

**Policy on Academic Integrity, Conflict of Interest and Ethics
University of Kelaniya**

- 1. Policy Title:** Academic integrity, conflict of interest and ethics. University of Kelaniya
- 2. Policy Number:** CQA/A/P/03
- 3. Effective Date of the policy:** 15th July 2020
- 4. Approved by:** The Council and The Senate, University of Kelaniya
- 5. Policy Functional Area:** Academic

This policy applies to all university-trustees and employees of the university including the academic staff (permanent, temporary and visiting), administrative staff, academic support staff and the non-academic staff (permanent and temporary), which here after will define as the “university community”. By joining this university, one agrees to proactively contribute to the university’s culture of academic honesty and integrity, and to act ethically in all dealings and relationships with other members of the university community and society. It is university community’s responsibility to be familiar with this policy and act upon whenever and wherever applicable.

6. Introduction:

This policy document is prepared based on the letter issued by the University Grants Commission (ref no UGC/AC/QA/ Gen dated 7 May 2015) and the internal circular prepared by the University of Kelaniya on “*Ethics for University Teachers*”.

6.1 Academic integrity

The university's principal missions are teaching, conducting research and generation and dissemination of knowledge. In pursuing these missions, the University of Kelaniya has recognized the importance of academic integrity including the fulfilment of appropriate ethics procedures in achieving excellence in teaching, research and scholarly endeavors. The term **academic integrity** refers to the professional honesty that the university community is expected to demonstrate in their duties. **Academic misconduct** is defined as “any action or attempted action that may result in creating an unfair academic/professional advantage for oneself or an unfair academic/professional advantage or disadvantage for any other member or members of the university community”. Academic misconduct can be in various forms such as intentional or unintentional plagiarism, collusion, falsification, and cheating. Some of them are briefly described here.

Plagiarism is presenting someone else’s work or ideas as your own idea and incorporating it to your own without acknowledgement. It is considered as the most common and best known method of academic misconduct. Merriam-Webster online dictionary defines plagiarism is the act of stealing and passing off (the ideas or words of another) as one's own or without proper citation, committing literary theft or presenting as a new and original idea or product derived from an existing source. Regardless of intentional, unintentional or reckless, plagiarism is considered as an offence in the University of Kelaniya. **Collusion** is another version of plagiarism, which is the

unauthorized collaboration. **Falsification** is an attempt to present distorted data, results or any other information in scholarly activities. **Cheating** is any attempt to obtain or to give assistance in examination/assessments.

6.2 Conflict of interest

Conflict of interest means any circumstance in which the personal, professional, financial or other interests of an individual, may potentially or actually diverge from his or her professional obligations to the University of Kelaniya.

In pursuing the university's mission, the staff often become involved in outside activities such as collaborations including consultancy, commercial research and development, paid or non-paid outreach activities etc. While these external activities promote the university's identity, image and prestige and are generally encouraged, in some instances such activities may lead to conflicts of interest as these may have the potential for diverting the university employees from their primary duties. A conflict of interest may also arise when an individual has the opportunity to influence the university's administrative, academic, research, or other decisions in ways that may directly or indirectly lead to his/her financial, professional, or personal gain or advantage of any kind. An employee should not use his/her university position to influence employment, promotion, admission to a course of study, educational progression or other financial or non-financial benefit for a relative, friend or himself/herself.

6.3 Ethics

The word '**ethics**' is defined as a set of moral principles that guide a person's behavior. Ethics reflect beliefs about what is right, what is wrong, what is just, what is unjust, what is good, and what is bad in terms of human behavior. These serve as guidelines to direct how people should behave toward each other, understand and fulfill their obligations.

7. The overall aim of the policy:

The aim of this policy is to communicate the institution's expectations regarding integrity, conflict of interest and ethics to the university community so that it helps to balance the rights and responsibilities of the university community. It proposes standards and guidelines to protect its employees, and itself, from reputational damage and other liabilities while giving freedom to all employees to engage in external activities by protecting themselves and the university from potential conflict of interests. It is important for the institution as well as for the individual not just to know how to deal with these situations but most importantly how to prevent such fraud from occurring in the first place.

Specific aims are to;

- indicate individual responsibilities in applying principles of academic integrity, conflict of interest and ethics,
- identify circumstances in which academic dishonesty and conflicts of interest may occur,
- provide guidance to assist in the resolution of academic dishonesty, conflicts of interest and violation of ethics in order to protect the reputation of the university and its employees, and

- protect academic freedom, help preserve the highest standards of teaching and research, and advance the mission of the university as an institution of higher education.

8. Policy standards

The university community should respect the dignity of their colleagues and work cooperatively with them in the interest of fostering student development. They should maintain professionalism in order to maximize student attainment. At the same time they should be aware of, and respect the educational goals, policies and standards of the university. They should always share a sense of collective responsibility to work for the advancement of the university. Therefore, the university community should avoid exploitation, harassment, favoritism or discriminatory treatment of each other and shall not grant any advantage or disadvantage to a co-worker based on race, color, sex, national origin, marital status, political or religious beliefs, seniority, family, social or cultural background, or sexual orientation. They should not make false or malicious statements about any member of the university community. In the exchange of criticism and ideas they should show due respect for the opinions of others. Members of the university community should refrain from personal vilification; threatening, intimidating, or abusive language, or conduct that creates a hostile work environment.

In addition, the university obligates its community to adhere to the following standards whenever and wherever appropriate.

8.1 Teaching and assessments

As teachers, academics encourage the free pursuit of learning of their students. They hold before them the best scholarly standards of their discipline.

- (a) Primary responsibility of academics to his/her subject is to seek and to state the truth as it is. To these ends academics should strive to continuously improve and maintain a high level of their subject/practical knowledge, ensure that it is up-to-date in a rapidly advancing world, appropriate to the level of the study programme and it covers the minimum requirement defined in the subject benchmark statements.
- (b) University teachers should improve their pedagogical skills and select appropriate methods of instructions and assessments. Such methods should be effective in helping students to achieve the intended learning outcomes of the course and encourage independent thinking.
- (c) If sensitive topics are to be discussed, teachers should explain the reasons for including such topics and lead the discussion in open, positive and honest manner.
- (d) Conducting lectures and practical classes should be avoided if an immediate family member (spouse, children, individual's or spouse's siblings and children of siblings) is registered for that particular course unit.
- (e) University staff should demonstrate respect for students as individuals and adhere to their proper roles as intellectual guides and counselors.
- (f) University staff should avoid any kind of discriminatory treatment of students. The staff shall not grant any advantage or disadvantage to any student based on the race, color, sex, national origin, marital status, political or religious beliefs, family, social or cultural background, or sexual orientation.
- (g) University staff should not use professional relationships with students for personal advantage and it should be based on pedagogical goals and academic requirements.

- (h) Personal relationships with students of a romantic or sexual nature, even if consensual, is inappropriate as any such relationship jeopardizes the integrity of the educational process and could lead to actual or perceived favoritism.
- (i) Academics should make every reasonable effort to ensure that their assessments of students fairly reflect the true merit of each student's work.
- (j) Academics should ensure that students' grades, attendance records, and communications are treated as confidential material. Thus such information should be released only for legitimate academic purpose.
- (k) University community is bound to follow the examination by-laws of the University of Kelaniya.

8.2 Research

All university teachers are expected to conduct research in their fields of specialization while adhering to the following standards.

- (a) Appropriate approvals (from relevant authorities, committees on ethical clearance/ethics review committee if human or animal objects are used) should be obtained prior to the commencement of research, and that conditions of any approvals are adhered to during the course of research. These documentations should be retained with the Principal Investigator for a period of five years.
- (b) If human objects are used, participants should be informed about how their data will be used, what will be done with case materials (photos, audio and video recordings etc.), and secure their consent.
- (c) The research proponents should be able to highlight the gaps in current knowledge and how the intended study would bridge the gap. Non-referencing of literature unfavorable to one's own proposal is unethical.
- (d) The design, conduct and actual outcome of the research should be stated clearly. It should be free from bias arising from self-interests including financial benefits, one's own firm beliefs and other gains in any kind.
- (e) Use of methods that are unlikely to achieve the objectives is unethical since valuable resources in the form of time, efforts, and funds will be wasted. Hence experiments should be appropriately designed.
- (f) The research project leader should retain clear, accurate, secure and complete records of the research including raw data pertinent to publication for a reasonable period of time (normally five years) after publication.
- (g) Conflict of interest in research that arise when the individual has interests in the outcome of the research that may lead to a personal advantage and that might therefore, in actuality or appearance compromise the integrity of the research, should be avoided.

Research student supervision

- (a) Personnel involved in research should be specifically supervised by a designated Principal Investigator of the research project.
- (b) The Principal Investigator should supervise the design of experiments and the process of acquiring, recording, examining, interpreting and sorting data.
- (c) Research group should be manageable so that close interaction for scientific communication and oversight of the research at all stages are possible.

Research publication

In modern multidisciplinary era of research, it is very common and encouraged to have multi-authored publications. In such occasions, following guidelines should be adhered.

Authors of research outputs are all those, and only those, who have made a significant intellectual or scholarly contribution to the research and its output. Inappropriate authorships, involve undue credit to a non-contributor as well as no credit to a true contributor. Therefore, honorary, guest, and courtesy authorships should be avoided.

- (a) First author is the one who conducted the experiments, usually the research student who does a significant part of the research including laboratory work, data collection, analysis and interpretation. Generally, supervisors do not claim first authorship unless under special circumstances where he/she does most of the data collection and writing. Corresponding author is the one who is well aware of the specific area of the subject that publication arises (may not necessarily be the principal investigator of the research grant) and usually the concept developer.
- (b) Since academics have a social responsibility, only the information gathered based on solid scientific principles and ethically conducted research should reach wider society.
- (c) As a general principle, research should be published in scientific literature before reports of such research are released to the public press.
- (d) Simultaneous submission of essentially identical manuscripts to different journals should be avoided.
- (e) In reporting research findings, quoting studies that only support the researcher's outcomes, and failure to include negative results should also be avoided. Researchers should maintain transparency all the time.
- (f) If authors learn of errors that change the interpretation of research findings, they are ethically obligated to promptly correct the errors in a correction, retraction, erratum or by other means.
- (g) Dishonesty in research is unethical. Fabrication or invention of data, falsification or deliberate distortion of data and plagiarism (even from one's own published materials) should be avoided.

8.3 Other professional activities:

- (a) Engagement of the university staff in outside professional activities is a privilege and not a right. It must not unduly interfere with the time and energy committed by the individuals' primary responsibilities to the university and the performance of the job.
- (b) University community may not use university resources when engaged in outside activities conducted for private financial gain.
- (c) If a university staff member intends to involve in private consultancies and other paid work, he/she should refer to the university's terms and conditions stated in university establishment code (section 1.3 of chapter xix).
- (d) If the university students or temporary academic staff are engaged in outside professional activities by the university staff, their involvements need to be guided to avoid distracting them from their primary duties. In such cases, the responsible staff member must seek approval from the relevant department head /heads before engaging students in these activities.
- (e) When asked to evaluate the professional performance of another, the university staff members strive to be objective and amidst the healthy exchange of criticisms

and ideas, they should show due respect for the rights of others to express differing opinions.

- (f) If involved in selection committees and panels, the university staff must meet very high standards of ethical behavior in their task.
- (g) Finally, the university staff are members of the society. They have the rights and obligations of other citizens. When university staff members speak or act as private persons, they should avoid creating the impression of speaking or acting for their university.

Important Note: Although academics observe the stated regulations of the institution, provided the regulations do not contravene academic freedom, they maintain their right to criticize and seek revision. These standards are set to protect academic freedom, to help preserve the highest standards of teaching and scholarly activities and to advance the mission of the university as an institution of higher learning.

References

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