

AOU Strategy for combating Plagiarism

The Arab Open University is committed to safe guard academic standards and to promote and preserve academic integrity among its staff and students. To this effect, AOU has in place institutional policies and bylaws that address cheating and plagiarism as clearly mentioned in the Examination& Assessment bylaw. The relevant extracts are presented below:

“the following acts represent cases of cheating and plagiarism:

- Verbatim copying of printed material and submitting them as part of TMAs without proper academic acknowledgement and documentation.
- Verbatim copying of material from the Internet, including tables and graphics.
- Copying other students’ notes or reports.
- Using paid or unpaid material prepared for the student by individuals or firms.
- Utilization of, or proceeding to utilize, contraband materials or devices in examinations.”

AOU takes serious cognizance of plagiarism as a limiting factor to students learning and therefore has been working towards addressing the issue since its very inception. A wide range of measures has been taken to address plagiarism. These included the following:

Plagiarism detection software:

As a general policy and to improve plagiarism detection methods, the university has adopted a sophisticated detection tool namely; TURN IT IN to help academic staff identifying plagiarized Tutor Marked Assignments (TMAs) and other forms of formative assessments. The plagiarism detection software is implemented across all University branches for all offered academic programmes. It is mandatory that students’ TMAs are to be submitted online through the university learning management system (LMS) in order to check them through the plagiarism detection tool before the marking and grading process.

Plagiarism Penalties:

The University has set clear punitive measures for handling plagiarized TMAs and similar formative assessments. The penalties include the following:

- ✦ Grade deduction in the TMA
- ✦ Awarding of zero for the specific plagiarized TMA.
- ✦ Documentation of warning in student record.
- ✦ Failure in the course to dismissal from the University.

The punitive measures are implemented according to AOU approved plagiarism scheme of penalties. Academic staff members across board are expected to apply penalties that are consistent with the University by laws.

Other measures:

To address plagiarism, AOU was keen to adopt a developmental approach. This was reflected in a university wide plagiarism awareness strategy. It included:

- University Mandatory Course (GR 101) GR 101 (self- learning skills) is a mandatory university requirement course that provides students in their first year of study with extensive skills including information about ethical behavior and academic integrity.

-**Tutorial on plagiarism for students:** a tutorial on plagiarism was developed and posted on the LMS.

-**Plagiarism brochures:** printed brochures on plagiarism are available for students in all AOU campuses.

- **A standard TMA Coversheet (PT3):** TMA coversheets contain AOU definition of plagiarism and its penalties in addition to academic integrity statement to be signed by the student.

- **Orientation sessions:** Plagiarism and student code of conduct are discussed during orientation sessions for both staff and students.

- **Writing Centres:** the writing centres are initiated by the faculty of Language studies and operates across AOU branches. It teaches students the principles of academic writing and the relevant skills e.g. addition to quoting, rephrasing and referencing. The writing centres build students confidence and help them to avoid plagiarism.

- **Support & Guidance:** information about plagiarism and its penalties are included in the student prospectus and students' handbooks for each academic programme.

Similarly, a number of training workshops have been arranged to academic staff members to discuss the best means of addressing and combating plagiarism. In addition to guidance notes and presentations.

Despite the above mentioned measures, reports by Academic Programmes' External Examiners in the recent Exam's Board have indicted inconsistencies in the implementation of plagiarism penalties among programmes and across campuses. The variability in approaches to addressing plagiarism and in the application of penalties remain an issues which needs to be addressed at the institutional level.

For this purpose, AOU will be taking further measures to ensure that the relevant policies are applied consistently across AOU Branches and Study Programmes. Proposed measures are summarized as follows:

1.Plagiarism Scheme of Penalties:

The existing plagiarism scheme of penalties will be revisited and modified. The objective is to ensure inclusiveness, clarity and adaptability.

2.Improved Monitoring Approaches:

Monitoring can play a very important role in ensuring that the University policies and bylaws are respected and complied to. It is also a tool in internal quality control. Branch Course coordinators (BCCs) should monitor tutors' marking and feedback on TMAs more rigorously, and ensure that no instance of plagiarism which can be detected by a tutor is overlooked.

The Deanships through the General Course Coordinators (GCCs) are required to monitor the contribution of Branch Course coordinators to combating plagiarism. The General Course Coordinators are required to communicate closely with the BCCs and to monitor their work throughout the semester to provide the necessary support. Both GCCs and BCCs are expected to Complete the TMA monitoring forms as well as providing prompt feedback to individual tutors by completing and signing the duly approved feedback form.

3.Reporting and Documentation:

A plagiarism record sheet and feedback template has been developed by the university to ensure that plagiarism incidents are properly reported and documented. The relevant data can be utilized to study patterns and draw conclusions that may help in improving policies and approaches to dealing with plagiarism.

Course tutors will be directed to complete the plagiarism record form on a timely manner and to maintain regular records for ease of reference.

4.Promoting Awareness:

Each Dean ship and AOU branch is required to make sure that plagiarism and cheating is properly discussed at the students' and tutors' orientations. Specific training sessions should be arranged to tutors /every semester. Each course Presentation team will be instructed to conduct focus group discussions during TMA submission period to discuss issues around plagiarism. As a part of orientation, students should be taught about proper referencing, the boundary between plagiarism and legitimate quoting.

5.Procedures for handling plagiarized cases:

Plagiarism remains as one of the most important issues that compromises both the quality and standards. The university will put more efforts to promote academic integrity and to fully support the implementation of cheating and plagiarism penalties. Extra guidance to tutors on handling and implementing plagiarism penalties will be prepared and posted to staff members.