GUIDELINES TO INFORM THE USE OF SIMILARITY DETECTING SOFTWARE BY UNIT OF STUDY COORDINATORS AND FACULTIES FOR THE PURPOSE OF EDUCATING STUDENTS ABOUT ACADEMIC HONESTY.

The following guidelines should be used to inform the use of similarity detecting software (SDS) by staff for the purpose of educating students about academic honesty. The guidelines were prepared by the Educating for Academic Honesty Working Party and are based on the University of Sydney Academic Dishonesty and Plagiarism in Coursework Policy, effective January 2012; experience of and inquiry into the use of SDS in local contexts in several Faculties; published research on the use of Turnitin® in higher education; and other Australian universities’ guides to Turnitin® for staff and students. The similarity detecting software for text funded by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Education) and supported in the University is Turnitin®.

GUIDELINE 1
SDS is software that for each student assignment produces a report that requires understanding and skill to interpret. Staff who are responsible for interpreting SDS reports for student assignments should attend the relevant Sydney eLearning Extension Workshop (if using Turnitin) and/or Faculty-based session. [Relevant Policy section 4.3.4]

GUIDELINE 2
It should be recognised that SDS is software with the option of generating reports based on finding similarities across works, and as such it is one of the tools that may inform a decision that plagiarism has occurred. This decision is always a matter of academic judgement for the examiner or marker. [Relevant Policy section 4.3.2]

GUIDELINE 3
When SDS is used in a unit of study, students should be informed through written statements that the purpose of the software is to help lecturers and tutors to detect instances of apparent plagiarism. [Relevant Policy section 4.3.4 (e)]

GUIDELINE 4
To foster academic honesty SDS should be used in conjunction with the Library’s iResearch online module http://sydney.edu.au/library/elearning/learn/plagiarism/index.php on plagiarism and academic honesty, and/or any discipline or Faculty specific training modules. [Relevant Policy section 4.2.3 (a)]

GUIDELINE 5
To foster academic honesty SDS should be used in conjunction with formal in-class writing activities, Learning Centre sessions and/or the Write Site, [http://writesite.elearn.usyd.edu.au/] which are designed to scaffold students’ development of academic writing skills, including paraphrasing and referencing. [Relevant Policy section 4.2.3 (a)]

GUIDELINE 6
In-class writing activities may involve students critically evaluating samples of SDS reports through discussion led by a unit of study coordinator or tutor, but should focus on providing students with feedback and guidance on academic writing skills. [Relevant Policy section 4.2.3 (a)]

GUIDELINE 7
Activities designed to scaffold students’ development of academic writing skills should be supplemented with assessment and feedback on the development of these skills (e.g., through in-class or online quizzes on paraphrasing and referencing). [Relevant Policy section 4.2.3 (a)]

GUIDELINE 8
Students should not be permitted to pre-submit an assignment and independently view its SDS report and then submit the assignment. Allowing students to independently view their SDS report encourages students to focus on avoiding detection, rather than fostering their understanding of academic honesty. Any viewing by students of sample SDS reports should only occur in conjunction with approved formal in-class and/or online writing activities which are designed to scaffold students’ development of academic writing skills (see Guideline 6).