# Academic misconduct protocol

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Abbreviations and definitions:

ECRO – joint Master’s of the School of Medical Sciences, consisting of Epidemiology, Cardiovascular Research and Oncology

GNK – Bachelor’s and Master’s of Medicine

CEB – Central Examination Board; the legally responsible Examination Board

EsubB – sub-Boards with a mandate from the CEB to perform various executive duties

Examination – the assessment of a student’s knowledge, understanding and skills with regard to an educational unit. The assessment is expressed as a final mark. An examination can be completed in parts by means of two or more constituent examinations. An exam resit always covers the same material as the original examination.

***1. Legislation pertaining to academic misconduct***

The subject of this protocol is described in

Article 7.12b paragraph 2 of the Higher Education and Research Act. If a student or external student is found guilty of academic misconduct, the Examination Board may withdraw the right of the individual concerned to sit one or more examinations (to be specified by the Examination Board) for a period (to be determined by the Examination Board) of no more than one year. In cases of serious academic misconduct, and in response to a proposal by the Examination Board, the board of the institution may officially terminate the programme registration of the individual concerned.

***2. The importance of identifying academic misconduct***

In the academic world, academic misconduct is very harmful as it undermines the integrity of science, confidence in the physician/researcher, the value of educational programmes, and the status of VU University Medical Center Amsterdam. Moreover, in cases of academic misconduct, it is not possible to reliably assess what the student in question has actually learned i.e. the quality of the course of study’s end product. It is precisely these points that are crucially important to the Examination Board, in view of its duty to guarantee the quality of the assessment and of the end product. It is important to convey the clear message that this behaviour will not be tolerated and that a strict monitoring system is in place. This protocol provides the Examination Board with the guidelines it needs to transparently and clearly check for academic misconduct, to follow structured procedures in suspected cases of academic misconduct, to impose penalties, and to formulate procedures for the prevention of academic misconduct. This protocol has been incorporated into the rules and guidelines governing the degree programmes offered by VU Medical Center Amsterdam’s School of Medical Sciences.

***3. Various types of academic misconduct***

Cheating and plagiarism are defined as any act or omission by a student that partially or entirely precludes making an accurate assessment of their knowledge, understanding and skills, or those of another student. Some examples of what we mean by the term ‘academic misconduct’ are described below.

*Copying someone else’s work*

a. being in possession of aids or resources (pre-programmed calculator, mobile phone, books, syllabi, notes, etc.) which are not expressly permitted during the examination;

b. copying from – or exchanging information with – another student during the examination;

*Switching identity*

c. assuming someone else’s identity during the examination;

d. allowing someone else to assume your identity during the examination;

*Foreknowledge*

e. obtaining details of examination questions before the date or time at which that examination is scheduled to take place;

*Amending*

f. changing, extending or amending an examination component after it has been submitted for final assessment;

g. falsifying research results/inventing non-existent patients;

*Plagiarism*

h. using or copying other people’s texts, data or ideas without a complete and correct source reference;

i. not showing clearly in the text, for example through the use of quotation marks or a particular layout, that text is being cited directly from another author, even where correct referencing has been included;

j. paraphrasing the contents of other people’s texts without sufficient referencing of sources;

k. submitting texts that have previously been submitted for earlier assignments, or comparable texts, for separate examination components;

l. copying work from other students and presenting this work as one’s own;

m. submitting papers that have been obtained from a commercial agency or that have been written by someone else (whether or not this was in exchange for payment).

***4. Procedure in cases of suspected academic misconduct***

The Examination Board shall always handle information pertaining to cases of academic misconduct with the utmost confidentiality, while making every effort to deal with the matter as clearly and carefully as possible. There is an established procedure for dealing with cases of suspected academic misconduct.

4.1 Any lecturer, examiner or invigilator who discovers a case of academic misconduct (or who has strong suspicions that this has taken place) is obliged to notify the student in question and the relevant Examination sub-Board by means of a written report. Such notification must take place within two weeks, following the examination in question. In the case of a specific written assignment, such as a literature review or a project proposal, the notification period is five weeks from the date on which the work in question was submitted.

The EB does not consider individual notifications that are made anonymously. These are passed on to the examiner for information purposes only. However, any serious anonymous reports that could have repercussions in terms of safeguarding the quality of the examination will be investigated and communicated to the examiner, to prevent any recurrence.

4.2 The EsubB will issue a written acknowledgment of receipt, after which the portfolio holder for academic misconduct will prepare the details and submit them to the sub-Board for academic misconduct (which consists of the two portfolio holders from the EsubBs and the chair of the Central Examination Board). The sub-Board will determine, as soon as possible (within a period of no more than two weeks), whether or not the suspicion of academic misconduct is well founded. To this end, the sub-Board will, if necessary, contact the individual who reported the case of academic misconduct in question.

4.3 The sub-Board for academic misconduct will question the student involved, to establish whether and – if so – to what extent, academic misconduct has actually taken place. Where appropriate, the individual responsible for managing the programme in question will also be invited to take part in this hearing. Following confirmation that the suspicion of academic misconduct is well founded, a hearing will take place within three weeks. While this is not a public hearing, a report will be made of what is said. When the student is formally invited to attend the hearing, the study advisors will be informed of this.

4.4 When they have finished questioning the student, the members of the sub-Board for academic misconduct will discuss the information obtained during the interview. Details of the verdict and the penalty imposed will be communicated in writing to all parties concerned within two weeks. All cases of academic misconduct will be reported to the CEB meeting. In addition, the decisions will be pooled to enable these meetings to regularly consider the consistency of such verdicts.

***5. Potential penalties in confirmed cases of academic misconduct***

In confirmed cases of academic misconduct, a penalty will be imposed that is proportionate to the academic misconduct in question. Under its mandate from the CEB, the sub-Board for academic misconduct fixes the penalty to be imposed. Details of this are always reported at the meeting.

Various penalties can be imposed, depending on the seriousness of the academic misconduct in question. These range from a reprimand to termination of the course of study. In general, the following penalties are imposed:

5.1 Reprimand. In the case of an incident that was not especially serious and which did not negate the assessment in question, a reprimand is sufficient. Details of this will be appended to the student’s dossier, and any repeat offences will be punished more severely.

5.2 Declaring the examination results invalid. If it is not possible to guarantee that the academic misconduct in question had no effect on the assessment, then the examination can be declared invalid and the student can participate in the next scheduled resit.

5.3 Rejection of the written assignment.

5.4 Suspension from participation in assessments for a period of up to one year.

Details of any academic misconduct are always appended to the student’s dossier. Where necessary, a note concerning unprofessional behaviour can be appended, if remedial assignments are appropriate.

***6. Measures for the prevention of academic misconduct***

To prevent academic misconduct, students are reminded about the importance of integrity and about the “great trust, high penalty” principle on several occasions during their course of study and academic training. In addition, a range of preventive measures are used.

6.1 When they are given written assignments, students are made aware of the issue of plagiarism, as they must give active permission for their reports to be run through a plagiarism scanner.

6.2 Examinations (and constituent examinations) are subject to rules of procedure drawn up by the Examination Board and the programme authorities, for the prevention of academic misconduct. With regard to the medical programme, these rules are set out in the Procedural regulations for examinations (Appendix 3). Those applicable to the ECRO Master’s are contained in the respective rules and guidelines.

***7. Reporting***

The Examination Board will accurately archive all cases, with a view to building up a body of jurisprudence. In the course of national discussions between the chairs of the various Examination Boards, these cases will be assessed under the guidelines of other universities, to further expand the body of jurisprudence. Each year, a report summarizing every case of academic misconduct that has been processed will be published in the Examination Board’s annual report.