Guidelines on the Assessment of Plagiarism in Degree Theses

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The term plagiarism is difficult to be clearly defined. As useful definition can be found at the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers that specifies "plagiarism as the use of someone else's prior ideas, processes, results, or words without explicitly acknowledging the original author and source." [1, Sec. 8.2.1.B] Plagiarism in degree theses is unacceptable and will usually lead to a fail of the corresponding examination or project. Therefore, each thesis or report has to be checked using the Ephorus software package. This software will mainly find verbatim copies of external text parts, i. e. several words in the same order. Not everything that will be found as potential plagiarism will be effectively accounted as actual plagiarism. The examiner or supervisor has to carefully check and judge each finding and decide about the thesis on a case-by-case review. The following guidelines shall help in this task.

1 No significant plagiarism

Explanation:

- There are no sentences or sentence parts (longer than 10 words) that have been copied verbatim from other sources, which could not be easily rephrased.
- All other sources are correctly marked for the indirect citations.
- All figures, tables and significant formulas that have been used from external sources are correctly cited.

Result: The report or thesis can be accepted without problems.

2 Some relevant plagiarism

Explanation:

- There are some sentences that have been copied verbatim from other sources and that could have been rephrased, but the amount is less than 5 % and less than 150 words, they appear in less than three paragraphs and only in the basic sections.
- Some sources are not correctly marked for the indirect citations, but not more than two.
- Some figures, tables and significant formulas that have been used from external sources are not correctly cited, but not more than three.

Result: The report or thesis can be accepted, but the result will be lowered by at least one grade.

3 Severe amount of plagiarism

Explanation:

- There are more plagiarized passages than mentioned in Sec. 2.
- Plagiarized parts not only occur in the basic sections.

Result: The report or thesis cannot be accepted. The student fails.

Self-plagiarism

Self-plagiarism in student's report and theses can occur, if the student works on a similar topic in different projects, e. g. if a research or integrated project is extended in a Master thesis. The same report or thesis cannot be graded and recognized as an academic record twice. Nevertheless, the student is allowed to use results of his earlier works, if:

- the earlier work is mentioned (in this case, sentences don't have to be necessarily marked as direct citations, an indirect citation is sufficient)
- the total amount of re-used material is less than 35 % to 40 % in the new report or thesis, i. e. a significant extension of the earlier work must be achieved.

Amount of allowed direct citations

Students can easily avoid plagiarism by placing each and everything into quotation marks and citing some source. However, a collection of many direct citations is not yet a well-written thesis or report. Therefore, the amount of direct citations should be limited to the following percentages:

- 10 % for reports or theses, where the primary task is to solve a question of research,
- 20 % for reports or theses, where the primary task is a literature survey.

References

[1] IEEE Publication Services and Products Board Operations Manual, Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers, 445 Hoes Lane, Piscataway, NJ 08854, USA, Nov. 2015. [Online]. Available: http://www.ieee.org/documents/opsmanual.pdf 2