



SIKKIM ALPINE UNIVERSITY

Kamrang, Namchi, South Sikkim – 737126

(Established under Sikkim Alpine University Act, 2021)

PLAGIARISM & ACADEMIC INTEGRITY POLICY

(Policy Document – 2025)

Prepared by:

Office of the Assistant Director
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Recommended By:

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Approved by:

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Amendment Clause

This Plagiarism and Academic Integrity Policy is a dynamic and evolving document. It is subject to revision, modification, or amendment in response to updates in UGC regulations, changes introduced under the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, national and state-level academic directives, emerging best practices in academic integrity, technological advancements in plagiarism detection, and evolving institutional requirements.

Revisions may also be undertaken based on recommendations of the Plagiarism & Academic Integrity Committee (PAIC), the Academic Integrity Panels (DAIP/IAIP), or the Research & Development Cell (RDC).

Any modifications to this policy shall become effective only after formal approval by the Academic Council of Sikkim Alpine University.



1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Purpose of the Policy

The purpose of this *Plagiarism and Academic Integrity Policy* is to promote a culture of honesty, originality, and ethical scholarship at Sikkim Alpine University. It establishes a clear framework for responsible academic conduct, outlines acceptable and unacceptable practices, and provides mechanisms for preventing, detecting, and addressing plagiarism and related academic misconduct across all levels of the University.

1.2 Alignment with UGC Regulations

1.2.1 UGC 2018 Plagiarism Regulation Compliance

This policy is framed in accordance with the *University Grants Commission (Promotion of Academic Integrity and Prevention of Plagiarism in Higher Educational Institutions) Regulations, 2018*. The University adopts the definitions, categorization of plagiarism levels, similarity thresholds, and penalty structures mandated by the UGC.

1.2.2 Integration with National Education Policy (NEP) 2020

The policy also aligns with the NEP 2020 emphasis on research integrity, academic ethics, critical reasoning, and development of responsible research practices in higher education.

1.3 Commitment to Ethical Academic Culture

1.3.1 Institutional Values

The University is committed to fostering a learning and research environment rooted in:

- Academic honesty
- Intellectual responsibility
- Respect for original ideas
- Fairness and transparency
- Accountability in scholarly work



1.3.2 Maintaining Academic Trustworthiness

By ensuring that all academic work is original and ethically produced, the University upholds trustworthiness, credibility, and respect within the national and global academic community.

1.4 Applicability of the Policy

1.4.1 University Stakeholders Covered

This policy applies to all individuals involved in academic and research activities, including:

- Undergraduate and postgraduate students
- Research scholars
- Faculty members and supervisors
- Visiting faculty and adjunct staff
- Administrative and technical staff involved in academic submissions
- External research collaborators associated with University projects

1.4.2 Academic Work Covered

The policy governs all scholarly submissions, including:

- Assignments, reports, dissertations, theses
- Research papers, books, book chapters
- Grant proposals and project reports
- Conference papers, seminar submissions, and academic presentations
- Digital and creative works submitted for academic evaluation



1.5 Importance of Originality, Integrity & Ethical Scholarship

1.5.1 Central Role of Academic Integrity

Academic integrity forms the foundation of credible scholarship, effective learning, knowledge creation, and public trust.

1.5.2 Role of Ethical Scholarship in Research Quality

Ethical scholarship ensures:

- Authentic research outcomes
- Respect for intellectual property
- Credible and reproducible findings
- Prevention of academic dishonesty or misconduct

1.5.3 Institutional Goal

Through this policy, Sikkim Alpine University aims to nurture responsible scholars who contribute meaningfully to their disciplines while upholding the highest standards of academic ethics and professionalism.



2. SCOPE & APPLICABILITY

2.1 Academic Submissions Covered Under the Policy

The Plagiarism and Academic Integrity Policy of Sikkim Alpine University applies comprehensively to all academic submissions produced by students at the undergraduate, postgraduate, M.Phil., and Ph.D. levels. At the undergraduate level, this includes class assignments, project reports, seminar papers, laboratory reports, and term papers that form part of the assessment. At the postgraduate level, the policy is applicable to coursework submissions, fieldwork reports, research papers, and dissertations or theses that demonstrate advanced scholarly engagement. For M.Phil. and Ph.D. scholars, the policy covers every stage of research work including the synopsis, research proposals, thesis drafts, pre-submission documents, and the final dissertation or thesis. All publications arising from doctoral research, whether submitted before or after thesis completion, also fall under the purview of this policy.

2.2 Faculty and Researcher Submissions

The policy extends fully to the academic contributions of faculty members and researchers associated with the University. This includes journal articles, book chapters, monographs, conference papers, edited volumes, and any form of scholarly contribution representing the University. Additionally, all documents related to externally or internally funded research—such as grant proposals, project progress reports, technical documents, deliverables to funding agencies, consultancy outputs, or institutionally commissioned reports—are equally governed by this policy. Faculty are expected to uphold the highest standards of originality and ethical scholarship in all academic and research-related submissions.

2.3 Administrative and Technical Staff Involved in Research

Administrative and technical staff who assist in the preparation, compilation, drafting, or formatting of academic or research-related materials are also subject to the principles of academic integrity. Any official document produced with the potential to contribute to knowledge creation, project dissemination, or academic evaluation—such as research documentation, technical reports, white papers, or institutional data summaries—must adhere to the same standards of originality and authenticity as other academic work within the University.



2.4 External Collaborators and Partner Institutions

This policy applies equally to external collaborators, visiting scholars, and researchers working with Sikkim Alpine University under formal agreements, partnerships, or memoranda of understanding (MoUs). Researchers affiliated with external organizations who utilize SAU's academic resources, laboratory facilities, field sites, or intellectual support are required to comply with the University's academic integrity standards. Similarly, partner institutions engaged in collaborative research activities, joint publications, field projects, or community-based participatory research are expected to uphold these norms to ensure ethical and responsible knowledge production.

2.5 Special Provisions for Non-Scientific Disciplines and Indigenous Knowledge Research

Recognizing the unique nature of research in the humanities, social sciences, and indigenous knowledge systems, the policy provides special consideration for forms of scholarship where originality must be evaluated differently from standard scientific writing. This includes research related to Lepcha, Limboo, Bhutia, Rai, and other indigenous communities, as well as oral traditions, folklore, ritual practices, ethnographic documentation, linguistic field recordings, and cultural narratives transmitted across generations. Such work may not be adequately assessed through text-based similarity detection software alone, and therefore requires expert evaluation, field documentation, and contextual interpretation. Research in humanities and qualitative disciplines—such as literary analysis, cultural studies, translation studies, anthropology, sociology, and history—also falls fully under this policy but will be evaluated using methods appropriate to interpretive, descriptive, and context-driven inquiry.

2.6 Summary of Applicability

In essence, this policy applies to all individuals engaged in academic or research activities within Sikkim Alpine University and governs every form of academic output, regardless of discipline, format, or authorship. No academic submission is exempt from the expectations of honesty, originality, ethical conduct, and respect for intellectual property that this policy seeks to uphold.



3. DEFINITIONS

3.1 Plagiarism

Plagiarism refers to the act of presenting another person's work—whether ideas, words, data, images, figures, graphs, computer code, creative expressions, or any other intellectual material—as one's own without proper acknowledgment. It includes both verbatim copying and close imitation without citation. In accordance with UGC regulations, plagiarism is considered a serious academic offence because it undermines the credibility of scholarly work and violates ethical standards of originality and honesty.

3.2 Academic Misconduct

Academic misconduct encompasses all forms of dishonest practices that compromise academic integrity. This includes cheating, unauthorized assistance, misrepresentation of sources, improper citation, submission of work produced by someone else, the use of ghostwriters or contract cheating services, and undisclosed use of AI-generated content that misrepresents authorship. It also includes behaviours that unfairly distort academic evaluation or mislead examiners, supervisors, editors, or funding agencies.

3.3 Fabrication and Falsification

Fabrication refers to the intentional invention or creation of data, results, or evidence that did not actually occur. Falsification involves the manipulation, alteration, or selective omission of data, results, or research processes in a manner that misrepresents or distorts the true findings. These practices violate fundamental research ethics and compromise the integrity, accuracy, and reproducibility of academic work.

3.4 Self-Plagiarism

Self-plagiarism occurs when an individual reuses their previously published or submitted work—whether paragraphs, data, figures, or entire sections—without proper citation or acknowledgment. Although it may not involve taking someone else's work, it constitutes academic dishonesty because it falsely represents old material as new and original. In research publications, self-plagiarism also conflicts with copyright and authorship norms.



3.5 Paraphrasing vs. Original Expression

Paraphrasing involves rewriting someone else's ideas in one's own words while still providing proper citation to the original source. It becomes plagiarism when the paraphrasing is too close to the original phrasing, structure, or sequence of ideas, or when a citation is missing entirely. Original expression requires the author to contribute independent thought, interpretation, analysis, or synthesis rather than relying excessively on reworded source material.

3.6 Common Knowledge

Common knowledge refers to facts, ideas, or information that are widely known, widely available, and universally accepted within a particular field or discipline, and therefore do not require citation. Examples include well-known historical dates, established scientific laws, or universally recognized cultural concepts. However, what constitutes "common knowledge" may vary between disciplines and must be evaluated sensibly within the academic context.

3.7 Permissible Similarity (Discipline-Specific)

Permissible similarity refers to the acceptable level of text overlap in academic submissions. This limit is discipline-specific: scientific writing may tolerate limited similarity in methodological descriptions, while humanities and indigenous knowledge research require contextual evaluation rather than strict similarity percentages. Permissible levels are governed by UGC's similarity thresholds, but additional flexibility is provided for areas such as translation studies, folklore documentation, and oral traditions where standard software metrics are inadequate.

3.8 Exemptions from Similarity Checks

Certain types of material are exempted from similarity calculations and do not constitute plagiarism when overlap occurs. These include bibliographies and reference lists, properly quoted passages with citation, standardized templates, legal documents, commonly used protocols or methodologies, institutional forms, and formulaic expressions that cannot be altered. In projects involving indigenous or oral knowledge, traditional expressions that must be repeated verbatim are also exempt.



4. RESPONSIBILITIES OF STAKEHOLDERS

Academic integrity at Sikkim Alpine University is upheld collectively by students, supervisors, faculty, departments, and the designated Academic Integrity Panels. Every stakeholder carries a set of responsibilities that ensures ethical scholarship, original work, and accountability at all academic levels. The responsibilities listed below outline how academic honesty is maintained and how cases of plagiarism or misconduct are addressed.

4.1 Responsibilities of Students

4.1.1 Ensuring Originality

Students are responsible for producing original and independent academic work. They must avoid copying or presenting someone else's ideas, text, or data without proper acknowledgment.

4.1.2 Submitting Authentic Work

Students must ensure that all assignments, reports, project work, dissertations, and theses submitted to the **Departmental Academic Integrity Panel (DAIP)** are genuine and free from any form of plagiarism, fabrication, or falsification.

4.1.3 Correct Citation Practices

Students must learn proper citation, paraphrasing, and referencing techniques. Incorrect or missing citations, whether intentional or accidental, may be treated as academic misconduct by the DAIP.

4.2 Responsibilities of Faculty & Supervisors

4.2.1 Providing Ethical and Technical Guidance

Faculty members and supervisors must guide students in academic writing, referencing styles, use of sources, and understanding plagiarism. They must also explain the functioning and expectations of the **DAIP and IAIP**.



4.2.2 Ensuring Ethical Research Conduct

Faculty members must model ethical research behaviour. All manuscripts written by faculty must be ethically produced and must undergo plagiarism checks before submission.

4.2.3 Verification of Student Work Before DAIP Submission

Supervisors must thoroughly review drafts of dissertations, theses, and research work before they are formally submitted to the **Departmental Academic Integrity Panel (DAIP)** for similarity checking and evaluation. The supervisor's certification is mandatory for DAIP acceptance.

4.3 Responsibilities of the Departmental Academic Integrity Panel (DAIP)

4.3.1 First-Level Review of Similarity Reports

DAIP serves as the **first-level academic integrity body** within each department. It reviews all similarity reports generated for student theses, dissertations, term papers, and faculty submissions, taking into account the discipline-specific context.

4.3.2 Preliminary Investigation and Recommendations

When a possible case of plagiarism is identified, the DAIP examines the evidence, interacts with the student or faculty involved, and prepares a detailed report. DAIP is responsible for determining whether the similarity falls under Level 0, Level 1, Level 2, or Level 3 as per UGC norms.

- **Level 0 and Level 1** cases may be resolved at DAIP itself.
- **Level 2 and Level 3** cases must be forwarded to IAIP with recommendations.

4.3.3 Maintaining Department-Level Records

The DAIP maintains logs of:

- All submissions received
- Similarity reports
- Student declarations
- Decisions made at departmental level

These records shall be archived for at least **five years**.



4.4 Responsibilities of the Institutional Academic Integrity Panel (IAIP)

4.4.1 Final Decision-Making Authority

The IAIP is the apex decision-making body for academic integrity matters. It reviews cases escalated by the DAIP, especially those falling under Level 2 and Level 3 offences. IAIP ensures consistency in applying penalties across departments.

4.4.2 Approval and Implementation of Penalties

IAIP approves, modifies, or strengthens the penalties recommended by DAIP. It also ensures that all disciplinary measures are implemented fairly and professionally. IAIP maintains institution-wide records of academic misconduct cases.

4.5 Responsibilities of Departments

4.5.1 Awareness and Training Initiatives

Departments must frequently organize orientation sessions, workshops, and training programs on plagiarism prevention, proper citation practices, ethical fieldwork, and research integrity. DAIP plays an active role in these awareness programmes.

4.5.2 Maintaining Submission Logs and Coordinating with DAIP

Departments must maintain detailed logs of all academic submissions, including UG/PG dissertations, theses, and project reports that require similarity checking. These logs form the basis for DAIP evaluation. Departments must ensure smooth coordination between supervisors, students, and the DAIP.



5. PLAGIARISM CHECKING PROCEDURES

Sikkim Alpine University follows a robust, multi-layered plagiarism detection system designed to ensure fairness, accuracy, and context-appropriate evaluation of academic submissions. All similarity checks are conducted through approved mechanisms and under the supervision of the **Departmental Academic Integrity Panel (DAIP)** and the **Institutional Academic Integrity Panel (IAIP)** as per UGC regulations.

5.1 Mandatory Similarity Checks

5.1.1 Categories of Submissions Requiring Similarity Verification

All academic and research submissions produced within the University must undergo a mandatory plagiarism check prior to acceptance, evaluation, or external submission. These include:

- i. **Undergraduate and postgraduate dissertations**, capstone projects, and research reports
- ii. **Ph.D. synopsis, thesis chapters, and final thesis**, including pre-submission drafts
- iii. **Faculty research publications**, including journal articles, books, book chapters, and conference papers
- iv. **Project proposals** for externally funded grants or internal seed money
- v. **Reports submitted to external agencies**, including consultancy documents, technical reports, and deliverables under MoUs
- vi. **Institutional documents** that form part of academic evaluation, accreditation, or regulatory submissions

5.1.2 Submission to DAIP

All submissions requiring similarity checks must be uploaded to the **Departmental Academic Integrity Panel (DAIP)** through the designated portal or departmental office. DAIP is responsible for generating, reviewing, and recording similarity reports before allowing any submission to move forward for evaluation.



5.2 Approved Plagiarism Detection Software

5.2.1 UGC-Approved Tools

Similarity checks shall be conducted only using plagiarism detection software approved by UGC, such as:

- **URKUND (Ouriginal)**
- **Turnitin**
- **PlagScan**
- **iThenticate** (for faculty publications)
- Any **UGC-approved** institutional tool introduced in the future

The University will maintain valid licenses, access rights, and training programmes for using these tools effectively.

5.2.2 Software as a Screening Tool, Not a Final Verdict

DAIP shall treat similarity software as an **initial screening mechanism**. The final interpretation must always involve human judgment, ensuring discipline-specific and context-appropriate evaluation.

5.3 Human Review and Contextual Evaluation

5.3.1 Need for Human Review

Because software-based similarity reports cannot fully capture nuance, context, or the nature of certain disciplines, every similarity report must undergo a **human evaluation** by DAIP members trained in academic integrity standards.

5.3.2 Special Human Review Committee for Indigenous & Humanities Research

For disciplines where software tools are not fully appropriate, a **Human Review Sub-Committee** under DAIP shall conduct evaluations. This applies to submissions involving:

- Indigenous languages such as **Lepcha and Limboo**
- **Oral literature**, folklore, chants, and ethnographic narratives



- **Translations**, bilingual editions, and linguistic documentation
- **Cultural documentation** based on community traditions and rituals
- **Humanities and social sciences research** with interpretive or qualitative content
- Texts containing archival material or traditional expressions that cannot be rewritten

5.3.3 Basis for Human Evaluation

The Human Review Panel shall assess originality using:

- Authentic field notes
- Interview transcripts
- Audio/video recordings
- Community acknowledgment or cultural validation (when applicable)
- Supervisor certification
- Evidence of student's own interpretation, analysis, or contribution

5.3.4 Cases Not Suitable for Software Checking

Software similarity checks **may be waived or partially applied** when the content primarily consists of:

- Documented oral knowledge
- Translated texts where meaning cannot be altered
- Archival historical materials
- Sacred or culturally fixed expressions
- Indigenous stories that cannot be paraphrased

In such cases, **DAIP's human evaluation is final.**

5.4 DAIP Review and Forwarding Mechanism

5.4.1 Initial Screening by DAIP

DAIP reviews the similarity report, removes exempted sections (references, quotations, standard procedures), and determines the applicable plagiarism level.



5.4.2 Resolution of Minor Cases

DAIP may resolve **Level 0 and Level 1** cases within the department and instruct the student or faculty to revise and resubmit.

5.4.3 Escalation to IAIP

If the similarity exceeds Level 1 or involves suspected misconduct, DAIP forwards the case to the **Institutional Academic Integrity Panel (IAIP)** for further action, along with:

- Similarity report
- Written explanation from the author
- Supervisor/HoD remarks
- Evidence file (transcripts, field notes, etc., when relevant)

5.5 Documentation and Recordkeeping

DAIP shall maintain secure internal records of:

- All similarity reports
- Student plagiarism declarations
- DAIP review minutes
- Cases forwarded to IAIP
- Decisions and penalties

Records must be kept for **five years** for audit, accreditation, and regulatory verification.



6. SIMILARITY THRESHOLDS & PERMISSIBLE LIMITS

Sikkim Alpine University adopts the similarity thresholds prescribed by the UGC (**Promotion of Academic Integrity and Prevention of Plagiarism in Higher Educational Institutions Regulations, 2018**). These thresholds determine the severity of plagiarism and guide the actions taken by the **Departmental Academic Integrity Panel (DAIP)** and the **Institutional Academic Integrity Panel (IAIP)**. While numerical similarity percentages serve as a foundational guideline for scientific and technical disciplines, the University recognizes that certain fields—particularly in the humanities, social sciences, and indigenous knowledge systems—require contextual interpretation rather than strict reliance on software-generated scores.

6.1 UGC-Approved Similarity Levels

6.1.1 Level 0: Less than 10% Similarity

This level reflects a negligible amount of overlap, typically arising from standard terminology, common phrases, unavoidable expressions, or appropriate citations. Submissions falling under Level 0 are considered original and **do not attract any penalty**. The work may proceed for evaluation without any revisions.

6.1.2 Level 1: 10–40% Similarity (Minor Offence)

Level 1 indicates minor overlap that may arise from inadequate paraphrasing, improper citation, or the unintentional use of secondary sources. In such cases, the **DAIP** shall require the student or author to revise the submission and correct the identified issues. Level 1 cases are generally treated as learning opportunities, especially for students, provided there is no intent to deceive.

6.1.3 Level 2: 40–60% Similarity (Moderate Offence)

Similarity in this range is considered significant and indicates a substantial portion of the work is insufficiently original or inadequately cited. These cases must be reported by the **DAIP** to the **IAIP** for a detailed evaluation. Penalties may involve resubmission with a substantial rewrite, delay in thesis submission, or academic repercussions as per UGC and University norms.



6.1.4 Level 3: More than 60% Similarity (Severe Offence)

Submissions with similarity above 60% reflect serious academic misconduct. Such cases are escalated to the **IAIP** for strict action, which may include cancellation of the submission, suspension, or other disciplinary measures. For Ph.D. theses, this may result in cancellation of registration or denial of thesis acceptance. Faculty publications with such similarity may lead to disciplinary action under service rules.

6.2 Special Norms for Humanities, Social Sciences, and Indigenous Knowledge Disciplines

Sikkim Alpine University acknowledges that similarity detection software has limitations, especially in disciplines where originality cannot be assessed solely through text-matching tools. Therefore, special provisions apply to submissions in:

- Indigenous languages (Lepcha, Limboo, Bhutia, Rai, etc.)
- Oral literature, folklore, and ethnographic narratives
- Linguistic documentation
- Translation studies
- Humanities, cultural studies, and interpretive research

6.2.1 Optional or Partial Use of Similarity Software

For these disciplines, the use of plagiarism detection software is **optional** or may be limited to specific sections such as the English-language commentary. Core content—particularly oral histories, folk narratives, chants, translations, or sacred expressions—may bypass software checks because these cannot be paraphrased meaningfully.

6.2.2 Mandatory Expert Evaluation by DAIP Human Review Sub-Committee

Originality is evaluated through expert review rather than numerical similarity. The **Human Review Sub-Committee** under DAIP shall assess contextual originality by examining:

- Field notes
- Audio/video recordings
- Transcribed interviews or oral narratives



- Archival documentation
- Translation records
- Cultural validation or community acknowledgment

6.2.3 Validation of Oral and Community-Based Sources

For research involving oral traditions or indigenous knowledge, similarity is assessed based on **authenticity** rather than textual uniqueness. Students must provide:

- Precise transcripts
- Consent forms (where required)
- Supervisor certification
- Evidence of personal fieldwork

Traditional expressions, ritual texts, or culturally fixed phrases are exempt from similarity thresholds.

6.3 Summary of Applicability of Similarity Levels

While UGC's numerical similarity thresholds (Levels 0–3) serve as the guiding framework, their application must always consider:

- The nature of the discipline
- The type of academic work
- The originality demonstrated through analysis, interpretation, and fieldwork

DAIP and IAIP shall ensure that similarity judgments are fair, contextual, and aligned with both **UGC standards** and **SAU's commitment to protecting indigenous and cultural knowledge systems**.



7. CATEGORIES OF ACADEMIC MISCONDUCT

Academic misconduct encompasses a broad range of unethical behaviours that undermine the credibility and integrity of scholarly work. Sikkim Alpine University adopts a stringent stance on all forms of academic dishonesty in accordance with UGC regulations, NEP 2020 principles, and globally accepted academic standards. The following categories define the major forms of misconduct that may arise in academic writing, research activities, fieldwork, or publication processes. Cases of misconduct shall be examined initially by the **Departmental Academic Integrity Panel (DAIP)** and escalated to the **Institutional Academic Integrity Panel (IAIP)** when warranted by severity.

7.1 Plagiarism

7.1.1 Textual Plagiarism

Textual plagiarism occurs when sentences, paragraphs, or narrative structures from another source are reproduced without proper citation. This includes both verbatim copying and close paraphrasing that mimics the structure or idea of the original text.

7.1.2 Idea Plagiarism

Using another individual's original concepts, hypotheses, interpretations, theories, or arguments without acknowledgment, even when expressed in different words, constitutes idea plagiarism.

7.1.3 Figure, Table, and Image Plagiarism

Replicating charts, diagrams, tables, maps, photographs, or any graphical representation from previously published or unpublished sources without appropriate credit violates academic integrity.

7.1.4 Data Plagiarism

Using or presenting data collected by others without permission or citation—including datasets, fieldwork results, statistical findings, laboratory readings, cultural recordings, or community testimonies—falls under data plagiarism.



7.2 Data Falsification and Fabrication

7.2.1 Fabrication

Fabrication involves the intentional invention or creation of data, statistics, experimental outcomes, interviews, or field observations that never took place.

7.2.2 Falsification

Falsification includes manipulation, alteration, selective omission, or misrepresentation of data, materials, processes, or research instruments in a way that distorts the accuracy or meaning of results. Both practices are considered severe violations of research ethics and may result in disciplinary action by IAIP.

7.3 Ghostwriting

Ghostwriting refers to the submission of academic work written by another person—paid or unpaid—while claiming authorship. This includes outsourced assignments, theses prepared by third parties, or publications drafted by external writers. The University treats ghostwriting as a major academic offence warranting strict action.

7.4 Contract Cheating

Contract cheating occurs when a student or researcher hires an individual or service to complete academic work on their behalf. It includes the purchase of essays, dissertation writing services, unauthorized assistance from seniors, or use of online platforms that offer ready-made assignments. Such misconduct violates academic ethics and will be evaluated by DAIP and IAIP for appropriate penalties.

7.5 Artificially Generated or AI-Based Content Without Disclosure

With the rise of artificial intelligence tools, the University recognizes the importance of transparent academic practices. The use of AI tools (such as ChatGPT, Gemini, Copilot, or content-generation platforms) is permissible only for limited, supportive functions such as grammar correction, formatting, or idea exploration **provided that disclosure is made**. Using AI to generate substantial parts of assignments, theses, literature reviews, analyses, or project reports **without disclosure** constitutes academic misconduct. Undisclosed AI-generated content will be treated as a form of plagiarism or misrepresentation.



7.6 Improper Citation Practices

Improper citation includes incorrect referencing, missing citations, use of fabricated sources, or misattributing ideas. Even when not intentional, poor citation affects academic credibility. Examples include copying sentences with minor changes, citing sources inaccurately, or omitting citations for paraphrased material. DAIP will determine whether the act constitutes negligence (minor) or intentional deception (major).

7.7 Misuse of Collaborative Work

Collaborative work must clearly identify individual contributions. Misconduct occurs when a student or researcher:

- Claims credit for work primarily done by collaborators
- Submits parts of group work as individual work
- Excludes contributors unfairly
- Uses collaborative data for personal publications without consent

Such misuse may lead to investigation by IAIP, especially in cases involving funded research or multi-author projects.

7.8 Violation of Ethical Norms in Fieldwork

Academic misconduct also includes unethical behaviour during fieldwork or community-based research, such as:

- Conducting interviews or surveys without informed consent
- Misrepresenting community permissions
- Misusing cultural or indigenous knowledge
- Recording or documenting rituals without approval
- Exploiting tribal or vulnerable groups
- Failing to maintain confidentiality of respondents

For research in indigenous communities, violation of ethical protocols may result in stricter penalties given the cultural sensitivity involved. DAIP is responsible for verifying ethical clearance before accepting fieldwork-based submissions.



7.9 Summary

Academic misconduct in any form erodes the quality of scholarship and damages the reputation of the institution. All stakeholders are expected to uphold the highest standards of ethical behaviour. The DAIP and IAIP retain the authority to interpret, classify, and penalize misconduct in alignment with UGC regulations and institutional values.



8. EXEMPTIONS

Not all textual similarities constitute plagiarism. Sikkim Alpine University recognizes that certain portions of academic and research work naturally contain repeated, standardized, or culturally fixed content that cannot be altered. Therefore, these components are exempt from similarity assessment and do not count toward plagiarism calculations. These exemptions apply across all disciplines, with additional provisions for humanities, social sciences, and indigenous knowledge systems.

8.1 Bibliographic and Reference Material

8.1.1 References, Citations, and Bibliographies

Bibliographies, reference lists, footnotes, citations, and endnotes are exempt from similarity checks. These sections follow standardized formats (APA, MLA, Chicago, etc.) and will naturally show overlap with other documents. Similarity software routinely excludes these, but DAIP ensures manual verification when necessary.

8.2 Standard or Commonly Used Academic Elements

8.2.1 Standard Definitions and Terminologies

Definitions of widely accepted concepts, scientific laws, standard terminologies, and textbook-level descriptions are exempt from being treated as plagiarism. Such content is generally uniform across writings and cannot be rephrased meaningfully without losing precision.

8.2.2 Repetitive Legal or Procedural Statements

Policies, guidelines, consent forms, experimental protocols, legal disclaimers, and procedural descriptions that follow mandatory formats are exempt from similarity analysis. These statements are standardized across institutions and disciplines, and repetition is unavoidable.

8.3 Common Knowledge



8.3.1 Universally Known and Non-Attributable Facts

Information considered “common knowledge”—such as well-known historical events, geographical facts, widely recognized cultural practices, or universally accepted scientific truths—is exempt from plagiarism consideration. Since such facts are public knowledge, they do not require citation or contribute to similarity percentage.

8.4 Institutional and Administrative Documents

8.4.1 Forms, Templates, and Official Documents

Institutionally mandated templates, cover pages, approval formats, ethics forms, data sheets, acknowledgments, and standardized University documents are exempt from similarity evaluation. These materials follow fixed institutional formats and therefore recur verbatim across submissions.

8.5 Cultural and Indigenous Knowledge Exemptions

8.5.1 Fixed Cultural or Ritual Descriptions

Descriptions of cultural rituals, traditional practices, ceremonial scripts, prayers, chants, oral narratives, genealogical accounts, or folklore that must be recorded verbatim are exempt from similarity checks. In many indigenous communities, including Lepcha, Limboo, Bhutia, and Rai groups, such expressions are traditionally fixed and cannot be altered without loss of meaning.

8.5.2 Attribution of Oral Sources

Orally transmitted knowledge—such as interviews, oral histories, folk stories, community teachings, ritual explanations, or linguistic corpora—when documented with proper attribution, consent, and field notes, is exempt from standard plagiarism thresholds. Instead, originality is validated by DAIP’s **Human Review Sub-Committee** through examination of transcripts, field documentation, and supervisor certification.



8.6 Summary of Exemptions

These exemptions ensure that students and researchers are not penalized for unavoidable textual overlap and that academic integrity is assessed fairly across disciplines. The DAIP is responsible for interpreting exemptions appropriately, while the IAIP ensures consistency in their application across the University.



9. ACADEMIC INTEGRITY WORKFLOW

Sikkim Alpine University follows a systematic and transparent Academic Integrity Workflow to ensure fair, consistent, and accountable handling of plagiarism cases. The workflow aligns with UGC regulations and incorporates both software-assisted and expert-based evaluations. Each submission passes through clearly defined stages—starting from submission, similarity checking, departmental review, institutional approval, and finally, the implementation of decisions. The process ensures that academic integrity is maintained across all levels of scholarship.

9.1 Submission Stage

9.1.1 Initial Submission by Student or Faculty

All academic documents—including assignments, dissertations, theses, project reports, faculty publications, and grant proposals—must be formally submitted to the **Departmental Academic Integrity Panel (DAIP)** through the designated submission mechanism. Submissions must include required forms such as plagiarism declarations, supervisor endorsements, and ethics approval (if applicable).

9.2 Similarity Check

9.2.1 Tool-Based Similarity Check

Upon submission, DAIP initiates a similarity check using UGC-approved plagiarism detection software (e.g., Turnitin, URKUND, PlagScan). The raw similarity report is generated and verified for exclusions such as references, quotations, and standard templates.

9.2.2 Expert Panel Review (Non-Scientific Disciplines)

For research in indigenous languages, oral traditions, translations, cultural documentation, or humanities disciplines, a tool-generated similarity score may not be sufficient. In such cases, the **Human Review Sub-Committee** under DAIP evaluates the submission using field notes, transcripts, recordings, and contextual analysis to determine originality.



9.3 Submission of Report to DAIP

9.3.1 DAIP Receives the Similarity Report

Once the similarity check and expert review (if applicable) are completed, the resulting report is formally submitted to the DAIP for evaluation. The report includes the similarity percentage, identified overlaps, exempted content, and any expert observations.

9.4 DAIP Review and Recommendations

9.4.1 Department-Level Analysis

DAIP carefully examines the similarity report, validates the nature of overlaps, assesses intent (negligence vs. misconduct), and classifies the case as Level 0, 1, 2, or 3 based on UGC thresholds.

9.4.2 Recommendations

DAIP may:

- Approve the submission (Level 0)
- Instruct revision and resubmission (Level 1)
- Forward the case to IAIP for action (Level 2 & 3)
- Attach supervisor and department remarks

The DAIP's review is documented and archived.

9.5 Forwarding to IAIP (Level 2 and Level 3 Cases)

9.5.1 Escalation Procedure

Cases classified as **Level 2 (40–60%)** or **Level 3 (>60%)** are escalated to the **Institutional Academic Integrity Panel (IAIP)** along with all supporting documents, similarity reports, explanations, and departmental recommendations.

9.5.2 IAIP Proceedings

IAIP conducts hearings, interacts with the concerned candidate(s), evaluates all evidence, and ensures due process before arriving at a decision.



9.6 Final Decision

9.6.1 IAIP's Role in Decision Making

IAIP issues the final decision for moderate and severe offences. Decisions may include rewriting, resubmission, rejection, penalty imposition, suspension, or cancellation of thesis/work, depending on the severity.

9.6.2 Communication of Decision

The final decision is communicated formally to:

- The concerned student/faculty
- The department
- The controller of examinations (if applicable)
- The supervisor
- Academic administration

9.7 Penalty Implementation

9.7.1 Execution of Penalties

Departments, in coordination with the Registrar's Office and Examination Section, implement the penalties approved by IAIP. Penalties may involve:

- Resubmission deadlines
- Restrictions on academic progression
- Administrative disciplinary action

Compliance is monitored by DAIP.

9.8 Record Maintenance

9.8.1 Documentation and Archiving

DAIP maintains complete records of:

- Original submissions
- Similarity reports
- Evaluation forms
- Penalty decisions
- Correspondence with IAIP



IAIP maintains institutional-level records for all Level 2 and Level 3 cases. All records are archived for a **minimum of five years** for internal audit, NAAC/NIRF submissions, and UGC compliance.

10. PENALTIES FOR STUDENTS (UG/PG/PHD) AND ACCEPTABLE SIMILARITY BENCHMARKS

Sikkim Alpine University adopts the UGC 2018 Plagiarism Regulations for determining penalties while also introducing institution-specific similarity benchmarks to guide students, supervisors, faculty, and DAIP in preparing drafts before final submission. These benchmarks help establish clear expectations of originality for different academic levels and ensure that similarity is assessed fairly and contextually.

10.1 Acceptable Similarity Benchmarks (SAU Institutional Norms)

Before applying UGC-prescribed penalty levels, the University establishes internal benchmarks to define what constitutes “good”, “acceptable”, or “requires revision” similarity levels for various categories of scholars.

10.1.1 Ph.D. Theses – Ideal & Acceptable Levels

Ph.D. research demands the highest degree of originality. Therefore, the following similarity levels apply before penalty consideration:

- **Below 10% similarity** → *Considered Good and Ideal*
- **10–15% similarity** → *Acceptable with minor corrections*
- **Above 15% similarity** → *Must be revised before DAIP submission*

Methodology sections may show slightly higher overlap if properly cited, but conceptual and analytical sections must remain original.

10.1.2 Faculty Publications – Ideal & Acceptable Levels

Faculty members must model ethical scholarship. Acceptable pre-submission similarity levels are:

- **Below 10% similarity** → *Good and Ideal*
- **10–20% similarity** → *Acceptable with proper citation and justification*
- **Above 20% similarity** → *Requires revision prior to journal submission*

These norms help maintain institutional credibility in scientific and academic publishing.



10.1.3 UG and PG Dissertations / Project Reports

Recognizing that UG and PG students are still learning academic writing, slightly higher flexibility is provided:

- **Below 15% similarity** → *Considered Good*
- **15–25% similarity** → *Acceptable but requires revision before DAIP submission*
- **Above 25% similarity** → *Must be rewritten under supervisor guidance before similarity checking*

Students must ensure that results, discussion, and interpretations are entirely original.

10.1.4 Humanities, Social Sciences & Indigenous Knowledge Research

For disciplines relying on oral narratives, translations, folklore, cultural documentation, or indigenous knowledge systems:

- Software-based similarity checks may be **optional**
- Expert review **supersedes numerical similarity**
- Fixed cultural expressions and ritual phrases are **exempt**
- Oral data is validated through field notes, transcripts, and supervisor certification

These norms ensure culturally sensitive evaluation aligned with NEP 2020 principles.

10.2 UGC Similarity Levels and Penalties

Once the above institutional benchmarks are applied, submissions are evaluated according to UGC's plagiarism levels to determine penalties. The DAIP handles minor cases, while IAIP addresses moderate to severe offences.

10.2.1 Penalties for Level 1 Offences (10–40% Similarity)

Level 1 indicates minor academic lapses—often unintentional—and is handled by DAIP.

10.2.1.1 Warning and Revision

Students receive an official warning and must revise and resubmit the work within the stipulated time.



10.2.1.2 Mandatory Academic Integrity Workshop

Students must attend a workshop on research writing, citation practices, and plagiarism prevention. Proof of participation is required for acceptance of the revised work.

10.2.2 Penalties for Level 2 Offences (40–60% Similarity)

Level 2 reflects significant overlap and potential misconduct. These cases are forwarded to IAIP.

10.2.2.1 Resubmission with Penalty

Students may revise and resubmit their work with penalty implications such as marks reduction.

10.2.2.2 Grade Reduction

IAIP may reduce marks or assign a lower grade based on the severity of similarity.

10.2.2.3 Delay in Thesis Submission

For PG and Ph.D. students, IAIP may impose delays up to one semester if originality requirements are not met.

10.2.3 Penalties for Level 3 Offences (>60% Similarity)

Level 3 indicates substantial plagiarism or intentional misconduct. IAIP imposes the following penalties:

10.2.3.1 Cancellation of Submission

The assignment, dissertation, or thesis may be rejected in its entirety, requiring complete rewriting.

10.2.3.2 Suspension (Severe Cases)

Intentional plagiarism—such as copying large sections, using purchased assignments, or ghostwriting—may lead to suspension.

10.2.3.3 Debarment for One Semester

For serious cases, particularly at PG and Ph.D. levels, IAIP may debar the student for one academic semester.



10.3 Special Provisions for Repeat Offences

10.3.1 Progressive Penalties

Repeated plagiarism—at any level—results in progressively harsher penalties regardless of similarity percentage.

10.3.2 Supervisor Notification

Supervisors are notified of all penalties. Repeated offences within a department may trigger department-level interventions.

10.4 Appeals

Students may appeal an IAIP decision through the formal grievance mechanism outlined in Section 11. Appeals must be submitted within 15 working days from the date of the decision.



11. PENALTIES FOR FACULTY & RESEARCHERS

Sikkim Alpine University expects its faculty members and researchers to uphold the highest standards of academic honesty and originality. The University follows UGC's plagiarism regulations while also applying additional institutional benchmarks to ensure clarity, fairness, and discipline-wide consistency. All faculty manuscripts, research proposals, consultancy reports, and scholarly outputs are subject to similarity evaluation by the **Departmental Academic Integrity Panel (DAIP)** and, when required, the **Institutional Academic Integrity Panel (IAIP)**. Penalties depend on the severity of similarity and the intent behind the misconduct.

11.1 Acceptable Similarity for Faculty & Researchers

Faculty members and researchers must ensure that all manuscripts and academic submissions maintain a high degree of originality. However, the University recognizes that small overlaps may occur due to standard phrasing, methodology, or discipline-specific terminology. Therefore:

- **Below 10% similarity is considered acceptable** and does not require revision or penalty, provided that all sources are properly cited and no sections are copied verbatim without quotation.

This threshold serves as the University's internal quality benchmark for responsible research writing. Faculty are encouraged to maintain similarity as low as possible, especially in introduction, discussion, and conclusion sections, where original intellectual contribution is expected.

11.2 Level 1 Plagiarism (10–40% Similarity)

Level 1 similarity indicates minor academic negligence, inappropriate paraphrasing, or incomplete citation, without clear intent to deceive. Such cases are handled by the **DAIP**.

11.2.1 Warning and Mandatory Correction

The faculty member receives a formal written warning and is required to correct the manuscript or document within a stipulated time.



11.2.2 Ineligibility for Research Incentives

Any publication or submission falling under Level 1 will not be eligible for publication incentives, API/CAS benefits, or institutional recognition.

11.3 Level 2 Plagiarism (40–60% Similarity)

Level 2 similarity reflects substantial overlap and indicates more serious academic or ethical issues. These cases must be forwarded by DAIP to the **IAIP** for review.

11.3.1 Mandatory Withdrawal of Manuscript

The concerned manuscript must be withdrawn from any journal, publisher, or conference immediately. A certificate of withdrawal must be submitted to IAIP.

11.3.2 Freeze on Research Incentives

The faculty member shall be ineligible for research incentives, publication grants, conference funding, or seed grants for **one year** from the date of the decision.

11.4 Level 3 Plagiarism (>60% Similarity)

Level 3 constitutes severe plagiarism involving extensive copied content, intentional academic dishonesty, or misuse of collaborative work. IAIP handles all Level 3 cases with strict disciplinary action.

11.4.1 Disciplinary Action Under University Service Rules

The University may initiate formal disciplinary procedures, which may include suspension from academic duties, a formal inquiry, or other penalties as per University service rules and statutory provisions.

11.4.2 Barred from Supervising Students

Faculty members found guilty of Level 3 plagiarism shall be **barred from supervising UG/PG dissertations and Ph.D. scholars for 1–2 years**, depending on the severity of the offence.



11.5 Additional Notes on Faculty Misconduct

11.5.1 Repeated Offences

Repeated plagiarism offences will attract progressively stricter action, including possible termination of supervisory privileges, ineligibility for promotion, and restrictions on research engagement.

11.5.2 Funded Project Misconduct

If plagiarism occurs in documents related to funded projects, the matter will also be reported to the corresponding funding agency as required by national guidelines.

11.5.3 Collaborative Works

In multi-author manuscripts, responsibility shall be proportionate to each author's contribution. However, the corresponding author carries primary accountability for ensuring originality.



12. ETHICAL CLEARANCE REQUIREMENTS

Ethical clearance is a fundamental requirement for ensuring that all research conducted within Sikkim Alpine University upholds the highest standards of respect, safety, responsibility, and integrity toward human participants, animals, biodiversity, indigenous communities, and the environment. No research activity involving sensitive data, human subjects, animals, ecological systems, or culturally significant knowledge may proceed without formal approval from the appropriate ethics committee. Ethical clearance is mandatory before the commencement of data collection and must be obtained and submitted to the Departmental Academic Integrity Panel (DAIP) along with the plagiarism declaration for all relevant academic submissions.

12.1 Research Requiring Mandatory Ethical Approval

12.1.1 Human Interaction Research

Any study involving human participants—including interviews, surveys, questionnaires, psychological tests, focus groups, community interactions, or documentation of personal narratives—requires prior approval from the **Human Ethics Committee (HEC)**. This ensures informed consent, privacy, confidentiality, and protection of vulnerable groups.

12.1.2 Biodiversity Sampling and Ecological Studies

Research involving biodiversity sampling—such as ecological assessments, vegetation sampling, species collection, soil or water sampling, or environmental impact studies—must be cleared by the **Environmental/Biodiversity Ethics Committee** (or equivalent institutional authority). Such approval ensures compliance with national wildlife and environmental laws.

12.1.3 Animal Experiments and Zoological Research

Any research involving vertebrates or invertebrates for teaching or experimentation must receive approval from the **Institutional Animal Ethics Committee (IAEC)**. This ensures humane treatment, adherence to CPCSEA guidelines, and ethical research design.

12.1.4 Indigenous Knowledge Documentation

Research involving indigenous knowledge systems—especially among Lepcha, Limboo, Bhutia, Rai, and other tribal communities—requires approval from the **Human Ethics Committee** in consultation with relevant cultural and community representatives. This protects



cultural rights, prevents exploitation, and ensures that documentation is conducted with respect and consent.

12.2 Linkage with University Ethics Committees

12.2.1 Human Ethics Committee (HEC)

The HEC reviews all proposals involving human subjects to ensure safety, voluntary participation, confidentiality, and compliance with national ethical guidelines. It is responsible for approving consent forms, data collection plans, and risk mitigation strategies.

12.2.2 Animal Ethics Committee (IAEC)

The IAEC evaluates all research involving animals used for scientific purposes. It ensures ethical treatment, minimization of harm, proper housing, and compliance with CPCSEA norms. Clearance must be obtained before beginning any animal-based study.

12.2.3 Biosafety Committee (IBSC)

Research involving biohazardous materials, microorganisms, genetic engineering, or laboratory-based biological risk requires approval from the **Institutional Biosafety Committee (IBSC)**. This committee ensures safe laboratory practices, risk containment, and regulatory compliance with national biosafety frameworks.

12.3 Integration with the Academic Integrity Process

12.3.1 Ethical Approval as a Prerequisite for DAIP Submission

Before any thesis, dissertation, or research project involving ethical considerations is submitted to DAIP for plagiarism evaluation, the ethical clearance certificate must be attached. DAIP will not accept or process submissions lacking the appropriate approval.

12.3.2 Non-Compliance as Academic Misconduct

Conducting research without proper ethical clearance, falsifying ethics documents, or ignoring approved protocols constitutes serious academic misconduct and may lead to penalties under Section 10 (students) or Section 11 (faculty).



12.3.3 Continuous Monitoring

Supervisors and departments are responsible for ensuring ongoing compliance with ethical standards throughout the research process. Any modification in research design must be submitted as an amendment to the appropriate ethics committee.

12.4 Commitment to Ethical, Responsible, and Respectful Research

Sikkim Alpine University affirms its commitment to protecting human dignity, cultural heritage, biodiversity, and animal welfare. Ethical clearance ensures that research contributes positively to society while upholding national regulations, institutional values, and global ethical standards.



13. Special Provision: Humanities, Social Sciences & Indigenous Knowledge

Sikkim Alpine University recognizes that research in the humanities, social sciences, and indigenous knowledge systems cannot always be evaluated using conventional plagiarism detection tools. Such disciplines rely heavily on interpretive reasoning, cultural context, oral traditions, lived experiences, and archival or linguistic documentation.

13.1 Expert Review in Place of Similarity Tools

13.1.1 Human Review Overrides Software

For disciplines such as Lepcha, Limboo, folklore studies, translation studies, ethnography, cultural anthropology, history, and spirituality, the University mandates a **Human Review Panel** under the DAIP. This panel evaluates originality based on qualitative criteria rather than numerical similarity percentages.

13.2 Requirements for Oral and Community-Based Documentation

13.2.1 Field Notes as Evidence of Original Work

Students must document field activities through detailed notes, interviews, observations, and contextual descriptions.

13.2.2 Transcripts and Recordings

All oral narratives, interviews, chants, folk stories, and cultural testimonies must be transcribed and securely stored. These serve as primary evidence of originality.

13.2.3 Consent Forms and Community Permissions

Research involving indigenous communities must include signed consent forms and, where appropriate, community permissions or elder approvals. Cultural sensitivity is essential.

13.3 Determination of Acceptable Originality

13.3.1 Interpretive Analysis

Originality in humanities is reflected through interpretation, critique, commentary, and synthesis—not merely new wording.



13.3.2 Cultural Authenticity

For indigenous research, authenticity lies in faithful representation of community knowledge, accurate documentation, and ethical attribution.

13.3.3 Non-Text-Based Knowledge Systems

Songs, rituals, genealogies, oral epics, and sacred narratives cannot be paraphrased. Originality is based on documentation quality rather than textual uniqueness.

13.4 Exemptions from Similarity-Based Penalties

13.4.1 No Penalties for Cultural Repetition

There shall be *no penalties* when similarity arises from:

- Religious texts
- Oral histories
- Folklore structures
- Traditional narratives with fixed wording
- Archival quotations
- Translation equivalence

13.4.2 Translation-Based Research

Similarity in translated texts is unavoidable. Only the **critical commentary and analysis** must demonstrate originality.

13.5 Institutional Commitment

This special provision ensures that culturally grounded and humanities-based research receives fair evaluation while protecting indigenous knowledge systems and respecting disciplinary diversity. DAIP and IAIP will apply these norms consistently and transparently.



14. APPEALS PROCESS

The University ensures that all individuals accused of academic misconduct have the right to a fair, transparent, and unbiased appeals mechanism. The Appeals Process allows students, faculty, and researchers to contest decisions made by the Departmental Academic Integrity Panel (DAIP) or the Institutional Academic Integrity Panel (IAIP). Appeals must be made in good faith, supported by evidence, and submitted within the stipulated timeframe. The procedures outlined below ensure procedural justice while maintaining the integrity of academic standards at Sikkim Alpine University.

14.1 Right to Appeal

14.1.1 Eligibility to Appeal

Any student, faculty member, or researcher who has received a penalty or adverse decision related to plagiarism or academic misconduct has the right to file an appeal. Appeals may challenge either the findings of DAIP/IAIP or the severity of the penalty imposed.

14.1.2 Grounds for Appeal

Appeals may be submitted on the following grounds:

- Procedural error or irregularity in the inquiry process
- New evidence not available at the time of the DAIP/IAIP decision
- Disproportionate or excessive penalty
- Misinterpretation of similarity results or contextual originality (especially for indigenous or humanities research)
- Evidence of bias, unfair treatment, or conflict of interest

Frivolous, repeated, or unsupported appeals may be rejected.

14.2 Filing the Appeal

14.2.1 Timeframe for Submission

An appeal must be submitted **within 15 working days** from the date the DAIP or IAIP decision is formally communicated to the concerned individual. Late appeals will not be considered unless the appellant provides valid justification accepted by IAIP.



14.2.2 Documentation Required

The appeal must include:

- A written appeal form stating the grounds for reconsideration
- A copy of the original decision letter
- Similarity report or evidence reviewed by DAIP/IAIP
- Any new evidence or explanatory documents
- Supervisor/HoD remarks (for student appeals)

Appeals must be addressed to the Chairperson of IAIP.

14.3 Review by IAIP

14.3.1 Procedure for Re-Evaluation

Upon receiving the appeal, the Institutional Academic Integrity Panel shall:

- Acknowledge receipt within 5 working days
- Review the appeal and supporting documents
- Conduct hearings if necessary (with the appellant, supervisor, or DAIP representatives)
- Seek expert opinion where required (especially for indigenous or humanities submissions)
- Re-evaluate the similarity findings, penalty rationale, and procedural fairness

14.3.2 Decision-Making

IAIP may decide to:

- Uphold the original decision
- Modify the penalty
- Replace the penalty with corrective action
- Overturn the decision entirely

All decisions must be justified with written reasoning.

14.4 Communication of Final Decision

14.4.1 Formal Notification

The final decision of IAIP shall be formally communicated in writing to:

- The appellant
- The department
- The supervisor or concerned faculty
- Examination or administrative units (if relevant)



14.4.2 Binding Nature of the Decision

The IAIP's decision on the appeal is **final and binding**, and no further appeals will be entertained within the University on the same case.

14.5 Confidentiality and Fairness

14.5.1 Protection of Rights

All appeal proceedings shall uphold confidentiality, fairness, and respect for all parties involved. Records shall be maintained securely for institutional purposes, accreditation, and UGC compliance.



15. RECORD KEEPING

15.1 Documentation and Archival of Records

The Institutional Academic Integrity Panel (IAIP) shall maintain comprehensive and systematic records of all plagiarism-related proceedings. This includes similarity reports, DAIP review documents, student and faculty explanations, departmental recommendations, final IAIP decisions, and all related correspondence. All files—digital or physical—shall be indexed and stored securely to ensure traceability and institutional accountability.

15.2 Retention Period

All academic integrity records shall be preserved for a minimum period of **five years** from the date of decision or case closure. This retention period ensures compliance with UGC regulations, supports accreditation processes such as NAAC and NIRF, and fulfills requirements for institutional audits, quality assurance reviews, and legal verification, if necessary.

15.3 Confidentiality and Restricted Access

All plagiarism reports and associated documents shall be treated as confidential. Access to these records is strictly limited to authorized personnel, including members of the IAIP, DAIP, the Registrar's Office, and the Research & Development Cell, on a need-to-know basis. Unauthorized disclosure or misuse of these confidential documents shall be considered a violation of University policy.

15.4 Annual Reporting Obligations

IAIP shall compile an annual summary report detailing the number of cases handled, categories of misconduct identified, penalties imposed, and trends observed. This annual report shall be submitted to the **Research & Development Cell** and subsequently presented before the **Academic Council** for review, policy refinement, and institutional improvement.



16. AWARENESS & CAPACITY BUILDING

Creating a culture of academic integrity requires more than rules and penalties; it requires continuous education, training, and the strengthening of research ethics across the University community. Sikkim Alpine University is committed to fostering awareness and building capacity among students, faculty, researchers, and staff through structured workshops, training programmes, and orientation sessions. These initiatives are designed to enhance understanding of plagiarism, citation practices, research ethics, responsible use of sources, and ethical fieldwork, thereby ensuring that all academic stakeholders are equipped to uphold the highest standards of scholarly conduct.

16.1 Workshops and Training Programmes

16.1.1 Academic Writing Skills

The University shall organize regular workshops focusing on academic writing techniques, paraphrasing, synthesis of literature, thesis structuring, and avoiding unintentional plagiarism. These sessions will help students and researchers develop clarity, originality, and confidence in producing high-quality academic work.

16.1.2 Citation and Referencing Styles

Hands-on training in citation styles such as APA, MLA, Chicago, Vancouver, and discipline-specific referencing systems shall be provided. These workshops will include practical exercises to ensure participants understand how to correctly acknowledge sources and avoid citation-related misconduct.

16.1.3 Plagiarism Prevention and Use of Similarity Tools

Dedicated sessions will be conducted to familiarize students and faculty with plagiarism detection software (Turnitin, URKUND, PlagScan) and teach them how to interpret similarity reports. Emphasis will also be placed on differentiating legitimate similarity from misconduct, handling paraphrasing correctly, and meeting institutional similarity expectations.

16.1.4 Ethical Field Research and Community Engagement

Training will be provided on ethical norms governing human interaction, informed consent, cultural sensitivity, biodiversity documentation, and indigenous knowledge research. These workshops will ensure compliance with the Human Ethics Committee, Animal Ethics Committee, and Biosafety Committee protocols.



16.2 Mandatory Training for New Students and Faculty

16.2.1 Student Orientation Programme

All newly admitted UG, PG, and Ph.D. students must undergo compulsory academic integrity orientation sessions at the beginning of their programme. The sessions include introduction to plagiarism rules, ethical research practices, and expectations for maintaining originality.

16.2.2 Faculty Induction Programme

Newly appointed faculty members shall attend mandatory training that covers institutional plagiarism policies, responsibilities of supervisors, correct supervision practices, handling similarity reports, and ethical publication standards. This ensures consistency and competency across all academic departments.

16.3 Continuous Capacity Building

16.3.1 Department-Level Initiatives

Each department, through its DAIP, will conduct periodic seminars, peer discussions, and interactive sessions to reinforce academic integrity practices and address discipline-specific challenges related to citation, originality, and qualitative research.

16.3.2 Access to Learning Resources

The University will make available manuals, guidelines, recorded lectures, citation handbooks, and online modules to support ongoing learning. These resources shall be accessible through the library, LMS portals, and departmental websites.

16.4 Culture of Ethical Scholarship

Through continuous awareness programmes, capacity-building initiatives, and institutional support, Sikkim Alpine University aims to develop a sustained culture of academic honesty, critical thinking, and ethical scholarship. This long-term commitment ensures that students and faculty not only comply with plagiarism regulations but also internalize values that uphold research integrity at national and global standards.



17. USE OF AI TOOLS IN ACADEMIC WRITING

Advances in artificial intelligence (AI) have introduced new tools that can support academic writing, but their improper or undisclosed use also poses risks to academic integrity. Sikkim Alpine University recognizes the role of AI in enhancing efficiency and clarity in writing, while firmly upholding the requirement for originality, independent thinking, and genuine scholarly contribution. This section outlines the acceptable, restricted, and prohibited uses of AI tools such as ChatGPT, Gemini, Copilot, and other emerging platforms within academic submissions. All use of AI must be transparent and verifiable, and misuse of AI-generated content will be treated as academic misconduct.

17.1 Disclosure Requirement

17.1.1 Mandatory Disclosure Statement

Students, faculty, and researchers must provide a clear written disclosure if AI tools were used at any stage of preparing an academic document. This statement must specify the nature and extent of AI assistance. Failure to disclose AI usage will be treated as a violation of academic integrity.

17.1.2 Submission of AI Usage Declaration

A standard “AI Assistance Declaration” form must accompany all dissertations, theses, major assignments, project reports, and faculty publications submitted for review. DAIP will not accept submissions without this declaration.

17.2 Prohibited Uses of AI in Academic Work

17.2.1 Generation of Research Data

AI tools must not be used to generate or fabricate research data, statistical outputs, interview transcripts, field observations, survey responses, biodiversity records, or any empirical evidence.

17.2.2 Generation of Research Results

AI tools cannot be used to write or simulate results, analysis, interpretations, graphs, tables, or findings that should come from genuine research, fieldwork, laboratory experiments, or academic inquiry.



17.2.3 Generation of Thesis or Dissertation Content

AI must not be used to generate substantive thesis chapters such as introduction, literature review, methodology, data analysis, results, or discussion. Doing so constitutes contract cheating or plagiarism.

17.3 Acceptable Uses of AI Tools

17.3.1 Grammar and Language Correction

AI tools may be used to improve grammar, clarity, spelling, or readability, provided the core ideas and content remain the author's own.

17.3.2 Formatting and Structural Assistance

AI may be used for formatting, preparing tables of contents, summarizing long reference lists, generating basic templates, or checking formatting consistency in accordance with academic guidelines.

17.3.3 Support in Literature Search

AI tools may assist in identifying keywords, refining research questions, or guiding a literature search. However, AI outputs must be cross-verified with authentic academic sources, and AI-generated references are not permitted.

17.4 Verification by Supervisors

17.4.1 Supervisor Responsibility

Supervisors must verify that any AI-assisted submission reflects genuine academic work. They must review the AI usage disclosure form and ensure that AI was used only within acceptable limits.

17.4.2 DAIP Review

The DAIP may request drafts, notes, or earlier versions to confirm authentic authorship. If undisclosed or excessive AI-generated content is suspected, the submission will undergo academic misconduct investigation.



17.5 Consequences of Misuse of AI Tools

17.5.1 Treated as Academic Misconduct

The use of AI to generate data, analysis, or thesis content is considered a major academic violation and will invoke penalties aligned with Level 2 or Level 3 offences under this Policy.

17.5.2 Repeat Offences

Repeated instances of AI misuse will attract stricter penalties, including suspension, cancellation of submission, or debarment as applicable.



18. POLICY REVIEW & AMENDMENTS

18.1 Need for Periodic Review

The *Plagiarism and Academic Integrity Policy* of Sikkim Alpine University is a dynamic document that must evolve in response to emerging academic practices, technological advancements, and changes in regulatory frameworks. To ensure continued relevance, clarity, and effectiveness, the University maintains a strong commitment to reviewing this policy regularly and revising it whenever necessary.

18.2 Basis for Revisions

18.2.1 UGC Updates

Any modifications or new directives issued by the **University Grants Commission (UGC)**—including amendments to the 2018 Plagiarism Regulations, research norms, or integrity guidelines—shall be incorporated into this policy without delay.

18.2.2 NEP 2020 Guidelines

Reforms introduced under the **National Education Policy (NEP) 2020**, particularly those concerning academic integrity, ethical research practices, interdisciplinary learning, and indigenous knowledge systems, shall be integrated into the policy through periodic updates.

18.2.3 Academic Council Recommendations

The **Academic Council of Sikkim Alpine University** shall serve as the final approving authority for policy amendments. Recommendations arising from the **Institutional Academic Integrity Panel (IAIP)**, **Research & Development Cell (RDC)**, or quality assurance evaluations (including NAAC/NIRF requirements) may be submitted to the Academic Council for consideration and approval.

18.3 Amendment Mechanism

All proposed revisions must be formally reviewed by the **Plagiarism & Academic Integrity Committee (PAIC)** before being placed before the Academic Council. Once approved, the revised policy shall be circulated to all departments, supervisors, faculty, students, research centres, and administrative units. The updated version replaces previous editions and becomes applicable immediately upon notification.



18.4 Summary

Policy review is a continuous process integral to maintaining high academic standards. Through regular updates and alignment with national regulations and institutional priorities, Sikkim Alpine University ensures that its academic integrity framework remains current, robust, and responsive to evolving scholarly landscapes.

