
ACADEMIC INTEGRITY AND THE PREVENTION OF PLAGIARISM IN HIGHER EDUCATION: LEGAL FRAMEWORKS, CHALLENGES, AND TECHNOLOGICAL INTERVENTIONS

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ABSTRACT

Plagiarism remains one of the most persistent threats to academic integrity across global higher education systems. This study examines the nature, causes, and consequences of plagiarism, highlighting how pressures to publish, limited writing skills, excessive dependence on online material, and inadequate awareness contribute to academic misconduct. It provides a detailed analysis of the types of plagiarism and explores why scholars engage in such practices despite ethical and institutional deterrents. The paper evaluates the role of anti-plagiarism software, comparing major tools such as Turnitin, iThenticate, Urkund/Ouriginal, Viper, and DrillBit Extreme, while also explaining how similarity reports are interpreted. Further, it investigates the regulatory framework established under the Academic Integrity and Prevention of Plagiarism in Higher Educational Institutions Regulations, 2018, including legal foundations, exclusion criteria, procedural safeguards, and penalty structures. By integrating legal analysis with practical experiences from research environments, the study underscores the importance of promoting academic integrity, strengthening institutional responsibility, and adopting effective preventive measures. Ultimately, it argues that technological tools, legal regulation, and ethical academic culture must function collectively to curb plagiarism and uphold the credibility of scholarly work.

Keywords: Academic integrity; Plagiarism; Higher education regulation; Anti-plagiarism software; Research ethics.

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Introduction

In today's digital world, where information is just a click away, plagiarism has become one of the biggest challenges in academic life. With vast amounts of research and content available online, it is easy for individuals to copy others' work, sometimes even without realizing it. Hence, maintaining academic integrity and ensuring the originality of research has become extremely important.³ Although most people are aware that plagiarism is wrong, it still occurs frequently. One reason is that many individuals do not fully understand what plagiarism truly entails or how to avoid it. Plagiarism is not limited to copying text word for word; it can also include paraphrasing someone else's ideas without giving proper credit or using someone else's research without appropriate citation.⁴ Essentially, plagiarism is a form of literary theft, as original writing and ideas are protected under copyright laws, making plagiarism both an ethical and legal issue.

To help detect and prevent plagiarism, students and researchers often rely on online plagiarism detection tools such as *Turnitin*, *iThenticate*, *Grammarly Plagiarism Checker*, *Copyscape*, *Viper*, *Dustball Scanner*, and *Small SEO Tools*. These tools compare submitted texts against billions of web pages, journals, and databases to check for similarities. They are widely used by educators, editors, and publishers to verify whether a piece of writing is original or copied from another source. With the rise of the internet, copying has become easier, but so has detecting plagiarism. Understanding the nature of plagiarism, its types, reasons, and consequences, as well as the tools available for detection, is crucial for maintaining academic honesty.⁵ These tools not only help identify copied content but also support researchers in producing original and trustworthy academic work. ⁶By using plagiarism detection software and adhering to ethical writing practices, students and scholars can ensure that their research contributions are genuine, credible, and valuable.

³ *Academic Integrity and Plagiarism Video Part 1* (Directed by High Library - Elizabethtown College, 2023) <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u2k2VLILOTM>> accessed 21 November 2025.

⁴ 'Academic Integrity and Avoiding Plagiarism' <<https://psychology.ucsd.edu/undergraduate-program/undergraduate-resources/academic-writing-resources/writing-research-papers/academic-integrity.html>> accessed 21 November 2025.

⁵ Library, 'Academic Integrity and Plagiarism' <<https://library.leeds.ac.uk/info/1401/academic-skills/46/academic-integrity-and-plagiarism/3>> accessed 21 November 2025.

⁶ Dinesh Kadam, 'Academic Integrity and Plagiarism: The New Regulations in India' (2018) 51 *Indian Journal of Plastic Surgery : Official Publication of the Association of Plastic Surgeons of India* 109 <<https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC6219367/>> accessed 21 November 2025.

Nature of Plagiarism

In today's world, research has become more global, competitive, and fast-paced than ever before. Every year, millions of research papers, theses, and articles are published across thousands of journals.⁷ Along with this rapid growth, there is a serious concern about plagiarism, which is the act of copying someone else's work without giving proper credit.⁸ To prevent plagiarism, many universities and publishers now rely on anti-plagiarism software such as *Turnitin*, *Urkund*, *iThenticate*, and *Viper*. These programs compare a researcher's writing with billions of web pages, journal articles, and academic papers to detect any similarities. Over the years, numerous plagiarism detection tools have been developed to help identify copied or closely paraphrased content, making it easier for authors, reviewers, and institutions to ensure the originality of research work. Researchers today face increasing pressure to publish papers and complete their studies quickly. This pressure can sometimes lead individuals to take shortcuts, such as copying parts of others' work rather than producing original content. However, plagiarism whether intentional or accidental can have serious consequences. It can damage a researcher's academic reputation, lead to a loss of credibility, and in extreme cases, result in the retraction of publications or cancellation of degrees. Therefore, understanding and avoiding plagiarism is critical for maintaining the integrity, trust, and quality of scholarly research.

What Is Plagiarism?

Plagiarism refers to the act of using someone else's ideas, words, or data as your own without proper acknowledgment.⁹ It is considered a serious academic offense and a form of intellectual theft, undermining the integrity of scholarly work. For example, if a student copies a paragraph from a journal article or a website and includes it in their thesis without quotation marks or a proper citation, it constitutes plagiarism. Even if the student changes some words but the underlying idea remains the same, it is still regarded as plagiarism. Another example is a researcher using statistical data from a published study in their paper without citing the original source. Dr. Benson Honig, a renowned academic from McMaster University, defines major

⁷ M Suresh Benjamin and Sayed Qudrat Hashimy, 'Writing an Effective Legal Research Proposal: Standard Synopsis Format For Socio-Legal Research' (2023) 13 BANGALORE UNIVERSITY LAW JOURNAL 168 <<https://papers.ssrn.com/abstract=4487709>> accessed 21 November 2025.

⁸ Kadam (n 6).

⁹ 'Plagiarism | University of Oxford' <<https://www.ox.ac.uk/students/academic/guidance/skills/plagiarism>> accessed 21 November 2025.

plagiarism as “at least one full paragraph of text copied without any credit to the original author.”

Plagiarism is more than just unethical it destroys trust in academic research and misrepresents the true source of intellectual effort.¹⁰ Essentially, it is like lying about who actually performed the work. Plagiarism can take multiple forms, including: using another person’s work without acknowledgment, committing literary theft, presenting an existing idea as an original contribution, changing words but retaining the ideas without giving proper credit, failing to use quotation marks for direct text, and stealing someone’s ideas while pretending they are your own. For instance, a student might copy a definition of “machine learning” from an online article without citing it, or a faculty member might reuse sections of a previously published paper in a new article without acknowledging the earlier work. In all these cases, the core issue is misrepresenting someone else’s intellectual property as your own, which can have serious academic and professional consequences.

Why Plagiarism is a Big Problem?

Plagiarism has become a serious and growing issue in the academic and research world.¹¹ One of the main reasons is the dramatic increase in the number of research papers being published each year. In 2002, approximately 1.09 million papers were published globally, and by 2010, this number had nearly doubled to 1.94 million. Today, over 3 million research papers are published annually across thousands of journals worldwide. This explosion of research has created intense competition among scholars, making it tempting for some to take shortcuts, such as copying existing work or paraphrasing others’ ideas without proper attribution. Studies have indicated that one in three scientists admits to engaging in questionable research practices, including falsifying data, fabricating results, or committing plagiarism. This growing problem has forced publishers and academic institutions to adopt stricter measures. For example, major publishers like Taylor & Francis and Springer Nature now reject nearly one out of every four submitted papers due to plagiarism or excessive similarity with previously published works.

¹⁰ Md Sozon and others, ‘Cheating and Plagiarism in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs): A Literature Review’ (2024) 13 F1000Research 788 <<https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC11489843/>> accessed 21 November 2025.

¹¹ Guy J Curtis and Lucia Vardanega, ‘Is Plagiarism Changing over Time? A 10-Year Time-Lag Study with Three Points of Measurement’ (2016) 35 Higher Education Research & Development 1167 <<https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2016.1161602>> accessed 21 November 2025.

Such measures highlight the seriousness of plagiarism and its potential to undermine the integrity of academic research.

Why do Scholars Plagiarize?

Plagiarism can occur for a variety of reasons, sometimes intentionally and sometimes by mistake.¹² Understanding these reasons is crucial for both preventing plagiarism and promoting ethical research practices. One of the most common reasons is lack of knowledge. Many students and researchers do not fully understand how to properly cite sources or what constitutes plagiarism. For instance, a researcher might think that changing a few words from an article is enough to make it original, not realizing that paraphrasing without proper citation is still considered plagiarism.¹³

Several factors contribute to the prevalence of plagiarism:

Pressure to Publish

Researchers face immense pressure to publish papers for career advancement, promotions, or securing funding. For example, in many universities, faculty evaluations are heavily tied to the number of publications, sometimes leading scholars to prioritize quantity over quality.¹⁴

Lack of Writing Skills

Some students or researchers struggle with academic writing, particularly non-native English speakers, and may copy text from online sources instead of expressing ideas in their own words.¹⁵

Overuse of Online Material

The internet provides easy access to articles, blogs, and journals, which can tempt researchers to reuse content without proper citation. For instance, copying paragraphs from open-access

¹² 'Reasons Students Plagiarize or Cheat | Academic Integrity | RIT'

<<https://www.rit.edu/academicintegrity/reasons-students-plagiarize-or-cheat>> accessed 21 November 2025.

¹³ *ibid.*

¹⁴ Munir Moosa Sadruddin, 'Exploring the Causes of Plagiarism among Post Graduate Research Students- A Phenomenological Case Study Approach' (2021) 8 Journal of Education and Educational Development

<<https://journals.iobm.edu.pk/index.php/joeed/article/view/443>> accessed 21 November 2025.

¹⁵ *ibid.*

websites without acknowledgment is a common form of plagiarism.¹⁶

Poor Understanding of Plagiarism

Many individuals do not fully understand that plagiarism is not just word-for-word copying. Even paraphrasing someone else's ideas without giving credit is considered plagiarism. For example, rewriting a published study's methodology in slightly different words without citing the original source still constitutes plagiarism.¹⁷

Therefore, plagiarism is a growing problem because of the combination of publication pressure, lack of writing skills, easy access to online resources, and limited understanding of ethical research practices. Its consequences are serious, affecting academic credibility, career prospects, and the trustworthiness of scientific research. Preventing plagiarism requires both awareness and the use of tools that check for originality, such as Turnitin, iThenticate, and Viper, alongside strong guidance on ethical writing.¹⁸

Types of Plagiarism

Plagiarism can take many forms, each of which can seriously damage a researcher's credibility. Understanding the different types helps in avoiding them effectively.¹⁹ Some common forms include:

Blatant Plagiarism

Copying entire sections, paragraphs, or even whole papers without acknowledgment. Example: Submitting another person's research paper as your own work.²⁰

Potluck Paper

¹⁶ *ibid.*

¹⁷ *ibid.*

¹⁸ Munir Moosa Sadruddin, 'Exploring-the-Causes-of-Plagiarism-among-Post-Graduate-Research-Students-a-Phenomenological-Case-Study-Approach' [2021] Journal of Education and Educational Development <<https://www.bohrium.com/paper-details/exploring-the-causes-of-plagiarism-among-post-graduate-research-students-a-phenomenological-case-study-approach/814724288526417921-49554>> accessed 21 November 2025.

¹⁹ Minh Ngoc Tran, Linda Hogg and Stephen Marshall, 'Understanding Postgraduate Students' Perceptions of Plagiarism: A Case Study of Vietnamese and Local Students in New Zealand' (2022) 18 International Journal for Educational Integrity 3 <<https://edintegrity.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1007/s40979-021-00098-2>> accessed 21 November 2025.

²⁰ *ibid.*

Mixing ideas from multiple sources without giving proper citations.²¹ Example: Taking concepts from five different journal articles and combining them into one paper without referencing any of them.

Word Switch

Changing a few words or phrases but keeping the original idea intact.²² Example: “Economic reforms raised GDP” becomes “Economic policies increased national income” without citing the original source.

Mosaic Plagiarism

Combining copied phrases with your own text to make it appear original. This is sometimes called the “labour of laziness” type, where most of the content is paraphrased from other sources.

Self-Plagiarism

Reusing your own previously published work without acknowledgment.²³ Example: Submitting parts of a previously published article in a new journal submission without citation.

Ghostwriting

Having someone else write your paper or thesis and submitting it as your own.²⁴

Resourceful Citer

Using many quotations and references from other authors but contributing no new ideas of your own.

Therefore, plagiarism arises from a combination of lack of knowledge, poor skills, external pressure, and personal choices. Recognizing these causes is the first step toward promoting

²¹ *ibid.*

²² *ibid.*

²³ *ibid.*

²⁴ ‘Intellectual Property Rights For Ghostwriting’ (*Parker & Parker*)

<<https://www.parkerip.com/blog/understanding-intellectual-property-rights-of-ghostwriting/>> accessed 21 November 2025.

academic honesty, improving writing skills, and using resources ethically to produce original and credible research.

How Anti-Plagiarism Software Helps

What Anti-Plagiarism Tools Do

Anti-plagiarism tools are essential for ensuring the originality of academic and research work before submission.²⁵ Their main purpose is to detect copied or closely paraphrased content, helping authors avoid unintentional or deliberate plagiarism. These tools work by comparing a document against millions or even billions of online and offline sources, including websites, academic journals, books, theses, dissertations, and conference proceedings. When a document is scanned, the software highlights matching text in different colors and provides the original source of the content. Additionally, it generates a similarity report, which indicates the percentage of the document that matches previously published material. For example, if a paper shows an 18% similarity score, it means that 18% of the text is found elsewhere. Some level of similarity is normal, especially in sections like methods, definitions, or standard phrases, but a high percentage generally above 25–30% signals potential plagiarism that needs to be addressed.

What Anti-Plagiarism Tools Work

The process is straightforward

Upload Document

Users upload their file in formats such as Word, PDF, or RTF. Most tools do not scan images, charts, or graphs, so only textual content is analyzed.

Scanning and Comparison

The software scans the text and compares it with its vast database of online resources, institutional repositories, and previously submitted documents.

²⁵ Olena Zimba and Armen Yuri Gasparyan, 'Plagiarism Detection and Prevention: A Primer for Researchers' (2021) 59 *Reumatologia* 132 <<https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC8436797/>> accessed 21 November 2025.

Generating Reports

Within a few minutes, a detailed report is produced, typically showing:

- a) Total similarity percentage of the document
- b) List of sources where matching content was found
- c) Side-by-side comparison of the user's text with the original source, allowing easy identification of copied or paraphrased sections
- d) Downloadable report for record-keeping or submission with the manuscript

For example, a researcher submitting a thesis on renewable energy might find that a paragraph describing standard solar panel efficiency calculations matches a published textbook. The software will highlight this match and show the source. The researcher can then correct the citation or rephrase the content to ensure originality. By providing instant feedback and transparency, anti-plagiarism tools not only help avoid ethical violations but also enhance the quality and credibility of academic work. They are increasingly considered an indispensable part of scholarly writing and research publication.

Understanding the Similarity Report

A similarity report is not the same as a plagiarism report. While a plagiarism report indicates instances of improper use of someone else's work, a similarity report simply shows all matches between your text and existing sources. These matches can include properly cited material, common phrases, or standard technical terms, so some degree of overlap is natural. For instance, references, quoted text, or commonly used terminology in a field may appear as matches, even though they do not constitute plagiarism. The main purpose of a similarity report is to help authors identify areas where the text could be improved. Researchers can review the highlighted sections and take actions such as paraphrasing the text, adding missing citations, or clarifying the originality of their ideas. Most similarity-checking software also provides the option to exclude certain sections that naturally contain repeated or standard text. These may include:

- a) Title pages, acknowledgments, and certificates

- b) Bibliography and reference lists
- c) Abstracts and methodology sections
- d) Quoted material and properly cited text

By applying these exclusions, the final similarity percentage becomes a more accurate reflection of the originality of the work. This allows authors and reviewers to focus on content that truly requires attention and ensures a fair assessment of the work's uniqueness.

Implication of Plagiarism

Plagiarism can have severe consequences for both individuals and institutions, affecting academic, professional, and public trust.²⁶ Research papers may be retracted from journals, and universities can cancel degrees if instances of plagiarism are discovered. Researchers risk losing jobs or promotions, while institutions may face a loss of credibility or funding. Legal actions and fines may also be imposed in certain cases. These cases illustrate that plagiarism not only harms individual careers but can also damage the reputation of institutions and negatively impact society, emphasizing the critical importance of academic integrity and ethical research practices.²⁷

Why Anti-Plagiarism Tools Are Important

Anti-plagiarism tools play a crucial role in supporting researchers and students, not as instruments of punishment, but as aids for learning and self-assessment.²⁸ These tools allow writers to identify missing citations or quotations, ensuring that all sources are properly credited and reducing the risk of unintentional plagiarism. They also help improve writing and paraphrasing skills by highlighting sections that may need rewording or clarification. By providing a clear overview of similarities with existing work, anti-plagiarism software enables authors to ensure the originality of their work before submission, giving them confidence that their research meets ethical standards. Furthermore, consistent use of these tools encourages

²⁶ 'Consequences of Plagiarism: Punishment and Penalties Detailed'

<<https://www.compilatio.net/en/blog/plagiarism-studies-risks>> accessed 21 November 2025.

²⁷ 'Plagiarism, Its Types, Consequences, & Prevention' (*AIJR Publisher*) <<https://aijr.org/blog/plagiarism-types-consequences-prevention/>> accessed 21 November 2025.

²⁸ Lucia Morales and Amparo Soler Dominguez, 'Assessment for Learning: How Plagiarism Could Be Used as an Efficient Learning Tool' (2015) 12 *International Journal of Learning, Teaching and Educational Research* <<https://www.ijlter.org/index.php/ijlter/article/view/346>> accessed 21 November 2025.

responsible and ethical research practices, fostering academic integrity and professionalism. In essence, anti-plagiarism tools serve as both a preventive measure and an educational resource, helping researchers refine their writing while upholding high standards of honesty and credibility in academic work.

Popular Anti-Plagiarism Software

Several anti-plagiarism tools are widely used around the world by students, researchers, and publishers to ensure the originality of academic work.²⁹ Each tool has its own features, coverage, and strengths.

1. Turnitin (USA)

Turnitin is one of the most widely used plagiarism detection tools, particularly in schools and universities globally. It provides detailed color-coded similarity reports and allows a side-by-side comparison of the submitted text with the original sources.³⁰ This makes it easy for instructors and students to identify sections that require revision or proper citation. Turnitin is particularly popular for checking student assignments, theses, and dissertations.

2. iThenticate (USA)

iThenticate is a professional-grade tool preferred by major academic publishers such as Elsevier, Springer, and Taylor & Francis. It scans over 40 billion web pages and more than 130 million scholarly works, making it highly reliable for journal submissions and doctoral theses. iThenticate is mainly used by researchers preparing manuscripts for publication to ensure that their work is original and does not infringe on existing literature.³¹

3. Urkund / Ouriginal (Sweden)

Urkund, now also known as Ouriginal, is recommended by UGC-INFLIBNET in India for scanning academic theses and dissertations.³² It is widely used in Indian universities to detect

²⁹ 'Plagiarism Detection Software – Indian Institute Of Technology Goa' <<https://iitgoa.ac.in/plagiarism-detection-software/>> accessed 21 November 2025.

³⁰ 'TurnItIn | Innovation in Learning Center' <<https://www.southalabama.edu/departments/ilc/turnitin.html>> accessed 21 November 2025.

³¹ 'iThenticate | Graduate School' <<https://gradschool.utexas.edu/navigating/research/copyright/ithenticate>> accessed 21 November 2025.

³² 'Ouriginal: Text-Matching Solution - Plagiarism Prevention' (9 January 2021) <<https://ouriginal.com/>> accessed 21 November 2025.

plagiarism in research work and supports integration with institutional submission systems. Urkund focuses on academic and scholarly texts, making it particularly suitable for higher education.

4. Viper (UK)

Viper is a free plagiarism checker that is easy to use, though its database coverage is limited compared to paid tools like Turnitin or iThenticate. It is suitable for students or researchers who need a quick check of essays, reports, or smaller documents, but it may not detect all sources due to database constraints.

5. DrillBit Extreme (India)

Developed specifically for Indian universities, DrillBit Extreme supports multiple Indian languages, making it valuable for theses and research reports written in languages such as Hindi, Malayalam, or Tamil. It is used by institutions like UGC-INFLIBNET and other regional universities.

Institutional Use

For instance, Visvesvaraya Technological University (VTU) in India mandates that all Master's theses be scanned using Turnitin. The university sets a maximum similarity limit of 25%, ensuring that the research is substantially original while allowing for unavoidable similarities in standard definitions or methodology sections. By using these tools, universities and publishers can maintain academic integrity, prevent plagiarism, and guide researchers to produce high-quality, original work.

Real Experiences from Research Work

After scanning many theses and journal papers using tools like Urkund, Turnitin, iThenticate, and Viper, several patterns emerge:

- Turnitin detects more sources but sometimes marks common phrases as copied.
- iThenticate has the widest database and is ideal for journal publications.
- Urkund is accurate for short papers but limited for long theses.

- Viper is free and useful for drafts but less reliable for formal submission.

For example, one study found that the same thesis showed 20% similarity in Turnitin but only 13% in Urkund. The difference comes from the databases each software scans.

How to Avoid Plagiarism

Plagiarism can be effectively avoided through careful research practices and good writing habits. Researchers should take detailed notes and record all sources, use quotation marks when copying text directly, and always provide proper citations including the original author, year, and source. Paraphrasing should be done correctly by expressing ideas in one's own words, and citation management tools like EndNote, Zotero, or Mendeley can help organize references efficiently. At the institutional level, measures such as conducting plagiarism workshops, making plagiarism checks mandatory for theses and publications, and encouraging supervisors to review students' work can significantly reduce instances of plagiarism. Increasingly, publishers also require authors to submit plagiarism check reports along with their papers, reinforcing the importance of academic integrity and responsible research practices.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY AND PREVENTION OF PLAGIARISM IN HIGHER EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS (REGULATIONS, 2018)

The University Grants Commission (Promotion of Academic Integrity and Prevention of Plagiarism in Higher Educational Institutions) Regulations, 2018, issued on 23rd July 2018 in New Delhi (F. 1-18/2010(CPP-II)),³³ represent a significant step by the University Grants Commission (UGC) towards fostering a culture of honesty, originality, and ethical conduct in academic and research activities within India's higher education system. As mandated under the UGC Act, 1956, the Commission is responsible for coordinating, determining, and maintaining the standards of higher education across the nation. Recognizing the increasing importance of originality and transparency in scholarly work, these regulations were introduced to ensure that the academic and research output whether in the form of theses, dissertations, publications, book chapters, or any similar works upholds the principles of academic integrity.

³³ 'UNIVERSITY GRANTS COMMISSION NOTIFICATION UNIVERSITY GRANTS COMMISSION (PROMOTION OF ACADEMIC INTEGRITY AND PREVENTION OF PLAGIARISM IN HIGHER EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS) REGULATIONS, 2018 New Delhi, the 23rd July, 2018' <https://www.ugc.gov.in/pdfnews/7771545_academic-integrity-Regulation2018.pdf> accessed 21 November 2025.

The regulations emphasize that the assessment of academic and research contributions by students, faculty members, researchers, and staff must reflect a genuine commitment to originality and ethical scholarship. By doing so, the UGC aims to strengthen the credibility and global standing of Indian higher educational institutions (HEIs). Invoking the powers conferred by clause (j) of Section 12, along with clauses (f) and (g) of sub-section (1) of Section 26 of the University Grants Commission Act, 1956, the Commission formally enacted these regulations to provide a structured and enforceable framework for promoting academic integrity and preventing plagiarism in all forms of scholarly work conducted under HEIs.

This chapter examines the background, objectives, and key provisions of the 2018 UGC Regulations, highlighting their significance in ensuring ethical research practices and maintaining the sanctity of academic standards in higher education.

Curbing Plagiarism

Section 6 of the UGC Regulations, 2018 stipulates on curbing plagiarism which establishes a hybrid legal regime one that intertwines administrative law, intellectual property protection, Information Technology Act, 2000 (Amended 2008) and ethical governance in academia. It enforces accountability at both institutional and individual levels, embedding originality as a legal and moral norm within India's higher education framework.

1. Legal Foundation and Authority

Section 6 derives its binding force from the powers vested in the University Grants Commission (UGC) under Sections 12(j), 26(1)(f), and 26(1)(g) of the UGC Act, 1956.³⁴ These provisions empower the UGC to set and enforce minimum standards in higher education and to ensure the maintenance of academic integrity. Therefore, Section 6 is not merely advisory but carries regulatory and quasi-legislative authority, obligating all Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs) recognized by the UGC to comply with its provisions.

From a legal research standpoint, this section establishes a regulatory framework of compliance aimed at safeguarding intellectual property (IP) within academia, thus linking educational

³⁴ § 6, Academic Integrity and Prevention of Plagiarism in Higher Educational Institutions (Regulations, 2018)

governance to broader principles of copyright law, authorship rights, and research ethics.³⁵

2. Institutional Responsibility and Accountability (Clauses a, b, e, h)

Clauses (a) and (b) impose an institutional duty on HEIs to implement technology-based plagiarism detection systems and ensure universal accessibility of such mechanisms to all research participants.³⁶ This creates a positive legal obligation for HEIs to maintain due diligence in verifying originality before academic work is accepted for evaluation or publication. Clause (e) mandates HEIs to formulate and publicly disclose a plagiarism policy approved by their statutory bodies.³⁷ This embeds transparency and accountability within institutional governance, aligning with the administrative law principle of public disclosure and procedural fairness. Furthermore, Clause (h) reinforces the requirement of institutional repositories, ensuring open access and traceability thereby reducing duplication and facilitating the legal protection of intellectual outputs.³⁸

From a legal research perspective, these clauses promote procedural compliance, ensuring that academic institutions act as custodians of intellectual integrity rather than passive evaluators.

3. Individual Responsibility and Legal Undertaking

(Clauses c, d, f) Clauses (c) and (d) introduce mandatory undertakings and certifications from both students and supervisors, creating a quasi-contractual obligation under public law.³⁹ The undertaking operates as a declaration of authorship, carrying potential disciplinary or legal consequences if falsified. Clause (f) extends this responsibility to supervisors, reinforcing joint accountability in maintaining research integrity.⁴⁰ In legal terms, these clauses institutionalize

³⁵ Sayed Qudrat Hashimy, 'Comparative Insights Into Copyright Disclaimers of the United States and India' (2024) 1 Annual International Journal of Vaikunta Baliga College of Law (AIJVBCL) 170 <<https://zenodo.org/records/11084134>> accessed 21 November 2025.

³⁶ §6 (a) HEI shall declare and implement the technology-based mechanism using appropriate software so as to ensure that documents such as thesis, dissertation, publications or any other such documents are free of plagiarism at the time of their submission. § 6 (b) The mechanism as defined at (a) above shall be made accessible to all engaged in research work including student, faculty, researcher and staff etc.

³⁷ *ibid* § 6 (e) HEI shall develop a policy on plagiarism and get it approved by its relevant statutory bodies/authorities. The approved policy shall be placed on the homepage of the HEI website.

³⁸ *ibid* § 6 (h) HEI shall create Institutional Repository on institute website which shall include dissertation / thesis / paper / publication and other in-house publications.

³⁹ *Ibid* § 6 (c) Every student submitting a thesis, dissertation, or any other such documents to the HEI shall submit an undertaking indicating that the document has been prepared by him or her and that the document is his/her original work and free of any plagiarism. § 6 (d) The undertaking shall include the fact that the document has been duly checked through a Plagiarism detection tool approved by the HEI.

⁴⁰ § 6 (f) Each supervisor shall submit a certificate indicating that the work done by the researcher under him / her is plagiarism free.

the concept of vicarious responsibility holding both the researcher and the supervisor answerable for breaches of integrity. The inclusion of an approved plagiarism detection tool ensures the standardization of evidence, making findings verifiable and admissible in potential disciplinary or legal proceedings.

4. Integration with Digital Repositories and Intellectual Property Protection

Clauses g and h) Clause (g) mandates submission of dissertations and theses to INFLIBNET's *ShodhGanga*, creating a national digital repository.⁴¹ This aligns with global open-access mandates and strengthens India's compliance with international norms under the WIPO framework on authorship and access to knowledge.

From a legal research viewpoint, the repository system enhances traceability, authorship recognition, and deterrence of plagiarism, providing a digital evidentiary base to address future IP disputes. Clause (h) complements this by ensuring institutional repositories mirror national databases, creating a multi-level system of oversight.

5. Enforcement, Compliance, and Legal Implications

Though Section 6 primarily prescribes administrative obligations, non-compliance may trigger UGC sanctions, including withdrawal of recognition or funding. Moreover, plagiarism as defined under these regulations may overlap with violations under the Copyright Act, 1957, particularly Sections 51 and 63, where unauthorized reproduction of protected material constitutes infringement. Thus, this section indirectly bridges academic misconduct with statutory IP infringement, bringing academic plagiarism within a broader legal framework of enforceable accountability. From a legal research standpoint, Section 6 reflects a normative shift in India's academic law from reactive punishment to proactive prevention. It institutionalizes technological due diligence, mandates public disclosure, and promotes shared responsibility among academic actors. However, certain ambiguities persist, such as:

- a) the lack of clarity on the threshold of "acceptable similarity" before disciplinary action;
- b) the absence of procedural safeguards for accused researchers; and

⁴¹ § 6 (g) HEI shall submit to INFLIBNET soft copies of all Masters, Research program's dissertations and thesis within a month after the award of degrees for hosting in the digital repository under the "Shodh Ganga e-repository".

- c) the delegation of technological discretion to HEIs without standardization across institutions, which may raise concerns of unequal implementation.

For legal researchers, this provision offers a rich site for exploring the intersection between regulatory compliance, academic freedom, and intellectual property rights, marking a pivotal evolution in India's educational jurisprudence.

Similarity Checks for Exclusion from Plagiarism

The "Similarity Checks for Exclusion from Plagiarism" provision serves as a clarificatory clause within the broader regulatory framework of the UGC Regulations, 2018, defining the scope and limits of what constitutes plagiarism in academic research.⁴²

1. Legal Foundation and Purpose

Legally, this section is essential to ensure that plagiarism detection mechanisms operate within the bounds of fairness and reasonableness, principles that are central to both administrative law and academic due process. This section operationalizes the regulatory intent expressed in Section 6 ("Curbing Plagiarism") by differentiating legitimate similarities those arising from citations, references, or common scientific usage from illegitimate copying. It thus balances academic accountability with intellectual fairness, ensuring that originality requirements do not suppress scholarly referencing or lawful academic reproduction.

2. Clause-wise Legal Interpretation

i. Quoted Work with Permission or Attribution

This clause legally recognizes that reproduction of quoted material when done with appropriate citation, acknowledgment, or permission does not amount to plagiarism. It upholds the principles of fair use/fair dealing under Section 52(1)(a) of the Copyright Act, 1957, which

⁴² *Supra* § 6 Section Similarity checks for exclusion from Plagiarism

The similarity checks for plagiarism shall exclude the following:

- i. All quoted work reproduced with all necessary permission and/or attribution.
- ii. All references, bibliography, table of content, preface and acknowledgements.
- iii. All generic terms, laws, standard symbols and standards equations.

Note: The research work carried out by the student, faculty, researcher and staff shall be based on original ideas, which shall include abstract, summary, hypothesis, observations, results, conclusions and recommendations only and shall not have any similarities. It shall exclude a common knowledge or coincidental terms, up to fourteen (14) consecutive words.

permits limited reproduction for research, criticism, or educational purposes. From a legal research standpoint, this provision ensures the harmonization of academic integrity norms with copyright law, acknowledging that scholarly writing inherently relies on the synthesis and quotation of prior works.

ii. References, Bibliography, Table of Contents, Preface, and Acknowledgements

This clause excludes sections of academic writing that are structural, procedural, or formal components of a thesis or dissertation. These elements lack substantive originality and are often mechanically or conventionally formatted, meaning their similarity is functional rather than creative. In legal terms, such exclusions align with the principle of *de minimis non curat lex* the law does not concern itself with trifles ensuring that plagiarism assessments focus on substantive intellectual content rather than administrative or formatting similarities.

iii. Generic Terms, Laws, Standard Symbols, and Standard Equations

This provision establishes a doctrine of common domain within the academic context. It legally acknowledges that universally accepted scientific laws, terminologies, and mathematical symbols belong to the public domain, and thus cannot be subject to claims of originality or plagiarism. This reflects a parallel with Section 13(2) of the Copyright Act, 1957, which excludes ideas, procedures, methods, and mathematical concepts from copyright protection. Consequently, this clause affirms that plagiarism detection must not penalize the use of scientific conventions or standard formulations that form part of the shared corpus of human knowledge.

The “Fourteen Consecutive Words” Rule

The note appended to section above mentioned 6 introduces an operational guideline similarity up to fourteen consecutive words may be disregarded if they arise from common knowledge or coincidental phrasing. This quantitative threshold provides predictability and objectivity in the evaluation process, reducing arbitrary determinations of plagiarism.

Legally speaking, this clause can be interpreted as a due process safeguard, ensuring proportionality in enforcement and protecting researchers from unwarranted accusations based on minimal or unavoidable linguistic overlap. However, its application requires contextual

judgment, as mechanical reliance on numerical thresholds without qualitative analysis could undermine the principle of *mens rea* (intent) in assessing plagiarism.

Legal Implications for Research Integrity

The regulation establishes a solid foundation for fair assessment in academic research, yet several interpretive challenges remain. One issue is the lack of clarity around the definition of “common knowledge” across disciplines, which could result in inconsistent enforcement. Additionally, the “fourteen-word” rule, while pragmatic, lacks legal precedent or empirical support and may need further refinement through institutional guidelines.

Furthermore, the provision does not clarify the burden of proof in disputes over permissible quotation or attribution, creating potential procedural ambiguity. Despite these challenges, the regulatory framework promotes a balanced approach by integrating copyright law, academic freedom, and procedural fairness within the UGC's regime. The provision also serves multiple critical legal and procedural functions. First, it shields researchers from false positives in plagiarism detection software, ensuring that legally permissible similarities are not mistakenly penalized. Second, under Section 6(e), Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are required to establish plagiarism policies, and this section provides a statutory basis for such guidelines. Third, it ensures that plagiarism accusations are evaluated in both substantive and contextual terms, thereby safeguarding academic justice.

In the broader context of legal research methodology, this provision reinforces the idea that plagiarism is not simply about textual similarity but an act of intellectual misappropriation a distinction that is crucial from both legal and ethical perspectives. The “Similarity Checks for Exclusion from Plagiarism” section functions as an interpretive clause, clarifying the line between legitimate academic referencing and wrongful appropriation. It aligns national copyright norms with institutional research ethics, ensuring that plagiarism detection promotes integrity rather than hindering scholarly work. By codifying specific exclusions, the UGC supports a rights-based approach to academic integrity, protecting both the originality of creators and the legitimate use of existing knowledge by researchers. In doing so, the UGC establishes legally coherent, ethically grounded, and procedurally just standards for academic conduct within India's higher education system.

Levels of Plagiarism and Mechanisms for Detection, Reporting, and Handling

1. Level of Plagiarism

Sections 8 and its accompanying procedural clauses on detection and reporting together create the substantive and procedural framework for addressing plagiarism within Indian Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs).⁴³ These provisions derive their legal authority from the University Grants Commission Act, 1956, particularly under Section 26(1)(f) and (g), which empower the UGC to prescribe standards of academic conduct and mechanisms for disciplinary enforcement. From a legal research perspective, these sections operationalize the principles of natural justice, proportionality, and due process within academic governance. They not only define the degrees of misconduct (through levels of plagiarism) but also institutionalize a formalized process for its detection, investigation, and adjudication, akin to quasi-judicial proceedings within administrative law.

2. Quantification of Plagiarism – Legal Interpretation of Section 8

i. Level 0: Similarities up to 10% – Minor Similarities, No Penalty

Level 0 establishes a de minimis threshold, recognizing that minimal textual similarities may occur due to coincidental phrasing or technical language. This reflects the principle of materiality, ensuring that only substantial instances of copying attract legal or disciplinary consequences. From a legal standpoint, this prevents arbitrary penalization and ensures alignment with the broader doctrine of fairness in administrative decision-making.

⁴³ Section 8 stipulates on Levels of Plagiarism i.e. Plagiarism would be quantified into following levels in ascending order of severity for the purpose of its definition:

- i. Level 0: Similarities up to 10% - Minor similarities, no penalty
- ii. Level 1: Similarities above 10% to 40%
- iii. Level 2: Similarities above 40% to 60%
- iv. Level 3: Similarities above 60%

Section Detection/Reporting/Handling of Plagiarism

If any member of the academic community suspects with appropriate proof that a case of plagiarism has happened in any document, he or she shall report it to the Departmental Academic Integrity Panel (DAIP). Upon receipt of such a complaint or allegation the DAIP shall investigate the matter and submit its recommendations to the Institutional Academic Integrity Panel (IAIP) of the HEI. The authorities of HEI can also take suo motu notice of an act of plagiarism and initiate proceedings under these regulations. Similarly, proceedings can also be initiated by the HEI on the basis of findings of an examiner. All such cases will be investigated by the IAIP.

ii. Level 1: Similarities above 10% to 40%

Level 1 identifies moderate plagiarism, where there may be partial overlap in ideas or expression without full replication. The classification introduces graduated accountability, implying that sanctions must correspond to the extent of academic misconduct. This principle aligns with the doctrine of proportionality in punishment, a cornerstone of both administrative and penal jurisprudence.

iii. Level 2: Similarities above 40% to 60%

Level 2 represents substantial plagiarism, where the integrity of the work is significantly compromised. At this level, the act may involve systematic appropriation of another's intellectual work, potentially constituting a violation under Section 51 of the Copyright Act, 1957 if the copied material includes protected expressions. This level triggers institutional disciplinary mechanisms and can have implications for the researcher's academic standing, funding, or employment.

iv. Level 3: Similarities above 60% – Severe Plagiarism

Level 3 marks the highest degree of intellectual dishonesty, equating to wholesale reproduction or deliberate misrepresentation of authorship. It may warrant major disciplinary action, including withdrawal of degrees, dismissal from service, or blacklisting.

Legally speaking, such conduct may extend beyond academic misconduct into the realm of civil and criminal liability, especially if it involves the commercial use or publication of plagiarized material. Thus, this classification provides an objective and enforceable basis for institutional sanctions and potential legal remedies.

Procedural Framework for Detection, Reporting, and Handling of Plagiarism

This accompanying section establishes a multi-tier institutional mechanism that ensures fair investigation and adjudication:

a) Departmental Academic Integrity Panel (DAIP)

The DAIP functions as the first-level fact-finding authority. It embodies the principle of proximity that is, initial investigation by the department most familiar with the research

context. This step ensures procedural fairness and subject-matter expertise, reflecting the administrative law requirement that inquiries be conducted by competent bodies.

b) Institutional Academic Integrity Panel (IAIP)

The IAIP serves as the appellate and decision-making authority, reviewing findings from the DAIP. Its establishment institutionalizes checks and balances within the disciplinary process, preventing arbitrary decision-making. The IAIP's role corresponds to a quasi-judicial body within the university, mandated to apply the UGC Regulations consistently with principles of audi alteram partem (the right to be heard) and nemo judex in causa sua (no one should be a judge in their own cause).

c) Suo Motu Proceedings and Examiner-Based Detection

The regulation also allows the HEI to initiate proceedings suo motu, or based on an examiner's findings. This clause reflects the preventive and supervisory role of academic institutions, ensuring that misconduct is addressed even in the absence of a formal complaint. It mirrors the inquisitorial powers of regulatory authorities in administrative law, reinforcing institutional vigilance in maintaining academic standards.

4. Legal Implications and Procedural Safeguards

The structured reporting and adjudication process under these sections has several legal implications:

- i.** The two-tier panel system ensures that accused individuals have the opportunity to respond, maintaining procedural fairness consistent with Article 14 of the Indian Constitution.
- ii.** Failure to establish or follow these mechanisms could expose HEIs to allegations of negligence or non-compliance under UGC directives.
- iii.** Evidentiary Standards: Reports generated by plagiarism detection software and corroborated by the DAIP/IAIP become part of the administrative evidentiary record, forming the legal basis for sanctions.
- iv.** While the Regulations do not explicitly outline appellate remedies beyond IAIP,

principles of administrative law suggest that affected individuals retain the right to appeal to the UGC or judicial forums under writ jurisdiction.

Comments

From a legal research perspective, the provisions under the UGC Plagiarism Regulations, 2018 reflect a deliberate effort to codify academic misconduct into measurable legal standards, aligning with international frameworks such as those promoted by the OECD and UNESCO. This marks a significant step toward formalizing academic integrity within a legal structure. However, several normative and procedural uncertainties remain. The use of fixed numerical thresholds (10%, 40%, 60%) may not fully account for disciplinary differences, leading to potential inconsistencies in application. Moreover, the regulations do not clearly address the role of intent (*mens rea*), raising concerns about whether unintentional negligence and deliberate plagiarism are subjected to the same consequences. Additionally, the lack of a standardized appellate process or external oversight may limit procedural transparency and hinder consistent enforcement across institutions.

Despite these issues, the framework represents a notable development in Indian academic jurisprudence. It redefines plagiarism not merely as an ethical lapse but as a legally recognized academic offence, supported by codified mechanisms for detection and adjudication. When viewed through the lens of legal analysis, particularly in Section 8 and its associated procedural clauses, the regulations form the core enforcement architecture of the UGC's approach. By integrating quantitative benchmarks with procedural safeguards, the framework strives to strike a balance between deterrence and fairness.

For legal scholars, these provisions highlight the convergence of administrative law, intellectual property rights, and education regulation, underscoring how academic integrity has evolved into a legal responsibility. By introducing defined thresholds and embedding due process into institutional practices, the UGC affirms its commitment to fostering a research environment grounded in accountability, transparency, and justice. These elements collectively strengthen the legitimacy and ethical foundation of India's higher education system.

Penalties for Plagiarism

Section 12 of the UGC Regulations, 2018 constitutes the enforcement and sanctioning

mechanism of the regulatory framework on plagiarism.⁴⁴ It is grounded in the UGC's statutory powers under Section 12(j) and Section 26(1)(f)–(g) of the University Grants Commission Act, 1956, empowering the Commission to prescribe conditions and penalties for maintaining standards in higher education.

From a legal research perspective, Section 12 reflects a formalization of academic misconduct into an enforceable disciplinary offence, governed by procedural safeguards and proportionate sanctions. This section operationalizes the principle of accountability while embedding due process protections, ensuring that punishment follows only after misconduct has been “established without doubt” through a fair and transparent inquiry. Thus, it aligns with constitutional principles of natural justice, specifically *audi alteram partem* (the right to be heard) and *nemo debet esse judex in propria causa* (no one should be a judge in his own cause), ensuring fairness in both investigation and adjudication.

2. Procedural Safeguards and Due Process

Before any penalty can be imposed, the regulation mandates that:

- a) The academic misconduct must be “established without doubt.”
- b) All avenues of appeal must be exhausted.
- c) The accused individual must have been given adequate opportunity to defend themselves.

This clause embeds a procedural safeguard comparable to the standard of proof in disciplinary law, although not as stringent as “beyond reasonable doubt” in criminal law. It requires a standard of “clear and convincing evidence,” suitable for administrative and quasi-judicial proceedings. Therefore, this procedural structure ensures compliance with Article 14 and Article 21 of the Indian Constitution, which guarantee fairness and protection from arbitrary action by public authorities.

⁴⁴ Section 12 imposes Penalties for plagiarism, which encapsulates;
Penalties in the cases of plagiarism shall be imposed on students pursuing studies at the level of Masters and Research programs and on researcher, faculty & staff of the HEI only after academic misconduct on the part of the individual has been established without doubt, when all avenues of appeal have been exhausted and individual in question has been provided enough opportunity to defend himself or herself in a fair or transparent manner.

3. Penalties in Case of Plagiarism in Thesis and Dissertations (Clause 12.1)

Subsection 12.1 provides a graded sanctioning framework based on the severity of plagiarism,⁴⁵ corresponding to the quantitative thresholds established in Section 8.

i. Level 0: Up to 10% – No Penalty

This category reflects negligible overlap, invoking the de minimis principle. No disciplinary action is warranted.

ii. Level 1: 10%–40% – Revision Permitted

Students are required to resubmit a corrected version within six months. This penalty reflects a reformatory approach, emphasizing education and correction rather than punishment. It also ensures academic rehabilitation, consistent with the pedagogical role of HEIs.

iii. Level 2: 40%–60% – Suspension of Submission Rights

The one-year debarment from resubmission introduces a punitive dimension, signaling serious misconduct while maintaining proportionality. Legally, this functions as an administrative suspension, similar to disciplinary penalties in public service law.

iv. Level 3: Above 60% – Cancellation of Registration

This represents the severest academic sanction, effectively terminating the student's enrolment. Legally, cancellation equates to a forfeiture of academic status, permissible under the UGC's regulatory authority but subject to judicial review if due process is found lacking.

⁴⁵ *Supra* § 12.1 Penalties in case of plagiarism in submission of thesis and dissertations
Institutional Academic Integrity Panel (IAIP) shall impose penalty considering the severity of the Plagiarism.

i. Level 0: Similarities up to 10% - Minor Similarities, no penalty.

ii. Level 1: Similarities above 10% to 40% - Such student shall be asked to submit a revised script within a stipulated time period not exceeding 6 months.

iii. Level 2: Similarities above 40% to 60% - Such student shall be debarred from submitting a revised script for a period of one year.

iv. Level 3: Similarities above 60% -Such student registration for that programme shall be cancelled.

Note 1: Penalty on repeated plagiarism- Such student shall be punished for the plagiarism of one level higher than the previous level committed by him/her. In case where plagiarism of highest level is committed then the punishment for the same shall be operative.

Note 1 – Penalty for Repeated Plagiarism

The “progressive penalty” rule, escalating punishment by one level for repeat offences, reflects the principle of recidivism, a concept borrowed from criminal jurisprudence. It reinforces deterrence while maintaining procedural predictability.

4. Penalties in Case of Plagiarism in Academic and Research Publications (Clause 12.2)

This clause 12.2 extends the penalty structure to faculty members, researchers, and staff, reflecting institutional parity and shared responsibility.⁴⁶

i. Level 0: Up to 10% – No Penalty

No action is warranted, recognizing unintentional or minimal similarity.

ii. Level 1: 10%–40% – Manuscript Withdrawal

Authors are required to withdraw the plagiarized publication. This functions as a corrective

⁴⁶ Supra § 12.2 imposes Penalties in case of plagiarism in academic and research publications

I. Level 0: Similarities up to 10% - Minor similarities, no penalty.

II. Level 1: Similarities above 10% to 40%

III. i) Shall be asked to withdraw manuscript.

IV. Level 2: Similarities above 40% to 60%

i) Shall be asked to withdraw manuscript.

ii) Shall be denied a right to one annual increment.

iii) Shall not be allowed to be a supervisor to any new Master's, M.Phil., Ph.D. Student/scholar for a period of two years.

Level 3: Similarities above 60%

i) Shall be asked to withdraw manuscript.

ii) Shall be denied a right to two successive annual increments.

iii) Shall not be allowed to be a supervisor to any new Master's, M.Phil., Ph.D. Student/scholar for a period of three years.

Note 1: Penalty on repeated plagiarism - Shall be asked to withdraw manuscript and shall be punished for the plagiarism of one level higher than the lower level committed by him/her. In case where plagiarism of highest level is committed then the punishment for the same shall be operative. In case level 3 offence is repeated then the disciplinary action including suspension/termination as per service rules shall be taken by the HEI.

Note 2: Penalty in case where the benefit or credit has already been obtained - If plagiarism is proved on a date later than the date of benefit or credit obtained as the case may be then his/her benefit or credit shall be put in abeyance for a period recommended by IAIP and approved by the Head of the Institution.

Note 3: HEIs shall create a mechanism so as to ensure that each of the paper publication/thesis/dissertation by the student, faculty, researcher or staff of the HEI is checked for plagiarism at the time of forwarding/submission.

Note 4: If there is any complaint of plagiarism against the Head of an HEI, a suitable action, in line with these regulations, shall be taken by the Controlling Authority of the HEI.

Note 5: If there is any complaint of plagiarism against the Head of Department/Authorities at the institutional level, a suitable action, in line with these regulations, shall be recommended by the IAIP and approved by the Competent Authority.

Note 6: If there is any complaint of plagiarism against any member of DAIP or IAIP, then such member shall excuse himself / herself from the meeting(s) where his/her case is being discussed/investigated.

administrative measure, protecting the academic record's integrity while preventing reputational harm to the institution.

iii. Level 2: 40%–60% – Multi-dimensional Sanctions

At this level, the regulation imposes three cumulative penalties:

- a) Manuscript withdrawal;
- b) Denial of one annual increment;
- c) Disqualification as a research supervisor for two years.

Legally speaking, this combines administrative penalties (salary impact) with academic sanctions (loss of supervisory role), establishing a hybrid enforcement model within service and academic law frameworks.

iv. Level 3: Above 60% – Severe Academic Misconduct

This highest level adds:

- a) Two successive increment denials, and
- b) Supervisory disqualification for three years.

In addition, the regulation empowers the HEI to initiate disciplinary actions, including suspension or termination, under the institution's service rules. These sanctions are consistent with Rule 14 of the Central Civil Services (Classification, Control and Appeal) Rules, 1965, which permits termination for gross misconduct.

Notes 1–6: Contextual Legal Provisions

Note 1 (Repeat Offences)

Escalating sanctions for repeated offences reflect progressive disciplinary jurisprudence, ensuring proportional yet increasing deterrence.

Note 2 (Post-Benefit Discovery)

Where plagiarism is proven after benefits (degree, promotion, credit) have been conferred, the regulation mandates retrospective abeyance of such benefits. This reflects the doctrine of unjust enrichment preventing retention of advantages gained through misconduct.

Note 3 (Mandatory Plagiarism Screening)

Requires HEIs to establish pre-submission plagiarism verification mechanisms, converting technological due diligence into a legal obligation.

Notes 4–5 (Complaints Against Authorities)

Provide for vertical accountability by assigning jurisdiction over cases involving institutional heads to higher or controlling authorities, ensuring impartiality.

Note 6 (Conflict of Interest)

Mandates recusal of DAIP/IAIP members from proceedings concerning them, reinforcing *nemo judex in causa sua*.

Together, these notes codify institutional ethics and procedural transparency, consistent with administrative law norms

Legal Implications and Institutional Responsibility

Section 12 transforms the abstract principle of academic integrity into a legally enforceable duty. Once a violation is established, the HEI must impose penalties consistent with the prescribed framework failure to do so could constitute regulatory non-compliance under the UGC Act. For faculty and researchers, the imposition of penalties such as denial of increments or disqualification as supervisors carries implications under employment and service law, potentially affecting their contractual and reputational rights. Therefore, institutions must adhere strictly to procedural fairness to prevent arbitrary disciplinary action or subsequent judicial challenges under Article 226 (writ jurisdiction).

Conclusion

The evolving landscape of academic research demands a strong, legally grounded, and ethically

consistent framework to safeguard originality and uphold scholarly integrity. The UGC Regulations, 2018 particularly Sections 6 and 12 represent a significant advancement in India's effort to institutionalize academic honesty. Section 6 lays the foundational architecture by mandating institutional mechanisms, promoting technological scrutiny, and reinforcing individual responsibility, thereby cultivating an environment where authenticity and transparency are central to knowledge creation. Section 12 strengthens this framework through a calibrated, proportionate system of penalties that is both procedurally fair and legally robust, ensuring that academic misconduct is addressed without arbitrariness and with respect for due process.

When viewed together, these provisions form a coherent regulatory model that merges administrative law principles, intellectual property considerations, and academic governance into a unified compliance structure. This harmonization not only standardizes institutional practices but also elevates research quality by embedding accountability at every level—from students to senior faculty. Although gaps persist, such as uneven institutional implementation, limited avenues for external review, and the need for rehabilitative pathways for academics, the regulations nonetheless mark a decisive shift toward a culture of legally enforceable academic integrity.

In a broader context, India's alignment with global norms on plagiarism prevention supported by technological tools, clear procedural safeguards, and structured penalties enhances the credibility of its higher education system. As research ecosystems expand and digital scholarship accelerates, the effective enforcement of these regulations becomes essential for preserving trust, protecting intellectual contributions, and promoting a sustainable academic culture. Ultimately, the UGC's regulatory architecture provides not only a preventive mechanism but also a roadmap for strengthening ethical scholarship, ensuring that higher education institutions remain spaces where knowledge is produced responsibly and with integrity.