

# UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN

## GUIDE TO COMMITTEES OF ASSESSORS

### Introduction

1. From time to time an allegation of plagiarism will arise in the process of examining a thesis submitted by a candidate for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. This note is intended to help the COA and the DDB deal with such cases. It is critical to an understanding of this note that the process in the COA/DDB be recognised as independent of any disciplinary process before a student disciplinary tribunal. It is the role of the DDB (advised by the COA) to determine a result when a candidate is examined. The DDB does this under Senate's authority. It is the role of the disciplinary tribunals to try students for alleged breaches of the code of conduct for students. The disciplinary tribunals do this under Council's authority.

### Procedures

2. The COA must do three things.
3. First, it must assess the evidence and decide whether, the candidate has failed to make the appropriate attribution, or to cite and reference sources, in an isolated or unimportant or insignificant case, or whether the candidate is guilty of substantive plagiarism. This is an academic judgment.

4. Secondly, if the COA finds substantive plagiarism the COA must report this and make a recommendation, to the Doctoral Degrees Board on the result to be given to the candidate. The COA would ordinarily recommend that the candidate be failed. (The COA could only recommend that the candidate not be failed where the plagiarism, was entirely incidental to the candidate's thesis and the candidate's proving of his or her thesis. In such cases, **if there ever were such**, the COA might, in reporting the plagiarism to the DDB, recommend a revision by the candidate to take account of this finding.)
  
5. The COA has a third responsibility. Plagiarism has two consequences:

First, it may lead to a decision by the body having academic jurisdiction to fail the candidate (see 4 above).;

Secondly, plagiarism constitutes a breach of the rules for students, and therefore committee of assessors, which finds evidence of plagiarism, must report the matter for adjudication in terms of the University's Rules on Disciplinary Jurisdiction and Procedures. (The COA may take advice from the legal counsel in the office of the Registrar on how to do this.) In essence, the COA is required to make a report to the Vice Chancellor, or the Vice Chancellor's nominee, who will then determine whether to institute a prosecution before the University Student Disciplinary Tribunal.

The processes of examining on the one hand, and of assessing the student's guilt in terms of the disciplinary rules for students on the other hand are independent of each other.

Where the COA, on the assessment of the evidence, reports and recommends a course of action to the DDB, neither the COA nor the DDB should wait for the outcome of the hearing on the allegation of a breach of the rules for students before the Student Disciplinary Tribunal because the issues are separate.

It is thus theoretically possible for the DDB to fail a candidate, and the Student Disciplinary to acquit the student.

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