

# Policy for handling cheating and plagiarism at the Department of Information Technology

## 1. Background

Certain forms of cheating may lead to disciplinary measures such as suspension for a limited time. The formal regulations connected thereto are to be found in Chapter 10 of the Higher Education Ordinance (1993:100). The Swedish University Board organised a conference on the subject in the autumn of 2002, documented in a number of clarifying publications by Nils Jareborg and Hans-Heinrich Vogel. The policy described here is a summary of the relevant parts of this matter and recommendations for how they should be applied. It is aimed at helping department staff by explaining how and under what circumstances teachers should act. This document is thus not an ordinance but rather a collection of guidelines.

## 2. What is cheating?

According to the Higher Education Ordinance disciplinary measures may be taken against

*Students who ... by forbidden means or other attempts to mislead/deceive during a test or other student assignment which is to be assessed.*

In the following such misleading acts are called **cheating** for short. Disciplinary measures may also be taken in some other circumstances, such as against students who cause disturbance or are guilty of harassment but these cases fall outside the scope of the present policy.

To be considered cheating it must be a case of wilful deceit, which requires intent. The student must wilfully have tried to take the teacher in. This requires that

- the student has done it **consciously** (not by mistake or from carelessness), and
- the student **has been aware** that the conduct in question was not allowed, and
- it was part of a **test** or other assignment which was to be assessed.

**Examples** of cheating are the use of forbidden aids at written examinations, changes in a test paper that has been returned, forbidden co-operation between students at individual assignments, copying other students' work, copying without correctly providing references, falsely ticking off presence at obligatory lessons, misleading information about previous study results with a bearing on credits to be given, etc.

By **student** is here meant a person who is accepted to and pursues university studies, including post-graduate studies. Disciplinary measures may thus be taken against post-graduate students but not in connection with acceptance tests, against guest students not formally accepted, or in contract research.

Some important aspect to consider when deciding what counts as cheating:

- The wording by the Ordinance *attempts to mislead* means that the attempt must not necessarily have been successful. It is sufficient that an attempt was made.
- Preparations, such as writing cribs or agreeing to collaborate, are not cheating. It is required that an actual attempt at cheating is made.
- The cheating does not have to affect the grades to be considered cheating. Even if it has a negative effect, i.e. the crib was incorrect, it is still cheating.
- The Ordinance does not require that the cheating has to be done for one's own gain. Helping another student in a forbidden way or disclosing solutions at individual tests is cheating.
- The cheating does not have to be an active effort but may be an omission to act if this thus actively misleads/deceives the teacher.
- By study results is meant also previous study results which are relevant for the knowledge required for a course or exemption from course items.

The most common instances of cheating at the IT department are forbidden collaboration on assignments. It is thus important that it is clear from the assignment to what degree collaboration is permitted, and that in a case of forbidden collaboration, *all* students concerned are considered to have cheated, also those who help without receiving help themselves.

All teachers must actively work to prevent cheating by giving careful information about what are permitted ways to solve tasks that are part of a test, and as far as possible avoid forms of examination in which it is easy to cheat without risk of discovery. Short individual oral tests in connection with the handling in of laboratory papers or assignments may be efficient for hindering cheating.

### 3. Handling within the department

The handling of cheating originates in the wording of the Higher Education Ordinance

*Grounded suspicion of such misdemeanour... shall be speedily reported to the Vice Chancellor.*

The word *shall* implies the duty to report and neglect to report may be considered a breach of the employment agreement. Since it is not specified to whom this duty belongs, it is considered to belong to everyone.

The word *speedily* means that the issue should be given high priority and, for instance, must not wait until the Director of Studies is back from his vacation.

The handling within the department is usually done in the following way. Whoever suspects cheating must inform the Director of Studies immediately. The course co-ordinator and the Director of Studies decide together on the further handling of the issue. It takes an interview with the student to clarify whether there is intent/premeditation or whether the act is due to lack of knowledge or carelessness, before deciding to proceed with a report or not. The interview may have to be complemented with other investigations to be able to decide if there is a grounded suspicion of cheating or not.

Every case must be handled speedily and correctly. The integrity and legal rights of the individual must be considered. The first interview with the student should be open, i.e. we cannot state that we suspect cheating but try to seek the student's own explanation for the occurrence. Every contact with different parties must be written down. All oral and written communication with the student should be matter-of-fact. The identity of the student should not be unnecessarily revealed to colleagues who are not immediately concerned in the matter.

The task of the Director of Studies and the teacher is only to investigate whether there is a grounded suspicion of cheating. They should not try to analyse the strength of the evidence or the existence of extenuating circumstances.

The most common cases of this kind at our department involve judging whether two students have collaborated in a forbidden way on a written home test. The fact that two solutions are largely similar cannot in itself be ground for suspicion. One requirement should be that it is possible to confirm that files have been plagiarised or copied in essential parts, unless there are other proofs such as witness statements or preserved correspondence.

If the investigation results in a grounded suspicion of cheating, a report to the Vice Chancellor should be made jointly by the Director of Studies and the teacher. All written material in the case should be added to the report, including copies of the information students have received about the course and the requirements for examination. We shall thus not keep any material that we are in duty bound to file and enter in the department diary.

The Vice Chancellor handles the case normally through the disciplinary committee. The sanction may be a warning or suspension for a maximum period of six months. No disciplinary measures other than those decided by the disciplinary committee are allowed.

#### 4. Marking tests when cheating is suspected

When cheating is suspected, the marking teacher is the absolute authority and neither the Vice Chancellor nor the disciplinary committee may prescribe whether the test should be marked or what marks should be given. Normally, the teacher awaits the standpoint of the disciplinary committee. If cheating is considered to exist the teacher may declare the test invalid and refuse to mark it. However, the teacher has the right to make his own judgement whether the cheating has influenced the test result and to mark it even though there was cheating, for instance, if the cheating consisted of a failed attempt or was not made for personal gain. In the same way the teacher has the right to declare the test invalid in spite of an acquittal, for instance, if it has been established that forbidden aids have been used but the student has been unaware of this. But the teacher must not refuse to mark the test referring to a disagreement with the decision of the disciplinary committee, for example, if the teacher is convinced that the student has cheated but the conclusion of the disciplinary committee is that it cannot be proven. Such a refusal may be considered misconduct. If the teacher marks the test and assesses it, the mark cannot be appealed against.

If cheating is discovered after the test was marked and the result registered, the teacher may reappraise the mark. The formal authority in such a reappraisal is the teacher who gave the original mark. It is necessary for a lowering of the mark to be allowed that the student himself has misled the teacher, and that the teacher would have declared the test invalid or given a lower mark if the actual facts had been known.