

# Milpark Education reaffirms commitment to academic integrity

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The newly-created Department of Assessment Integrity is an indication of how seriously Milpark takes academic standards, says its head, Riette Brune. She believes the fast-paced online environment and the emergence of artificial intelligence (AI) demands continuous strict supervision and rigorous adherence to rules and regulations to ensure the educational institution maintains the highest levels of academic excellence.



Milpark Education has updated its discipline policy and procedures and published these in a document called the Milpark Good Conduct and Disciplinary Policy for Students. It has been compiled by the new Department of Assessment Integrity and clearly sets out the student disciplinary code in terms of good conduct and ethical academic processes.

Since 2020, all assessments and examinations have been conducted online and all tuition takes place virtually. “Milpark Education recognises that the environment that we find ourselves in is different,” says the department’s new head, Riette Brune. “In the last six months we have noticed many new issues we never had to deal with before. We will keep updating the policy and informing students and faculty members of any changes.”

The discussions around the role of artificial intelligence (AI) chatbots like ChatGPT as well as other aspects regarding the way online assessments are conducted and moderated, have led to Milpark Education management wanting to ensure best practices are in place, not only to maintain academic integrity but to give students the assurance that their qualifications are measured against the highest academic standards, says Brune.

“We want our students to share in the culture of integrity we have in the business, which means reaching out more from our side, which is more challenging in an online space,” says Brune. This means communicating clearly to students how they should conduct themselves online and how to engage with the institution during assessments. The assessment rules and regulations are sent to students and they are also given videos and emails to inform them what is expected of them as well as the repercussions that await those who do not comply or are in contravention. On the day of examinations, an IT team is ready to help students deal with any tech issues too.

“We are aware that there are more opportunities for irregularity now, but we can assure everyone that we know what they are. We have software in place, like Proctorio, which monitors and records students while they participate in assessments.

There is also a team of reviewers analysing their exam recordings and we pick up on inconsistencies fairly quickly,” says Brune.

When a student’s assessment has been flagged for irregularity, it is sent for further review by a disciplinary committee that again scrutinises the recordings of the assessments and a report is compiled to ensure appropriate action is taken. In cases of serious or repeat misconduct, students are then invited to give their side at a hearing and each case is decided on its own merits. The disciplinary hearings are not trials but are conducted in an informal manner so as not to be intimidating for students. Brune stresses the importance of such hearings being fair and timeously concluded so that students can resume studies.

“We always take student circumstances into account and often a response will be to recommend the rewriting of a certain assessment. Sometimes there is ignorance about procedures and students admit to not reading the information sent out on assessment criteria.”

In cases where cheating and misconduct is evident, the consequences are more severe and a suspension may follow. Brune says Milpark Education wants students to know there are consequences and that they can be severe. This is why the organisation wants to engage more with students to inform them about the importance of a culture of integrity. This underscores the value of the qualification and the institution offering it.

Brune says Milpark also wants to reassure students who are working hard and are serious about their studies that the institution will not allow students getting external help or using tools during assessments to get away with such conduct. Committed students following the rules can be comfortable in the knowledge that those trying to cut corners will always be found out.

While other learning institutions may be struggling to main credibility and adherence to academic standards, Brune says Milpark believes it is important to stay up to date with all technological advances that could either assist students or academics, whether ethically or unethically.

“There should never be any doubt about the quality of a Milpark Education qualification. It has been obtained in an environment regulated by strict ethical and academic practices and procedures,” says Brune. “This message should reassure not only potential employers of graduates and other stakeholders, but students themselves, who know they are getting one of the finest qualifications at a higher educational institution in SA.”

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