L-Università ta' Malta

Plagiarism Screening Policy for Dissertations and Theses submitted to the University of Malta

Approved by Senate on 20 September 2017

Contents

Appendices

Abbreviations

VLE   Virtual Learning Environment
F/I/C/S   Faculties, Institutes, Centres, Schools

Study-unit codes referred to in this document

LIN1063 Academic Reading and Writing in English
      Level 01 - Year 1 in Modular Undergraduate Course
      2 ECTS credits
LIN5063 Academic Reading, Writing and Speaking in English for Postgraduates
      Level 05 - Postgraduate Modular Diploma or Degree Course
      5 ECTS credits

Executive summary

The University of Malta currently operates a plagiarism screening policy which utilizes Turnitin®, a major worldwide tool used in higher education, as the electronic screening platform. The current policy provides for the screening of all student assignments and dissertations/theses, but leaves the choice to screen at the discretion of the lecturers or supervisors concerned. It is the aim of this document to propose the mandatory screening of all dissertations/theses, and provide the mechanisms for doing so. Besides dissertations/theses being the major documents produced by students which normally comprise a critical component of their course assessment, the importance of this screening is further accentuated by dissertations/theses now being made available electronically to a wider audience, via the Library.

Undergraduate dissertations: This policy proposes to manage undergraduate dissertation screening in the same way assignments are currently managed, by creating one draft and one final Turnitin® screening activity for the respective dissertation study-unit code. Each student will only have access to his/her upload area, but the Head of Department or Director of I/C/S, the course co-ordinator, supervisors and examiners will have access to all uploaded dissertations for the study-unit. It will be the responsibility of the Head of Department or Director of I/C/S to ensure that dissertations are in fact uploaded by the students by the stipulated deadline.

Postgraduate dissertations/theses: The Plagiarism Committee recognises that Master and Doctoral research may involve work that due to potential issues of intellectual property, requires an environment of strict confidentiality, even between academic colleagues. Therefore in the case of Master dissertations and Doctoral theses, this policy proposes that each student should be provided with an isolated Turnitin® upload area that is only accessible to the student, the Senate-appointed supervisor/co-supervisor, the Head of Department or Director of I/C/S, and the particular Board of Examiners appointed for the specific dissertation/thesis.

It is proposed that the responsibility of ensuring that dissertations/theses are in fact uploaded by students within the required deadlines, will fall upon the Head of Department or Director of I/C/S. Appropriate declarations by chairpersons of Boards of Examiners are being proposed in order to place emphasis on the consideration of Turnitin® Originality Reports by such Boards.

The Plagiarism Committee believes that the mandated plagiarism screening of all students' dissertations/theses can only be justly proposed, if such students are also offered the possibility of adequate academic writing training during their course. This document therefore also proposes recommendations for the widespread provision of student training at undergraduate and postgraduate levels, as well recommends training for academic staff in academic integrity and the interpretation of Turnitin® Originality Reports.

1. Preamble

The University of Malta currently operates a plagiarism screening policy which started its development in 2009, by the Senate-appointed Plagiarism Committee. The electronic screening platform chosen was Turnitin®, which started to be implemented at the University of Malta in 2012. It is currently in use by approximately 15,000 institutions and 30 million students worldwide.

The implementation of the policy was accompanied by the provision of training sessions to students and academic staff as well as online training material available for download from the University's website. This training, provided by the UM IT Services focussed on the use of Turnitin® platform and the interpretation of the generated Originality reports. In addition, two specific multi-occurrence study-units were designed and approved by Senate in order to provide formative training in academic writing to undergraduate and post- graduate students.

Currently, the use of plagiarism screening, and the participation in training and formative courses for staff and students is strongly encouraged by the University, but is not mandatory. The use of plagiarism screening has seen a steady yearly increase since its implementation, rising from just under 20,000 student submissions in academic year 2012/2013 to over 58,000 in 2016/2017 (Appendix I), while study-units LIN1063 and LIN5063 have been taken up by an increasing number of students. However, the University is still faced with the fact that the most important student-generated documents, i.e. theses/dissertations, are frequently not screened for plagiarism prior to being examined. This is often either due to lack of knowledge of Turnitin® operation by the examiners and supervisors concerned, or due to a lack of perceived importance of such screening. The Plagiarism Committee considers the use of correct academic writing and the absence of plagiarised or colluded text of prime importance in dissertations at all levels, especially in view of the fact that the majority of such dissertations are publicly available through the University of Malta Library Services.

The Committee notes, that Turnitin® has recently expanded its language support to 30 different languages (Appendix II), thus automatically extending its applicability to several foreign language courses.

The Plagiarism Committee also recognises that there is a degree of logistical implemental variation amongst those Departments/Institutes/Centres/Schools which currently regularly use Turnitin® for dissertation screening, and these Departments/Institutes/Centres/Schools have been successful at establishing a *modus operandi* which is optimized to their internal workflow. This policy builds on these approaches and aims as much as is reasonably possible, to retain such flexibility in the *modus operandi*, as long as the final goals are attained.

2. Policy aims

This policy aims to (i) mandate plagiarism screening procedures for all dissertations submitted to the University of Malta, (ii) recommend formative training in academic writing related to the specific discipline for all students, (iii) recommend training to academic staff in the interpretation of Turnitin®-generated plagiarism screening reports, and (iv) publicly promote academic writing skills and the use of plagiarism screening, within the campus.

This policy is intended to work alongside existing University plagiarism policy[1], and does not detract or supersede any components. The technical requirements for this policy to be implemented have been discussed during Plagiarism Committee meetings, during which members of the University IT Services were also present.

3. Recommendations for plagiarism screening policy implementation

3.1 Undergraduate dissertations

The Turnitin® submission procedure will follow the standard submission procedure which is currently in place for assignments.

One draft and one final upload Turnitin® activity and will be created in the VLE area for the respective dissertation study-unit code for each course, following current procedures. This area will be made available during the final year of studies.

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[1] http://www.um.edu.mt/__data/assets/pdf_file/0009/95571/University_Guidelines_on_Plagiarism.pdf

Access to this area will be provided to:

a) All students registered on that study-unit

b) All supervisors who are supervising students registered on that study-unit

c) The course co-ordinator

d) The Head of Department or Director of Institute/Centre/School

The Turnitin® activities may be created by the course co-ordinator, any academic supervisor, the Head of Department or Director of Institute/Centre/School, or an academic delegate. In the case of an appointed delegate who does not have access to the dissertation VLE area, IT Services should be contacted in order to provide any additional required VLE access.

Although the academic assigned to create and monitor the Turnitin® dissertation upload activity, and the logistics to be followed, may be decided at a Department/ Institute/Centre/School level, it remains the responsibility of the Head of Department or Director of Institute/Centre/School to ensure that such Turnitin® activities are indeed created, and that the dissertations are in fact uploaded by the students into at least the final area by the stipulated respective deadline. At a later stage, when the Board of Examiners for the dissertations is appointed by Senate, such examiners will also be granted access to the same VLE area.

3.2 Postgraduate dissertations/theses

The Plagiarism Committee recognises that Masters and Doctoral research may involve work that due to international collaborations, current or prospective patents or other issues related to intellectual property, requires an environment of strict confidentiality, even between academic colleagues.

This Committee therefore proposes that each Master or Doctoral candidate be allocated a separate Turnitin® activity which will *only* accessible to:

a) The candidate

b) The respective candidate's supervisor/s

c) The Head of Department or Director of Institute/Centre/School

d) Members of the Board of Examiners, once the Board has been officially appointed by Senate

One draft and one final Turnitin® activity as per current guidelines, will be automatically created for each candidate by default, following acceptance of student registration by the University. Creation of these areas will be effected by University IT Services. However in those cases where the project supervisor is of the professional opinion that a particular candidate requires more than one draft Turnitin® area, due to the particular academic nature of his/her written work, the supervisor will be able to add Turnitin® activities to the respective candidate's dissertation VLE area.

The same approach will be used for MPhil to PhD transfer reports, and access to the respective Turnitin® Originality Report will be provided to the *ad hoc* Board appointed for assessment of such transfer reports.

It will be the responsibility of the Head of Department or Director of Institute/Centre/School to ensure that the transfer reports/dissertations/theses are in fact uploaded by the students into at least the final area by the stipulated submission deadline.

3.3 Declarations

3.3.1 Declaration by students

For every Turnitin® final dissertation/thesis/transfer report uploaded, students will be requested to sign an electronic declaration (this can take the form of ticking a check-box on the Turnitin® upload screen) stating that the uploaded file is text-readable and is identical to the hard copy which has been submitted to the University for assessment.

3.3.2 Declaration by Boards of Examiners

The Chairpersons of the Boards of Examiners for all levels of dissertations/theses, including *ad hoc* boards appointed for the purpose of examining MPhil to PhD transfer reports, will be asked to include the following statement in their final Board of Examiners report:

> "*It is the opinion of the Board of Examiners, that to the best of its members'*
> *knowledge, there are no issues of plagiarism or collusion related to this*
> *dissertation/thesis/transfer report.*"

4. Recommendations for the introduction of student training in academic writing

4.1   Introduction

The Plagiarism Committee recognises that recommendations for the introduction of academic components into courses is not within its direct remit. However, the committee is of the opinion that the inclusion of training in academic integrity in all courses will strongly contribute to a decrease in plagiarism and collusion. Moreover, the Plagiarism Committee is of the opinion that the proposed Turnitin® screening of all students' dissertations/theses can only be justly mandated, if such students are also offered the possibility of adequate academic integrity training during their course.

4.2   Proposals

The University needs to increase its effort to encourage Faculties, Institutes, Centres and Schools (FICS) to implement training in academic writing within their respective courses. In view of the different modalities by which different courses are organized, this policy proposes that FICS identify their own way which would be considered optimum for the training of students in academic writing. It should however be noted that the Academic English Programme within the Institute of Linguistics and Language Technology already comprises two long-standing specific multi-occurrence study-units approved by Senate in order to provide formative training in academic writing to undergraduate and postgraduate students. These are LIN1063 (Level 1, 2 ECTS credits, Academic Reading and Writing in English) and LIN5063 (Level 5, 5 ECTS credits, Academic Reading, Writing and Speaking in English for Postgraduates). The committee also recognises that different academic disciplines necessitate different academic writing styles, and therefore any student training needs to be tuned to the specific academic discipline. In this respect, references to study-units LIN1063/LIN5063 below should be taken to imply that discussions between the Institute of Linguistics and Language Technology and course co-ordinators may be required in order to make the study-unit content more relevant to the specific disciplines concerned. The committee also recognises that in-house study-units may already be in place covering academic writing other than LIN1063 and LIN5063.

In view of the above, this committee would like to highly recommend the following:

a) **Newly established undergraduate and Masters degree courses:** It is being recommended that all newly established degree courses incorporate LIN1063 (for undergraduate – 2 ECTS credits) or LIN5063 (for post graduate – 5 ECTS credits) during their first year. The Programme Validation Committee (PVC) and the Academic Programmes Quality and Resources Unit (APQRU) will need to be consulted and directly involved in the implementation of this requirement.

b) **Existing undergraduate degree courses:** It is being recommended that already existing undergraduate degree courses which to date do not incorporate LIN1063 or an in-house alternative implement one of the following options during the first year:

   i) Incorporation of LIN1063 should the opportunity arise, for example, when degree courses are being revised or updated.

   ii) If the degree course in question *includes* optional study-units in the first year, students will be recommended to attend LIN1063 as one of these study-units.

   iii) If the undergraduate degree course in question *does not include* LIN1063 or an in-house alternative in the first year, then the course coordinator should choose an existing first year study-unit in which to incorporate an academic writing component that covers basic principles of source use/avoidance of plagiarism. This will be reflected in an assessment component comprising a minimum pre-agreed percentage of the overall mark for that study-unit

c) **Existing Masters degree courses:** It is being recommended that already existing Masters degree courses which to date do not incorporate LIN5063 or an in-house alternative, will implement one of the following options during the first year:

   i) Incorporation of LIN5063 should the opportunity arise, for example, when degree courses are being revised or updated.

   ii) If the degree course in question includes elective study-units in the first year, students will be recommended to attend LIN5063 as one of these study-units.

   iii) If the degree course in question *does not include* LIN5063 or an in-house alternative in the first year, then the course coordinator should choose an existing first year study-unit in which to incorporate an academic writing component that covers basic principles of source use/avoidance of plagiarism. This will be reflected in an assessment component comprising a minimum pre-agreed percentage of the overall mark for that study-unit.

d) **New and existing PhD programmes:** It is being recommended that in the case of current or newly established PhD programmes, any considerations for candidate training in academic integrity should be left to the remit of the University of Malta Doctoral School.

With respect to options 4b (iii) and 4c (iii) above, the number of lectures dedicated to the academic writing component will be left to the discretion of the respective Department/Institute/Centre/School. However, the Plagiarism Committee commits itself to provide an online lecture covering the basic principles of source use/avoidance of plagiarism designed as minimum instruction for the academic writing component of such study-units. It is, however, highly recommended that further instruction/support be provided. Students should also be directed to the website of the Academic English Programme that provides links promoting self-learning in academic writing.[2]   This arrangement has to be decided together with the respective course and study-unit co-ordinator/s and Head of Department or Director of Institute/Centre, and it is important that consensus is reached. Such arrangements need to be in place in time for the beginning of academic year 2018/19.

e) In addition to the above, it is proposed that all students be required to attend a single session on the technical end-user aspects of the use of Turnitin® and the interpretation of generated Originality Reports. This session, which need not necessarily take one complete lecture, may be provided in the following ways:
    i) Incorporation into the academic writing lectures referred to in 4b (iii) and 4c (iii).
    ii) Attendance at one of the regular Turnitin® student training sessions provided by IT Services, as advertised on their website. However, due to space and number limitations for attendance by large numbers of students, this option is to be considered as a very last resort.

It is understood that the University is at this point fully committed to ensuring that issues of plagiarism are given due importance and the above recommendations are designed to reflect this commitment by providing means to ensure that related skills are learnt and assessed as an integral part of the degree courses.

The Institute of Linguistics and Language Technology will be the reference point for consultations on teaching of academic writing by Departments/Faculties/Institutes/Centres/Schools, while IT Services will be the reference

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[2] http://www.um.edu.mt/linguistics/academicenglish/onlineresources

point for consultations regarding training on the use and interpretation of Turnitin®. Specific email accounts will be set up to facilitate academic staff communication related to this. However this Committee would like to emphasize that actual student training should be carried out in-house by the departments concerned, since it is impossible for either the Institute of Linguistics and Language Technology or IT Services to provide Turnitin® training to all first year university students directly.

5. Recommendations for the increased provision of tutor training in the use of Turnitin® and interpretation of originality reports

The University needs to provide increased training to current and newly appointed Resident and Visiting academic staff in order to provide them with increased skills at recognising plagiarism and collusion, as well as to empower them with the tools required to promote and teach correct academic writing to students.

The Committee is therefore proposing the following:

a) Newly appointed resident academic members of staff should be provided with an induction course which includes training on (i) academic integrity, (ii) plagiarism and collusion, (iii) technical use and interpretation of Turnitin® reports. In cases where such induction courses are already being provided, these topics should be incorporated. Attendees should be provided with an attendance certificate at termination of training.

b) Visiting academic members of staff appointed to T1 or higher, should be provided with a training course which at least covers the technical use and interpretation of Turnitin® reports. Attendees should be provided with an attendance certificate at termination of the course. Visiting academic members who after a period of absence from the University academic stream are re-appointed to a T1 position or higher, should show evidence of having previously attended such training.

The Committee believes that such training would ideally be incorporated as part of a rolling training programme for all academic staff that incorporates other skills such as teaching methods, assessment methods, the university electronic infrastructure etc.

6. Recommendations for the embarking of a publicity campaign to students, to encourage the learning of correct academic writing

In order to promote the importance of correct academic writing amongst students, this Committee proposes that a promotional campaign be launched by the University in collaboration with KSU. Suggestions for such a campaign include talks to students, flyers, posters, mailshots and the production of multimedia presentations.
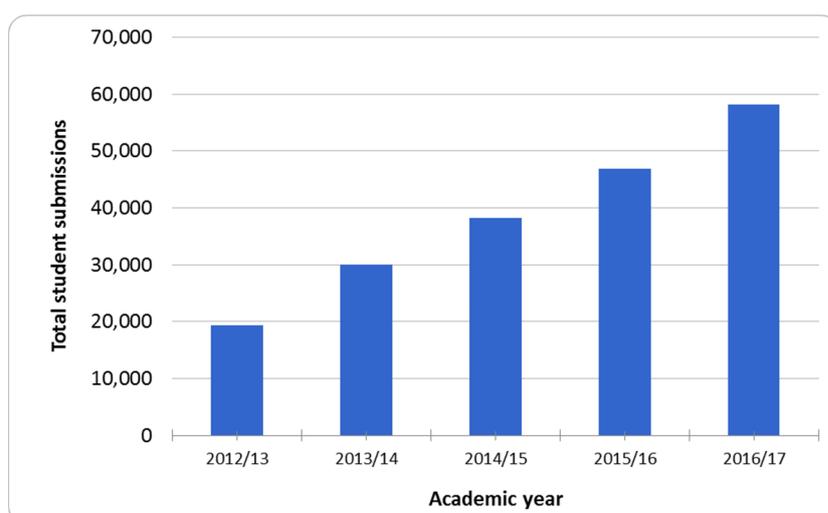

Appendix I

Summary of Turnitin® use during 2012 – 2017

Academic year	2012/2013	2013/2014	2014/2015	2015/2016	2016/2017
VLE areas containing at least one Turnitin® activity[a]					
Study-units	746	661	732	903	1,056
Undergraduate dissertations	57	144	176	175	189
Postgraduate dissertations	229	341	455	560	607
Total	**1,032**	**1,146**	**1,363**	**1,638**	**1,852**
Number of Turnitin® activities[b]					
Study-units	-	-	-	2,339	2,882
Undergraduate dissertations	-	-	-	323	321
Postgraduate dissertations	-	-	-	1,076	1,166
Total	**1,862**	**2,717**	**3,284**	**3,738**	**4,369**
Number of student submissions via Turnitin®					
Study-units	-	-	-	44,344	55,323
Undergraduate dissertations	-	-	-	1,057	1,169
Postgraduate dissertations	-	-	-	1,558	1,688
Total	**19,383**	**30,024**	**38,268**	**46,959**	**58,180**

Table 1: Summary of Turnitin® use at the University of Malta between 2012 and 2017. Cells which are marked with a dash indicate currently unavailable data breakdown, due to different methods of implementation at the time. ([a]Study-Units and dissertations for which at least one Turnitin®-screening facility was created. [b]The number of Turnitin®-screening upload submission areas created for study-units and dissertations. These values are approximately double those in the previous section, due to the current practice of creating a draft and final Turnitin® activity for every submission.)

Figure 1: Total student submissions to the University of Malta via Turnitin® between 2012 and 2017.

Appendix II
Turnitin® supported languages

Database - Supported languages

Papers can now be submitted to Turnitin in the following 30 languages: Chinese (simplified and traditional), Japanese, Thai, Korean, Catalan, Croatian, Czech, Danish, Dutch, Finnish, French, German, Hungarian, Italian, Norwegian (Bokmal, Nynorsk), Polish, Portuguese, Romanian, Serbian, Slovak, Slovenian, Spanish, Swedish, Arabic, Greek, Hebrew, Farsi, Russian, and Turkish. Please note that Turnitin will match text between text of the same language. Therefore, there will be no matches to "translated" papers (unless your institution purchases this additional feature).

What does this mean?

A paper submitted in Spanish text is checked against the Turnitin Spanish text database which contains Spanish language papers and crawled Spanish language webpages. If a paper is submitted in English (translated from Spanish), then it will be checked against the English database (not the Spanish database). Therefore there will be little to no matches to the original paper submitted in Spanish.

Also note, because our system is based on text character matching, if a paper is submitted as an image or copied from an image (ex. Google Books), the image does not register as text. A match would not be detected since an image of text is not the same as actual text.

Figure 2: Languages supported by Turnitin® as on 1 September 2017. This information has been reproduced from the knowledgebase record at the following URL:
http://turnitin.force.com/pkb/articles/en_US/Knowledge_Article/Database-Supported-languages/?q=languages&l=en_US&fs=Search&pn=1