

## **Policy on Plagiarism and Deceitful Plagiarism in First, Second and Third Cycle Higher Education at Lund University's Faculty of Engineering: Background document**

The Swedish Higher Education Ordinance (SHO) Chapter 10, section 1 and 9 states that all employed by the University have an obligation to report suspected attempts to deceive during examinations or when academic work is otherwise assessed. There are many ways in which a student can attempt to deceive, e.g. through hidden notes during a written exam, use of prohibited aids during the solving of an examination task, using ghost-writers, falsification of data and collusion. In many cases, students are well aware of what is allowed or not and why that is.

The reason why the faculty of Engineering has a policy on plagiarism and deceitful plagiarism is that plagiarism *may* be an attempt to deceive and that it has become apparent that different views exist among students at different levels as well as teachers, tutors and examiners regarding plagiarism and deceitful plagiarism. The aim of the policy is to encourage the growth of a shared view among students, teachers, tutors and examiners on these issues.

The policy was adapted after submission for comments by students, teachers, programme representatives and heads of departments as well as by the division of legal affairs at Lund University and by people from Lund University Library. All suggestions from the division of legal affairs in the last round of submission for comments have been incorporated in the policy.

The aim with this document is to give a background to the policy. The reasoning in this document implies that plagiarism is both a juridical and a pedagogical problem and that it is somewhat difficult to draw a line between the two. An artefact that a student presents as part of an assessment may by the examiner be deemed as a *suspected* or even an *obvious case of plagiarism* but this does not automatically imply that the examiner has *reason to suspect an "attempt to deceive during examination or when academic work is otherwise assessed"* (SHO Chapter 10, section 1). If the latter is the case, the examiner is obliged to report the incident to the Vice-Chancellor of the University, but whether or not a suspected plagiarism is an a suspected attempt to deceive depend on such things as the nature of the plagiarism, the pedagogical situation in which the plagiarism was made etc. As drawing a line between what is allowed or not is not always straightforward, good communication between teachers and students, supervisors and PhD-students is needed. Hopefully, this document can serve as one source of ideas and thus help teachers design value judgement exercises to be used in their courses as a way of creating a shared view on plagiarism between teachers and students, supervisors and PhD-students.

We will in this text approach the problem with plagiarism from several different angles:

- Different definitions of plagiarism and Academic Conduct
- Learning Outcomes and quality
- Referencing and attribution
- Plagiarism versus originality

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- Smaller assignments
- Plagiarism versus deceitful plagiarism
- Plagiarism versus copyright
- Appropriate actions when plagiarism is revealed/suspected
- The need for coordination and a shared vision

Please note that although the focus of this document is plagiarism and deceitful plagiarism similar arguments can often be made for other forms of deceitful behaviour than deceitful plagiarism.

### **Different definitions of plagiarism and Academic Conduct**

Academic conduct is hard to define and it is perhaps easier to explain its opposite: Fabrication, Falsification and Plagiarism. The National Academy of Science (NAS) defined in 1992 academic misconduct (COSEPUP 1992) as:

*“Fabrication is making up data or results, falsification is changing data or results, and plagiarism is using the ideas or words of another person without giving appropriate credit.”*

Carroll (2007) notes that a commonly used definition of student plagiarism is

*“Plagiarism is defined as submitting someone else’s work as your own.”*

The underlying assumption here is that there is an ownership for texts, something which from a historical point of view has not always been taken for granted (e.g. Pennycook 1996). To summarise the history of written texts very schematically we have gone from seeing it as important to become a part of a tradition to seeing it as important to give an original, personal contribution.

Central to both definitions above is that plagiarism implies that it is not clear what the author’s contribution was (i.e. that the reader might be misled to think that the author’s contribution is larger than it really was). In what way and to what level of detail the author should indicate what his/her own contribution was varies from context to context. One way to describe this is to say that there is an implicit contract between the creator (author) and the receiver (e.g. reader) when any artefact is presented. Plagiarism can then be defined (Alveteg 2009) as

*“Plagiarism is a lack of self-reliance in design and/or wording as compared to the level of self-reliance anticipated by the receiver based on the context and form of the product”*

In academic writing this means for example that sources of facts that are not common knowledge should be referenced since the receiver expects that sources of such facts should be referenced. In visual arts and music, expectations are somewhat different. In classical music, for example, a composer might give attribution to others implicitly, in that a knowledgeable listener recognises a theme from another piece by another composer. It is therefore very important that the student is given the opportunity to learn what expectations are implied by writing ones name on an article, an architectural drawing, a calculation, etc.

## Learning Outcomes and quality

With the changes that came into force July 1, 2007 in the Swedish Higher Education Ordinance, the goals of a course should be specified as learning outcomes, i.e. descriptions of what the student who has passed the course is capable of doing. The learning outcomes should thus describe the level that has to be achieved in order to pass the course rather than the level towards which the course strives. The use of learning outcomes is meant to facilitate student mobility by making it easier for other universities to compare with their own courses, include courses from different universities in the same exam, etc. The underlying assumption is that the learning outcomes describe the course so precisely that it leaves no room for conflicting interpretations.

However, every teacher that has ever tried to interpret the learning outcomes for a course from another department or indeed another university realises that the interpretation of learning outcomes is often problematic. The syllabus of a course is written within a certain context and without that context it might be difficult or even impossible to acknowledge the details in the learning outcomes in the way that whoever wrote the learning outcomes intended. For a student, prior to taking a course, a further complication lies in understanding learning outcomes that describe something that the student is yet to master.

To help the student to a deep understanding of the learning outcomes and thus what the student is supposed to be able to do is this an integral part of the pedagogical task given to the teacher. For written assignments, there are many different things, regardless if they are mentioned explicitly in the learning outcomes or not, that contribute to the perceived overall quality of the work e.g.

- **Correctness:** Is everything in the report correct?
- **Relevance:** Is the contents of the report relevant in light of the task given to the student? Is there a good balance between scientific breadth and depth?
- **Structure:** Is the line of argument easy to follow? Does the division of the text into paragraphs increase readability?
- **Foundation:** Is it evident that the report is well founded in scientific literature? Is the referencing made in a fluent and consistent manner? Is the list of references complete? Are the references used trustworthy?
- **Cooperative ability:** If more than one author have contributed to the text, do the different parts fit nicely together or does the report consist of loosely attached bits and pieces?
- **Self-reliance:** Has/have the author(s) succeeded in formulating the text using their own words? Is the report a result of the work of the author(s)? Have the author(s) critically evaluated their sources?

There are, of course, other aspects of quality and nuances of quality aspects that might be important. What we want to draw attention to here is that there are many different aspects of quality to consider and that it is part of the pedagogical responsibility of the teacher to provide opportunities for the students to train their ability to understand and master these quality aspects.

It should be noted that many quality aspects that are acknowledged within academia coincide with quality aspects acknowledged by industries and companies. To be able to communicate in writing and orally with a clear line of argument that is well founded in sources acknowledged as important by the listeners/readers is valuable in

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many circumstances. The longer education programmes should therefore offer the students opportunities to train their communicative skills in a range of different settings such that the well known problem of transferring skills and knowledge from one context to another is made easier to overcome for the student.

The examiner is responsible for quality assurance of the assessment in the course so that only those students who have achieved the level of quality as described by the learning outcomes are given a pass on the course. Since plagiarism is a way by which the student may avoid learning the examiner therefore needs to

- 1) Investigate what opportunities exist for plagiarism within the course context
- 2) Ensure that the students understand what is required of them. Since drawing the line between what is accepted or not is often non-trivial, at least from the student-perspective, the teacher needs to do more than just handing out written information, or reading it out loud. The Programme Director has a special responsibility to create an overview of how these issues are dealt with in different courses, such that teachers of one course can build upon what teacher in other courses have already discussed with the students.
- 3) Design learning experiences in which students are given a reasonable opportunity to train the skills needed to attain the increased requirements specified by the learning outcomes as compared to the student's earlier educational experience.

It should be carefully noted that the obligation to report suspected deceitful behaviour to the Vice-Chancellor is not limited to the examiner. This obligation holds for all employed by the University. Even a rather weak suspicion of deceitful behaviour must be reported.

### **Referencing and attribution**

Handling sources and references is central in the academic tradition today. There are many reasons why it is so important to correctly refer to ones sources, e.g.

- To give attribution to those who rightly deserves it
- To show the reader that one masters the field
- To support claims made
- Defend oneself from criticism by showing the reader that others have come to similar conclusions
- Give the reader an opportunity to dig deeper

Some aspects of referencing might seem simple enough, at least when we limit ourselves to one referencing standard. Scientific journals usually provide long lists of examples showing how different sources should be written in the list of references and how to properly give a reference within the text. To follow such instructions is something that at least everyone that wants to become a scientist need to master.

A more difficult aspect of referencing is how to properly give a reference within the text in such a way that it increases rather than decreases readability. I have met many students who find it difficult to tell, by giving references, exactly what and how much information is taken from which source, a problem which is not seldom made even *more* difficult by the fact that the novice student is given a task which does not require an in-depth analysis. On the other hand, more experienced students seem often to be given assignments which require in-depth analysis which in turn often is experienced as a task where it is *easier* to give references in a clear way.

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To oversimplify this dilemma a bit, one might argue that the more limited and simplified the assignment is and the earlier in the education the assignment is given, the more crucial the assignment design is for the learning efficiency of the assignment. Ideally there should be a well-designed progression within the education such that the student is given assignments that successively demand more in-depth analysis, where the students are given more freedom and where the assignments become increasingly more realistic.

Another problem with referencing relates to the concept of “common knowledge”. Facts and circumstances that can be regarded as common knowledge, by the reader *and* the target audience, do not (generally speaking) need to be supported by references. However, it is important to realise that this does not imply that one is allowed to “borrow” expressions from others without giving due attribution. The idea is instead that knowledge mastered the author as well as the audience, can be expressed freely by the author (using his/her own words) without giving references. This implies that there is a progression in what the student is expected to give references for. A fact that a student doing her master thesis can successfully argue is common knowledge might need to be supported by a reference in a paper written by a first-year student. Indirectly, this also implies that there should be a progression in the kind of sources that students (normally) refer to. Sources that are acceptable in a paper by a first-year student are not automatically acceptable in a master-thesis.

A third problematic aspect of plagiarism is that the attitude towards plagiarism and authorship vary from context to context. A newspaper article or an article in a popular science magazine does usually not cite their sources so carefully, if at all. In radio and TV-interviews the interviewed scientist is usually not given the opportunity to give references. On the other hand it is taken for granted (and thus not self-plagiarism) that the facts explained by the scientist are either already published or soon will be. Whoever is interested in the details thus have an opportunity to look up these publications and study their references. It is not uncommon that textbooks, e.g. on chemistry or physics, and lecture notes fail to give references, or give references in a way that a student might not notice. In some circumstances, simply providing the name of a theory or a formula (e.g. the Pythagorean theorem) is considered adequate. The student thus experience a vast variation in referencing culture that he/she might need help in interpreting and understanding.

### Plagiarism versus originality

Biggs (2003) categorises different shades of plagiarism using the SOLO taxonomy

Description	SOLO-level
Simple copying	Unistructural (unacceptable)
”Patching” (joining phrases)	Weak multistructural (unacceptable)
”Plagiphrasing” (partly changing wording)	Multistructural. (insufficient?)
Conventional academic writing	Relational
Genuine originality	Extended abstract

What Biggs does not mention explicitly is that different sections of a scientific text in many cases end up in different SOLO-categories. In disciplines that rely on the use

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of advanced instruments, the method-section can often be classified as one of the less advanced SOLO-categories above. This since the same measurement method is often used in a multitude of studies and since the emphasis is on reproducibility, (i.e. that other researcher can repeat the study and get similar results) rather than originality. In the results and discussion section(s), however, there is typically more emphasis on originality.

Unacceptable paraphrasing, or “plagiphrasing”, is when pieces of text without quotation marks (but with references given) are *almost* verbatim copies of the original<sup>1</sup>. When inexperienced students write such texts it is usually a sign of a lack of training in writing and teacher feed back is usually needed for the student to acquire an appropriate writing skill. An experienced student, on the other hand, should during his/her education at the Faculty of Engineering have acquired the writing skills needed. Unacceptable paraphrasing in a master thesis should therefore normally be deemed as a suspected attempt to deceive. This in turn implies that there should be a progression in the standard of writing that is expected of the student and that education boards and programme coordinators have a responsibility to ensure that this progression is enforced in the education programme. At the third cycle this is a responsibility of the research boards and supervisors.

### **Smaller assignments**

There exists a multitude of different assessment designs at the Faculty of Engineering and it is not uncommon that lab reports, smaller calculation tasks, smaller programming tasks, a minor architectural drawing or some other artefact that is the result of some rather limited student work is part of the compulsory assessment of a course. From the perspective of the education programme, such smaller assignments are often motivated pedagogically by the opportunity they give the student to acquire skills by doing small, simple and limited tasks. These skills are later needed when the student is given larger, more complex assignment with a large degree of at a later stage in the education programme. A problem, however, is that a student who plagiarises lab reports or other small assignment, does not get the intended training. If the task is very simple and limited, which might be the case for e.g. simple lab reports and simple programming assignments, there might be only one possible correct answer. Without additional information it might therefore be impossible to judge whether or not the assignment is plagiarised.

The examiner is responsible for quality assurance of the assessment methods used. Complementary assessment methods, e.g. asking the student to give a short oral summary of some part of the handed in material, might be needed to ensure a high assessment quality.

### **Plagiarism versus deceitful plagiarism**

A plagiarised report can give the impression of being a high quality report in that it fulfils nearly all the quality aspects described above. However, if the student has not been self-reliant in his/her work, this impression of quality does not match the quality of the skills and knowledge acquired by the student. This is both a juridical and pedagogical problem. It is a juridical problem since the student might have had an

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<sup>1</sup> Note that an almost verbatim copy of the original *with* quotation marks would be wrong as well. A quote must be verbatim (verbatim meaning the same, word for word).

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intention to deceive the examiner with his/her plagiarism. It is a pedagogical problem since the plagiarism often implies that the student does not meet the quality standards as described by the learning outcomes. Unintentional plagiarism can be caused by e.g. limited language skills (in the language used) or a limited understanding of what self-reliance in writing is all about.

The more training a student has had in written communication, the larger self-reliance in writing it is reasonable to demand of the student. Education programmes at the Faculty of Engineering should, however, be designed in such a way that even an inexperienced student should know the basic principles that references should always be given and that verbatim quotes must always be marked as quotes.

This means that unacceptable paraphrasing, for which references are given, by students taking their first course(s) should normally be treated as a pedagogical problem only. Thus, Courses for beginners where written communication is an integral part should be designed such that the students are given an opportunity to get feed back on their writing, especially on their ability to formulate phrases in a self-reliant manner.

Unacceptable paraphrasing in a master thesis or similar should however normally be treated as a suspected attempt to deceive, even if references are given, and should therefore be reported to the Vice-Chancellor. It is not possible to decide exactly where the limit is, e.g. how many words that one can “copy” before it becomes unacceptable paraphrasing. The text must instead be judged from the context in which it was written and normal language use within the discipline in question. (It should be noted that establishing the *intent* is a key task for the disciplinary board while the *quality* of the work is a key task for the examiner.)

### **Plagiarism versus copyright**

While there is no single, unequivocal, commonly accepted definition of plagiarism there are indeed strict rules on copyright issues. These rules, however, are difficult to interpret.

There is no exact juridical limit as to how much text can be quoted. Quotations can instead be used, if they are properly marked as quotations, to the extent that is reasonable given the context. Overuse of quotations in academia is a sign of poor quality and it is therefore not common that quotations are used to such an extent that it violates copyright laws.

As for illustrations and pictures it is unfortunately much easier to act in conflict with copyright laws. An important rule of thumb is to always refrain from using pictures and illustrations if one is not totally sure that one is permitted to use them.

Master thesis reports in Sweden falls under the Swedish freedom of information legislation, and thesis reports are commonly publicly available through Internet. Consequently it is of essence that master thesis reports follow the copyright laws. To include a copyrighted picture/illustration in a master thesis is, as a general rule, not allowed even if a reference to the original is given. Even the use of an illustration that is redrawn (e.g. simplified) typically requires a permit from the copyright-holder of the original illustration/picture.

There is thus a need to be cautious when using illustrations and pictures and it is recommended that students ask their teachers/supervisors for advice if they have the slightest doubt regarding their right to use an illustration/picture.

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### **Appropriate actions when plagiarism is revealed/suspected**

It is essential for the credibility of the Faculty of Engineering that the measures taken when plagiarism is revealed/suspected are consistent, experienced as fair and are in accordance with current legislation. All employed are obliged to quickly report to the Vice-Chancellor if they have reason to suspect deceitful behaviour at examinations or when academic work is otherwise assessed. The legal office states that (in free translation to English)

*“There must be an objective basis for the suspicion, but the requirements for this basis is low. A suspicion with very shallow support may be enough for a report [to the Vice-Chancellor] to be required. A purely subjective intuition is, however, not enough”*

Plagiarism can, as described earlier, cause a teacher to misinterpret a student performance as being of higher quality than it actually is. Depending on the situation in which plagiarism is discovered, e.g. how grave and extensive the plagiarism is, at what point in the student’s academic career it is discovered, etc. different measures might be appropriate. These measures might include

- Informing the student why the examiner deems the work to be of poor quality and thus why a lower grade is given to the student
- Informing the student why the examiner deems the work to be of such poor quality that the student must redo the report
- Encouraging the student to sign up for a special course in academic writing
- Reporting the incident to the Vice-Chancellor. Note that if e.g. the teacher argues that the incident does not need to be reported to the Vice-Chancellor because the student obviously misunderstood the purpose of the assignment, other measures must be taken prevent this from happening again, e.g.
- Further informing the students taking the course regarding the requirements built into the assessment
- Redesign the course/section of the course such that future students will not misunderstand the purpose of the assignment(s)
- Redesign the education programme
- Rewrite policy documents

For the measures taken to be experienced as adequate and fair by the involved parties, an open climate is needed within the Faculty so that experiences related to these matters are shared and communicated. This open climate is a prerequisite for ensuring progression within education programmes. It should be noted that student work that clearly deviate from the expected/required level of self-reliance *always* should result in some kind of measure taken.

When an employee at the University has reason to suspect deceitful behaviour the rule of thumb is that the employee should not discuss the issue with the involved student(s). (It is, however, recommended that the department organise a meeting at which the student is informed about the suspicion of deceitful behaviour) It should be noted that a reason to suspect deceitful behaviour might arise during a discussion with a student, e.g. when a student is asked to clarify or discuss certain aspects of his/her work with the teacher. A student’s inability to explain or discuss such issues might imply valid ground for suspected attempt to deceive. Once such a suspicion has

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arisen, however, it is recommended that the teacher refrains from discussing the issue further with the student and instead report the incident to the Vice-Chancellor.

### **The need for coordination and a shared vision**

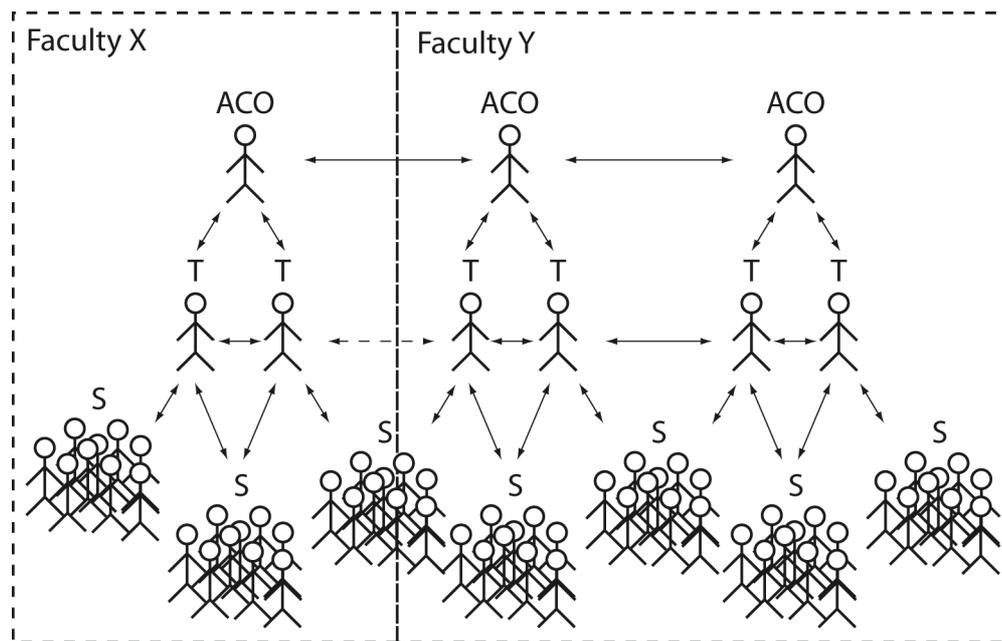
According to the Faculty of Engineering's strategic plan, "the educations at the Faculty should meet the highest quality standards by being developed and organised by teachers with a third cycle degree, professors and lectures, engaged in research or artistic development." (free translation from Swedish) To achieve this quality it is necessary to have a shared view on what good quality implies. An undetected case of plagiarism may result in a teacher misinterpreting a student performance as being of higher quality than it is. A student who plagiarises rather than creating something in a self-reliant manner misses an opportunity to learn. To strive for an increased awareness of what plagiarism is and what Academic Conduct is, is thus to work with quality assurance of the education.

Students that receive a degree at the Faculty of Engineering should have achieved the basic skill of self-reliance in creation that they need in their further career. As should be evident from the reasoning above, concepts such as self-reliance, quality and plagiarism are not trivial. Longer education programmes should therefore be designed in a way that ensures a progression in the required level of self-reliant creation, e.g. as regards academic writing, so that the students become ever more self-reliant the closer they come to taking their degree. All longer education programmes must therefore have well designed communication strategies for how these requirements are to be communicated with the students.

There are many ways to work to improve academic conduct among students and thus to deter plagiarism (see e.g. Carroll 2007) and in turn increase learning. One might motivate the students to learn, design learning situations in which plagiarism is either impossible or where the perceived advantage with plagiarism is minimised, design multiple assessment tasks that complement each other in such a way that plagiarism in one task makes it difficult for a student to pass the next task, etc. However, if our efforts are to be perceived as trustworthy there must also exist good opportunities for detecting plagiarism. It will not be enough to use only one method for detecting plagiarism, rather several methods need to be used. Using a text comparison tool, e.g. Urkund, is one method that should be used in assignments where such tools are effective. In other assignments, e.g. shorter lab reports, and calculation tasks, other methods are needed. The incidents of plagiarism that are detected must lead to measures that are experienced as fair and adequate and that are in agreement with current legislation.

In order to accomplish a shared view on these issues within the Faculty of Engineering, people are needed that inform and discuss these issues with students and teachers (see figure 1). A few key individuals, academic conduct officers (ACO), are likely needed, individuals who a part from discussing with teachers and helping them to inform students also can guide and assist teachers when an incident needs to be reported to the Vice-Chancellor. It is likely beneficial if these individuals

- Have a formal position that provides insight into teaching and learning e.g. director of studies, programme director or similar.
- Have contact with each other to promote a shared view within the faculty
- Have time allotted for this task



**Figure 1.** Our students are confronted with teachers from different departments and faculties. To establish a shared view in theory and practice as regards academic conduct a limited number of individuals ought to be given a special responsibility. These individuals would, like the Academic Conduct Officers (ACO) at Oxford Brookes University be a support for the teachers (T) who need help in deciding whether or not a student (S) needs to be reported to the Vice-Chancellor. To decrease the extra work effort needed by the teacher, these ACO should also aid in preparing the paperwork needed in such a report. Illustration taken from Alveteg and Josefsson 2008.

### On the origin of the policy

This document and the Faculty of Engineering policy on plagiarism and deceitful plagiarism have been inspired and influenced by many people in ways that are difficult to disentangle and present in a way that gives due credit to all involved. The policy prepared by the department of Environmental and Energy Systems Studies under the guidance of Per Svenningsson some 8-9 years ago have been used as a point of departure as well as the ideas of Lars-Erik Nilsson and the dual policy on plagiarism and deceitful plagiarism that was adopted by the University of Borås. Others that should be mentioned include

- The many teachers, PhD-students and innumerable students that actively participated in discussions regarding what plagiarism is all about
- The teachers at Lund University who participated and carried out projects within the pedagogical course “Academic Conduct: Students beyond plagiarism”
- Jonas Josefsson, Elin Bommenel, Carl-Mikael Zetterling (KTH), Jude Carroll (Oxford Brookes), Johanna Alhem (legal office), Per Warfvinge and many others who have contributed in different ways with their comments and ideas.

After a round of submission for comments in which students and teachers at the faculty of Engineering as well as Lund University Libraries and the legal office participated, the policy was restructured and reworked. After processing in the joint education committee at the faculty (Swe: Utbildningsberedningen vid LTH) the policy

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was once again submitted to the legal office for comments. All comments and  
suggestions from the legal office have been fully incorporated within the policy

The Swedish version of the background document was finished October 22, 2009.  
This is an English version of the document rather than an exact translation of the  
Swedish document.

Lund, May 12 2010

Mattias Alveteg, on commission by the joint education committee of the Faculty of  
Engineering

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