

College Policy on Assessment Offences

Introduction

1. An assessment offence is defined as “any attempt whether successful or unsuccessful to achieve an unfair advantage in any element of assessment over other candidates participating in the assessment”.
2. Assessment Offences are categorised as Plagiarism, Collusion, Examination Offences and Other Offences.
3. This policy may apply to any piece of work submitted for formal assessment towards a College or University award at Birkbeck, University of London.
4. The purpose of this policy is to ensure equity of treatment for all students alleged to have committed an assessment offence, to establish a clear and progressive tariff of penalties and define when each is appropriate.

Plagiarism

5. Plagiarism is defined by the College as “the submission for assessment of material (written, visual or oral) without correct acknowledgement, in such a way that the work could be assumed to be the student’s own, or could be assumed to have been originally produced by the student for the purposes of the assessment in question, where this is not the case.” Plagiarism includes the unattributed use of another person’s work, ideas, opinions, theory, statistics, graphs, models, paintings, artefacts, performance, computer code, drawings, quotations of another person’s actual spoken or written words, or paraphrases of another person’s spoken or written words. It may also include the submission of unattributed work previously produced by the student towards some other assessment, or published in some other forum.
6. Plagiarism can occur in any piece of work. This policy applies for any alleged case of plagiarism in any piece of work submitted for formal assessment at the College.
7. A student who knowingly assists another student to plagiarise (for example by willingly giving them their own work to copy from) is committing an assessment offence.
8. It is accepted that not all cases of plagiarism are committed intentionally, and that it is not appropriate to invoke the formal processes within this policy for all cases where work submitted for assessment meets the College definition of plagiarism. Where, in the judgement of the marker, a student has committed a minor act of plagiarism for which the formal processes are not appropriate, a marker may:
 - Reduce the mark for the element of assessment relative to the scale of the offence;
 - Award a mark of zero for the element of assessment in question;
 - Issue an informal warning. Records of informal warnings should be kept to inform decisions as to whether to consider allegations of plagiarism under

the formal processes of this Policy; any allegation of plagiarism against a student who has already received an informal warning should be dealt with under the formal provisions of this Policy.

9. Any appeal against a decision made in accordance with Paragraph 8 of this Policy will be considered in accordance with Stage 1 of this Policy, as outlined in Paragraphs 14-26 of this Policy. Appeals must be submitted in writing within 10 days of notification of any decision.

Collusion

10. An assessment offence is committed if a piece of work is produced with the assistance of another person, or persons, when the assignment was to have been undertaken and completed by a student working individually. This includes cases where two or more students submit work for assessment that is identical in its entirety or in substantial parts. It also includes cases where help has been given to improve the style of written language in the work submitted, although help with basic proof-reading for typographical and grammatical errors is normally permitted.

Examination Offences

11. The Regulations for Taught Programmes of Study state the following in relation to Examination Offences

“20.3 Candidates must not remove any examination script(s) (whether completed or not) from an examination room.

20.4 Candidates at any examination by written papers taken under supervision and within a defined time limit or at any practical, oral or similar examination are permitted to use only such books, notes, instruments or other materials or aids as are specifically permitted by the appropriate authority for the examination in question. No stationery is permitted in examinations other than approved examination stationery, which should be used for any rough notes and then crossed through where such notes are not to be submitted for assessment.

20.5 Where candidates are permitted to use their own electronic calculators at examinations, the machine to be used must be of the hand-held type, quiet in operation and compact, and must have its own power supply. Candidates are entirely responsible for ensuring that their machines are in working order for their examinations and for providing in advance for alternative means of calculating in the event of the calculator failing during the examination. When candidates use electronic calculators at examinations they must state clearly on their examination scripts the name and type of machine use. The unauthorised use of material stored in a pre-programmable memory will constitute an assessment offence.

20.6 Except as provided in regulation 20.4 above, no books, notes, instruments or other materials or aids whatsoever may be introduced into an examination room or be handled or consulted during an examination. Any such

materials or aids in the possession of the candidate on entry to the examination room must be deposited immediately with the Invigilator.

20.7 Any unauthorised materials or aids introduced by a candidate into an examination room must upon request be surrendered to the Invigilator. Any aids so surrendered may be handed over by the Invigilator to the College which may make copies thereof, and the original aids (together with all such copies) may be retained by the College at its absolute discretion.

20.8 Candidates shall not, unless expressly so authorised, pass any information from one to another during an examination nor shall any candidate act in collusion with another candidate or other person or copy from another candidate or engage in any similar activity.

20.9 At any examination by written papers taken under supervision or where the regulations for any qualification provide for part of an examination to consist of 'take-away' papers, essays or other work written in a candidate's own time, coursework assessment or any similar form of test the work submitted by the candidate must be his/her own and any quotation from the published or unpublished works of other persons must be duly acknowledged.

20.10 Candidates shall not obtain, or attempt to obtain, access to examination papers prior to the start of the examination, unless expressly authorized to do so.

20.11 Candidates shall not copy, or attempt to copy, the work of another candidate during an examination, whether by looking at what they have written or are writing, or by asking them for information, in whatever form.

20.12 Candidates may not attempt to tamper with examination scripts or coursework after they have been relinquished.

20.13 Candidates may not attempt to add to or amend examination scripts after they have been instructed to cease writing during or at the end of an examination.

20.14 Failure to observe any of the provisions of paragraphs 20.3 – 20.13 above will constitute an assessment offence."

12. Any student contravening any of the provisions of the Regulations referred to in Paragraph 11 of this Policy will be considered to have committed an Examination Offence.

Other Offences

13. Other offences that may be considered as assessment offences include:
 - a) The inclusion of unauthorised members in student teams conducting group work assignments.
 - b) Being party to any arrangement which, if enacted, would constitute a breach of the regulations.

Stage 1: School Based Investigation

14. Allegations of assessment offences that cannot be dealt with in accordance of Paragraph 8 of this Policy should be heard under Stage 1 of this policy. Such offences may include, but are not limited to, substantial copying of paragraphs (without acknowledging sources), downloading essays from 'cheat sites' on the Internet, copying much/all of the work of a fellow student, allegations of plagiarism in multiple pieces of coursework submitted by a student and, any Collusion and Other Offences.
15. Where the student is on their final attempt at the module, and the result of failure in that module would be that the student's programme of study would be terminated, the investigation shall be conducted under Stage 2 of this Procedure.
16. In addition, appeals made by a student under Paragraph 8 of this Policy should be heard under Stage 1 of this policy.
17. It is the responsibility of the Chair of the Sub-Board of Examiners of the programme to which the student in question is registered to determine if any case should be dealt with under Stage 1 of this Policy or referred to the Academic Registrar under Stage 2. Cases should be referred to the Academic Registrar where, in the judgement of the Chair of the Sub-Board, there is an arguable case for termination of registration of the student in question.
18. Where a case is dealt with under Stage 1 of this Policy, the Assistant Dean of the relevant Department will nominate a Panel consisting of a minimum of two academic members of staff¹ to consider the case. The Panel should not consist of any member of staff associated with the allegation or any previous investigation involving the student concerned.
19. The student will be informed of the allegation and investigation, and will receive copies of any evidence to be used to support the allegation. The student will then be offered the opportunity to make representations to the Panel. This will normally be in writing, within 10 working days of the student's receipt of the evidence, but the student may elect to make personal representations, in which case a meeting of the panel will be convened. Any request for personal representations should also be made within 10 working days of the student's receipt of the evidence.
20. If a student who has indicated that he or she wishes to make personal representations to the Panel has been offered three separate dates and either does not reply within 10 working days without good reason, or declines all three dates, the Panel may decide the outcome of the case in the student's absence. Where a student does not attend at a previously agreed meeting, the investigation will continue and may be concluded in his or her absence.

¹ For this purpose this may include sessional lecturers.

21. Where an assessment offence is alleged, evidence in support of any allegation should be provided as appropriate.
22. The marker may make a recommendation to the Panel on an appropriate penalty; however the Panel is not obliged to implement the recommendation even if the allegation is upheld.
23. The Panel will examine the evidence, including any representations from the student. The Panel may wish to consider the following in determining the appropriate penalty:
 - premeditation, intent to deceive;
 - scale of the offence;
 - previous history of the student;
 - academic level (e.g. is the student undergraduate or postgraduate, their year of study);
 - whether or not there is admission of the offence.
24. A student may choose to be accompanied by a companion. The role of the companion is to provide support for the student. Anyone acting in this role is not a member of the Panel and should not be involved in determining the outcome of the investigation. Companions should not contribute to any Hearing unless invited to do so by the Chair.
25. Where the finding is that an offence has been committed, the Panel may determine:
 - a) that no further action be taken; or
 - b) that a formal warning be issued; or
 - c) that the mark be reduced relative to the scale of the offence;
 - d) that a mark of zero (0%) be awarded for the element of assessment in question; panels may also determine that the mark for any subsequent reassessment should be capped at the pass mark; or
 - e) that a mark of zero (0%) be awarded for the module of which the element of assessment formed a part;
 - i. panels may also determine that any mark awarded following reassessment or a retake of that module is capped at the pass mark;
 - ii. In addition where the module in question is an optional module, the cap should then be applied to any optional module attempted by the student as a substitute;
 - f) that the student resubmits the assessment but the mark will be capped at the pass mark (the resubmission will count as a separate additional attempt at the assessment).
26. The Panel will inform the student of its decision within 10 working days of the Panel meeting. In addition to the above the student may be asked to undertake specific tuition in relation to plagiarism or seek guidance from a member of academic staff.
27. Where the Panel are unable to come to a clear decision or consider that the offence potentially merits a more severe penalty than that which can be

authorised under Stage 1 of this Policy, then the alleged offence will be dealt with under Stage 2 of this Policy.

28. Where the student is able, in the judgement of the Academic Registrar, to establish a prima facie case that:
- (i) the conclusion of the panel that an academic offence has been committed could not, given the evidence, reasonably be sustained;
 - (ii) that the penalty applied by the panel is unfair and/or unreasonable;
 - (iii) that either the process applied or the decision reached by the panel is not in accordance with this Policy.

then the student may have an appeal considered. Any appeal will be dealt with in accordance with Stage 2 of this Policy. Any request to the Academic Registrar to consider permitting an appeal to be heard should be submitted to the Academic Registrar by the student within 10 working days of receipt of the report of the Stage 1 Hearing.

Stage 2 College Level Proceedings

29. Where an alleged offence (including a first or second offence) is considered by a Sub-board or Stage 1 Panel to be of such a serious nature that it would not be possible to apply an appropriate penalty under Stage 1 of this policy were the allegation to be upheld, then a written request for formal disciplinary proceedings, under the *Code of Student Discipline*, should be made to the Academic Registrar. Such a request should also be made where it is a student's third or more offence.
30. Requests for formal disciplinary proceedings under Stage 2 of this Policy will be considered by the Academic Registrar in line with the *Code of Student Discipline*; if instituted these proceedings will be convened according to the stipulations of the *Code of Student Discipline*.
31. A College Disciplinary Panel convened under the *Code of Student Discipline* to consider an alleged assessment offence may apply one or more of the following sanctions:
- a) that no further action be taken;
 - b) that a formal warning be issued;
 - c) that the mark be reduced relative to the scale of the offence;
 - d) that the student resubmits the assessment but the mark will be capped at the pass mark (the resubmission will count as a separate, additional attempt at the assessment);
 - e) that a mark of zero (0%) be awarded for the element of assessment in question and normally the mark for any reassessment will be capped at the pass mark;
 - f) that a mark of zero (0%) be awarded for the module of which the element of assessment formed a part; and normally the overall module result for any retake of that module will be capped at the pass mark; and that where the module in question is an optional module, this penalty will be applied to any optional module attempted by the student as a substitute;

- g) that the student's registration and enrolment on the programme of study be terminated immediately but that an intermediate award may be made, provided the student has satisfied the requirement for that award;
 - h) that the student is suspended from attendance at the College and/or using College facilities and/or undertaking any further assessments for a stated period of time;
 - i) that the student's registration and enrolment be terminated immediately and the student is not awarded any intermediate award that they would otherwise have been entitled to;
 - j) that the student's registration and enrolment be terminated immediately and that some or all previously awarded credit on the student's current programme of study be rescinded.
32. Any appeal against a decision made under Stage 2 of this Policy should be heard according to the appeal procedure outlined in the *Code of Student Discipline*.

Reporting of Offences

33. Where an allegation of an assessment offence has been made and the case is being investigated, the relevant Sub-Board and or College Board should defer a decision on the student's progression or classification until the investigation is completed.
34. Any penalty imposed as a result of an assessment offence should be communicated to the Registry, for recording purposes.
35. Student's academic transcripts do not include reference to assessment offences, whether proven or otherwise; transcripts solely provide details on the final marks awarded for modules taken, together with the class of award made (where appropriate).

Assessment offence after a mark or module result has been assigned or an award been made

36. If evidence of an assessment offence is produced after a mark has been awarded, the mark, module result or an entire award can be revoked.
37. Consideration of whether to revoke a mark, module or degree result as a result of an assessment offence should be dealt with in accordance with the provisions of Stage 1 or Stage 2 of this Policy. The result of any Hearing should be communicated to the Chair of the relevant Sub- Board; where a decision is made to revoke a degree the Chair of the College Board of Examiners should also be informed.

Delegation

39. The Academic Registrar may delegate his or her powers and duties under this Code to an appropriately qualified senior officer of the College.
40. An Assistant Dean may delegate his or her powers and duties under this Code to an appropriately qualified senior colleague.

Academic Board
June 2011