

Academic Integrity and Research Misconduct Policy

1 Purpose and scope

New Meridian University requires honest academic work, accurate academic records, and responsible research. This policy establishes standards for identifying and addressing academic misconduct, research misconduct, and authorship disputes. It applies to students, faculty, staff, research supervisors, contractors, and other individuals undertaking academic or research activities on behalf of NMU.

Covered activities include assignments, examinations, dissertations, theses, research proposals, data collection and analysis, publications, presentations, and academic or research records. The policy applies to work connected with NMU and to misconduct committed during an NMU affiliation that is discovered after graduation or departure. Applicable conduct standards are those in effect when the conduct occurred. Current procedures may be used when they preserve the protections applicable to the case.

Coursework allegations follow the academic misconduct procedure. Fabrication, falsification, or plagiarism in research follows the research misconduct procedure, including when the research forms part of a dissertation or another academic requirement. Ordinary disagreements about publication credit follow the authorship procedure. Related allegations may be coordinated under one case record, with the applicable findings and procedures identified separately.

2 Responsibilities and authority

For this policy, business days are Monday through Friday, excluding published NMU holidays and closures. Calendar days include weekends and holidays. A response period begins on the next applicable day after receipt of notice. The integrity officer documents delivery through the confirmed university communication channel and any reasonable alternative needed to provide notice.

The President designates the Academic and Research Integrity Officer within the Office of Ethical Compliance. The officer receives reports, assesses their scope, preserves evidence, issues notices, coordinates reviewers, and maintains case records. The officer administers the process under the authority of the President and does not decide responsibility or hear an appeal in the same case.

The President approves this policy, oversees its administration, appoints investigators and committees, authorizes institutional action, and directs implementation of final decisions. Investigation committees are appointed for individual cases. An investigator or committee develops the factual record, considers explanations and contrary evidence, and provides a written report to the Provost and President. Research investigations and cases involving possible expulsion, degree revocation, or personnel termination for misconduct require a three-member investigation committee with expertise relevant to the allegation.

The President assigns the Provost responsibility for initial misconduct findings and student sanctions other than degree revocation. Expulsion requires the investigation and offered hearing specified in this policy. Degree revocation and termination of faculty, staff, or contractors require the Provost's written findings and recommendation, followed by the President's written sanction decision. The President directs final notices and implementation after the appeal period or any timely appeal has concluded.

The President appoints a separate three-member panel for each eligible appeal. Appeal reviewers must have no prior involvement in the case and no relevant conflict. At least one member must be external to NMU for appeals involving expulsion, degree revocation, personnel termination for misconduct, or university leadership. Making the initial decision does not prevent the President from administratively appointing independent appeal reviewers. The President does not sit on the panel, hear an appeal of the President's own decision, direct the panel's findings, or override its determination. The appeal determination is final within this policy, subject to additional review expressly required by applicable law or an agreement.

Individuals disclose personal, supervisory, financial, or other relationships that could compromise impartiality. A person who reported the allegation, supervised the disputed work, supplied material evidence, or is implicated in the case may not serve as investigator, decision-maker, or appeal reviewer. The President appoints replacements for conflicted officials and reviewers. For an allegation personally implicating the President, an independent external reviewer designated in advance by the President receives the report and appoints impartial officials to perform the President's case responsibilities. This arrangement applies to that case. The external reviewer and appointed officials must have no prior involvement or relevant conflict.

3 Definitions and prohibited conduct

The respondent is the person whose conduct is under review. A reporter supplies an allegation or concern. In an authorship dispute, an affected author is a person whose publication credit is being determined. Rights and responsibilities are assessed individually when a case involves several people.

Plagiarism occurs when a person uses another person's words, ideas, processes, results, images, or other work without appropriate attribution and presents the contribution as their own. Examples include unattributed copying, close paraphrasing that conceals its source, and presenting another person's research or writing as original work. A similarity score alone does not establish plagiarism. Reviewers examine the material, attribution, context, and applicable instructions.

Fabrication means making up data or results and recording or reporting them as actual research evidence. Examples include invented participants, survey responses, interviews, quotations, observations, or results. Invented citations and references are prohibited academic misrepresentation and are evaluated under the applicable academic or research procedure.

Falsification means manipulating research materials, equipment, or processes, or changing or omitting data or results so the research is inaccurately represented. Examples include altering responses, disguising exclusions, changing quotations, or reporting analyses that were not performed. Documented analytical decisions are assessed in their methodological context.

Academic misconduct also includes cheating, impersonation, unauthorized collaboration or assistance, obtaining or providing unauthorized examination material, arranging for another person to complete assessed work, submitting purchased or commissioned work as one's own, and substantially reusing previously assessed work without required permission and disclosure. A person who knowingly assists misconduct may be reviewed under this policy.

Falsified records include altered grades, transcripts, qualifications, authorship or contribution records, recruitment records, consent documentation, ethics approval documents, or claims about completed academic or research activities. Allegations involving admission, employment, or

administrative records are coordinated with the applicable procedure. A serious sanction under this policy requires the relevant academic or research connection to be established.

Research misconduct consists of fabrication, falsification, or plagiarism in proposing, performing, reviewing, or reporting research. Honest error and reasonable differences of opinion are excluded. A finding requires a significant departure from accepted research practices and intentional, knowing, or reckless conduct. An unsatisfactory result, disputed method, or inability to reproduce a finding does not by itself establish misconduct.

4 Permitted assistance and technology

Students and researchers remain responsible for the accuracy, attribution, and authenticity of submitted work. Instructors and supervisors communicate permitted assistance and collaboration in writing. Where instructions are unclear, the individual obtains clarification before using assistance that could affect an assessment or claim of original contribution.

Editing, tutoring, methodological advice, and statistical consultation are permitted only within the requirements of the activity. Substantial assistance must be acknowledged when required, and an outside contributor may not replace work the individual must complete personally. Assistance must not involve invented evidence or deceptive representation of authorship.

Use of artificial intelligence is governed by NMU's separate Artificial Intelligence policy and applicable activity instructions. This policy addresses plagiarism, fabricated evidence, false records, and other established integrity violations regardless of the tool or service used.

5 Research data and records

Researchers maintain accurate records sufficient to explain recruitment, consent where applicable, data collection, analysis, and reporting. Original data are preserved securely, with working versions and transformations distinguishable from the source. Access is restricted consistently with confidentiality commitments, permissions, and applicable requirements.

Data cleaning, exclusion, recoding, weighting, imputation, and other transformations must have a defensible methodological basis and be documented. Reporting identifies material decisions that affect interpretation. Researchers preserve enough information to explain the relationship between the original data and the reported findings.

Simulated or synthetic data may be used for an authorized instructional or methodological purpose when clearly identified. Such data must not be represented as observations collected from actual participants or events. Research quotations and participant records must accurately reflect the source material.

Research records are ordinarily retained for seven years after project completion or publication, whichever is later. Applicable retention or destruction requirements and approved consent and data-management terms may require a different period. The integrity officer documents how conflicting requirements are reconciled and whether nonidentifiable documentation may be retained. Destruction must not violate an applicable legal or investigation preservation obligation. Identifiable information is retained only as authorized and necessary.

6 Authorship and publication credit

Authorship reflects substantial scholarly contributions and responsibility for the work. Individuals discuss expected contributions and publication credit early, document the

understanding, and revisit it when contributions change. Each author approves the submitted manuscript and accepts responsibility for their contribution and participation in resolving concerns about the work.

Rank, employment, payment, or supervisory status alone does not establish authorship. Substantial qualifying contributors must receive appropriate credit. Assistance that does not meet authorship criteria is acknowledged when appropriate and with any necessary permission. Undisclosed substantial authorship, honorary authorship, and coercion concerning publication credit are prohibited.

Publications substantially based on a student's independent thesis or dissertation ordinarily identify that student as principal author, consistent with actual contributions and documented disciplinary or publication conventions. Exceptions require a written explanation. A faculty member may not condition appropriate student credit on unrelated services or benefits.

A person may report an authorship dispute directly to the integrity officer. Voluntary discussion or mediation may be attempted when appropriate, but a person is not required to negotiate with an implicated supervisor. An impartial reviewer examines contribution records, drafts, correspondence, agreements, and relevant disciplinary conventions, gives each affected person an opportunity to respond, and recommends a resolution to the Provost. The written decision may address authorship inclusion, acknowledgment, author order, or correction of publication records and may be appealed under Section 12.

Authorship disagreements do not automatically constitute research misconduct. Separately identifiable allegations of plagiarism, fabricated evidence, falsified contribution records, coercion, or retaliation are referred to the appropriate misconduct procedure.

7 Reporting and protection against retaliation

Any person may report a concern to the integrity officer through the reporting contact designated with this policy. A report should identify the conduct, people and work involved, relevant dates, and available evidence. A reporter may describe uncertainty and does not have to establish a completed violation before reporting.

Anonymous reports are assessed when they provide sufficiently specific information to identify evidence. Anonymity may limit follow-up or the available evidence. The university protects information on a need-to-know basis but cannot promise absolute confidentiality or anonymity throughout a proceeding.

Reports implicating the integrity officer go to the alternate reporting official designated by the President. Reports implicating the Provost or another university official go to the President. Reports personally implicating the President go to the independent external reviewer described in Section 2. Relevant documents are preserved promptly while impartial reviewers are appointed.

Retaliation against a person for reporting in good faith, responding to an allegation, supplying evidence, or participating in a proceeding is prohibited and may be investigated separately. An allegation that is not substantiated does not establish that the report was improper. Knowingly false reports or deliberate fabrication of evidence may constitute a separate violation.

8 Initial assessment and evidence preservation

The integrity officer acknowledges an identifiable report within five business days when contact information is available. The officer ordinarily completes initial assessment within fifteen

business days, determining the applicable procedure, specificity of the concern, availability of evidence, conflicts, and any immediate need to protect individuals or records.

Relevant submissions, data, source documents, communications, and access records are secured with an inventory and an access record. Copies are used when appropriate, while preserving evidentiary value. Evidence collection respects applicable access rights and confidentiality restrictions. Individuals must preserve relevant records and cooperate with authorized requests.

The assessment may result in documented closure, an educational response to a minor coursework concern, referral to another procedure, an authorship review, or a formal misconduct review. Closing an allegation is accompanied by reasons. New evidence may justify reopening a matter.

The President may authorize temporary restrictions directly or through a designated official to protect research participants, evidence, assessment integrity, or university operations. The official issuing the restrictions provides written reasons, scope, and a review date. The President appoints an uninvolved reviewer when an affected person requests prompt review. Temporary action does not establish responsibility. Employment-related measures follow the applicable appointment or contract terms.

9 Review and investigation

For coursework concerns, an instructor may provide feedback and a revision opportunity for a minor citation or attribution problem. Educational intervention is documented and distinguished from a formal misconduct finding. Serious concerns and patterns of concern are reported to the integrity officer. Sanctions requiring a responsibility finding follow the formal procedure.

Written notice identifies the alleged acts, relevant policy provisions, applicable evidence standard, possible sanctions, assigned reviewers, and response deadlines. The person receives the evidence relied upon, subject to necessary redaction and confidentiality protections. They ordinarily have at least ten business days to provide a response, identify witnesses, submit evidence, and raise a documented conflict objection. Reasonable extensions and accessibility arrangements may be granted.

Formal coursework reviews ordinarily conclude within thirty business days after notice. Research cases first undergo an inquiry, ordinarily completed within sixty calendar days. A full investigation is warranted when there is a reasonable basis to suspect covered research misconduct and sufficient identifiable evidence to investigate. An inquiry decision identifies its reasons and is not a final misconduct finding. A full investigation ordinarily begins within thirty calendar days of that decision and is completed within one hundred twenty calendar days of its initiation.

An investigation examines each allegation, considers relevant expertise and contrary evidence, and interviews people with material information. A three-member committee handles research investigations and cases involving possible expulsion, degree revocation, or personnel termination for misconduct. Committee composition is disclosed and conflict objections are resolved before substantive review.

The person receives the proposed investigation findings and ordinarily has at least ten business days to comment before the report is finalized. When a severe sanction is possible, a hearing is offered before the initial decision. Written notice provides at least ten business days to prepare. The person may present relevant information, identify witnesses, submit questions for witnesses

through the chair, and attend with an adviser. The hearing chair maintains a fair and orderly process and documents material reasons for excluding evidence or questions. A reliable record of the hearing is retained with confidentiality protections.

Reviewers may require additional evidence after a response or hearing. Material new evidence is disclosed with a further opportunity to respond. The university may proceed after documented reasonable notice if a person declines participation, but nonparticipation is not an admission. Extensions beyond stated targets require written reasons, an updated expected completion date, and notice to affected participants.

10 Findings and ordinary sanctions

NMU bears the burden of establishing a violation by a preponderance of the evidence, meaning that the alleged violation is more likely than not to have occurred. Each allegation is decided separately. Missing records, a software score, or an accusation alone does not establish misconduct. Research findings must also satisfy the departure and state-of-mind requirements in Section 3.

The initial written decision identifies the allegation, established facts, evidence considered, applicable standard, conclusions, and reasons for the sanction or closure. The person has an opportunity to address factors affecting sanctions before the decision. Sanctions reflect seriousness, extent, intent where relevant, educational experience, prior established violations, harm, and relevant mitigation. A proven serious first offense may justify a severe sanction without prior warnings.

Student sanctions may include required instruction, revision or reassessment, a reduced or failing assignment grade, course failure, probation, restrictions, suspension, expulsion, invalidation of affected credit, or degree revocation. Conditions, duration, and any return requirements are stated in writing. Faculty and staff measures may include instruction, corrective supervision, removal from particular duties, restrictions on research or supervision, formal reprimand, or employment or contract action.

Corrective measures may require accurate attribution, correction of data or records, notification of appropriate collaborators, and correction or withdrawal of unreliable publications. Unreliable research may require correction even when culpable misconduct is not established.

Responsibility findings and related employment action are distinguished. Degree revocation and personnel termination for misconduct follow the additional stages in Section 11. The decision includes appeal rights and implementation arrangements.

11 Degree revocation and faculty termination

Degree revocation procedure

Stage 1 Assessment and notice. The integrity officer assesses a credible allegation concerning work or representations used to satisfy requirements for an awarded NMU credential. The graduate receives written notice identifying the disputed degree-related conduct, evidence standard, review procedure, and possibility of revocation.

Stage 2 Investigation. An impartial three-member committee preserves and examines relevant degree records and research evidence. The graduate may review the material relied upon, supply explanations and evidence, and identify witnesses. The committee must address how the alleged conduct relates to the validity of the credential.

Stage 3 Findings and hearing. Proposed findings are disclosed for comment. The graduate is offered a hearing with the protections in Section 9. The committee finalizes an allegation-specific report after considering the response and hearing record.

Stage 4 Academic determination. The Provost reviews the record and determines whether misconduct is established. A revocation recommendation must explain why the proven conduct materially undermines requirements for the awarded credential and why a lesser corrective measure is inadequate. Unrelated later conduct does not by itself justify revocation under this policy.

Stage 5 Initial sanction decision. The President issues a written initial decision addressing revocation, affected credentials, reasons, appeal rights, and the proposed effective date. Applicable requirements are satisfied before this decision is issued. The President may not decide the appeal.

Stage 6 Independent appeal. The graduate may appeal the responsibility finding, sanction, or both under Section 12. Revocation is stayed until the appeal period expires without an appeal or the final appeal determination is issued. A vacancy does not eliminate the appeal or permit implementation before the required review.

Stage 7 Final notice and implementation. The President communicates the final outcome and directs implementation after the appeal period or any timely appeal has concluded, consistent with the final appeal determination. If revocation is upheld, the Registrar records the effective date and affected credential accurately, updates authorized verification records, and provides written confirmation. Any research correction or external notification follows Section 13. Permanent records preserve the original award and subsequent revocation history.

Faculty employment and contract procedure

The following protections also apply when termination of a staff member or contractor is sought as a misconduct sanction. For a nonacademic appointment, the President may designate an uninvolved official to perform the initial responsibility decision and recommendation role. The President makes the sanction decision and directs implementation. Investigation, notice, hearing, independent appeal, and final implementation protections remain applicable.

Stage 1 Assessment and notice. The integrity officer assesses the allegation and the faculty member receives written notice identifying the alleged conduct, applicable standard, possible employment or contract consequences, and review rights. Applicable appointment and contract provisions are identified.

Stage 2 Temporary measures and investigation. The President may authorize documented temporary protections directly or through a designated official, with a review date. The President appoints an impartial three-member committee to investigate cases in which termination may be sought. Measures concerning duties, access, leave, or pay follow the applicable terms and requirements.

Stage 3 Findings and hearing. The faculty member receives proposed findings, access to the relied-upon evidence subject to necessary protections, and opportunities to respond and participate in a hearing. The committee addresses each allegation and considers the response before finalizing its report.

Stage 4 Responsibility determination and recommendation. The Provost determines whether misconduct is established and gives written reasons. Any recommendation for termination

identifies the proposed employment or contract basis and explains the inadequacy of lesser measures. The faculty member may address sanction factors before the initial decision.

Stage 5 Initial employment or contract decision. The President reviews the findings and applicable terms and issues the initial decision. Required employment, appointment, contractual, or other applicable procedures are completed or coordinated at this stage. Any different review rights or required procedure are identified in the notice before the decision.

Stage 6 Independent appeal. The faculty member may appeal findings and the proposed sanction under Section 12 and any identified additional applicable procedure. Final termination for misconduct is stayed pending the appeal period and a timely appeal. Necessary temporary protections may continue with review. The original decision-maker does not decide the appeal.

Stage 7 Final notice and implementation. The President communicates the final decision, effective date, applicable contractual arrangements, and instructions for records and research materials, and directs implementation after the appeal period or any timely appeal has concluded, consistent with the final appeal determination. Dismissal of an employee, termination of a services contract, removal of an academic appointment, and nonrenewal are recorded as distinct actions. Any required separate procedure is observed. An allegation alone does not authorize a misconduct finding or substitute for a required termination procedure.

12 Appeals

The respondent may submit an appeal within ten business days after receipt of the initial decision. In an authorship dispute, each person whose credit is determined may appeal that decision. A reporter may submit new evidence supporting reopening or report procedural or retaliation concerns, but does not acquire a right to appeal another person's sanction solely by reporting. Grounds for an eligible appeal include a material procedural error, relevant new evidence that could not reasonably have been presented earlier, a material conflict or demonstrated bias, a finding unsupported by the evidence under the applicable standard, or a sanction disproportionate to established conduct. The appeal identifies the challenged finding or sanction, grounds, supporting material, and requested outcome.

The integrity officer forwards the appeal and complete case record to the independent appeal panel appointed by the President. The panel determines whether the appeal presents a permitted ground. An otherwise timely appeal is not rejected solely because a reviewer appointment is pending. Panel identities are disclosed, and the person has five business days to submit a reasoned conflict objection to the President. For a case personally implicating the President, the independent external reviewer described in Section 2 appoints the panel and resolves objections.

The panel ordinarily decides the appeal within thirty business days after receiving the complete record. It may affirm, reduce, reverse, or remand a decision for specified further review. It does not impose a more severe sanction on appeal. A remand identifies the required work and provides a further appeal opportunity for any new adverse decision. Material new information considered on appeal is disclosed for response.

The written appeal decision explains the evidence and grounds considered and the reasons for the outcome. Expulsion, degree revocation, and personnel termination imposed as misconduct sanctions are stayed from the initial decision through expiration of the appeal period and, when a timely appeal is filed, through its final disposition. Other sanctions may be stayed by the panel when needed to prevent an unfair consequence. Any continuing temporary measures remain subject to review. Required external or contractual rights are preserved.

13 Records and external notifications

The Office of Ethical Compliance retains reports, inventories, notices, evidence relied upon, responses, investigation and hearing records, decisions, appeals, and implementation records. Access is limited to authorized people with a legitimate need. Case files are retained for at least seven years after final resolution, with longer retention for preservation obligations. Final decisions involving expulsion, invalidated credit, degree revocation, or termination are retained permanently by the appropriate records office.

Disclosure follows applicable privacy requirements, contractual obligations, consent restrictions, and a documented purpose. A reporter receives an appropriate notice of closure or completion, with private information protected. Public reporting of allegations or sanctions is not routine. Research corrections identify the affected findings accurately and disclose only information necessary for the correction.

The President, advised by the integrity officer, determines whether a publisher, collaborator, sponsor, regulatory authority, or another recipient must be notified and directs any required notification. The reason, recipient, information disclosed, and timing are documented. Urgent protective obligations may require action before a final finding. Sponsor-specific procedures apply when relevant support or an agreement creates those obligations.

Where an allegation is not substantiated, the university takes reasonable steps to correct any inaccurate institutional communication about a finding and restore permissions restricted solely because of the allegation, subject to any separate justified restriction.

14 Education and policy administration

Instructors and supervisors communicate integrity expectations and provide appropriate guidance on attribution, collaboration, data records, and research responsibilities. Committee members and deciding officials receive orientation to the policy, evidence standard, confidentiality, conflict rules, and the applicable case procedure before serving.

The Office of Ethical Compliance reviews implementation annually and recommends revisions to the President. The President approves amendments and sets their approval and effective dates. The President designates reporting officials, maintains access to qualified investigators and appeal reviewers, and ensures that the procedures in this policy can be carried out. Amendments are communicated through the manual and website. Material differences between the website summary and the policy are corrected promptly. Vacancies do not eliminate notice, response, hearing, or appeal protections. The complete approved policy governs the university process.

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