### **4) Report to the Rector**

- If the discussion with the student and the other inquiries indicate cause for suspecting an attempt at deception, the studies director shall notify the Rector in writing. The grounds for the report are to be included.

#### **5) The Rector files a report with the disciplinary board**

- If the Rector decides to bring the matter before the disciplinary board, both the Department and the student will be called to appear at the meeting. When the parties have completed their presentations, they will leave the room while the board considers its decision.
- A decision by the board that the student is guilty of cheating may result either in a caution or in a suspension from studies for a certain period of time. The relevant studies advisors and studies administrators are notified of any decision to suspend. No disciplinary measures shall be taken other than those decided upon by the Rector and the disciplinary board. This means that a student who has received a formal caution or been suspended shall not be discriminated against when s/he resumes his/her studies. In order to avoid this taking place, it may be appropriate that the student have different examiners on any subsequent re-examination (if possible).
- The home university of an exchange student involved in cheating is to be notified of the matter. It is important to do so since a caution or suspension does not always have the desired effect upon exchange students, who will leave or have already left the University.

Commissioned instruction is not covered by the Higher Education Ordinance since the participants are not enrolled at the University. Nor are formal disciplinary actions relevant in such instruction. However, the same regulations clearly apply concerning

what is and is not permitted, and they consequently have an affect upon the assessment of a participant's performance.

#### ***4. How we can prevent cheating and plagiarism***

It is important to discover and report cheating and plagiarism when they occur, but it is also important that we endeavor to **prevent** such activities. We must ensure that all students have accurate and up-to-date information concerning what is and is not permitted. Furthermore, because the relevant rules differ from course to course, such as in the case of take-home examinations, teachers in all courses must exercise their responsibility to inform students concerning the rules that apply. Provide precise and accurate information about the ways in which it is permitted to answer the questions on an examination and avoid the types of examinations on which it is easy to cheat without being discovered. Assignments must make absolutely clear the extent to which working together is permitted, and how working together in a prohibited fashion can result in all involved being suspected of cheating.

Insofar as a common type of cheating is plagiarism, that is, either copying another's text without indicating the source, or reproducing a text exactly or nearly exactly without indicating that it is a quotation, it is recommended that every teacher who supervises essays or written reports remind students of the regulations governing the use of published information. In particular, these regulations should be gone through during essay courses and before written assignments. It is also recommended that teachers refer to the information concerning plagiarism that is posted on the **homepage** as they do so. The regulations that apply are always handed out in connection with registration in combination with a reference to the homepage.