

## Guidelines for academic ethics and procedures for handling allegations of misconduct at Tampere University<sup>1</sup>

### Background, objectives and scope of application

This document contains the guidelines for academic ethics at Tampere University, i.e. general descriptions of good academic and study practices and study-related responsible conduct of research, descriptions of misconduct relating to the aforementioned, and the procedures for handling allegations of misconduct.

These guidelines and procedures apply to all theses, coursework, study attainments and parts thereof, i.e. to all research practices that are related to study attainments. The guidelines do not, however, apply to such allegations of misconduct where the allegation relates to (1) a thesis that is to be included in a master's degree and has already been *passed as a study attainment*, or (2) a licentiate thesis or doctoral dissertation that has already been *submitted for preliminary examination or passed as a study attainment*, regardless of whether or not the work has been published. Instead, those cases will be handled according to the procedure laid out in the guidelines of the Finnish National Board on Research Integrity (TENK; see [Appendix 1](#)). Furthermore, these guidelines do not apply to other allegations of misconduct than study-related ones. Instead, those allegations are handled in accordance with the TENK guidelines.

Tampere University is committed to observing ethical principles and good scientific practice in accordance with the Universities Act (558/2009, Section 2) as well as the TENK guidelines on the responsible conduct of research (2012). Tampere University Regulations on Degrees state, "responsible research and study practices are observed in studies and teaching, in addition to the instructions issued by the Finnish Advisory Board on Research Integrity and other guidelines on the responsibilities related to university studies and research ethics" (Section 4).

The mission of Finnish universities includes the promotion of independent academic research, academic and artistic education, and the provision of research-based higher education. The universities have the duty to evaluate and develop their education, research and artistic activities, and to constantly evaluate and develop degrees, degree studies and teaching (Universities Act 558/2009, Sections 2 and 87; 794/2004, Section 28). The objective of these guidelines is to ensure that the members of the university community are able to contribute to the realisation of the mission and duties of the university in an ethically sustainable and responsible manner by adhering to good scientific practices in activities related to teaching, learning and studying.

### Academic ethics, its teaching and learning

The teaching and learning of **good study practices** span the entire duration of studies. Good study practices and good scientific practices are learned as knowledge, skills and attitudes, which are necessary not only while studying, but also in future jobs and in life more generally. Learning to act in a responsible manner requires familiarisation with the relevant decrees, guidelines and practices, and participation in ethical debates.

The basis of ethical and sound study practices lies in good scientific practice, whose key premises are described in the TENK guidelines (TENK 2012, 6–7).

**Good study practices** entail the following:

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<sup>1</sup> NB: This is an unofficial translation. In case of any discrepancies between the Finnish and English versions, the Finnish version shall prevail.

- understanding one's position as a member of the university community and striving towards the fair and equal treatment of fellow members of the community;
- taking responsibility for one's own studies;
- respecting the work of other people;
- observing established ethical principles and practices in research;
- securing shared resources for one's own use responsibly;
- acting responsibly in groups and other forms of collaboration;
- completing assignments within set time limits; and
- informing others about unforeseen circumstances that affect them.

**The university community** comprises the teaching and research staff, other staff and students (Universities Act 558/2009, Section 4). Each member of the university community must act in an honest, fair and responsible manner and respect the work and achievements of others. The members of the university community are responsible for their own values and attitudes, and for acting accordingly. They also have the right to expect others to act in an ethically sustainable manner. It is the duty of all members of the community to ensure that any course of action they are about to undertake is appropriate and ethically sound.

The duties of the **teaching staff** include supporting and furthering the students' engagement in studying, learning and academic growth by employing varied teaching methods that take into account the skills and abilities of diverse types of learners and by providing feedback that encourages students to learn continuously. Every teacher provides study-related guidance and counselling. Students must be treated in a fair, equal, encouraging and respectful manner. Teachers must also take part in the development of their own competence and that of their work community.

**Students** study in order to gain knowledge and learn the skills and attitudes required in life and future duties in working life, as well as to progress in their studies and complete their degrees. An essential objective of studying at university is to develop into a good learner capable of resolving difficult and challenging problems through sound research methods and scientific study. Students have the freedom and the responsibility to plan and complete their studies to which they are entitled by virtue of their right to study. Students are expected to give feedback in order to develop teaching, guidance and assessment. Students are responsible for acquiring the information required in their studies. If a student is unable to participate in a class or is late, he/she will obtain any information he/she lacks due to the failure to attend without burdening others. Students are expected to manage their time in such a way that they are able to keep to the agreed schedule and to submit in a timely manner the assignments given to them, on whose basis their competence is assessed.

Tampere University places great emphasis on the teaching and learning of good study practices and the responsible conduct of research in order to prevent misconduct and disregard for good scientific practice.

### **Good study practice and the responsible conduct of research in curricula**

The TENK guidelines require that the teaching and learning of research integrity and ethics are integrated into universities' degree education. Every Tampere University curriculum includes learning outcomes on good study practices and the responsible conduct of research at the levels of degree programmes, study modules and course units. The learning outcomes are designed cumulatively, so that the learning outcomes of a higher-cycle degree are founded on the competencies gained from a lower-cycle degree.

The Government Decree on University Degrees (794/2004 and amendments) states that a student's competencies in research ethics and the responsible conduct of research shall accrue in the following manner from one cycle to another:

- upon completion of a first-cycle degree, the student is able to engage in scientific thinking and use scientific methods, or to employ the skills and competencies required by artistic work;
- upon completion of a second-cycle degree, the student is able to, for example, apply scientific knowledge, prior research and sound research methods, or to undertake independent and demanding artistic work;
- upon completion of a third-cycle degree, the student is able to apply scientific research methods independently and critically and to produce new scientific knowledge within his/her field of research; and
- upon completion of a professional specialisation programme, the student is able to analyse, assess and develop the professional practices in his/her field of work by utilising prior scientific knowledge or the methods of artistic work (794/2004, Sections 7, 12, 21).

As part of its decision on the **Common competencies of the Tampere university community**, the Academic Board has set general learning outcomes for learning, critical thinking and ethical competencies. Everyone graduating with a degree from the Tampere university community must master the following competencies related to good study practices and good scientific practice:

The student

- takes responsibility for his/her actions and their consequences;
- is aware of the principles of the responsible conduct of research and acts accordingly;
- has an understanding of scientific thinking, reasoning and explication;
- follows the ethical principles that govern his/her field of research and/or work;
- acquires, handles, evaluates, analyses and uses information and knowledge in a versatile, critical and ethical manner;
- assesses and develops his/her knowledge acquisition processes;
- evaluates and further develops his/her competencies and learning methods, and continuously updates his/her knowledge and skills;
- is able to solve new and multifaceted problems, to make decisions also in unforeseen circumstances, and to choose the appropriate course of action in complex situations;
- acts according to the principles of equity, equality and accessibility;
- acts collegially in knowledge formation and grasps the significance of knowledge-sharing in furthering his/her competencies and learning;
- can make a communal and societal impact founded on ethically sustainable values and his/her competence, and is able to consider various parties when taking action.

**Curriculum design** should identify the course units that specifically teach and train good scientific practices. It is also important to systematically build the interconnections between course units so that learning good scientific practice is repeated, deepened and accumulated throughout the studies. This requires educational management, good cooperation between teachers and the participation of all university community members in curriculum design work. Thorough planning and development of curricula, courses and study modules ensures that the students are supervised on good scientific practice throughout their studies.

The University continuously **evaluates and develops education** so that students may learn sufficient knowledge, skills and attitudes to act according to good practices and in an ethically sustainable way during their studies and after graduation. The University ensures that it offers continuing education and learning opportunities in research integrity to teachers, thesis supervisors, researchers, those

working in senior research positions, and other experts, as set out in the TENK guidelines.

## Using text-matching software to support learning and education on good scientific practice

Ensuring good scientific practice in study attainments is part of the quality management of university education. One of the most important principles of good scientific practice is that the student is the author of the work that he/she presents as his/her own.

Knowledge of previous research and the use of it in one's work are a key part of learning research practice. When prior research is used, it should be referenced according to agreed scientific practices. A person reading a scientific text must be able to trust that the text is authored by the writer, the parts borrowed from others are marked with appropriate references and the citations are not misrepresented.

According to Tampere University Regulations on Degrees, web-based text-matching software for assessing the originality of texts is used as a tool in supervision, the writing of all theses and before the actual assessment process. This software may also be used in other studies, especially those for teaching and learning scientific writing and reference techniques.

The student always enters his/her text into the text-matching software personally and is responsible for being the genuine author of the text. *It is forbidden to enter another person's text into the text-matching software.*

A comparison report is produced based on the text that is entered into the tool. The report shows the detected similarities between the text and other texts in the reference database, but it does not tell whether the references have been appropriately cited. Therefore, the comparison report must always be interpreted. For the student, interpreting the report involves learning about research practice, and for the teacher or supervisor, the interpretation is part of the student's supervision and assessment of learning.

When practising the use of the text-matching software and interpreting the comparison report, the student may enter his/her text into the software and receive a comparison report multiple times. A text entered into the software via the practice area is not saved in the software's comparison database.

As part of the thesis writing process, the student enters his/her text into the text-matching software via the shared practising tool or the supervisor's platform. The student then receives a comparison report. The student may ask the supervisor to provide feedback on the report as part of the supervision process. During the supervision process, it is recommended that the supervisor only reads the comparison report when the student asks him/her to do so.

The student and supervisor agree when the thesis/dissertation is ready for submission to the official originality check that is part of the thesis process. When the thesis is completed and submitted for assessment, the student is responsible for having authored the text. The supervisor of the thesis goes through the comparison report and confirms that he/she has checked the report before the thesis/dissertation is assessed. The originality check is mentioned on the title page of the thesis/dissertation. Approved theses/dissertations are saved on the text-matching software's comparison database and Trepo, the University's institutional publication repository.

## Violations of good study practices and the responsible conduct of research

Violations of the ethical principles of studying and research include unethical and dishonest actions that aim to benefit the violator or another person by deceiving the scientific community or a decision-

maker. Violations of the ethical principles can be divided into two main groups: misconduct and disregard.

The **violation of good study practices** impedes learning and the attainment of learning outcomes, and it is against the University's values and ethical principles. Violations of good study practices usually aim to deceive the examiner who is assessing the study attainment.

Violations of good study practices include:

- **plagiarism**, i.e. presenting another person's text, picture, figure, graph, software, previous study attainment or other similar presentation or a part thereof as one's own;
- **helping another person to plagiarise**, i.e. drafting coursework on behalf of somebody else or giving to another student one's essay, other work or text, a presentation or a thesis or part thereof, when the student clearly has the intention of presenting it as his/her own coursework or its part;
- obtaining information needed in **an invigilated examination** by bringing sources of information to the exam room without the explicit instruction of the person in charge of the assessment, by viewing or otherwise obtaining information from another student participating in the exam, or by contacting others off-site, i.e. cheating;
- **helping a fellow student to cheat** in an assessment situation i.e. by giving one's own responses, other texts or information needed to complete the assessed exercise to another person who is participating in the assessment situation;
- **misappropriation**, i.e. presenting another person's text, idea, plan, observation or data related to or intended as a coursework as one's own, and
- **self-plagiarism**, using the same texts or presentations or parts thereof as new coursework without making it clear that the material has already been used in a previous study attainment.

Undue hampering or distortion of another person's work, and providing misleading information, such as giving a wrongful picture of one's own or another student's contribution to studies, may also be regarded as misconduct. Students must never assist another student's fraudulent behaviour or entice other students to engage in such behaviour.

In addition, the following is ethically inappropriate according to the TENK guidelines and thus against good scientific practice: *falsification of observations*, i.e. revising the observations so that the results change in a manner that distorts the research results; *falsification of research results*, i.e. unjustified modification, selection or omission of research results; *fabrication*, i.e. presenting invented observations or results; and *disregard* for good scientific practice.

**Disregard** for good scientific practice is manifested by the denigration of other people's work, neglectful and therefore misrepresented methods and results, deficient notification and preservation of results and data, self-plagiarism, and other methods of misleading the scientific community.

Actions that seem like disregard or fraudulent study practices may result from ignorance, especially at the start of studies. The deliberateness of the actions must be carefully assessed by taking into account how well the student is expected to master good scientific and study practices. Negligence or slight disregard for good practices may also have consequences.

## **The process of handling allegations of misconduct**

Tampere University always takes action in cases of alleged misconduct of the ethical guidelines of studies and applies regulations to handle the cases immediately. The University also takes into account the legal rights of all the parties involved. This guideline specifically concerns the investigation of a student's misconduct related to study attainments. If a student or some other person suspects that an individual has violated the ethical guidelines or good scientific practice, he/she may contact the Head of Study Services at their faculty.

### **General principles and procedures**

The teacher invariably takes action following any violation or allegation of the violation of good study practices or scientific practices. If, in the opinion of the teacher, the violation is due to the student's ignorance and the study attainment is not a thesis, the teacher may follow the procedure outlined in section 6.1 below to solve the matter by guiding the student to learn good practices. In such cases, the allegation is not explored further and the matter is not brought to the attention of others. In the case of a thesis/dissertation, the teacher should follow the instructions in section 6.2 below or the TENK guidelines.

The faculty responsible for the study attainment or thesis/dissertation investigates alleged violations. In the faculty, the Head of Study Services investigates all allegations related to violations of ethical guidelines. If the study attainment that the allegation concerns relates to studies offered by the Language Centre or Doctoral School, the faculty where the student has the right to study for those studies settles the matter. The allegation is only brought to the attention of those charged with investigating the offence.

The case is handled according to good administrative practice and processed without undue delay. The student is notified of the allegation in writing, for example by e-mail, and the allegation is specified. The student is notified of the process, and he/she shall be given the opportunity to be heard on the matter. The hearing can be arranged orally or, when necessary, in writing or another manner that safeguards the student's legal protection. The student can bring an advocate to the hearing, such as a representative of the Student Union. All stages of the process are documented.

The student is informed in writing of the decision in the case and the possible disciplinary actions. The decision must detail the justifications. The decision is a public document so no secrets under the Act on the Openness of Government Activities should be included. An appeal may be lodged about a decision on the violation of the ethical guideline as stipulated by the Universities Act.

If the student feels that he/she has been suspected of violating the ethical principles without good reason, but the matter has not been processed in the manner detailed in this guideline, the student has the right to demand an inquiry into the case. The request for the inquiry is made in writing to the Head of Study Affairs at the faculty in charge of processing the case. Unfounded suspicions and the misrepresentation of a violation themselves violate the ethical guidelines of studying and may be considered fraudulent behaviour.

The following describes the process of investigating alleged violations of the ethical guidelines in studies and theses/dissertations.

### **Investigation of alleged violations of study ethics (coursework other than a thesis)**

All alleged violations of the ethical guidelines in studies other than theses/dissertations are investigated according to the process described below. Procedures for resolving suspicions related to theses/dissertations are described in section 6.2.

### ***Investigation procedure of alleged misconduct in the case of study attainments submitted for assessment***

1. A teacher, exam invigilator, another student or someone else suspects misconduct in a study attainment a student has submitted for assessment. The teacher may handle the matter him/herself, ask the Head of Study Affairs at the faculty for advice or ask the Head of Study Affairs to investigate the matter. If a student suspects a violation, he/she should contact the teacher in charge of the study attainment. If another person suspects a violation, he/she should notify the Head of Study Affairs at the faculty. The assessment process of the study attainment is interrupted and will not continue until the matter has been investigated.
  2. The teacher/Head of Study Affairs contacts the student in writing and informs him/her that the assessment process has been interrupted because of allegations of misconduct and asks the student to provide a written account of what has happened within 14 days. If the teacher handles the matter, he/she also informs the Head of Study Affairs.
  3. If the teacher/Head of Study Affairs wants further clarification or if the student asks for a hearing, the Head of Study Affairs organises a hearing.
- 4a.** If the teacher, upon receipt of the account, estimates that the violation of good study practice is due to the student's ignorance, human error, or slight negligence, he/she supervises the student to correct the work in accordance with good study and scientific practices. The teacher documents the need to correct the study attainment. The teacher informs the Head of Study Affairs of the outcome of the inquiry.
- 5a.** The student does the required corrections and demonstrates them in the study attainment he/she resubmits for assessment in a way agreed with the teacher. The teacher assesses the study attainment.
- 6a.** No misconduct is found.
- 4b.** If, after the inquiry, the teacher has a legitimate reason to believe that the case is one of intentional deceit or gross negligence, he/she fails the student's study attainment. The teacher supervises the student and instructs him/her to do new coursework to replace the failed study attainment.
- 5b.** The Head of Study Affairs prepares an appealable decision on the outcome of the inquiry. The Dean makes a decision on the matter. A violation found in an inquiry is recorded and the material relating to the proceedings is filed in the University's document management system.
- 6b.** Proven misconduct

### **Appealing a decision related to the assessment of study attainments**

In the event a study attainment has been failed because of a violation of ethical guidelines, an appeal may be lodged in accordance with the provisions of the Universities Act and Tampere University Regulations on Degrees. After the study attainment has been failed because of misconduct, the student may request an oral or written rectification of the assessment from the teacher in question within 14 days of being notified that the coursework was failed. The teacher assesses whether the appeal warrants re-assessment or whether the decision to fail should prevail. The teacher must give the student a written decision regarding the appeal, for example by e-mail.

### ***Investigation procedure of alleged misconduct in the case of an already approved study attainment***

In the event the allegations of misconduct or disregard arise after the study attainment has already been approved, the decision to approve the study attainment may be rectified, the study attainment may be failed and, if the student is still enrolled as present at Tampere University, he/she may be subject to disciplinary action under Section 45 of the Universities Act. The investigation follows the process described above for resolving cases of alleged violations of study ethics.

### **Investigation of alleged violations of study ethics related to a thesis/dissertation**

Suspicious of misconduct may arise at different stages of the thesis/dissertation process. The investigation procedure varies according to the stage of the process. When the allegations concern a thesis/dissertation that has already been submitted for examination or approved, the procedure depends on whether the thesis/dissertation is part of the bachelor's, master's, licentiate or doctoral degree.

#### ***Alleged misconduct in the case of an incomplete thesis/dissertation***

If the allegations arise during the writing process, the supervisor of the thesis should advise the student about good scientific practice.

#### ***Alleged misconduct in the case of a thesis/dissertation already submitted for assessment***

Allegations may also arise when the thesis has already been formally submitted for assessment or when the thesis has already been assessed. The following describes the procedure for resolving an alleged violation of study ethics related to a bachelor's or master's thesis submitted for assessment, or any other thesis that is part of studies at the bachelor's or master's level. When the suspicions concern a licentiate thesis or doctoral dissertation submitted for assessment, the procedure set out in the TENK guidelines is followed.

#### **Investigation procedure of alleged misconduct in the case of a thesis submitted for assessment**

- 1.** The examiner or other person participating in the assessment of the thesis suspects the student of misconduct or disregard, i.e. that the student has not observed the ethical guidelines.
- 2.** The examiner or other person informs the Head of Study Affairs or another person responsible for such matters at the faculty.
- 3.** The Head of Study Affairs starts the investigation.
- 4.** The Head of Study Affairs informs the student in writing about the interruption of the examination of the thesis and about the allegations of misconduct. The allegations made are specified. The student is told about the process, schedule and his/her right to be heard on the matter.
- 5.** The Head of Study Affairs is responsible for obtaining the necessary reports and organises the hearing.
- 6.** The allegations are addressed in the hearing, even if the student does not attend or participate in the hearing in other ways. The student's failure to appear is recorded in the minutes of the hearing.
- 7.** The Head of Study Affairs prepares an appealable decision in the matter based on the reports and the student's response either at the hearing or in some other manner. The Dean makes the decision. The decision is noted and the data related to the matter is archived in the University's document management system.

**8a.** If, after the reports and hearing, it is estimated that the allegations are unfounded or the violation of good study practices is minor and caused by the student's lack of skills, human error or slight negligence, the supervisor counsels the student in order to improve the thesis. The thesis is approved according to the regular process.

**9a.** No misconduct is found.

**8b.** If the student is found to have acted fraudulently, the thesis is failed and the Dean gives the student a written caution. The student has the right to write a new thesis whose topic, data, methods and supervision are separately agreed.

**9b.** If the fraudulent behaviour appears to be gross, the Dean makes the decision on starting disciplinary action. The matter is brought to the attention of the President. The President can start a preliminary inquiry into the matter as stipulated by the TENK guidelines. The gravity of misconduct is estimated based on repetition, breadth and significance.

### **Appealing a decision on assessment**

Based on the stipulations contained in the Universities Act and Tampere University Regulations on Degrees, a student may lodge an appeal on the assessment of a thesis failed because of disregard for ethical guidelines.

### **Investigation procedure of alleged misconduct in the case of an approved thesis/dissertation**

If, after the thesis is approved, there is a suspicion of misconduct or negligence, the decision to approve the thesis may be revoked and the student may face disciplinary action under Section 45 of the Universities Act if the student is still enrolled as present at Tampere University. The investigation is carried out in accordance with the procedure of investigating allegations of misconduct described above in connection with a thesis. In the case of a master's or a licentiate thesis or a doctoral dissertation that has been submitted for assessment, the procedure will follow the TENK guidelines.

### **The consequences of misconduct**

The consequences of ethical misconduct must be commensurate with the degree and gravity of the fraudulent behaviour. When estimating gravity, the planned and intentional nature of the act and the extent, seriousness and repetition of the fraudulent or negligent conduct are taken into account. When deciding on disciplinary action, consideration must be given to the student's stage of study, as should whether he/she was aware of good scientific practice, had been introduced to the subject as part of the studies, and had received instruction on writing scientific texts.

On the basis of the gravity of the proven misconduct, the consequences may be:

- **Failing the study attainment**

When misconduct or disregard is detected in the student's coursework that has been submitted for assessment, the coursework is failed and the student is supervised and given the opportunity to do all or agreed parts of the coursework again. The decision concerning the misconduct is filed in the University's document management system.

- **Caution by the Dean or a written reprimand**

In serious or recurrent cases, or in the case of the violation of the ethical guidelines in a thesis/dissertation, the Dean may invite the student to an interview and give him/her a written reprimand. The reprimand is filed on the University's document management system.

- **Caution by the President and suspension from the University for a fixed period**

If a student is repeatedly found guilty of misconduct or disregard in his/her studies, or if the misconduct results in the failing of a bachelor's or master's thesis, or if the President otherwise considers the violation to be particularly serious, he/she may issue a caution as laid out by Section 45 of the Universities Act. Alternatively, the University Board can suspend the student for a fixed period of time based on a recommendation from the President.

During the suspension, a student cannot study or enroll for studies. The fixed-term suspension is entered onto the student's academic record and filed in the University's document management system. If the violation concerns a thesis, the Finnish National Board of Research Integrity (TENK) is informed about the decision of the disciplinary action.

If the misconduct is found by a faculty other than that in which the student has his/her primary right to study, the Dean's decision regarding the violation will be communicated to the Head of Study Affairs in charge of misconduct issues in the student's own faculty. If the student who has committed the violation is an exchange or a double-degree student at Tampere University, or is studying at the University based on a flexible study right, the student's home university is informed about the detected misconduct and possible disciplinary action.

If a student is found guilty of misconduct or serious disregard, he/she will not be eligible for any scholarship from Tampere University's scholarship scheme for the degree he/she is pursuing at Tampere University.

If there are valid reasons to suspect that a student who has previously committed an offence has repeatedly violated the University's ethical guidelines, the matter is referred to the President. The data recorded in the University's document management system can be used in handling the matter.