

# MAKING ACADEMIC INTEGRITY “CONNECTIONS”: (RE)DEVELOPING NWU STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES (SOPS) AT THE NORTH-WEST UNIVERSITY, SOUTH AFRICA

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## Abstract

Emanating from a crucial NWU Forum, hosted by the School for Philosophy during May 2021 titled “*Cheating, dishonesty and plagiarism with online Teaching and Learning(TL). What are the students saying? Can we fundamentally change it?*”, a group of highly motivated academics established a Community of Practice for Academic Integrity (CoPAI) to address academic integrity (AI) holistically, due to the fact that academic dishonesty, under current circumstances, is addressed on a case-by-case manner. Instead, this CoPAI strives to uncover as many aspects of the phenomenon as possible to be able to develop a systematic strategy to address all related issues. This event, as a result, served the purpose of gathering relevant stakeholders of the NWU on AI, such as staff from the Quality Enhancement Office, Writing Centre, Institutional Subject-Specialist: Plagiarism, the School of Philosophy and the Centre for Teaching and Learning (CTL). Herein, these stakeholders were in agreement with the need of engaging in further critical conversations regarding AI in a holistic, nuanced, and multi-disciplinary manner at the NWU. This initial small group invited all interested academics and support staff for a conversation on AI, specifically on the possible establishment of a CoPAI at NWU.

The focus, therefore, of this paper is to share the data of these critical discussions and experiences in developing relevant SOPs, specifically for a teaching and learning context. All the relevant engagements were recorded and transcribed. Hereafter, the data was analysed through a simplified thematic analysis.

Consequently, this paper is mainly informed by two occasions: (1) the fourth forum hosted on the 18th of October and the student forum hosted on 12th March 2021; and (2) SOP development meetings. The former yielded fruitful discussions where, for instance, our student representative aptly indicated the need to close the gap on “the dichotomy of the Institution”. On the other hand, amongst the primary concern gathered from the questions posed by the participants allude to the following: (1) creating awareness of the Policy amongst students (precisely when, what, where, and by whom); (2) the perceived focus is on borderline cases, as opposed to general cases; (3) the disciplinary committee’s capacity to process a vast array of cases and the streamlining reporting process; (4) cases regarding academic misconduct amongst students who enrol for courses cross-faculty; (5) record-keeping of cases dealt with internally by faculties and the accessibility intra-faculty; (6) distinguishing between academic dishonesty and poor academic writing practice.

As it stands, this paper speaks to Glendinning’s (2014) findings of the fact that generally, institutions have either poorly defined policies (by implication, poorly defined SOPs) or little evidence of monitoring and review of academic misconduct. Therefore, during our presentation, we will share the continual development of our SOPs to create a platform for a productive conversation with the participating delegates. To this end, we will demonstrate how we applied our Policy rules, informed our process, and analysed other academic integrity or

plagiarism policies found amongst other South African Higher Education Institutions. We hope to gather feedback on our understanding of our work from external neutral observers and the valuable experience from their institutions. Therefore, the takeaway of this

session/presentation encapsulates the purpose of the European Network for Academic Integrity (ENAI) in supporting higher education institutions to work together in the field of academic integrity and specifically the sharing of best practices in responding to misconduct.

## References

Glendinning, I., (2014). Responses to student plagiarism in higher education across

Europe. *International Journal for Educational Integrity*, 10(1):4-20.