

University of Ghana



Guideline on Allegations of Research Misconduct

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University of Ghana

<Office of the Pro Vice-Chancellor, Research, Innovation and Development>

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1. Purpose of the Guideline on Allegations of Research Misconduct

This guideline echoes the University of Ghana’s (UG) belief that incidents of misconduct or deliberate wrongdoing in research is a threat to the underlying principles governing scientific research and is against the motto of the University that is “*Proceed with Integrity*”. Misconduct in research also is diametrically opposite to the mission of the University, which seeks “to develop world-class human resources and capabilities to meet national development needs and global challenges through quality teaching, learning, research, and knowledge dissemination”. By the publication of this guideline we are reaffirming that “our operations are governed by the highest level of integrity, ethical standards, openness and fairness underpinned by a reward and recognition system that is performance driven”.

The overall objective of this Guideline on Allegations of Research Misconduct (GARM) is to demonstrate that the University of Ghana’s procedures for dealing with any allegations of research misconduct are fair, transparent and equitable. It is expected that all researchers in turn would be committed to good research practice.

2. Aims

The aims of the Guideline on Allegations of Research Misconduct shall be to:

- i. Upholds UG’s values of honesty and integrity in conducting research.
- ii. Promote timely, effective and fair responses to allegations of research misconduct.
- iii. Ensures credibility and trustworthiness of research activities conducted by UG’s research community.
- iv. Complying with UG’s rules and regulations governing research; with the ultimate aim that these regulations will follow acceptable best practice everywhere.
- v. Serve as an institutional guide in handling allegations of research misconduct.

The University of Ghana would like to acknowledge that this guideline on research misconduct was modelled on research misconduct policies of some educational institutions and agencies such as the US Federal Register: Public Health Service Police on Research misconduct; National Endowment for the Humanities: Research Misconduct Policy; and Dartmouth College: Research Misconduct Policy and Procedures.

3. Definitions of terms as used in this document

Word/Term	Definition
Allegation	Any written or oral statement or other indication of possible research misconduct made to an institutional official
Complainant	The person making allegations of research misconduct of another person.
Confidentiality	The rules or promises that limit the access or place restrictions on types of information gathered in the course of investigating alleged research misconduct.
Conflict of Interest	A conflict of interest is a divergence between an individual’s professional obligations and his or her private interests. Such conflicts may not be unethical and do not constitute or imply any wrong-doing. But they may lead to actual misconduct when consideration of the personal gain or financial influence compromises an individual’s judgment and actions in the performance of his or her primary responsibilities.

Word/Term	Definition
Fabrication	Inventing or making up data and recording or reporting them.
Falsification	Misrepresentation of information
Good Faith	An allegation made with the honest belief that research misconduct may have occurred. This allegation shall not be made with reckless disregard for, or wilful ignorance of, facts that would disprove the allegation.
Inquiry	Gathering of information and a fact-finding process into the issue of alleged research misconduct to ascertain the need for a formal investigation.
Institutional Official	A senior University official at the Office of Research, Innovation and Development (ORID) who is authorised to legally commit on behalf of the University. The Institutional Official in this case is the Pro-Vice Chancellor (RID).
Investigation	A detailed inquiry or a systematic examination of facts of allegation of or not of research misconduct.
Research Misconduct	Any unethical research practices that deviate from those that are commonly accepted within the disciplines of conducting research. Research misconduct may come in the form of fabrications, plagiarism, falsification of information, non-disclosure of potential conflict of interest and unauthorised use of data.
Plagiarism	The presentation of documented words or ideas of another person as one's own work, without giving the appropriate credit.
Preponderance of Evidence	Proof by information that, the evidence of the complainant when compared to that of the respondent indicates a probable level of truth than not.
Researcher	An individual who devotes him/herself to the systematic investigation or inquiry.
Research	A systematic investigation (i.e. the gathering and analysis of information) designed to develop or contribute to knowledge.
Research Records	These are all the information gathered during the investigation process and all items, objects or documents collected for the investigations.
Respondent	The person against whom an allegation of research misconduct is directed or the person whose actions are the subject of the inquiry or investigation. There can be more than one respondent in any inquiry or investigation.
Research Integrity Officer (RIO)	The Institutional Official responsible for research misconduct and research integrity activities.
Unauthorized use of data	The use of private or confidential information or data without permission from the original owner
Whistleblowing	To reveal the act of research misconduct to those in positions of authority
Witness	A person who has, or claims to have knowledge relevant to the allegation being made and voluntarily or under compulsion provides testimonial evidence, either oral or written to the investigations.

4. Application & Scope

The Guideline;

- i. is applicable to all UG faculty members, visiting scholars, researchers, students and all other staff members employed directly or indirectly by the University.
- ii. applies to all research and related activities carried out on or off UG premises by UG staff and affiliates.
- iii. covers allegations made by parties outside of the university concerning UG staff, students, affiliates et cetera.

5. Principles

The implementation of the Guideline on Allegations of Research Misconduct is underpinned and shaped by the following key principles:

- i. fairness
- ii. integrity
- iii. confidentiality
- iv. protection of parties
- v. balance to all parties

5.1 Fairness

All proceedings of allegations of research misconduct investigation shall be conducted thoroughly, in fairness and without any prejudice.

5.2 Integrity

If there is any reason to believe that the integrity of the research process is at risk during the process of reviewing allegations of research misconduct, the Institutional Official shall take whatever actions deem necessary to protect the integrity of the research process.

5.3 Confidentiality

The identities of the complainant (s), the respondent (s), the inquiry and its findings shall not be disclosed to any other persons by the investigators, except as necessary to carry out the assignment. Confidentiality shall be maintained for all records or evidence which form part of the inquiry and investigation proceedings.

5.4 Protection of parties

Protection for the Complainant

Adequate measures shall be put in place to protect the person making allegations from the possibility of victimisation from others. All other persons with preview of the allegations shall be encouraged to keep the information confidential.

Protection for the Respondent

Appropriate procedures shall be put in place to ensure protection and restoration of the reputation of persons alleged to have engaged in research misconduct when allegations have not been confirmed.

5.5 Balance to all Parties

Complainant Responsibilities

- i. The complainant is responsible for making allegations in good faith while maintaining confidentiality.
- ii. It is the responsibility of the complainant to appear before an inquiry and investigation committee when requested to do so.

Respondent Responsibilities

- i. It is the responsibility of the respondent to maintain confidentiality at all times.
- ii. The respondent is expected to cooperate with the inquiry and investigation team during misconduct proceedings.
- iii. The respondent is expected to appear before an inquiry and investigation committee when requested to do so.

6. The Research Integrity Office

The Research Integrity Office is the University of Ghana's independent hub for handling issues regarding and relating to research misconduct. The Office of Research, Innovation and Development (ORID) shall serve as the Research Integrity Office. The Pro-Vice Chancellor (Research, Innovation and Development) is the Research Integrity Officer (RIO) for the Research Integrity Office.

The Research Integrity Office staff, under the leadership of the RIO, shall facilitate the entire inquiry and investigation processes during alleged allegations of research misconduct. The office has both moral and legal duty to maintain strict confidentiality throughout any research misconduct proceedings. The office is responsible for liaising and educating both complainant and respondent during research misconduct proceedings and convening an Inquiry Committee.

The specific Inquiry Committee will review the allegation to determine whether it conforms to allegations of research misconduct. Research misconduct may be considered in a situation where:

- There is representation of significant evidence of departure from accepted practices of the relevant research community;
- Conduct has been committed intentionally, knowingly, or with reckless disregard for the integrity of the research; and
- There has been proof of preponderance of the evidence, i.e., the allegation is more likely than not to be true.

7. Procedures

7.1 Submission of Allegation

- i. Research misconduct allegations could have implications for both the complainant and the respondent and so great care should be taken when documenting allegations.
- ii. All allegations shall be made in writing and in confidence (in anonymity) to the Research Integrity Officer (RIO) at ORID.
- iii. Documenting allegations of research misconduct must include detailed description of the individual (s) or person(s) involved and description of the alleged misconduct.

- iv. The complainant must also provide full details of himself/herself otherwise the allegation will be rejected.
- v. Where possible the content of the allegation must be supported with evidence.

7.2 Notification to the Respondent

- i. Upon receipt of allegations of research misconduct, the RIO shall send a formal notification to the respondent.
- ii. The respondent shall be given the opportunity to respond in writing to the allegations within ten (10) days of receipt of notification.

7.3 Preliminary Assessment of Allegation

- i. A quick determination will be made by the RIO based upon the complainant's statements and that of the respondent to see whether there is a question to answer or not.
- ii. Depending on the outcome of the determination, the RIO shall determine whether to authorise a preliminary inquiry or to resolve the allegations through informal processes without further inquiry.
- iii. In reviewing an allegation of research misconduct, the RIO shall determine whether the facts of the allegation fall within the definition of research misconduct and if there are sufficiently credible and specific evidence to identify research misconduct.
- iv. If the allegation does not meet both of these requirements, the RIO shall dismiss the complaint and write to the persons involved of his/her decision. However, if the allegation does meet both the above-stated requirements, the RIO shall set up a committee to begin an inquiry into the matter.

7.4 Inquiry

The purpose of the inquiry is to conduct an initial review of the available evidence to determine whether to conduct an investigation.

- i. The person being accused of misconduct herein the respondent shall be notify in writing of the decision to carry out an inquiry.
- ii. The RIO shall appoint a committee comprise of three members with one from the accuser's department or unit. They shall make a determination as to whether or not a formal investigation should be carried out.
- v. The individuals appointed to undertake the inquiry shall be fair, objective and impartial and will possess, where required, the competence to understand the research in question.
- vi. A written report from the inquiry shall be submitted to the RIO.
- vii. The report of the inquiry shall be given to the respondent for him/her to make a formal response within ten (10) days of receipt of the report.
- viii. Based on the available evidence, the RIO will decide whether a further investigation is warranted.

7.5 Investigation

The purpose of the investigation is to conduct detailed or careful examination of the allegation in order to ascertain the facts.

- i. In carrying out the investigation, a five-member Investigation Committee shall be set up by the RIO. A committee chair shall be selected from among the committee members.
- ii. Where necessary, the RIO shall include appropriate expertise from within or outside the University to assist with the investigation.
- iii. The committee is solely responsible for conducting detailed examination of the facts relating to the allegations.
- iv. The Investigation Committee shall be prompt and fair, and complete the investigations within three months of its initiation.
- v. After the investigation, a draft report detailing the evidence collected including a summary of all the relevant facts shall be presented to the RIO by the chair of the committee. The respondent shall also be presented with a copy of the draft report and given an opportunity to respond in writing within (ten) 10 days of receipt of the draft report.
- vi. A final written report shall be presented to the RIO for appropriate actions to be taken.
- vii. The RIO shall take appropriate actions within three month of receipt of final report.

8. Options for Action

Research misconduct actions taken by the Research Integrity Officer (RIO) in consultation with the University Council shall be in line with the applicable laws, regulations and policies of the University. Recommended action taken shall be based on the following: no evidence of findings of misconduct and evidence of findings of misconduct.

8.1 No evidence of findings of misconduct

- i. If allegations are found not to be of research misconduct, the allegations shall be dismissed.
- ii. Put in place appropriate actions to protect or restore the reputation of persons alleged to have engaged in research misconduct.
- iii. If allegations were found to be of malicious intent, individual(s) involved may be subject to disciplinary action.

8.2 Evidence of findings of misconduct

- i. Depending on the severity of the allegations, the respondent shall be reprimanded or suspended from the university following procedures of the University Disciplinary Committee.
- ii. All published abstracts and papers emanating from the research shall be withdrawn.
- iii. The respondent shall be removed from the project in question.
- iv. Pay back any funds as appropriate
- v. Inform any agency that is providing grant support, considering support, or has supported the research in question.