

Addendum to the UNSW Plagiarism Guidelines

School of Computer Science & Engineering

Version 0.1

1 Rationale

The University plagiarism guidelines¹ focus on *essay assignments* and do not cover *computing assignments* adequately. For the purpose of the present document, a computing assignment is an assignment in which students have to develop one or more software components according to a set specification in a pre-determined time frame and submit computer *source code* for assessment. The differences between essay assignments and computing assignments, with respect to the issue of plagiarism, are the following: Firstly, a major concern of plagiarism in essay assignments is the appropriate attribution of ideas, concepts, and works of others. This is rarely a concern in computing assignments where source code of others may usually not be used at all, be it with or without attribution. Hence, guidelines which focus on improving our student’s ability to correctly attribute derived work are largely irrelevant to computing assignments. Secondly, the main concern with respect to plagiarism in computing assignments is unauthorised collusion of students resulting in *structurally* identical or highly similar computer source code.² The appropriate management of this problem, especially in the context of large courses, has not been addressed in sufficient detail in the University guidelines. As a consequence, the guidelines of the University have to be amended for the use with computing assignments and the *similarity detection tool (SDT)* proposed by the University is unsuitable for computing assignments.

2 What is Plagiarism in Computing Assignments?

The University guidelines define plagiarism as follows: “Plagiarism is the presentation of the thoughts or work of another as one’s own.” In addition, the guidelines explicitly state that submitting an assessment item that has already been submitted for academic credit elsewhere may be considered plagiarism and that knowingly permitting your work to be copied by another student may also be considered to be plagiarism. All this applies to computing assignments.

However, the University guidelines state that “the inclusion of the thoughts and work of another with attribution appropriate to the academic discipline does *not* amount to plagiarism.” For computing assignments, it is important to understand that although appropriate attribution implies that derived work does not constitute plagiarism, it generally also implies that the work is not an adequate solution of the assignment. Hence, depending on the substance of the included work of others, such an assessment item may be deemed entirely unsatisfactory or be of reduced value and be graded correspondingly. For an attribution to be appropriate in computer source code, it must appear right at the top (in the header) of the source file as well as in any accompanying documentation. Moreover, it needs to clearly describe which portion of the code constitutes a derived work. In addition, if the assignment specification or the course introduction material explicitly and clearly state that the inclusion of the work of others—even with attribution—is not permitted, then any attempt to submit derived work for assessment is regarded to be plagiarism.

¹*Helping Students Avoid Plagiarism—Report Summary and Strategies*. Office of the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Education and Quality Improvement).

²Note that matters of presentation, such as comments, the names of variables, functions, and types as well as the use of named intermediate results or simple helper functions, are irrelevant to determining the structural similarity of computer source code. They may help in identifying verbatim copies, though.

3 Helping Students Avoid Plagiarism

In line with UNSW's educative approach to student plagiarism it is imperative that students are informed about the special requirements of computing assignments and the plagiarism guidelines for such assignments. In particular, the course web page of every course that includes computing assignments as well as every assignment specification must have a clearly visible reference to the present guidelines. Moreover, the course introduction material must explicitly state which forms of collaboration between students is permitted for which assignment and whether derived work may be submitted for assessment. The portion of this statement relevant for a particular assignment needs to be repeated as part of the assignment specification. In online material, this may be in the form of a clearly flagged hyper link.

In addition, the criteria of what constitutes plagiarism in computing assignments as well as the specific details for the course must be discussed in the first lecture of every course including computing assignments. In courses that do not have prerequisites with computing assignments, this explanation must be thorough and include examples of typical student behaviour that lead to plagiarism. Moreover, the consequences of plagiarism in computing assignments need to be detailed. In courses that have prerequisites including computing assignments, the explanation can be abbreviated with reference to these prerequisite courses. In no case may the explanation be omitted.

4 Appropriate Response to Plagiarism

In cases where academic staff decides that a plagiarism incident is not significant, they may use an informal educative response as per University plagiarism guidelines. Where plagiarism is significant in a computing assignment, the first two of *the four levels of plagiarism*, as defined by the University plagiarism guidelines, are not applicable due to different nature of computing assignments.

Most plagiarism incidents in computing assignments are Level 3 incidents. Due to the high number of these incidents in first and second year courses, it is infeasible to require the Head of School or FSEO (Faculty Student Ethics Officer) to be involved in determining the penalty for these incidents. Hence, Level 3 penalties will be imposed by the academic course in charge of the relevant course. To guarantee a fair and uniform treatment of all incidents, academic staff needs to abide by the following list of offences with associated penalties.

Verbatim copy with malicious intent. Submission of a verbatim copy (with at most minor changes) of an assessment item produced by another person in conjunction with malicious behaviour, such as obtaining a copy of the assessment item without the originators knowledge or deliberately providing false information to academic staff during the investigation of the plagiarism incident.

Penalty: Failure of course with OFL.

Verbatim copy (second or further offence). Submission of a verbatim copy (with at most minor changes) of an assessment item produced by another person, and their was either a previous offence in the same course or there exists an entry in the School Plagiarism Register for a serious offence.

Penalty: Negative marks of the value of the assessment item.

Verbatim copy (first offence). Submission of a verbatim copy (with at most minor changes) of an assessment item produced by another person.

Penalty: Zero marks for the assessment item.

Derived work with malicious intent. Submission of a work derived from one or more contributions in conjunction with malicious behaviour, such as obtaining a copy of the assessment

item without the originators knowledge or deliberately providing false information to academic staff during the investigation of the plagiarism incident.

Penalty: Negative marks of the value of the assessment item.

Derived work (second or further offence). Submission of a work derived from one or more contributions, and their was either a previous offence in the same course or there exists an entry in the School Plagiarism Register for a serious offence.

Penalty: Negative marks of half the value of the assessment item.

Derived work (first offence). Submission of a work derived from one or more contributions.

Penalty: Reduction of the awarded marks in proportion to the extent of plagiarism.

Knowingly permitting work to be copied or imitated. Providing an assessment item in full or part to another student to copy, imitate, or produce a derived work.

Penalty: Awarded marks are halved.

Unauthorised teamwork (first offence). Submission of an assessment item produced as a group in an assessment component where individual work is required. Here teamwork is any form of joint work towards an assessment item that leads to a high similarity in whole or part of the assessment items submitted by the team members. Team work can occur without actual exchange of source code. For example, students may exchange programs in pseudo code or even in a stylised form of natural language.

Penalty: Awarded marks are equally divided among all involved students.

Unauthorised teamwork (second and further offence). Submission of an assessment item produced as a group in an assessment component where individual work is required, and their was either a previous offence in the same course or there exists an entry in the School Plagiarism Register for a serious offence.

Penalty: Zero marks for the assessment item.

Academic staff can at their discretion always reduce a penalty or grant supplementary assessment if they believe that extenuating circumstances apply.

5 Notification of Similarities and the Appeals Process

5.1 Notification of Similarities

After detecting similarities between student submissions, the lecturer needs to inform the affected students about the existence of these similarities and give them an opportunity to respond. The lecturer may either solicit a written response or may immediately invite students for an interview. The lecturer does not have to reveal the detailed nature of the similarities nor the identify of the students having similar assessment items until after the student responded to the lecturer's initial query. Lecturer's must give students adequate time to respond and clearly state any deadlines; they can require that students read School email at least every second weekday during teaching and examination time. Students who responded to all items of the initial query, can request to be informed of the details of the detected similarity. Lecturers need to take all student responses into account before making a final decision on plagiarism penalties.

5.2 Appeals Process

Students first need to try to resolve any disputes directly with the lecturer of the course. If conflicts cannot be resolved at this level, students may turn to the School's grievance officer. Further escalation of a grievance case is to the Head of School or FSEO as per University plagiarism guidelines.

6 School Plagiarism Register

The School Office will maintain a register of all plagiarism incidents. To guarantee transparency, students can request to see their personal entry in the register. Staff has access to the register on the same basis as they have access to student transcripts. The School Office forwards entries to the Central Plagiarism Register as required by the University plagiarism guidelines.