



GUIDELINES ON PARAMETERS FOR PLAGIARISM SOFTWARE

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1. Background

1.1 The University's *Research Ethics Policy* defines plagiarism as follows:

“Intentionally or carelessly taking credit for another person or source's work or ideas, stealing research results or methods, failure to acknowledge significant contribution(s) made by others and representing, without acknowledgement, another's ideas or product, including verbatim, paraphrasing, charts, figures, illustrations, mathematical or scientific solutions, or research work, without citing the source in the text and in reference lists.”

The *Policy* makes clear that plagiarism is a form of research misconduct. The *Academic Integrity Policy* also makes it clear that plagiarism is a form of academic dishonesty. Both policies indicate the sanctions that may be applied to those who engage in plagiarism.

1.2 Plagiarism can compromise the quality of programmes, student assessment, and research output. In higher education worldwide, plagiarism is a growing problem that has become worse since the advent of the digital environment where large quantities of information are readily available on the Internet for cutting and pasting. It is against this backdrop that it has become critical for the Botswana Open University (BOU) to put in place measures to curb plagiarism amongst its students, staff and researchers. It is for this purpose that BOU has adopted Plagiarism Detection Technology (PDT) to support good academic conduct as stipulated in the *Academic Integrity Policy* and the *Research Ethics Policy*.

1.2 In order to implement the use of plagiarism software (PDT) to enhance student and staff compliance with academic norms, there are a number of parameters that the University has to agree, particularly the similarity level of a document and the number of times a user is allowed to scan the same document.

2. Similarity level

A similarity level is the percentage of similarity in a document that should not be exceeded. Universities set similarity levels at different percentages depending on their own policies. Benchmarking indicates that universities set their similarity levels in a range from 15% to 30%. Some universities set higher levels for undergraduate programmes and lower levels for postgraduate

programmes. Some have a standard figure across all programmes. Any work for assessment that exceeds the percentage level set is managed according to clear prescriptions made by the Faculty or School responsible for the programme/course, including penalties if appropriate. For research outputs, guidance may be derived from internally set norms and from the external expectations of journal editors, conference organizers and so forth.

3. **Number of times scanning allowed per document**

The overall purpose of plagiarism software is to assist students, staff and other researchers to adhere to acceptable academic ways of acknowledging other people's work and properly citing such. This is the reason why users are allowed more than one chance to scan their work so as to identify portions of their work that can be deemed plagiarised and to revise them accordingly, for example by paraphrasing or properly citing other people's works. In deciding the number of times the same document can be scanned, BOU is guided by the fact that plagiarism software may charge by number of scans as well as the basic license cost. Thus, the more the same document is scanned, the more costs are incurred.

4. **Other implications**

To integrate plagiarism software into the University's academic processes, there are further implications. Two such implications are highlighted below:

a) *Training*

Lecturers, Part-time Tutors and Writers, and other researchers need to be trained on the nature of plagiarism and how to avoid it, on how to upload documents, check plagiarism, interpret the plagiarism level reports and so forth. Students also need to be educated about academic writing and in particular plagiarism, and they must be trained on the use of plagiarism software. The use of a PDT is a basic academic skill in the digital environment that all need to acquire.

b) *Identification of student written work requiring the use of plagiarism software*

Each School will need to specify those forms of student written work, such as assignments, projects, dissertations and theses, that must be scanned for plagiarism. In doing so, it should be noted that the use of the PDT can deter collusion between students as well as plagiarism per se.

5. Guidelines

- 5.1 All Lecturers, Part-time Tutors and Writers, Research Supervisors, students and other researchers should have a PDT account and a formal BOU email account for purposes of receiving PDT reports.
- 5.2 The similarity level for all academic work of the University should not exceed 20%.
- 5.3 Schools shall stipulate which forms of student written work should be submitted to the PDT and in what circumstances penalties will be imposed for exceeding the similarity level.
- 5.4 Users shall be allowed to submit each piece of work two times. For the assessed work of students, the second plagiarism level report shall be submitted to the Tutor or Research Supervisor responsible for grading the submitted piece of work. For research proposals, the second report shall be submitted to the University Research Ethics Committee.
- 5.5 The Centre for Instructional Technology shall be responsible for training Lecturers, Tutors, Research Supervisors and students on the use of the plagiarism software.

6. Review

The Guidelines shall be reviewed every three years or earlier as necessary.