

AGA KHAN UNIVERSITY
Guidelines, Policies and Procedures

Policy Name	University Policy on Research Misconduct
Policy Number	012
Approved by	University Research Council
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Contact	Provost's Office

1.0 BACKGROUND

- 1.1 The Aga Khan University is proud of its faculty, staff, trainees, and students in upholding its tradition of attaining the highest levels of rigour and integrity in all academic endeavours and desires to ensure that the same standards are applied in the conduct and reporting of research.
- 1.2 Though infrequent in occurrence, violations of ethical standards remain a possibility in all investigations. At the same time, a false allegation of misconduct can jeopardize the reputation of the University and its researchers. Hence, while having the responsibility to provide a conducive environment to promote integrity of research and quality assurance, institutions also need to ensure that appropriate mechanisms are in place to deal rapidly and expeditiously with allegations or evidence of fraud.
- 1.3 This policy is developed with this objective in mind and to put in place necessary checks and balances to ensure that the highest ethical standards in research are maintained at all AKU campuses, and to fairly evaluate any instances of alleged or apparent misconduct.
- 1.4 The University recognizes and appreciates the contributions of mentors, project supervisors, department chairs and unit heads which set the high bars of honesty and integrity required for conduct of research, and emphasizes continuation of these important efforts.

2.0 PRINCIPLES AND OBJECTIVES

- 2.1 As declared in its Vision, Mission and Value statements, AKU strives to be an international institution of distinction that is committed to the development of human capacities through the discovery and dissemination of knowledge, and application through service. In order to achieve its mission, AKU operates on the core principles of quality, relevance, impact and accessibility. Strict adherence to the principles of honesty and integrity in the conduct of research and scholarly activity is critical to AKU achieving its mission.

2.2 This policy has the following specific objectives:

- 2.2.1 To encourage responsible conduct amongst members of the AKU community who are engaged in research and scholarly activities.
- 2.2.2 To ensure that highest standards of integrity and honesty are adhered to in the dissemination of research output.
- 2.2.3 To establish and maintain a climate of recognition, and acknowledgement of research contributions of all those who have been involved in achieving a particular set of research objectives.
- 2.2.4 To recognize students', residents' and faculty's rights as per the University's policies on Intellectual Property Rights (when finalised) and Authorship Guidelines.

3.0 APPLICABILITY

- 3.1 This policy applies to all University employees and those affiliated with the University (such as, faculty, staff, trainees, technicians and other staff members, students, fellows, guest researchers, collaborators) who are engaged in research conducted at or by the University, regardless of the funding source.
- 3.2 If misconduct is suspected/ discovered after the individual leaves and no longer works with the University (up to a maximum of 7 years), the case could still need to be processed and appropriate action demanded (public apology/ withdrawal of publication/ legal action). The time limit for data retention will be 7 years.

4.0 DEFINITIONS

- 4.1 Misconduct in research is defined to include any one or more of the following acts:
 - 4.1.1 Fabrication and/ or falsification of research related data or in reporting research outcomes.
 - 4.1.2 Plagiarism in all research related matters including publications, appropriation of another person's ideas, processes, results, outputs or words without giving appropriate credit. [Refer Section # 5.0 below]
 - 4.1.3 Inappropriate use of others' intellectual property (without reference or acknowledgment).
 - 4.1.4 Denial of individual rights such as authorship to collaborative partners in research publications.
 - 4.1.5 Non-compliance with Institution's policies on 'conflict of interest', 'intellectual property rights' and 'authorship guidelines'.
 - 4.1.6 Deliberate misuse of institutional or sponsor's funds for financial gains.
 - 4.1.7 Wilful failure to honour an agreement or contract with the funding agency to perform certain tasks.
 - 4.1.8 Publishing any data or results that are against the internationally accepted general principles of research and scholarly activities.
 - 4.1.9 Deliberate destruction of one's own or others' research data or records or research related property.
 - 4.1.10 Making use of any information in breach of any duty of confidentiality associated with the review of any manuscript or grant application.

4.1.11 Violation of (or non-compliance with) the code of ethics for research as established by the University.

4.2 Misconduct does not include:

- 4.2.1 Misconduct in research and scholarly activities does not include honest errors or honest differences in interpretations or judgments of data.
- 4.2.2 Misconduct does not include an accidental loss of data or results generated out of a sponsored research study.
- 4.2.3 Discontinuation of agreed research collaboration or assigned task due to legitimate reasons such as ill health or situations beyond one's control.

5.0 PLAGIARISM

5.1 The University is against all forms of plagiarism and considers it as an act of misconduct liable to disciplinary action. In keeping with past practice, the University will adhere to the guidelines issued by the Higher Education Commission, Pakistan or the higher education authority of the country in which AKU has a presence.

5.2 The following types of plagiarism, irrespective of their degree of seriousness, whether committed deliberately or inadvertently, are considered as unethical, perhaps even illegal:

- 5.2.1 Complete Plagiarism: When the whole document, manuscript, research idea, is copied verbatim from one or more sources, even if the source is disclosed in the reference section.
- 5.2.2 Partial Plagiarism: When part or whole section(s) are inserted without paraphrasing, with few or cosmetic changes to the text without giving the appropriate reference. It also applies to insertion of figures, diagrams, illustrations, graphs, charts, from varied sources without prior approval of the author and / or publisher, as applicable.
- 5.2.3 Self Plagiarism: When one's own published work is re-sent for publication to another journal without the permission of the previous publisher, even if the publication is translated into another language.
- 5.2.4 Plagiarism of Ideas: When ideas or documented work of others is presented as one's own in any form and at any forum. This includes proposed research studies on specific topics previously conceived by another person or group.
- 5.2.5 Concealing Sources / Denying Credit: When the source of the information is not disclosed or acknowledged, or due credit is not given to fellow contributors in a publication or research study (for further clarity refer to 'AKU Authorship Guidelines').
- 5.2.6 If a doctoral candidate commits plagiarism in his/her thesis, he/ she may be judged to have failed the thesis. Any word-for-word quote must have a reference citation; written permission of the author and/or publisher is needed for lengthy quotations.

6.0 FINDING AND/OR REPORTING OF RESEARCH MISCONDUCT

6.1 A finding of research misconduct requires that there be a significant departure from accepted practices of the relevant research community. The initial reporting of the misconduct may be made in writing or by producing documentary evidence to the Dean or Director of a specific unit of the University who may direct it to the head of the respective academic department for verification. Alternatively, upon receiving a report

with evidence, the Dean can initiate an investigative process by requesting the Associate Dean / Associate Vice Provost, Research or a committee set up for this purpose to submit a full report of the findings and advise on penalties, if any, to be imposed.

7.0 CONFIDENTIALITY AND PROTECTION

- 7.1 Every effort must be made to maintain confidentiality to protect the interest of the University and those involved in reporting the act of misconduct to the authorities.
- 7.2 Allegations of research misconduct might originate outside the University from other institutions, in learned journals or in the press. Within the University, allegations of research misconduct might come from members of academic, research or technical staff, or from research students and residents.
- 7.3 Under no circumstances will an anonymous complaint be the basis for a formal proceeding.

8.0 PROCEDURE OF INQUIRY

- 8.1 The Dean in whose office the allegation charges are filed will set up an initial inquiry to assess whether or not the matter is a breach of any of the University's policies of good conduct in research.
- 8.2 The faculty member whose research or alleged act of violation of research integrity is the subject of investigation shall be notified about the complaint and the nature of the complaint without disclosing the identity of the initiator.
- 8.3 Evidences relevant to the complaint must be securely placed with the respective Dean of the academic unit and only duplicates shall be used for the investigative process.
- 8.4 An Inquiry Committee shall be appointed by the Dean to conduct the investigation, which will submit a written report of the inquiry proceedings. All activities and proceedings of the meetings must be audio recorded and transcribed on paper as well, to suffice legal requirements.
- 8.5 The Inquiry Committee may refer to guidelines within the University and various international organizations and committees as a resource for its deliberations.
- 8.6 The Inquiry Committee may also consult with faculty or students who have knowledge of the alleged research misconduct in question.
- 8.7 If an outside sponsor or collaborator is involved in the research, the report of the Inquiry Committee may be shared with the concerned organization or affected individuals, with the consent of the Dean or Provost.
- 8.8 The entire inquiry process from initiation, post allegation, to submission of the inquiry report to the Dean must be completed in 60 calendar days.
- 8.9 A copy of the report shall be provided to the accused for rebuttal.

- 8.10 If the alleged misconduct is not substantiated, diligent efforts will be undertaken, where appropriate, to restore the reputation of those under investigation. The research records will be restored appropriately as well. Copies of the inquiry report and supporting documents and decision-making must be retained for seven (7) years. The University will take no further action and no reports will be made to funding agencies unless they are specifically required under the circumstances of the allegation or unless the funding agency is aware of the allegation.
- 8.11 If misconduct is proven, the University will take appropriate action. The Provost or President, upon receiving the recommendations of the respective Dean based on the Inquiry Committee findings and any statement of rebuttal by the accused, shall take a final decision with respect to the action to be taken and will formally notify all parties including the sponsor of the research.
- 8.12 The final investigation report must be in writing and submitted to the Provost/ President in a timely fashion; the Provost will review the report, determine whether to accept it as is written or to return it to the Committee for further deliberation or fact finding. The timeline should allow for submission of the report to the concerned sponsor, if required, no later than 120 days from the date the investigation began if there is a finding of misconduct.

9.0 PENALTY FOR RESEARCH MISCONDUCT

- 9.1 In the event that a researcher is found guilty of misconduct, the Investigation Committee shall impose a penalty, taking into account the severity of the misconduct. Penalties may include:
 - A reprimand
 - Withdrawal of article / proposal or any other dissemination material
 - Public / private apology
 - A fine not exceeding Rs. 50,000 or US dollar equivalent
 - Disallowance of the work
 - Suspension
 - Expulsion
- 9.2 In cases where the investigation does not confirm the allegations, the Committee shall recommend the same to the Dean / Director who shall undertake appropriate efforts to ensure that the reputation and integrity of the individual is not harmed.
- 9.3 The higher authorities shall also take all actions to protect the positions and reputations of those persons who, in good faith, made the allegations. However, if it is considered that the complainant has brought charges improperly, he/ she should be reprimanded, disciplined and / or penalised as deemed fit.
- 9.4 If any student commits plagiarism in his/ her thesis that student may be judged to have failed the thesis.