

MEDIA STATEMENT

UNISA clarifies stance on its zero-tolerance against academic misconduct and use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools.

Approved for public release.

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Following the recent article published by *News24* ("*Unisa rocked by AI, ChatGPT cheating scandal after students' scripts flagged as 'disciplinary cases, 04 July 2024*") the University of South Africa (Unisa) would like to reiterate that it takes academic integrity very seriously, hence it adopts a zero-tolerance approach against any form of academic misconduct and dishonesty. Therefore, the following points are emphasised:

On academic integrity and the student disciplinary process

- The usage of proctoring tools and their attendant rules is very important and necessary to uphold the credibility of our examinations and protect the integrity of our qualifications. It is a critical aspect of the assessment process that the university cannot compromise on.
- Prior to the commencement of examinations, the examination rules, including rules about the usage of the proctoring tools, are clearly communicated to all students as part of our online examination rules and guidelines through various communication channels, including email, myUnisa announcements, SMS, and social media. These rules are emphasised to students during the pre-examination training.
- In the event of any suspicion of violation of the exam rules, a flagged student/s will be subjected to further investigation and, where the suspicions are confirmed, referred to the Student Disciplinary Unit for the requisite action in line with relevant policies, including the Academic Integrity Policy.
- Disciplinary measures are applied fairly and consistently; and without fear, favour or prejudice. To ensure that the principle of innocent until proven guilty is applied and that the affected students are not disadvantaged, students are allowed to register for other modules and/or remain in the system until finalisation of the investigation and disciplinary processes.
- The university respects its students and therefore restricts any correspondence and engagement between itself and the affected students. Students are also encouraged to direct any enquiries and/or concerns through the established channels of communication within the university. The university does not conduct student discipline through the media.

On the article by News24

The university takes exception to the misleading headline of the article by News24, which seeks to portray the situation as a scandal when it is not. The reporter, Mr Prega Govender, has a known history of unfairly targeting and bashing Unisa in his reporting, for reasons known only to him. The headline of this particular article by him, which is not backed up by any credible facts even in the body of his article, clearly suggests the continuation of this bullying behaviour.

As a case in point, one needs only to look at one obvious fabrication in his article, where he refers to 'exam scripts of hundreds of Unisa students', when the very document source he claims to rely on makes no mention of any figures. We can only conclude that this is a deliberate fabrication intended to give some justification to his falsified headline.

That said, we would like to set the record straight and clarify that the situation is not a "scandal" as portrayed. Unisa has a balanced and reasonable approach to the use of AI tools like ChatGPT by students. However, in line with the principles in the Policy on Academic Integrity, the responsible and ethical use of AI tools is promoted. Recognising both the potential benefits and risks of AI in education, Unisa is working on measures to ensure that students are guided accordingly against misuse or unethical use of AI. These include:

- Finalising the guidelines and Policy on Artificial Intelligence
- Introducing a compulsory course on Academic integrity in 2025 and amongst others, students will be equipped with the necessary skills to uphold principles of academic integrity, including honesty, fairness, and accountability, as well as the responsible and ethical usage of Gen AI tools.
- Finalising the draft of the soon to be approved comprehensive university position statement on the use of AI in teaching, learning, research and engaged scholarship.

Furthermore, the university continues to take proactive measures and continues to use proctoring and AI tools such as the Invigilator App, Moodle, and IRIS to secure academic integrity. The university also promotes the usage of Turnitin, a web-based text matching software that has an AI content detector as one of its measures to protect academic integrity. The University remains satisfied on the efficacy of its measures in detecting acts of misconduct during its assessments.

As communicated via the link :

<https://www.unisa.ac.za/sites/myunisa/default/Announcements/May-June-2024-post-examination-student-communication>, students who have been identified for suspected academic misconduct should await for further communication from the Disciplinary Office on the additional steps. Enquiries relating to disciplinary processes may be sent to Examscriptdisciplinary@unisa.ac.za

We emphasise that the University process on addressing potential academic misconduct is underpinned by fairness and respect, and is focused on educating students, not simply doling so out of discipline.

/Ends.



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