

Charter for Good Academic Practice at Vlerick Business School¹

The aim of this charter is to safeguard good academic practice and provide a framework that helps avoiding academic misconduct at Vlerick Business School. It provides clear guidelines regarding authorship and describes the role of the Scientific Ombudsperson and the Committee for Research Ethics and Integrity.

§1. Role of academic practice

- (1) Academic research is a core activity of the School. As an academic business school, we strive for:
 - **Rigor:** this refers to academic credibility, the use of academic models, doctoral work and publications in academic journals, and is a key differentiator towards consulting companies and other players in the market of business education.
 - **Relevance:** research starts and ends with the real challenges of companies and society.
 - **Reach:** this refers to communication and dissemination of research results and the applicability to real business and societal problems. Research output should be made as visible as possible.
- (2) By endorsing the RRBM position paper², we adhere to the principle that academic research serves a role in developing knowledge that benefits businesses and the broader society, locally and globally, for the ultimate purpose of creating a better world. This implies producing truthful and insightful knowledge that addresses problems important to business and society.
- (3) Following the research strategy and in line with societal challenges, the School defines strategic research priorities. The School encourages research in line with these strategic priorities, but also embraces the principles of academic freedom. In both cases, researchers must be able to carry out their research in complete freedom and independence. As an academic business school, we strive to make sound conclusions on the basis of scientific arguments, supporting our objective role, irrespective of the funding body.
- (4) The value of academic research goes beyond the scientific publication package. The publication itself is not an end goal, but a step in the journey to scholarly and societal impact. Assessing influence may require multiple papers, dissemination of findings to non-academic circles, and tracking whether companies, communities or policy makers benefit from this program of research. Impact also includes translating the findings from evidence-based responsible science in masters, doctoral, and executive education programs. Promotion and tenure requirements reflect this requirement to institutionalize research's positive influence on society. Vlerick stimulates researchers to engage in the academic and broader community (e.g. by attending and organising scientific conferences, by taking up editorial or reviewer roles in journals, by academic and professional service roles,...).

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² Vlerick Business School is an institutional partner of [RRBM](#) to advance and promote responsible research in business and management for a better world.

- (5) The value of academic research is also translated in the explicit engagement to educate PhD and DBA students at the school and to the learning journeys towards participants, for instance by stimulating critical thinking and rigorous execution of assignments and knowledge-in-action projects.
- (6) Not every paper needs to solve a current problem, and not every researcher needs to be on the frontline of practice. Rather, the School envisions a mix of diverse research activities combining current problems and more speculative and theoretical work, which we call a *portfolio approach*.
- (7) It is a basic rule in science that data should be verifiable and that studies should be reproducible. Reproducible research demands well-considered preparations and documentation of the research project from the planning-phase onwards. As of the research design one needs to think about data collection, data storage, data description and data sharing. Research funders increasingly require data management plans (DMPs) as a part of the submission of project proposals. The [Digital Curation Centre's Checklist](#) offers guidance in writing a good DMP. In any case, a discussion of the findings with colleagues can contribute to scientific quality as well as to data practice in compliance to the integrity principles. The expectation of data transparency might reduce the volume of studies but could improve the quality and comprehensiveness of studies by discouraging salami slicing and other questionable practices.

§2. Definition of good academic practice

- (1) Good academic practice is based on fundamental principles of research integrity. It goes beyond the mere research practice and guides academics in their work as well as in their engagement with the practical, ethical and intellectual challenges inherent to academia.
- (2) Academic work is based on the basic principle of honesty towards oneself and others in developing, undertaking, reviewing, reporting and communicating research in a transparent, fair, full and unbiased way. Honesty is both an ethical norm and the basis for the rules of professional conduct in relation to academic work.
- (3) The School has the responsibility to ensure that research carried out within the School, or in association with the School, respects strict scientific and ethical norms. The School subscribes to the guidance and advice concerning good research practices provided in '[The European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity](#)'.
- (4) Good research practice goes beyond conducting research in an ethical and integer way. Good research practice assumes:
 - a. a research environment that provides the necessary infrastructure, leadership and procedures to support a culture of research integrity;
 - b. appropriate and adequate training, supervision and mentoring of researchers across the entire career path to conduct research in a careful and well-considered way;
 - c. the necessary safeguards to protect research subjects and handle them with respect and care in accordance with legal and ethical provisions.

§3. Definition of academic misconduct

- (1) Academic misconduct is present where, in an academic context, either knowingly or through gross negligence, ethical norms are breached, false information is given, intellectual property rights of others are infringed, or research work is compromised in any other way.
- (2) Serious academic misconduct is defined as fabrication, falsification, or plagiarism (FFP categorisation) in proposing, performing, or reviewing research, or in reporting research results:
 - **Fabrication** is making up results and recording them as if they were real.
 - **Falsification** is manipulating research materials, equipment or processes or changing, omitting or suppressing data or results without justification.
 - **Plagiarism** is using other people's work and ideas without giving proper credit to the original source, thus violating the rights of the original author(s) to their intellectual outputs.
- (3) Academic misconduct extends to provision of incorrect information about the academic performance in selection or review committees or in applications for funding (internal or external). Other examples of violations of research integrity that go beyond the FFP categorisation are listed in the 'The European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity'.

§4. Guidelines for authorship

- (1) Authorship is an explicit way of giving credit for intellectual work and assigning responsibility. Authorship practices should be judged by the way they reflect actual contributions to the final product.
- (2) Authorship should be restricted to individuals who meet following 4 requirements³:
 1. make a substantial intellectual contribution to:
 - the conception and design; **and/or**
 - the collection of research data; **and/or**
 - the analysis and interpretation of research data;
 2. substantially contribute to the drafting of the manuscript (e.g. article, paper, book) and/or substantially critically revise its content;
 3. approve the final version of the manuscript to be published;
 4. agree to be accountable for all aspects of the work in ensuring that questions related to the accuracy or integrity of any part of the work are appropriately investigated and resolved. In addition to being accountable for the parts of the work done, an author should be able to identify which co-authors are responsible for specific other parts of the work and should have justified confidence in the integrity of the contributions of their co-authors.

All researchers who have made a substantial intellectual contribution in view of the first requirement should have the opportunity to meet the second and the third requirement.

- (3) In view of the above, securing research funding, providing space, equipment or materials, collecting some research data, or managing or supervising researchers involved in the project do not by themselves justify authorship.

³ Adapted from [ICMJE policy on authorship](#)

- (4) No person who fulfils the authorship criteria may be excluded as an author. This implies to all publication types. Also, if a student (degree or non-degree) has made substantial intellectual contributions to the research, the student should be included as an author of that publication.
- (5) The work of all contributors and collaborators who do not meet the criteria for authorship should be properly acknowledged in publications. This may include advisers, communities, funders, individuals, sponsors, or others.
- (6) Order of authorship: Many ways of determining order of authorship exist across disciplines, research groups, and countries. Examples of authorship policies include descending order of contribution, placing the person who took the lead in writing the manuscript or doing the research first and the most experienced contributor last, and alphabetical or random order. While the significance of a particular order may be understood in a given setting, order of authorship has no generally agreed-upon meaning. Together, the authors should attempt to reach a consensus on the sequence of authorship⁴.
- (7) For further information or for mediation in the event of conflicts that cannot be dealt with internally (i.e. between the authors as stipulated in the preceding agreements), the Scientific Ombudsperson can be contacted.

§5. Scientific Ombudsperson and Committee for Research Ethics & Integrity

- (1) The School shall appoint a Scientific Ombudsperson from among the ranks of its professors who shall be available as a confidential point of contact for all members of the School who have allegations of or information about academic misconduct. Each member of the School has the right to speak to the ombudsperson in person.
- (2) The ombudsperson is appointed by the Dean on the recommendation of the Executive Committee. The ombudsperson should have extensive experience of carrying out research projects and should also have national and international contacts.
- (3) The ombudsperson advises the Executive Committee and the Research Dean's Office in fundamental issues of good academic practice and may make recommendations in relation to this.
- (4) The ombudsperson is entitled to gather the information and statements necessary to establish the facts of the case, subject to safeguarding the legitimate interests of the persons affected, and to consult experts in individual cases.
- (5) If the ombudsperson is unable in individual cases to bring about an amicable settlement of the dispute in accordance with the preceding provisions or if, in the ombudsperson's view, there is the suspicion of a serious breach of the rules of good academic practice, the Committee for Research Ethics and Integrity shall be consulted. The Faculty Evaluation Committee, containing

⁴ Without prejudice to the guideline, it is recommended that for publications resulting from doctoral research, the PhD/DBA student is the first author. Since the PhD/DBA student is responsible for the doctoral research and is expected to prove that he/she can function as an independent researcher by way of this research, it is expected that the PhD/DBA student is the main contributor in at least the majority of the papers in a doctoral dissertation and as such will be the first author.

core faculty members with substantial research experience, will serve as ad hoc Committee for Research Ethics and Integrity and will investigate the matter.

- (6) The Committee for Research Ethics and Integrity shall meet in closed session and sends its conclusions to the Dean. Subject to safeguarding the legitimate interests of the persons involved, the Committee is entitled to gather the information and statements necessary to establish the facts of the case and, based on free evaluation of the evidence, shall examine whether academic misconduct has taken place. The accused person must be informed of the allegation and of any evidence without delay and be given the appropriate opportunity to make a statement. At his or her wish this person shall be granted an oral hearing to which he/she may bring one trusted person for the purpose of providing assistance. The same applies to other persons subject to hearings.
- (7) The Dean decides on the basis of the Committee's final report and recommendation whether the inquiry is to be concluded or whether a case of academic misconduct has been sufficiently proven. In the case of academic misconduct, the Dean shall also determine the measures to be taken, which may include:
 - a. a verbal warning, a written warning (which must be signed for reception), (instant) dismissal and/or labor-, civil- or criminal-law related sanctions towards the involved person;
 - b. a corrective action towards the scientific literature (e.g. retraction, correction, change of author order, consultation with the journal, ...);
 - c. a preventive action towards the research community (e.g. awareness training, explicit authorship agreements, ...).

§6. Whistle-blowers

- (1) Encouraging employees to act as whistle-blowers in case of academic misconduct is part of the ethical and open work environment of the School. It offers the School the opportunity to learn early of academic misconduct and to take prompt action before external pressure from the media or law enforcement would force the School to react. It is essential for the process to work that whistle-blowers are duly protected against all forms of retaliation, including harassment, dismissal, and blacklisting. Any form of retaliation will therefore result in disciplinary action.
- (2) Concerns about academic misconduct by an employee or partner of the School should be reported to the Scientific Ombudsperson who will keep the identity of the whistle-blower confidential and provide specific protection against possible retaliation. The ombudsperson will conduct the investigation and if, in the ombudsperson's view, there is the suspicion of a serious breach of the rules of good academic practice, the Committee for Research Ethics and Integrity shall be consulted. If, after investigation, the concern proves legitimate, the whistle-blower will benefit from protection during a period that ends two years after the investigation. The protection entails investigation of any form of retaliation upon the request of the whistle-blower.