

ETHICAL GUIDELINES FOR ACADEMIC STUDIES

The purpose of the ethical guidelines for university studies is to help LUT students understand what is expected of them. Students must read the ethical guidelines and observe them throughout their studies. The identification and consequences of misconduct are described in more detail in LUT's guidelines for handling misconduct.

The ethical guidelines can be summarised in three statements which can help students to ensure that their activity is ethical:

1. Use information correctly
2. Follow the rules
3. Be honest and fair

Nevertheless, students may encounter ethically problematic situations in their studies. In such situations, students are obligated to seek guidance, and the university is obligated to provide it in order to solve the problem in an appropriate and ethically sound manner with regard to all parties involved.

Use information correctly

What does it mean?

The correct and appropriate use of information is essential in the academic world. University students are required to be familiar with and observe the responsible conduct of research. The Finnish Advisory Board on Research Integrity has published guidelines for the responsible conduct of research and for handling alleged violations of conduct¹, which all universities have agreed to follow.

The correct use of information includes

- searching for reliable reference material
- using the information appropriately
- taking copyright matters into account

Reliable information can be found from many sources. Scientific publishers publish books and journals in which the information is checked and reviewed. Also publications by research institutes and universities can be considered reliable sources. Sources on the open Internet should be examined with a critical eye and their facts should be compared to other sources.

Information published by another person can be used as a source if it is referenced properly. References to information sources in assignments and final theses must be made according to certain principles. The referencing technique should be learned well, so that it becomes a natural part of the writing process and does not take up time and energy.

The ethically correct use of information means, for example, that you do not combine information from different sources misleadingly even if the result contradicts with your own views and invalidates your own hypotheses. You should not deliberately omit or distort information from your reference material. You should not search for reference material to serve your own purposes, in other words, information that only supports your own views.

¹ Finnish Advisory Board for Research Integrity. 2012. Responsible conduct of research and procedures for handling allegations of misconduct in Finland. Finnish Advisory Board for Research Integrity guidelines 2012. Available online at: http://www.tenk.fi/sites/tenk.fi/files/HTK_ohje_2012.pdf

The correct use of information also entails taking copyright issues into consideration. A text written by someone else, a figure drawn/taken by someone else, or an equivalent product is not to be copied. Otherwise, you are guilty of plagiarism. You may paraphrase the passage in your own words, but even then you must mention the original text as the source. The original source must be mentioned also when the original author has given his or her consent to citing the work.

Where can you go wrong?

In an information society, many are tempted to violate responsible research conduct, as the possibility is literally within reach. You should, nevertheless, bear in mind that misconduct in studies is always a punishable offence. The university uses software for detecting plagiarism, which enables teachers to identify the illicit use of other authors' text and material.

Also violations of the responsible conduct of research resulting from insufficient skills may have disadvantageous outcomes for the student, such as additional work due to correcting one's text. Therefore, it is worthwhile to develop your skills in this area actively. Learn the referencing technique already when you are preparing your first assignment. It will save time in the future and you will not violate the responsible conduct of research by accident.

Plagiarism

Plagiarism refers to both deliberate plagiarism and the blatant disregard of referencing practices. Plagiarism is deliberate when its result was the direct objective of the author or when the author was aware of the result even though it was not his or her primary objective². A typical example of the first case is copying a passage directly and presenting it as one's own. The latter case may, for instance, be an obscure reference which the author knows may mislead the reader.

Plagiarism due to negligence is typically a result of carelessness. Students who commit negligent plagiarism are aware of the rules of scientific writing and the fact that their own work may not be in accordance with them, but do not verify the right techniques for referencing. The further along in their studies the students are, the better they are expected to master scientific referencing techniques. This also lowers the threshold for negligence. Therefore, what initially was bad scientific practice due to a lack of skill (not considered as misconduct) may towards the end of the studies be considered as gross negligence and plagiarism.

Follow the rules

What does it mean?

LUT has issued guidelines for certain shared practices, such as examinations, to simplify the work of all parties and ensure integrity in examinations. There are no similar guidelines for courses, but each teacher responsible for a course has his or her own view of what is expected, allowed and forbidden. All teaching and study related activities are governed by the LUT Degree Regulations.

Instructions given by the Student Services must be followed in examinations. Usually the most important instructions are announced at the beginning of the exam. You must always have a photograph ID with you in an exam. There is a separate code of conduct for electronic exams.

Exam instructions can be found in the eLUT. Read them and make sure you understand them. Please turn to the Student Services if you have further questions on examinations. You can find out what items are allowed in the examination in advance from the teacher e.g. by e-mail or at a lecture.

The rules that apply to a course are decided by the teacher. The modes of study, i.e. what the student is expected to do during the course, as well as the evaluation are described in the Study Guide. Otherwise, the teacher informs students of activities and practices applied during the course as he or she deems fit. Usually these matters are discussed in the first lecture. For example, in individual assignments students are expected to produce the solution themselves, and in group assignments each student must make an equal contribution.

² Silpiö, K. 2012. Opiskeluvilppi ja plagiointi korkeakoulujen opintosuorituksissa. Master's thesis, Education. University of Tampere.

Where can you go wrong?

Many problems ensue from carelessness and the fact that the student has not studied the exam guidelines in advance. If the invigilator suspects that a student is cheating, the student will be removed from the examination hall immediately. Consequently, the examination will remain unfinished even if there is no actual misconduct. Exam hall for electronic exams has a recording camera surveillance that captures also sound.

Misconduct in examinations

When you are busy, you may not have much time to study for an exam and you may be tempted to cheat. Peeking at the paper of the person sitting next to you, crib sheets, a cell phone in your pocket or talking in the exam are not allowed. There are invigilators in each exam, and their job is to monitor that no one cheats. The invigilators check randomly that no additional information has been written or saved in formula handbooks, dictionaries or calculators. In electronic exams you leave all your belongings in the lockers that are reserved for the examiners.

In addition, completing an examination for someone else or having it done for you are also considered cheating.

Misconduct related to an assignment

Courses include different assignments which must be completed in a certain way to pass the course. Misconduct related to assignments involves e.g. the fabrication or misrepresentation of results related to the assignment, prohibited collaboration or use of outside help in the completion of the assignment, and having others do the work in a group assignment.

The fabrication and misrepresentation of results are usually connected to research-like assignments such as laboratory work. In scientific work, fabrication refers to presenting invented observations or results. Misrepresentation refers to modifying or presenting original observations deliberately so that the results based on those observations are distorted. It also refers to the selection or omission of essential observations or results.³

Depending on the assignment, collaboration or outside help (e.g. language revision) may be either forbidden or allowed. Students who do what is expressly forbidden are guilty of misconduct. In unclear cases, it is advisable to ask the teacher of the course in advance what is expected of the student and to make sure you apply the correct practices (e.g. ask for permission to have a text proofread by an outsider).

In team-work, a so-called freeloader lets others do the work and claims the reward. The other students should not let this happen, but instead, make sure that everyone in the group makes an equal effort. If the contributions of students to a group project differ significantly and this is not mentioned in the work or its presentation, the students commit misconduct because such actions are considered as deliberately misleading the teacher.

Be honest and fair

What does it mean?

Honesty and fairness are essential values in the Finnish society. In general, honesty refers to adhering to the truth and truthfulness, observing laws and regulations and avoiding misconduct and wrongdoing⁴. Fairness, on the other hand, refers to treating people fairly. Both honesty and fairness culture-specific concepts and their meaning varies from one culture to another.

In academic studies, honesty and fairness are also connected to how individuals see their activity as members of the community. Also issues that indirectly infringe on the rights of others constitute unfairness even if the activity has no direct impact on others. Honesty and fairness are rarely something that can be agreed on between two people – they usually have a ripple effect. For example, asking for an extension for an assignment under false pretences does not have a direct impact on the work and evaluation of other students, but it gives an unfair advantage to one student to obtain a good grade.

³ Finnish Advisory Board for Research Integrity. 2012. Responsible conduct of research and procedures for handling allegations of misconduct in Finland. Finnish Advisory Board for Research Integrity guidelines 2012.

⁴ www.suomisanakirja.fi

Where can you go wrong?

Due to the cultural specificity of honesty and fairness, also problems related to these concepts often result from different cultural interpretations. Differences in interpretation can be solved by discussion. If a constructive discussion between a student and a teacher is difficult to achieve, it might be useful to include an independent third party in the discussion, such as a student union representative or LUT's study counselling psychologist. Nevertheless, one should bear in mind that a Finnish university expects students to act according to Finnish interpretations of these concepts. In unclear cases, you should ask for further explanations from the teacher of the course.

Matters that seem minor or insignificant to an individual may, from a wider perspective, be unfair. Writing your friend's name in the attendance sheet of a compulsory lecture may not seem like a great offence, but it is in breach of the rules of the course (which require personal attendance) and is dishonest to the teacher and other students.

Lying, forging and omitting essential information

Lying, forging and omitting essential information are forms of modifying the truth with the aim to gain an unfounded advantage in a certain aspect of studies. Forging may be fabrication or misrepresentation involving an assignment, but it may also be connected to different application and administrative processes. Also misleading in order to create the impression that someone has promised something, such as an additional exam retake, constitutes misconduct of this nature. Omitting essential information is considered misconduct if it leads to or could lead to a decision or solution under false pretences.

Influencing or attempting to influence the evaluator of a study attainment

Students have the right to find out about the evaluation of their study attainment and are encouraged to use this right. Finding out about the grounds for the evaluation of their study attainment also provides students with feedback on their learning. In addition, it allows students to clarify issues that they have misunderstood. Students may not, however, consider it as an opportunity to correct their previous performance in hopes of improving their grade. Students who are not satisfied with their grade may apply for a correction to the evaluation in accordance with the Regulations for education and the completion of studies.

Trying to persuade the teacher by appealing to external reasons, such as the importance of the grade to the student, is not allowed. Bribing, threatening or blackmailing a teacher not only constitute misconduct, but may even be considered a crime.

Obstruction and sabotage

Indirectly influencing the evaluation of one's own study attainment and obstructing or sabotaging the work of other students are considered misconduct and are therefore forbidden. Even if a student is not completing the same assignment, it is forbidden and unequivocally unethical to obstruct or sabotage that of others.

Consequences of violations of the responsible conduct of research and misconduct

Unethical activity violates trust between people and makes interaction difficult. Students who repeatedly resort to unethical practices will quickly get a reputation for being dishonest, and other students may not collaborate with them on group projects. Repeated ethically questionable activities also inevitably affect the attitude of teachers and e.g. their possible willingness to agree on flexible solutions for studies with the student. A negative reputation may also have an impact beyond the university and affect the student's employment possibilities.

Proven misconduct will lead to disciplinary measures, which may include a written reprimand, a caution and suspension for a fixed term. In the case of exchange and double degree students, the home university will always be informed.