

VERIFICATION OF SUSPECTED PLAGIARISM/SELF-PLAGIARISM AND WITHDRAWAL OF DOCTORAL DEGREE. ANTI-PLAGIARISM PROGRAMS AND THE VALUE OF SIMILARITY REPORTS

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Abstract

In today's world, where information is easily accessible and shared, academic integrity is crucial for maintaining the credibility of educational systems. However, new challenges, such as dealing with plagiarism and self-plagiarism, have made it harder to verify the originality of academic work, especially for doctoral research. Although anti-plagiarism software has been developed to help detect copied content, there are debates about the usefulness and accuracy of these tools.

While anti-plagiarism programs are valuable tools, they should be used in conjunction with expert human judgment to ensure that plagiarism is detected accurately. The process of withdrawing a doctoral degree should be carefully considered and only applied in cases of serious misconduct. This paper argues for a balanced approach to verifying academic integrity, where technology supports human expertise, and the focus is on education and promoting ethical research practices. As self-plagiarism becomes a more significant issue, it's important that regulations evolve to address it, ensuring the continued trustworthiness and credibility of academic research.

Keywords: *doctoral research, plagiarism, self-plagiarism, similarities.*

1. Introduction

In an age of fast and accessible information flows, academic integrity has become a fundamental principle in international education systems, with new challenges.

A problem with significant impact is determined by the legal institutions *plagiarism* and *self-plagiarism*, and the verification of suspected plagiarism, especially in the case of doctoral degrees, is a continuous challenge. Anti-plagiarism programs have evolved to support this verification process, but the value of similarity reports raises debate, as we will show below.

We are aware of plagiarism as the main problem impacting on the credibility of academic research and, in the following, I have set out to analyze in more detail the younger challenge, self-plagiarism. It remains to be observed what are the main forms that *self-plagiarism* can take, how this legal institution has been regulated in other legal systems, whether it has produced consequences in the Romanian legal system prior to the appearance of the law that defines it and what are the possible interpretations.

This paper focuses on the legal and ethical concerns around plagiarism, with a special emphasis on self-plagiarism, an issue that is becoming increasingly important but is often misunderstood in academic legal frameworks. The first section of this paper explains what plagiarism and self-plagiarism mean in a legal context. According to Romania's Law no. 199/2023 on higher education, plagiarism is when someone presents another person's work as their own, while self-plagiarism occurs when someone republishes parts of their own previous work without acknowledging it. Although self-plagiarism wasn't clearly defined before, it has been gradually introduced into the law, and this paper examines how it's being regulated and its potential consequences. The second section looks at anti-plagiarism programs, which are widely used in academic settings to check for suspected plagiarism. Tools like iThenticate and Turnitin help detect similarities between texts by comparing them to large databases of academic content. While these programs are helpful, the interpretation of their results is not always straightforward. A high similarity score doesn't automatically mean that plagiarism has occurred, as it could be due to proper citations or common phrases used in the field. This section also discusses the challenges of detecting self-plagiarism, which often involves reusing parts of previous publications without making it clear that they have been used before. The third section highlights the role of similarity reports in detecting plagiarism and their limitations. Although these reports provide useful insights into potential issues,

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they should not be relied on solely. They can't distinguish between correctly cited material and actual plagiarism, and they may miss instances where text has been paraphrased without proper citation. In these cases, human judgment is essential to assess the context and determine whether plagiarism has occurred. Additionally, these reports can serve an educational purpose, helping authors learn proper citation practices and avoid plagiarism in future work. Despite the usefulness of anti-plagiarism software, it's clear that human review is necessary to interpret the findings properly. The verification process involves several steps, including identifying potential plagiarism, generating a similarity report, analyzing the context of similarities, and investigating further if needed. This process ensures that academic integrity is maintained. The final section focuses on the serious consequences of academic misconduct, particularly the withdrawal of doctoral degrees. This is a critical measure to protect the integrity of the academic system. In Romania, the process for withdrawing a doctoral degree involves a thorough investigation to determine whether plagiarism or other forms of misconduct occurred. If substantial plagiarism or falsification of data is found, the doctoral title can be revoked. This serves as both a punishment for the individual and a message to the academic community about the importance of ethical conduct.

2. Definition. Plagiarism and self-plagiarism

According to art. 169 para. 1 letter d) and e) of the Law no. 199/2023¹ on higher education (hereinafter Law no. 199/2023), plagiarism and self-plagiarism have been defined by the legislator as follows: „d) plagiarism – the presentation as a supposedly personal scientific creation or contribution in a written work, including in electronic format, of texts, ideas, demonstrations, data, theories, results or scientific methods taken from written works, including in electronic format, of other authors, without mentioning this and without reference to the original sources; e) self-plagiarism – the republication of substantial parts of one's own previous publications, including translations, without properly indicating or citing the original.”

2.1. Special references in relation to „self-plagiarism”

Although it was not defined until the appearance of Law no. 199/2023, the institution of self-plagiarism was introduced in the national legislation through the amendments and additions that the GO no. 28/2011² brings to Law no. 206/2004 on good conduct in scientific research, technological development and innovation (hereinafter Law no. 206/2004).

The list in art. 2 sets out the deviations the rules of good conduct in scientific research, while Article 4 of the same law refers to „the exposition in a written work or oral communication, including in electronic format, of texts, expressions, demonstrations, data, hypotheses, theories, results or scientific methods taken from written works, including in electronic format, of the same author or authors, without mentioning this and without referring to the original sources”.

In the new regulation, the chapter „University Ethics and Deontology” of the Law no. 199/2023 addresses, in separate sections, the rules of university ethics and deontology, followed by a list of deviations from these rules, including self-plagiarism.

Although the above definition would seem clear enough to the public, it is built on elements that presuppose a teleological analysis of the key words: „republication”, „substantial parts”, „own previous publications”, „to indicate properly”, „to cite the original”. Any approach to the terminology used by the legislator finds its meaning in the pursuit of the purpose of the legislation. The issue of self-plagiarism is closely linked to the institutions before which various forms of copying one's own work could be considered a form of unethical conduct. The benefits that would be gained by copying one's own work (grades, recognition, publication, financial advantages) cannot be excluded from the analysis.

2.2. Forms of self-plagiarism

Re-using a previously published work in its entirety without indicating so. *Example:* A researcher publishes an article in a scientific journal, then re-submits it to another journal without mentioning that it has already been published.

¹ Law no. 199/2023, published in the Official Gazette of Romania, Part I, no. 614/05.07.2023, in force from September 03, 2023.

² Published in the Official Gazette of Romania no. 628/02.09.2011.

Publication splitting or „salami slicing”, where a large study is artificially divided into several papers to increase the number of publications. *Example:* A large clinical trial is divided into several small articles that present each data set separately without clarifying the relationship between them.

Partial rewording of passages from an earlier work without proper citation. *Example:* An author rewrites sections of an older work with synonyms and minor changes, but without indicating the original source.

Publishing the same data in different contexts but presenting it as new. *Example:* A researcher publishes the same experimental results at two different conferences, suggesting that they are new findings each time.

Some of these notions have been interpreted in precedent through the prism of a known and widely accepted deviation, plagiarism.

Therefore, an analysis of the concept of self-plagiarism will include a joint analysis of the terms used and a specific terms.

In terms of the terminology used in the definitions, the distinction between the two concepts could be summarized by saying that plagiarism is when texts, ideas and/or works belonging to other authors are taken without properly disclosing their identity, but by presenting them in an original manner, whereas self-plagiarism would imply a reuse of one's own ideas, texts, works, without mentioning them as being previous („republishing” of „substantial parts” of „substantial parts” of „its own previous publications” without „properly indicating” or „citing the original”).

3. Anti-plagiarism programs. Similarity reports

3.1. Anti-plagiarism programs

In Romania, the use of anti-plagiarism programs in higher education institutions was regulated by the **Order of the Minister of National Education and Scientific Research no. 3485 of March 24, 2016.**

This order approves the list of programs recognized by the **National Council for the Attestation of University Degrees, Diplomas and Certificates (CNATDCU)**, which are used at the level of higher education institutions organizing doctoral studies and the Romanian Academy, in order to establish the degree of similarity for scientific works are:

- iThenticate;
- Turnitin;
- Plagiarism Detector + PDAS (Plagiarism Detector Accumulator Server);
- SafeAssign;
- SEMPLAG;
- www.sistemantiplagiat.ro.

According to *edupedu.ro*, higher education institutions may request to add other purchased software to this list, provided that the requirements set by the Ministry of Education are met.

Anti-plagiarism programs provide a quick and systematic method of identifying possible similarities between the work in question and existing sources. However, the evaluation of a similarity report is not an automatic process, nor is it infallible. The value of these reports depends not only on the technology used but also on the correct interpretation of the results.

Anti-plagiarism programs are designed to compare texts against vast databases containing academic papers, articles, websites and other publicly accessible sources. While the technology is useful in detecting identical or very similar portions of text, it cannot, in many cases, determine whether plagiarism was intended or whether the copied passages are justified by correctly citing the original source.

The article „*Towards an integrated diagnosis of plagiarism*” emphasizes the importance of confidentiality and thorough analysis in the process of checking suspicions of plagiarism: „*In the phase of checking suspicions of plagiarism, the specialist assessors must ensure full confidentiality of the debate on the case in question, and must thoroughly substantiate the decisions they take*”.³

³ D. Sandu, *Towards an integrated diagnosis of plagiarism*, in Contributors, March 2017.

3.2. Steps in the verification process

In general, the procedure for checking a paper for suspected plagiarism follows a few essential steps:

- *Identifying suspicions:* The process starts with identifying a possible suspicion of plagiarism. This can be triggered by a number of sources: a referral from another academic or a student, a report generated by an anti-plagiarism program, or even observations made by the doctoral thesis evaluation committee. In many cases, these suspicions may arise when a text stands out from the rest of the work in terms of its quality or shows obvious inconsistencies in writing style.

- *Generating the similarity report:* After identifying a suspicion, the work is entered into an anti-plagiarism program to generate a similarity report. These programs (such as Turnitin, Urkund, Plagscan, etc.) compare the work against a large database that includes scholarly papers, websites, articles and other publicly available sources. The report provides a percentage of similarities, highlighting passages that might be plagiarized and the sources that match them.

- *Analysis of the similarity ratio:* Once the report is obtained, a detailed analysis of the report is done. It is essential that reviewers or the plagiarism committee do not rely solely on the overall percentage of similarity. For example, if the report indicates 30% similarity, this does not necessarily mean that the work is plagiarized, as many similarities can come from correctly attributed citations or standardized wording in the field. Detailed analysis involves checking each section to understand the context of the similarities.

- *Checking sources and context:* Checking sources is an important step in determining whether passages identified as similar have been cited correctly. If the source is properly cited in the bibliography and the text is placed in the proper context, then the similarity can be justified and does not indicate plagiarism. On the other hand, if significant passages are copied without citation, it may prove plagiarism.

- *Further investigation:* If the analysis of the similarity report raises questions, the committee may decide to investigate further. This may include interviews with the author of the paper to understand his or her intent and to verify whether there was any knowledge of the plagiarized sources. Experts in the specific field of the thesis may also be consulted to assess whether the work or sources in question are necessary and relevant to the field of research.

3.3. Similarity reports

Similarity reports, generated by anti-plagiarism programs, are an essential tool in the process of identifying possible cases of plagiarism. They provide a preliminary analysis of the similarities between the work under investigation and existing sources, highlighting passages that may be plagiarized or that resemble previously published work. While similarity reports are extremely useful, their value should be understood in the wider context of the vetting process, with both advantages and limitations.

The similarity ratio is just the first step in a broader investigation. A ratio of 40-50% similarity does not necessarily mean plagiarism, as it may indicate the use of common sources such as citations or standardized phrases in the field. Conversely, a report that contains passages copied in their entirety without proper referencing may signal a violation of academic norms. It must be interpreted carefully, taking into account the context of the work and the research field. It should also be noted that a high similarity ratio does not automatically warrant a decision to withdraw the doctoral degree, additional evidence is required.

The document „*Academic Deontology - Framework Curriculum*” states that „*Similarity reports do not in themselves determine whether a text is plagiarized or original. Such a verdict requires a qualitative analysis of the human factor, more specifically of the teacher who checks the work with the help of these programs and reports*”⁴.

3.3.1. Benefits of similarity reports

- *Quick detection of possible similarities:* Similarity reports are very useful in quickly identifying sections of a paper that contain passages similar to existing sources. This saves time and resources for thesis reviewers, allowing them to focus on analyzing the most suspicious sections in detail. For example, a report may highlight passages of text that are very similar to already published articles, books or research papers, thus signaling

⁴ L. Papadima, A. Avram, C. Berlic, B. Murgescu, M.-L. Murgescu, M. Popescu, C. Rughiniș, D. Sandu, E. Socaciu, E. Șercan, B. Ștefănescu, S.E. Tănăsescu, S. Voinea, *Academic Deontology - Framework Curriculum*, bibliotecadigitală.ro - eticasiintegritate.unibuc.ro.

possible violations of academic ethics.

- *Comparing work with diverse sources:* Anti-plagiarism programs compare work with a wide range of sources, including scholarly articles, books, online published works and websites, providing a broader framework for assessing potential plagiarism. This makes the reports a comprehensive and effective tool in detecting most forms of plagiarism, including unacknowledged citations and partial plagiarism.

- *Providing a starting point for detailed analysis:* Similarity reports are never definitive, but they provide a solid starting point for researchers, professors or review panels to further examine whether similarities are justified or whether they represent an ethical violation. For example, a report that indicates a similarity between an excerpt from a thesis and a published article can help reviewers to quickly check whether the author has correctly cited the source.

- *Prevent plagiarism through education:* Another important benefit of similarity reports is that they can be used not only to detect plagiarism, but also to educate authors of academic papers. Students or researchers who use these programs can learn to cite their sources correctly and avoid plagiarism through increased awareness of how anti-plagiarism checks work.

3.3.2. Limitations and challenges of similarity reports

Despite their obvious usefulness, similarity reports should be treated with caution, and their value depends largely on the context in which they are used and how they are interpreted:

- *False positives:* One of the biggest drawbacks of similarity reports is the occurrence of false positives. This refers to cases where the report indicates similarities between two texts, but not plagiarism. For example, a report may indicate a high percentage of similarity in a paper that uses a particular term or phrase that is common in the field, without this constituting plagiarism. This may include quotations, standardized phrases or technical definitions that are accepted as *common knowledge* in the field. A similarity report cannot distinguish between a correct citation and an unauthorized borrowing of text.

- *Paraphrased plagiarism:* Another type of limitation is the difficulty in detecting paraphrased plagiarism. When the author expresses ideas taken from an original source in his or her own words, modifying sentence structure or wording, it is much harder for anti-plagiarism programs to detect similarities. Similarity reports are generally based on exact text comparison, and paraphrasing can lead to false negative results (i.e. failure to detect plagiarism). A paraphrased plagiarism occurs when someone rewrites someone else's ideas in different words, but without mentioning the original source. Although the phrase may sound different, the information still comes from an external source and must be cited correctly.

- *Context extraction:* Similarity reports are based on textual analysis, but they do not take into account the context in which a particular piece of text is used. For example, a report can detect a phrase that is similar to another text, but cannot assess whether that phrase is part of a correct citation or is used inappropriately. This lack of context can lead to misinterpretation of the results.

- *Database dependency:* Anti-plagiarism programs have a database limited to the sources they can analyze. Thus, a similarity report may not detect plagiarism from unindexed sources (such as unpublished papers or private online sources). Some sources may also be omitted from program databases, which may leave some cases of plagiarism unidentified.

- *Subjective evaluation:* Another important aspect to consider is that the similarity ratio is only a technological tool and its interpretation depends on the evaluators. A report may indicate significant similarities in a paper, but different reviewers may come to different conclusions about what constitutes plagiarism and what is acceptable as a fair reference. Thus, subjective evaluation plays an important role in the validation process of a similarity report.

- *Limitations of anti-plagiarism programs:* While anti-plagiarism programs are useful, they cannot detect all forms of plagiarism. For example, in the case of para paraphrased plagiarism, where the author changes the words but retains the gist of the text, some anti-plagiarism programs may not identify similarities. Also, many programs cannot analyze unindexed sources, such as material published only in hard copy or in unpublished research.

- *Clever or hidden plagiarism:* In some cases, researchers may try to *disguise* plagiarism by using advanced paraphrasing techniques or altering the structure of the text, which makes similarities harder for anti-plagiarism software to identify. In this case, detecting plagiarism depends a lot on the expertise of reviewers

who have to go beyond the limits of the technology and apply critical judgment to the work.

- *Lack of training for reviewers:* Another significant obstacle in the verification process is the lack of a standardized set of skills for reviewers who review similarity reports. In some cases, reviewers may not be familiar with the latest plagiarism techniques or anti-plagiarism technologies. There may also be significant differences between reviewers as to what constitutes *acceptable plagiarism* and *unacceptable plagiarism*, which may lead to inconsistencies in the application of ethical standards.

- *Time and resources needed:* Checking for plagiarism in doctoral work can be a time and resource consuming process. In some cases, researchers may have to sift through large volumes of texts and sources to assess every similarity, which can delay the evaluation process and final decision.

3.3.3. How the value of similarity ratios can be increased

To ensure effective use of similarity reports, it is important that they are used in a wider context, which includes:

- *Careful verification of context and sources:* It is essential that evaluations based on similarity reports include a detailed verification of the sources identified and take into account the context of the work. Reviewers need to be trained to distinguish between correct citations and actual plagiarism, depending on the research field and academic norms.

- *Use as an educational tool:* Similarity reports can be used not only to detect plagiarism, but also to educate authors on correct citation and paraphrasing techniques. This can help prevent plagiarism and promote more rigorous and ethical research.

- *Combination with human-assisted evaluation:* While anti-plagiarism programs are useful, they cannot replace detailed human evaluation. Similarity reports should only be a starting point for a more thorough examination of the work by experienced professionals.

3.4. The importance of a balanced verification process

Despite the challenges, checking suspicions of plagiarism is essential for maintaining academic standards. It is important that checking procedures are well regulated and uniformly implemented to ensure that all researchers are assessed fairly and equitably. At the same time, the assessment must be flexible and take into account the particularities of each piece of work, thus avoiding unfair sanctions for cases that do not really constitute plagiarism.

4. Withdrawal of doctoral title

4.1. The sanctioning nature of the withdrawal of the doctoral title and the role in society

Withdrawal of the doctoral title is an extremely serious measure designed to protect academic integrity and to ensure ethical standards in research. This measure is taken following a process of checking for a possible violation of plagiarism or other unethical behaviour in research. Withdrawal of the doctoral title is not only a sanction for the author of the plagiarized work, but also a way of preserving trust in the academic system and protecting the reputation of the awarding institution.

4.2. Procedure for withdrawal of the doctor's title before and after entry into the civil circuit

In Romania, the withdrawal of a doctor's degree is regulated by the Law no. 199/2023, which amended the procedure for verifying suspicions of plagiarism and the procedure for withdrawing a doctor's degree obtained through academic fraud.

The procedure for withdrawing a doctor's degree lasts a maximum of **two months and five days** and is detailed in **art. 168-172**, which reads as follows:

- *Complaint:* Any natural or legal person may submit a written complaint to CNATDCU, reporting non-compliance with quality or professional ethics standards, including suspected plagiarism in a doctoral thesis.

- *Preliminary analysis:* CNATDCU evaluates the referral to determine whether there are sufficient grounds to initiate a detailed investigation. This involves the identification of a possible breach of ethical rules, usually through a similarity report flagging a high proportion of copied text or through an internal investigation

within the institution.

- If the complaint is considered to be well-founded, the CNATDCU appoints a committee of experts in the field of the thesis in question to carry out an in-depth analysis.
- *Thesis evaluation*: the committee analyzes the PhD thesis in question, verifying the originality of the content and the respect of ethical and professional standards.
- *Committee report*: Following the evaluation, the committee draws up a detailed report setting out its conclusions and recommendations.
- *Decision of CNATDCU*: Based on the committee's report, CNATDCU may propose the withdrawal of the PhD title if serious misconduct, such as plagiarism, is found.
- *Issuing the withdrawal order*: the proposal of CNATDCU is forwarded to the Minister of Education, who may issue an official order to withdraw the doctoral degree:
 - If the decision is not appealed or the appeal is rejected, and the doctoral degree has not entered the civil circuit and has not produced legal effects, the Minister of Education orders the revocation of the order granting the degree within 30 days.
 - If the title of doctor has entered the civil circuit and has produced legal effects, the Ministry of Education files an action in administrative litigation for the annulment of the order granting the title.

CCR delivered its decision no. 364 of June 8, 2022. According to this decision, the withdrawal of a doctoral degree by the Ministry of Education is constitutional only if the degree has not entered the civil circuit and has not produced legal effects. Otherwise, the annulment of the title can only be achieved through the courts.

4.3. When to withdraw the doctoral title

Withdrawal of the doctoral title is an extremely rare measure and is only imposed in the most serious cases, usually when it is irrevocably proven that the thesis has been plagiarized or when the research included in the work has been carried out in serious breach of academic ethics. Some of the reasons that can lead to the withdrawal of the doctoral title are:

- *Blatant plagiarism*: If a doctoral dissertation contains significant plagiarized passages and the author has not properly cited the sources or acknowledged the appropriateness of the borrowing of ideas or text, and this is clearly proven, withdrawal of the title may be a justified measure. It is essential that the plagiarism is substantial and affects the completeness of the research.
- *Falsification of data or results*: If the author of the doctoral thesis has falsified or manipulated data to support false conclusions or to obtain results that are not supported by actual research, this behavior may justify withdrawal of the doctoral degree.
- *Violation of research ethics*: Apart from plagiarism, there are other behaviors that can violate academic ethics, such as manipulating participants in a study, falsifying bibliographic sources, failing to follow the principles of responsible research. These, if clearly proven, can lead to withdrawal of the title.
- In cases where serious misconduct is found in the thesis evaluation process (e.g.: evaluators who did not respect academic standards or significant conflicts of interest that influenced the awarding process), there is the possibility to revoke the doctoral title.

4.4. Implications of withdrawal of the doctoral title

Withdrawal of the doctoral title has significant implications for both the author of the work and the institution that awarded the title. The main implications include:

- *Impact on the author's career*: The withdrawal of a doctoral degree is a major blow to a researcher's career. They lose not only their academic title but also their professional credibility. Depending on the seriousness of the misconduct, the author may be expelled from the academic community and face significant difficulties in obtaining a job in academia or research.
- *Loss of trust in the institution*: The decision to withdraw a doctoral degree can damage the reputation of the awarding institution and the publication of such a measure can give a negative signal about the level of academic rigor. However, the withdrawal of the title can also be seen as a measure to protect the reputation of the institution by demonstrating commitment to academic integrity.
- *Recovery of benefits*: In some cases, the author may be required to return any material benefits

obtained on the basis of the doctoral degree, such as grants, scholarships or awards. The author will also no longer be able to use the doctoral title for professional or academic purposes.

- *Preventing further cases of plagiarism:* Withdrawal of the doctoral title can also serve as a warning to other researchers, sending a clear message about the seriousness of plagiarism and other unethical behavior. In this way, it can help prevent similar misconduct among other students and researchers.

5. Conclusions

The verification of academic originality plays a pivotal role in safeguarding the principles of scholarly integrity and in preserving the credibility of research. In this context, anti-plagiarism software functions as an essential instrument by enabling the rapid identification of potentially unoriginal content. These systems operate through algorithmic comparisons of submitted texts against extensive databases, which include academic publications, books, websites, and other accessible digital resources. By highlighting textual similarities, such tools offer substantial support in the preliminary stages of academic review and quality assurance.

However, while these technological solutions are invaluable in facilitating the detection process, their outputs demand careful human interpretation. Similarity reports should not be accepted uncritically; rather, they require contextualized analysis that considers the nature of the content, the genre of academic writing, and the author's methodological and citation practices. Not all instances of textual similarity constitute plagiarism – indeed, many reflect legitimate scholarly conventions, such as the use of standard terminology, properly cited references, or commonly accepted knowledge within a specific field.

Conversely, academic misconduct may take various forms, ranging from overt duplication of others' work to more subtle infractions such as self-plagiarism, wherein authors recycle portions of their previously published work without proper attribution. Distinguishing between these requires discernment and academic judgment. Thus, institutions must not rely solely on software-generated data but should integrate it within a holistic, human-led evaluative framework to ensure decisions are both fair and academically sound.

The revocation of a doctoral degree represents one of the most serious actions an academic institution can undertake. As the doctoral title symbolizes a culmination of years of research and scholarly achievement, its withdrawal can have profound consequences for the individual's professional standing and personal reputation. Therefore, any such decision must be grounded in a comprehensive, multilayered review process. This includes identifying the contested material, utilizing anti-plagiarism tools to assess textual overlap, and consulting disciplinary experts to evaluate the significance and context of the findings. Only through such a rigorous and equitable procedure can the institution ensure that its conclusions are justifiable and ethically responsible.

Furthermore, rescinding a doctoral degree must always be regarded as a measure of last resort, reserved for unequivocal cases of academic misconduct – such as confirmed plagiarism or data fabrication. The overarching aim should be not only to uphold academic standards but also to protect the integrity and trustworthiness of the institution that confers such degrees. Throughout this process, transparency, procedural fairness, and the opportunity for all parties to present evidence and clarify intent must be maintained.

In sum, while anti-plagiarism technologies are indispensable for monitoring academic integrity, they are only one component of a broader evaluative system. These tools must be supplemented by expert human judgment that appreciates the subtleties of academic discourse. When questions of serious misconduct arise – particularly those that may lead to the withdrawal of a doctoral qualification – institutions bear the responsibility of conducting a fair, informed, and transparent inquiry. By harmonizing technological capabilities with academic expertise, universities can effectively preserve both the integrity of scholarly work and the value of the degrees they award.

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