

# Student Academic Policy Review 2024: Explanatory memorandum

## Introduction

Academic Board has undertaken a major review of the *Student Academic Integrity Policy (MPF1310)*. The review has been conducted by a working group established for that purpose, with broad representation drawn from senior academic staff from across the University, professional staff responsible for student academic integrity, the Office of the Provost, and the student unions. The terms of reference for the review included improving the clarity, useability, and fitness for purpose of the policies and associated regulations, and reflecting revisions to operational responsibilities and processes.

## Scope and input to the review

In late 2023, the Vice-President of the Academic Board and Office of the Provost staff met with both Academic and Professional staff who have experience with the Student Academic Integrity process to gain insights into any issues with the policy, process, and systems.

Following this engagement, the Academic Board established a Policy Review Working Group to review the Student Academic Integrity Policy and draft an updated version to be put into practice from 1 January 2025. In reviewing the policy and regulations, the working group has:

- Gathered feedback from internal stakeholders on the effectiveness of existing regulation, policy, and procedural principles governing student academic integrity.
- Identified gaps, redundancies, inconsistencies, and areas for improvement.
- Identified sector best practice in student academic integrity policy design, with an eye to sector innovations relevant to and applicable for the University.
- Proposed revisions to improve the overall effectiveness of the University's policy framework related to student academic integrity.
- Considered policy implementation issues, including but not limited to training needs and supporting process and guidance material, which will be referred to relevant management areas to inform implementation.

## Revised Policy – key changes proposed

### *New Policy Structure*

The revised policy has been streamlined for improved readability:

- *Section 4 – Policy* – contains high-level policy principles and responsibilities.
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- The overarching principles have been expanded to emphasise the University's commitment to high academic standards and the expectation of fair and honest conduct when undertaking academic activities.
- Responsibilities under the policy for Chancellery, SASS, deans, academic staff, and students in supporting academic integrity are clearly articulated.
- *Section 5 – Procedural principles* – contains mandatory policy requirements, organised to follow the academic integrity lifecycle. Mandatory steps identified in the procedural principles will be elaborated on in processes to be hyperlinked, where relevant, from the policy.
- *Section 6 – Roles and responsibilities* – reflects a high-level summary of responsibilities organised by role.
- *Schedules* – A schedule has been added to incorporate the former Academic Board Schedule of penalties and categorise level 1 and level 2 academic misconduct allegation types.

The *policy*, its *schedules* and linked *processes* together form the principles and mandatory requirements and processes for student academic integrity. They may be supported by *guidelines* (advisory and explanatory statements offering detail for best practice) and *work instructions* (systems and workflow responsibilities for administering processes). Processes will be published in a form appropriate to the target audience (whether student or staff) and maintained under the authority of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic).

### ***A tiered approach to handling breaches***

- A tiered approach to handling breaches is proposed to ensure that breaches are dealt with proportionately and efficiently. Allegations of lower risk breaches will be addressed at the faculty level by a single decision-maker, with serious cases being escalated to a central student academic misconduct committee which will include student representation.

### ***Academic Misconduct definition & categories***

- Revisions to the Academic Board Regulation are proposed to clarify the existing definition of academic misconduct and introduce a definition of 'serious' academic misconduct. Academic misconduct is dealt with within faculties and serious academic misconduct is managed centrally.
- Allegation types are categorised; e.g. first-time plagiarism would constitute academic misconduct (Level 1) and be managed within a faculty, whereas fraudulent medical certificates are considered serious academic misconduct (Level 2) and would be managed centrally (a table is provided at appendix 1 with case examples) .
- Definitions of the methods of academic misconduct have been updated to reflect contemporary cheating practices, and are proposed to sit at the policy level. Enshrining these details in the policy rather than the regulations will assist in maintaining currency of the policy and more readily address emerging methods of academic misconduct.

### ***Penalties for research misconduct***

- The review recommends a revision to the policy framework for imposing penalties on students (including graduate researchers) arising from a finding of Research Misconduct. Currently, the process of investigating and determining research misconduct is governed by the [Research Integrity and Misconduct Policy \(MPF1318\)](#), however the imposition of penalties falls under the Student Academic

Integrity Policy (MPF1310). The proposed approach aims to relocate the mechanism to impose a penalty arising from a finding of research misconduct from the Student Academic Integrity Policy (MPF1310) to the [Research Integrity and Misconduct Policy \(MPF1318\)](#). Consolidating the process will allow for penalties arising from research misconduct to be administered directly through one policy, streamlining the procedure and providing clearer guidance for staff and students (including graduate researchers).

### ***Poor academic practice***

- Minor incidents that may occur as part of the learning process are proposed to be reclassified from 'minor breaches' to 'poor academic practice'. Subject coordinators will be able to determine and remediate poor academic practice, in accordance with limitations set out in the policy.
- Poor academic practice may occur where the activity:
  - is reasonably judged to be a minor and unintentional departure from accepted scholarly conventions or failure to comply with assessment guidelines
  - is characterised by inexperience, lack of student knowledge, or poor academic skills
  - occurs in the normal course of learning the techniques, methodologies, and presentation conventions that are accepted within a discipline area, and
  - the impact of the incident does not compromise the purpose or integrity of the assessment.
- Subject coordinators will be empowered to determine and respond, subject to the requirements in the policy, to treat the incident as an assessment matter and:
  - manage the lapses to poor academic practice within the marking and assessment guidelines set by the Board of Examiners.
  - permit the student to re-submit the assessment item in whole or in part. Where the student would otherwise fail the assessment due to the poor academic practice, the subject coordinator has the discretion to cap the grade for the resubmitted assessment item at 50%.

### ***Academic misconduct (Level 1)***

- Allegations of student academic misconduct (Level 1) are managed by the faculty with the outcome determined through a hearing chaired by a single Faculty Academic Integrity Officer as the decision maker.
- Level 1 cases are those typically closer to the conduct of learning and assessment such as plagiarism, self-plagiarism, minor to moderate breaches of the examination or assessment rules or directions, unauthorised use of technology including generative artificial intelligence or translation tools, or collusion. Where the allegation is upheld, first-time or minor to moderate breaches will typically result in penalties up to a failure in the subject.

### ***Serious academic misconduct (Level 2)***

- Allegations of student academic misconduct (Level 2) are managed centrally within Students and Scholarly Services (SASS) and determined through a hearing before a University-level Student Academic Misconduct Committee. It is proposed that the committee be comprised of two senior academics and a student nominated by the recognised student organisation (GSA or UMSU).

- Level 2 cases involve alleged breaches that are more serious in nature, such as contract cheating, unauthorised access or sharing of intellectual property, coercion, academic fraud (including falsification of medical certificates), misuse of University resources, and other serious forms of academic misconduct. Repeated, systematic or high impact breaches of academic misconduct (Level 1) by a student may be considered serious student academic misconduct (Level 2).
- Where the allegation is upheld, serious academic misconduct (Level 2) breaches may result in more serious penalties such as suspension, termination and expulsion. Where it is demonstrated that there are mitigating circumstances surrounding the breach, following a decision to uphold the finding of academic misconduct, the Student Academic Misconduct Committee may exercise discretion and apply a lesser penalty to the standard penalty.

### **Key roles involved in case management & the conduct of hearings**

<b>Role title in policy</b>	<b>Role type and level</b>	<b>High level responsibilities</b>
Subject Coordinator	Unspecified in policy (all academic levels)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Determine whether a minor departure from standards may be classified as poor academic practice.</li> <li>• Determine whether to mark the assessment 'as is' in accordance with the assessment criteria or permit the student to re-submit the assessment item in whole or in part.</li> </ul>
Case manager (Faculty) Case Manager (Central)	Unspecified in policy but expected to be a professional staff role.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Responsible for undertaking a preliminary review of a report of a potential breach referred to them in the case management system.</li> <li>• The case manager may undertake activities to aid in the identification, or exclusion, of potential breaches as part of the preliminary review.</li> <li>• Responsible for preparing the case for a decision whether to proceed with a formal allegation and to refer the matter to a hearing.</li> </ul>
Senior member of the academic or professional staff (Central & Faculty)	<p>Senior member of the academic staff at classification Level C or above.</p> <p>Senior member of the professional staff at or above UOM 10 (SM1 or SM2) level.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review the allegation and evidence prepared by the Case manager.</li> <li>• Make a decision whether to proceed with a formal allegation and to refer the matter to a hearing.</li> <li>• Cannot be the same person that hears the formal allegation, determines whether a breach has occurred, or imposes the penalty.</li> </ul>
Faculty Academic Integrity Officer	Senior member of the academic staff means a member of academic staff appointed at	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure appropriate conduct of the hearing</li> <li>• Make a decision on the balance of probabilities as to whether a breach has occurred</li> </ul>

Role title in policy	Role type and level	High level responsibilities
	classification Level C or above.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>May impose a penalty, considering mitigating and exacerbating circumstances</li> </ul>
Student Academic Misconduct Committee (Central)	<p>Two senior members of the Academic Staff</p> <p>One student member nominated by the relevant Student Union</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ensure appropriate conduct of the hearing</li> <li>Make a decision on the balance of probabilities as to whether a breach has occurred</li> <li>May impose a penalty, considering mitigating and exacerbating circumstances</li> </ul>
Secretary to the hearing (Central & Faculty)	Unspecified in policy but expected to be a professional staff role.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Attend the hearing to provide administrative and professional assistance and support as is required.</li> <li>Manage the record of the hearing including outcomes</li> </ul>

### **Case management lifecycle**

- A clearer lifecycle to support the detection and management of potential breaches, conduct of hearings and application of penalties.
  - A case manager (within the faculty for level 1 cases and the central team for level 2 cases) commences a preliminary review within 10 University business days of lodgement, assessing the evidence submitted by the person raising the concern or allegation.
  - The case manager may undertake activities to aid in the identification, or exclusion, of potential breaches as part of the preliminary review.
  - A senior member of the academic or professional staff with relevant subject matter expertise or training appointed by the dean (level 1 cases) and Academic Registrar (level 2 cases) will decide whether to proceed with a formal allegation and to refer the matter to a hearing.
  - Formal proceedings require notification of the student, provision of evidence, and information on potential consequences. Students must be given at least 10 business days' notice of the allegation and primary supporting documents relating to the alleged misconduct.
  - The hearing must be conducted within 20 University business days of the allegation notice.
  - The student must notify the University by email or via the case management system within 5 University business days of the date of the allegation notice that they wish to attend the hearing, make a written submission, or both.
  - In all hearings, students retain the right to appear before the decision maker and make submissions in writing. Students retain the right to bring a support person, including from the Student Union Advocacy Service.
  - The decision maker is supported at the hearing by a secretary.
  - Students are notified in writing within five business days of the hearing outcome, including the decision, penalties, and appeal rights.

### ***Penalty model & guidance***

- Penalties are imposed only after a fair disciplinary process and may include reprimands, corrective actions, resubmission of work, disallowance of the mark for a component of assessment or grade cap, failure in a subject, suspension, expulsion, or revocation of an award. The Faculty Academic Integrity Officer is not authorised to impose a penalty of suspension or expulsion.
- The penalty decision process has been modified to allow restricted penalties to be imposed at the Faculty level by a single decision-maker, with a fuller range of penalties available for serious cases to be imposed by the central student academic misconduct committee.
- A high-level schedule of typical penalties will be provided in the policy. More detailed guidelines for decision makers will form part of the training and resources to achieve consistent case outcomes, while allowing for each case to be decided on its individual merits.
- Principles to guide the imposition of penalties will sit at the policy level, with detailed guides and training to be provided to support decision makers. The following considerations are listed in the policy to assist in assessing the proportionality of any penalty imposed:
  - the extent of the breach, including the severity of the misconduct and its impact on academic integrity
  - the level of the student's course (graduate or undergraduate), the duration of their enrolment at the University, and the expectations associated with their level of study
  - the student's knowledge, understanding, and exposure to accepted scholarly practices and cultural norms, including whether discipline practices and requirements have been clearly communicated to the student
  - any previous breaches of academic integrity, considering only those instances where misconduct has been formally upheld in accordance with the Academic Board Regulation, the Student Academic Integrity policy, and corresponding processes authorised under the policy
  - mitigating circumstances such as personal hardship, illness, demonstrated remorse, and willingness to undertake corrective actions
  - exacerbating factors such as premeditation, repeat offences, and the negative impact on others within the University community
  - the potential long-term impact of the penalty on the student's academic and professional future.

### **Revised Policy – Things that will not change**

- In all cases, the student will be provided the opportunity to be heard and make submissions verbally and in writing to the decision maker (Faculty Academic Integrity Officer for Level 1 cases, or a Student Academic Misconduct Committee Level 2 cases).
- Notice periods for the issuance of allegations, hearings and outcomes will be outlined in the policy.
- Faculties will not have discretion to impose a penalty of suspension or expulsion, which maintains the status quo.

## Implementation

Subject to Academic Board approval, the revised policy is proposed take effect from 1 January 2025. Transition arrangements will be put in place for managing misconduct cases in the second half of 2024. Resourcing and administrative arrangements will be developed during 2024.

## Feedback

Feedback can be provided via email to [acad-policy@unimelb.edu.au](mailto:acad-policy@unimelb.edu.au)

## Authorised by

Professor David Shallcross  
Chair, Student Academic Integrity Policy Working Group

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