Plagiarism and Collusion: A Student Guide

Plagiarism and Collusion are terms used in Higher Education to refer to the practice where students present others’ material as their own. For example, you would be guilty of plagiarism if you:

× Include others’ words in essays without indicating that they were not your own.
× Take another artist’s visual concepts and reproduce it in your own work without acknowledging their influence on your production.
× Use another person’s essay plan to construct your own essay.
× Submit work that someone else has done as your own work.

In each of the four examples above, you would be found guilty whether you acted intentionally or by accident. Collusion refers to situations where you submit work as your own work when it has actually been produced with the help of another student.

In this guide we look at both plagiarism and collusion in detail. We give a full explanation of what plagiarism and collusion is and explore how UCS staff deal with suspected cases of plagiarism and collusion. Then we give a guide on how you can avoid committing plagiarism or collusion unintentionally.

Both plagiarism and collusion are also referred to as Academic Misconduct. This term is explained in detail in the document “Academic Misconduct: a student guide”. The UCS Academic Misconduct Policy gives a formal description of how UCS deals with alleged plagiarism and collusion cases. Both these documents are available on the Student Information Directory on the Intranet.

1. Why is plagiarism and collusion important?

Universities have two key roles:

✓ the delivery of courses that enable you to learn and to be equipped for your future,
✓ to provide qualifications that show your individual achievement on the course for you to use as evidence to employers.

It is important for you that employers looking at your qualifications are convinced of their value. They need to be sure that if you have completed your course successfully then you possess the knowledge and skills that the course taught. Consequently, it is essential that we at UCS take steps to ensure that when we assess your abilities, it is your own abilities that are demonstrated.

Students who present other’s words, thoughts and ideas as their own in assessment work are not demonstrating their own abilities. Consider the effect if we award such students qualifications. When then they begin employment they will be unable to do what the course taught. Consequently, their employers will lose confidence in UCS qualifications in future recruitment processes. Effectively, the value of your qualification will be reduced.

2. What is Plagiarism?

The UCS Academic Misconduct Policy defines plagiarism as
“the presentation by the student as his/her own work of a body of material (written, visual, or oral and including material downloaded from the internet and from computer files) which is wholly or partially the work of another, either in concept or expression, or which is a direct copy or in close paraphrase.”

Plagiarism refers to any situation where you include material in a piece of work that was thought of, devised, written or produced by an individual other than the author without making this clear. In all cases, it is assumed that where the student is trying to pass off the other’s work as their own, this could be because they are trying to gain credit without doing the work themselves, or because they are using an inappropriate academic approach in their work.

As others’ work can be included, developed, or used to influence any type of work, plagiarism can occur in any assessment that you are required to produce. We gave a few examples of plagiarism at the beginning of this document. Other examples of situations where not acknowledging where work comes from would constitute plagiarism include:

- The use of others’ photographs in a presentation.
- Taking computer models and adapting them to fit your assessment needs.
- Paraphrasing the text someone else has written.
- Importing someone else’s arguments, even if put into your own words, into your own essay.
- The use of others’ words within a presentation script.
- The replication of another’s style, or the use of another’s template, in the production of a poster.

Remember, it is not the inclusion of others’ work that makes your actions plagiarism, it is the lack of a recognition that it is not your work that counts.

3. What is Collusion?

Working together with other students can be an effective means of helping you learn. For example, explaining course content to other students will allow them to hear the content in a new way, and will ensure you understand it. Similarly, discussing assignment tasks can enable you to ensure you understand what you need to do. Group discussions may help you to identify clarifications that you need from tutors to enable you to perform successfully.

Consequently, UCS does not discourage you from working together with your fellow students. However, when you produce work towards assessment on your course, it is important that you only submit your own work. Collusion is defined in the UCS Academic Misconduct Policy as:

"a form of plagiarism involving unauthorised co-operation between at least two people, with the intent to deceive.”

It goes on to identify situations in which you would be judged to be guilty of collusion:

a. When you and one or more students produce a piece of work together with the intention that you pass it off as your own work.
b. When you use another student’s work to form part or all of your own submission.

c. When another student uses your work to form part of your own submission and you have willingly lent the work. It would be evident to you that lending the work would advantage the other student and so both you and the other student would be guilty of collusion.

d. In cases where there is unauthorised cooperation between you and another person in the preparation and production of work which is presented as your own work.

4. How does UCS deal with plagiarism and collusion?

As you would expect, UCS takes the issue of plagiarism very seriously. In consequence, it has put a number mechanisms and practices in place to deal with the issues effectively.

Detection
There are two means by which UCS staff detect cases of plagiarism or collusion. Firstly, many UCS courses utilise electronic tools that analyse the text of your assessment work. These tools compare your words to that on databases containing other students’ work (not only from UCS but also from many other universities), internet sources, and academic journals and texts. These tools produce reports in which each instance of plagiarism is highlighted, with the original source of the text indicated. Tutors use these reports to make a judgement of whether you have produced your work appropriately.

Secondly, tutors can become quite adept in spotting instances of plagiarism and collusion as they read through or inspect your work. While the electronic tools analyse text, tutors can
- identify where your submission’s writing style changes,
- spot similarities between presentation or argument between different students’ work,
- note where you have failed to use academic referencing conventions correctly.

Investigation
When a tutor identifies a suspected case of plagiarism or collusion, they initiate a formal investigation process. This process, involving staff outside your course team, will determine the validity of the tutor’s suspicions. The result of the investigation is given to the Assessment Board where a decision is made on what actions and penalties should be applied. The investigative process is explored in detail in the document “Academic Misconduct: A Student Guide”, and is fully described in the UCS Academic Misconduct Policy. Both these documents are available in the Student Information Directory.

Severity
Where an investigation concludes that plagiarism or collusion has taken place, a judgement on the severity of the offence will also be made.

The severity of collusion cases is usually deemed as ‘serious’.
The severity of a case of plagiarism is determined by:

✓ Whether this is the first case that the student has been found to have committed.
✓ The proportion of the work that is plagiarised.

**Minor offence**
- A first detected case of plagiarism, at an early stage of a course, where the work includes less than 20% plagiarised material.

**Serious Offence**
- A first detected case of plagiarism where the work includes up to 50% plagiarised material.
- The use of another student’s work with their permission (collusion).

**Grave Offence**
- A second offence.
- A first detected case of plagiarism where the work includes more than 50% plagiarised material.
- The use of another student’s work without their permission.

**Penalties**
When deciding penalties to impose, Assessment Boards are given some freedom to take each case on its merit, but are expected to use the following guidelines to inform their decision.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Minor Offence</th>
<th>Serious Offence</th>
<th>Grave Offence</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Refer component + Written Warning</td>
<td>Fail Component and Module + Written Warning + Opportunity for reassessment may be denied</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 and 6</td>
<td>As above + Opportunity for reassessment may be denied</td>
<td>As above + Entire stage of assessment may be failed + Students may be required to terminate studies</td>
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**Prevention**
You should be provided with information about the meaning of plagiarism and collusion at or near to the beginning of your course (you may be reading this document as a result of this!). This should include indication of the standards that are particularly applicable to your subject area. You may be provided with an opportunity to discuss and explore how you can develop your study and writing skills to avoid committing plagiarism. Further guidance on this is included in section 5 of this document.
Lecturers are also encouraged, where possible, to design your assignment work to reduce the opportunities for plagiarism and collusion. For example, lecturers may:

- Set essay questions that require you to research into specific case studies rather than discussing general situations. This prevents students being able to download essays from Internet sites and submitting them as their own work.
- Require students on the same course to work on different case studies, thus preventing you from working together too closely in developing your assessment work.
- Include presentations along with opportunities for questioning to allow them to ensure that you can demonstrate your own understanding of any assessed material.

5. How can you avoid committing plagiarism and collusion?

Plagiarism and collusion can be the result of a deliberate action by a student to pass off someone else’s work as their own. However, it can also be the result of careless or ill-thought actions with no malicious intent. The following points indicate some practices and approaches you can adopt that will help you avoid committing plagiarism unwittingly.

- Whenever you are reading or taking notes, take care to record the details of the documents you consult in case you need to refer to it in your work. If you are in the habit of writing out quotes that could be useful alongside your own text and ideas, ensure that you can tell which is which. For example, it may be useful to write any quotations in a different coloured ink to your own words.
- Develop skills in collating and summarising others’ words and ideas. When you are reading material you suspect will be useful, take notes in your own style. Then, without reference to the original source, write your own understanding of the material in your own words for inclusion in your work. It may be worth, once you have written your text, returning to the original sources to ensure that your text has captured the original meaning correctly.
- Ensure that every time that you include others’ work, or use others’ work to inform yours, you acknowledge this appropriately. This includes:
  - When you quote other’s words.
  - When you use their words to help you phrase your text.
  - When you include an image or diagram you didn’t create.
  - When you imitate others in any way.
  - When you use other’s designs or concepts to guide your own designs or development.
- It should be clear to anyone reading your work exactly what parts are based on another’s work. For example, when you are quoting others’ work, this should be clearly indicated through the use of speech marks (“ and ”). Where quotations are more than a few words long, it is usually best to place them in their own indented paragraph.
When you include diagrams or pictures that you have not produced, include citations identifying the original source in the diagrams’ and pictures’ captions. Remember to include each source in your References section.

✓ Make use of standard referencing methods as directed by your tutors. This should include a citation at every point where you include or use other’s work, and an entry in a references section detailing the source for the work in full. Details on how to use the Harvard referencing system, the standard for the majority of UCS courses, can be found in the Library section of the Intranet.

✓ Limit your use of quotations of others’ words. With a few exceptions, quotations would not be expected to form more than 10% of your work. Quotations are most effective in noting what particular authors believe. This can be used to form a contrast to others’ beliefs, or in stating standard definitions of key terms. Whenever you use a quote, it should be clear from the surrounding text why the particular quote is included – you should indicate in your own words:

  o Why you are including the quote (why this specific quote rather than any other, or this specific author?)
  o What the quote is providing to your discussions or arguments.

Some useful guidance on how you could do this can be found in Stella Cottrell's book (2008), or on the associated website: http://www.palgrave.com/skills4study/studyskills/reading/referencing.asp

✓ When you work with fellow students or other individuals in the course of completing assignment work, you should take care to:

  o Limit your discussions and any group working to more general aspects of the work.
  o Develop your own work in isolation to others, based on your own notes.
  o Acknowledge any help you have been given when producing assessed work, and make it clear how this effected your submission.
  o Ensure that you keep any course work you produce to yourself. If a fellow student were to gain a copy of your work and submit part or all of it as their own, you would be held responsible for letting them use your work.

6. Reference