Universiteit Utrecht

MA program New Media & Digital Culture

Research Lab 1

Situating Research

Block 1, 2016-2017

1. Course information
Course code and title:
MCMV16041 Research Lab 1: Situating Research

Instructor:
Dr. Michiel de Lange, Kromme Nieuwegracht 20 room 2.10A, m.l.delange@uu.nl

Office hours:
Any general questions about the course can best be asked on Blackboard in the forum "Questions about the course". Otherwise, the quickest way to get in touch is via e-mail: m.l.delange@uu.nl.

Skype interviews with HistoryIT Chief Executive Office Kristen Gwinn-Becker are possible on demand in the 3rd hour of class. The instructor will make arrangements.

Class schedule:
WG2 Fridays 10:00 – 12:45, ICU DESCARTES103
WG1 Fridays 13:15 – 16:00, ICU DESCARTES103

2. Content & Learning objectives
This module will re-introduce students to the methods and methodologies that are viable in the field of New Media Studies in the Humanities at Utrecht University. On top of this, students will engage in meta-reflection about the conceptual underpinnings these methods; i.e. they will learn about the traditions, assumptions and the explicit or implicit connections with certain new media theories in the humanities that are taught in the concomitant New Media Theories module. In connection with learning to identify the assumptions and traditions behind these methods, students will learn to assess the possible ethical issues involved in the application of each individual method and the justification in light of research ethics when formulating a methodology or research question.

At the end of this module, students will have learned which method may serve which types of research questions, and will be able to assess the ethical and practical viability of each such method. They will also have grasped which methods (and their implied epistemological traditions and theoretical underpinnings) will be appropriate for pursuing their own individual research interest. Students will have learned how to express all these aspects of the methodology trajectory in oral and written form, by way of participating in in-class debate, of a group presentation, and of a written methodology assignment.

3. Course proceedings
Central to the course concept is that students will work on a commissioned real-world assignment as a way to train and hone methodological skills. This year that is the project MAPPY. More about MAPPY below.

The course is seminar-based. We have weekly three-hour sessions in which the emphasis is on questioning and working on the assignment. This training of methodological skills happens in close connection to the parallel course "New Media Theories Thinkers, Debates, and Questions". This course is not heavy on reading but places more emphasis on doing research and reporting on it, both in and outside of class. Much of the class sessions are devoted to doing actual team work on the

assigment. The instructor shall be available for guidance. To that end it is important to bring your preferred device with you (laptop, tablet, etc.).

Expected from you during class
- Active participation and an inquiring attitude
- Equal contributions to team work
- Contributions to overall group dynamics and the work of other teams in a collaborative spirit

Expected from you outside of class hours
- Reading of weekly literature
- Finding additional literature if needed
- Individual writing of research diary
- Convene with your team at least once every week outside of class to discuss literature, team progress and prepare for next class session

3.1   Assignments
The **aims** of the assignments described in detail below are:

- To develop the capacity to design an approach to solving a particular question at hand. You'll learn to connect your understanding of the research question to a viable method to approach and answer this question.
- To develop the necessary skills for recording and retrieving data, both individually and as part of a collaborative team effort. You will train in organizing you findings in a productive way.
- To document and present findings in a meaningful and convincing way. You will practice with various ways of disseminating your work.
- To demonstrate your development across the duration of the course. You shall report in an iterative fashion, and reflect on your personal and collaborative learning trajectory.

1) Portfolio - 60% of total grade
The portfolio consists of 6 weekly methodological diaries + reflections (minimum 500 words, maximum 1000 words). While the deliverable is an individual portfolio, much of it will be based on team work. Some degree of overlap between team members is therefore to be expected.

Every week, you will submit your diary including – if relevant - supporting audio-visual materials (e.g. photos, maps, film footage). The diary should reflect the actual steps taken in order to address the questions raised in each weekly module. This part is more outcome-oriented: what were the questions, how did you go about, what steps have you taken to answer it, and why?

In addition, you will complement these diaries with reflections on the method:

- The "fit" between your understanding of the question, the underlying theory/concepts, and used method to find answers to the question.

- Pros/cons of the chosen approach: what can you, and can you not find in this way, what possible biasses are there in your approach? How could the model/approach by modified in a productive way?
- Group dynamics of the research team (e.g. division of tasks, complementarity, cross-fertilization and inspiration).
- Your own role as a researcher (self-reflexivity).

Deadlines: each week prior to class on Thursday 12:00, via Blackboard in your own portfolio thread in the Discussion Board Forum > Assignments.

2) Participation - 10% of total grade
In the first week six teams are formed of about 3 students. In order to ensure complementarity, teams will be based on a maximum of internal diversity (e.g. educational background, nationality, experience, age/gender). Team tasks:

- Every week, teams will present their ongoing collaborative work in short presentations to provoke commentary and suggestions from other classmates.
- At the end of the course, the outcomes of team efforts will be presented during a (semi-public) symposium or other format, which shall be co-organized and chaired by students themselves (where/when to be discussed).
- Team members will do short peer reviews for their final assignment.

3) Final paper - 30% of total grade
In this short final paper of about 1500 words (± 10%), students will reflect on the overall process and approach, and the outcomes. The main aim of this paper is to scrutinize the relationship between academic work and the applied domain, with a particular emphasis on the methodological aspects of doing research. This assignment should be closely tied to the portfolio and tie one or more elements together into a coherent narrative. This reflection needs to show consideration of how your thought has developed and changed over the course.

Deadlins: 9 November 2016 via Blackboard, and in print in the pigeonhole on the Kromme Nieuwegracht 20 (downstairs).

Assignment MAPPY - doing research on digital maps and storytelling
During the course, we will be working on the project MAPPY.

MAPPY: A dynamic, visually focused digital hub that approaches and presents the history of cartography using stories and highly engaging visual content to the general public. MAPPY will utilize cutting-edge concepts from the fields of new journalism, new-media, digital culture, social networks, international collaboration, and information presentation.

MAPPY will combine various elements of the academic study of the history of cartography while curating and elevating the general public's desire and latent fascination with maps and other cartographic works. High resolution digital images of maps will be combined with textual context,

video examples showing the importance of the work, interactive models, and a design element that engages and provides the user with the immediate visual experience they desire while pulling them deeper into the content.

MAPPY will use models established by various social media platforms and online encyclopedias in order to show the interconnectedness between the content of maps, the map makers, the places of creation and publication, and eras.

HistoryIT Goal
Take MAPPY from concept to working prototype; and establish underlying architecture and design framework for full functionality. We are also seeking to identify tangible design implications that emerge from research.
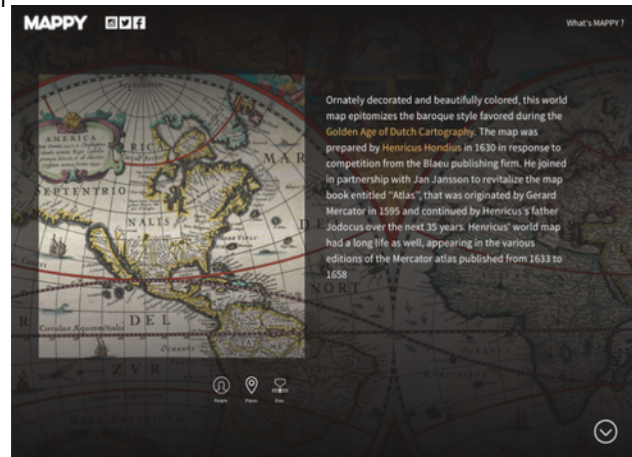
The overarching aim of this assignment for students is to engage in academic research via a "learning by doing" approach. This shall be done by connecting academic work with the world of practice in a series of methodological assignments. In this series of assignments we deal with the following overarching question:
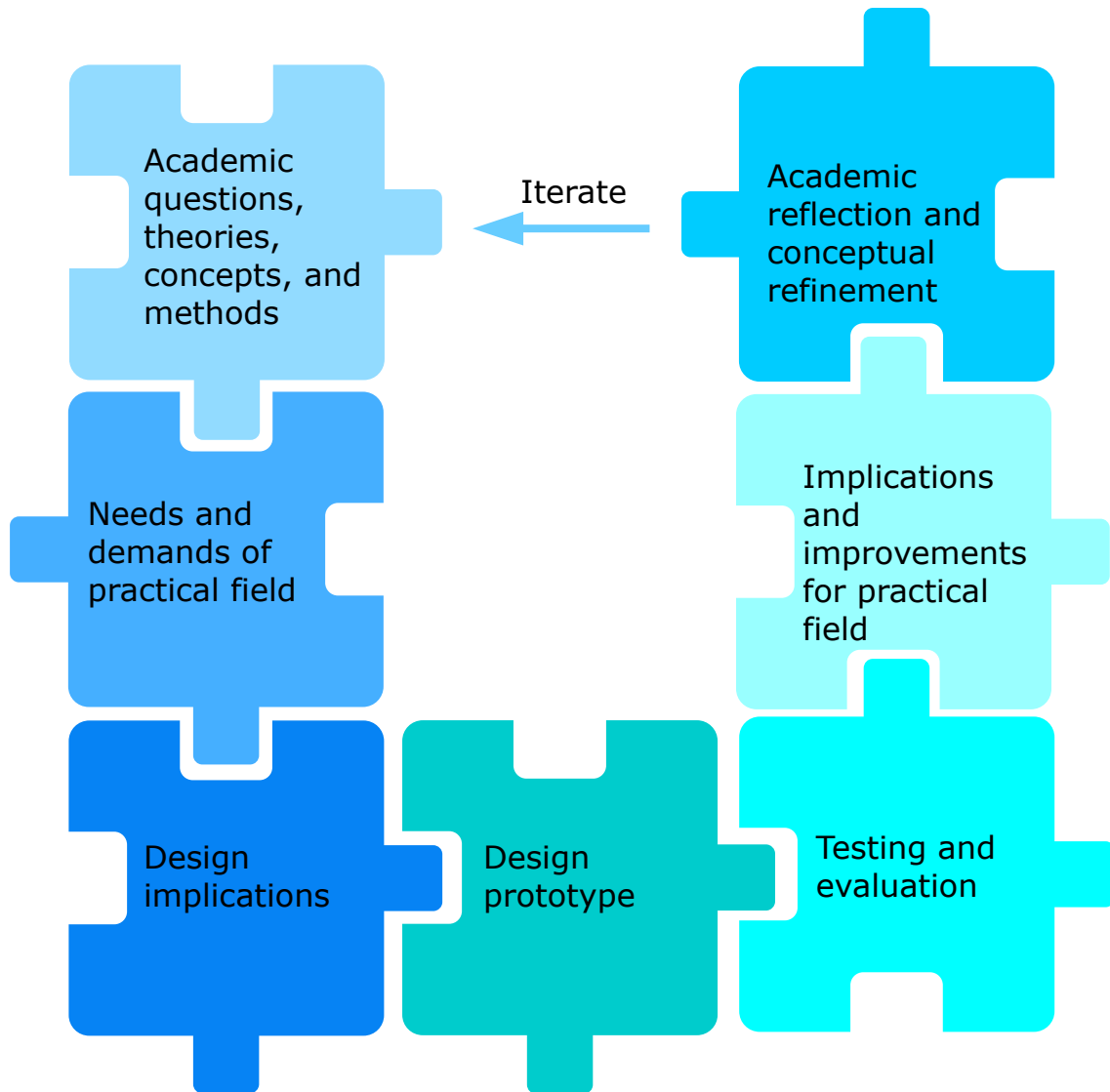
> How can we deploy a variety of methods in order to build a smart digital storytelling and story-sharing platform based on historical maps that is adaptive and responsive and not a "one-off" web site, and in turn use that to learn about and reflect on our approaches?

It is crucial to understand the different sides of this question: the academic point of view (How to do research? What do we learn from actual doing?), and the point of view of the practitioner (What kind of platform can we build?). One of our bigger challenges is to bridge this gap between academia and practice. This shall be done in an iterative way, that is, in a continual movement between the two. One can see how the above question is in fact a nested question:

1. How can we learn to use various methods productively?
2. How can we create a platform with certain demands?
3. What can we learn by reflecting on academic practice?

We can represent our approach with the following model:

1. Academic questions, theories/concepts, and methods
2. Needs and demands of the practical field
3. Design implications
4. Design prototype
5. Testing and evaluating
6. Practical implications and improvements
7. Academic reflection and conceptual refinement [and restart]

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┌─────────────────────┐                    ┌─────────────────────┐
│ Academic            │      ← Iterate     │ Academic            │
│ questions,          │                    │ reflection and      │
│ theories,           │                    │ conceptual          │
│ concepts, and       │                    │ refinement          │
│ methods             │                    │                     │
└─────────────────────┘                    └─────────────────────┘

┌─────────────────────┐                    ┌─────────────────────┐
│ Needs and           │                    │ Implications        │
│ demands of          │                    │ and                 │
│ practical field     │                    │ improvements        │
│                     │                    │ for practical       │
│                     │                    │ field               │
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┌───────────┐ ┌───────────┐                ┌─────────────────────┐
│ Design    │ │ Design    │                │ Testing and         │
│implications│ │ prototype │                │ evaluation          │
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Ideally, this iteration is done each week. We will not make full-fledged prototypes during the course. However we use hypothetical design decisions as more or less concrete "objects" that help us reflect on what doing research entails.

Furthermore, students will need to think about how to present outcomes of research in an accessible way by producing weekly and final reports, that will be shared with HistoryIT (with full credit given to individual students and teams).

Key considerations from the perspective of HistoryIT
- MAPPY will have two different roles and two portals to consider: story creator and story consumer
- History; story; mapping; interface; design; platform
- We want to establish a self-learning feedback loop in MAPPY so that it is always iterating.
- How do digital media technologies shape what MAPPY will begin as and what it will

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become?

- This is an opportunity to create something from the ground up that does not have any constraints. How can we apply research and theory to produce the next generation of storytelling online?

Weekly modules

The overarching broad assignment is cut up into weekly modules. Each week we will use a particular methodology in order to approach the overarching MAPPY assignment from a variety of angles. Again, students should aim to combine the perspective from HistoryIT, and the academic aim of learning how to work with different methods by doing.

Modules: considerations from the perspective of HistoryIT

- Deliver weekly reports to HistoryIT based on the questions presented each week.
- Be sure to ask "who is the user" for each set of recommendations – the creator or the consumer?
- When appropriate, deliver alterations in design, user interface, and software architecture for consideration.
- Students must be actively thinking about the construction – how to make MAPPY work better
- As the course develops, students will interact with MAPPY prototypes in order to evolve the product.
- As part of this research lab we will aim to return to conclusions discussed in previous modules to determine if they still hold true given new research.

Below are the descriptions of the weekly assignments for the MAPPY project. It will be the task of students to find out how the particular method central to that week can be deployed productively to address these issues. We shall work in this every week during class, and outside of class.

Module 1: Introduction

- Review MAPPY concept and initial design
- Consider methodological approaches for the entire course
- Consider maps as discourse – how can MAPPY develop from telling one story about and with a single object (map), to making multiple maps relate to a theme in a meaningful way. How can you navigate between these multiple maps? (E.g. how do multiple maps intersect and weave together into one story?)
- Discuss which modules will focus more on the MAPPY presentation component (the consumer of stories) and which ones more on the MAPPY creator component (the generation of context and stories)
- Create on initial overview of questions and potentially useful academic concepts for researching and developing the MAPPY platform.
- Watch Kristen's TED Talk!

Module 2: Media Archaeology

- Excavate *topoi* in earlier attempts at media representations of maps, art and/or storytelling intended to engage the general (non-specialist) public.
- Identify what worked/failed, draw lessons what MAPPY needs to incorporate for ongoing relevance.
- Based on the successes and failures of past media, draft platform considerations and interface expectations that will make MAPPY a dynamic platform.
- Given the fact that MAPPY will contain a complicated structure but want to present a streamlined experience, consider whether MAPPY would benefit from an animated mascot, or aid, that may serve new users as a guide. What are successes and failures of previous models (Clippy)? Present considerations for such a mascot. If not, present considerations for alternative ways to provide the user with this guided experience.

Module 3: Ethnography

- How can you capture user expectations and actual experiences in the realm of digital storytelling. Identify at least 3 components that MAPPY should contain as a platform for optimal end user experience.
- How does culture shape how people tell and consume stories? How can the MAPPY story creator take cultural differences and biases into account, perhaps even capitalize on it? Consider this from both a visual perspective (how to present the maps) and a textual one (how to present the stories).
- How are stories connected to people's identities, as individuals and as groups? (e.g. "narrative identity") Identify at least 3 components that the stories in MAPPY must contain in order to engage users in such a way that they seamlessly relate to the stories or find a personal connection within them.

Module 4: Semiotics, textual analysis and discourse analysis

- What are the key semiotic constants throughout the objects in MAPPY?
- Focus specifically on the unconscious and affective experiences of visual objects, their emotional interpretations, and how MAPPY can manipulate such interpretation in the story platform.
- Generate a list of recommendations for metadata and pictorial codes in maps that MAPPY must integrate in order to best tell stories with maps.

Module 5: Software Theory / Platform Studies

- Identify the at least 3 key components of the underlying software platform.
- Consider the platform's needs for both the story creator and the story consumer (the visual presentation and user interface).
- How can the MAPPY architecture be the most adaptive for changes in new media?

- How does MAPPY remain innovative and learn from user interaction?
- How can we increase the literacy of MAPPY over time?
- Provide data-driven research.
- Compare any current platform options given the scope of MAPPY.

Module 6: Actor-Network Theory and design research

- Look at the relationship between MAPPY itself (a network of objects) and the users of MAPPY.
- Look at five examples of network-driven online platforms or web site. Analyze these to identify trends that would shape MAPPY. What works now? What's been consistent? What has failed?
- How do the actors affect the network? Can we use ANT to examine translation effect in similar structures (i.e. Europeana, Digital Public Library of American) to make MAPPY better both in design and in its new media existence?
- Return to the idea of an animated Mascot as a guide for MAPPY users. If it serves as an appropriate tool, when should it be active or passive? When does the mascot (guide) drive the user rather than the user driving the product?

Module 7: Presentations

- How can you use (hypothetical) design interventions in the development of MAPPY
- What does that help you to reflect on academic practices?

3.2   Assessment and feedback

Students are graded on 1) their ability to express methodological issues and concerns in oral as well as written form, 2) their in-depth understanding of the assumptions behind each method and its connection to a theoretical tradition, and 3) their ability to identify and orally/textually present concerns in a new media methods case study.

4. Course schedule

A weekly scheme with all course meetings, deadlines and holidays. Provide a short description of what the theme in each week is and how this will be approached (lecture, excursion, presentations), one line per week/class meeting.

4.1 Calendar

	9 September	NMDC introduction (no class)
Module 1	16 September	Introduction course: Why Methodology?
Module 2	23 September	Media Archaeology

Module 3	30 September	Ethnography
	7 October	*no class!*
Module 4	14 October	Semiotics, textual and discourse analysis
Module 5	21 October	Software methods
Module 6	28 October	Actor-Network Theory & Design research
Module 7	4 Nov	Presentations
Week 10	9 Nov	Final paper due

4.2 Weekly literature

Module 1: Introduction: Why Methodology?

Brennen, Bonnie. 2013. *Qualitative research methods for media studies*. New York ; London: Routledge. Ch. 1 & 2 (pp. 1-25). http://proxy.library.uu.nl/login?url=http://uunl.eblib.com/patron/FullRecord.aspx?p=1075433.

Koskinen, Ilpo Kalevi, John Zimmerman , Thomas Binder, Johan Redström , and Stephan Wensveen. 2011. Design research through practice: from the lab, field, and showroom. Waltham, MA: Morgan Kaufmann/Elsevier. Ch. 3-5 (pp. 48-87). http://www.sciencedirect.com.proxy.library.uu.nl/science/book/9780123855022.

Module 2: Media Archaeology (guest: Imar de Vries)

Huhtamo, Erkki. 2004. An Archaeology of Mobile Media. *Keynote address, ISEA* 2 (2004). https://dl.dropboxusercontent.com/u/54619847/Erkki_Huhtamo_An_Archaeology_of_Mobile_Media.pdf.

Module 3: Ethnography

Ito, Mizuko, Daisuke Okabe, and Ken Anderson. 2009. Portable objects in three global cities: The personalization of urban places. In *The reconstruction of space and time: Mobile communication practices*, ed. Richard Seyler Ling and Scott W. Campbell. New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Publishers. 67-87. http://www.itofisher.com/mito/portableobjects.pdf.

Module 4: Textual analysis and discourse analysis

Gee, James Paul. 2014. *How to do discourse analysis: a toolkit*. Second Edition. ed. Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.

Module 5: Software methods (guest: Thomas Boeschoten, Utrecht Data School)

Burgess, Jean, and Ariadna Matamoros-Fernández. 2016. Mapping sociocultural controversies across digital media platforms: One week of #gamergate on twitter, youtube, and tumblr. Communication Research and Practice 2 (1): 79-96. http://www.tandfonline.com.proxy.library.uu.nl/doi/abs/10.1080/22041451.2016.1155338

Drucker, Johanna. 2011. Humanities approaches to graphical display. *Digital Humanities Quarterly* 5 (1). http://www.digitalhumanities.org/dhq/vol/5/1/000091/000091.html.

Module 6: Actor-Network Theory & Design research

Dodge, Martin, and Chris Perkins. 2012. Maps, memories and Manchester: The cartographic imagination of the hidden networks of the hydraulic city. In *Mapping cultures: Place, practice, performance*, ed. Les Roberts. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire ; New York: Palgrave Macmillan. 101-122. http://www.palgraveconnect.com.proxy.library.uu.nl/pc/doifinder/10.1057/9781137025050.

Module 7: Public presentations
More research through design literature (not compulsory but may help you further):

Bardzell, Jeffrey, Shaowen Bardzell, and Lone Koefoed Hansen. 2015. Immodest Proposals: Research Through Design and Knowledge. In *Proceedings of the 33rd Annual ACM Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems*. Seoul, Republic of Korea: ACM. http://dl.acm.org.proxy.library.uu.nl/citation.cfm?doid=2702123.2702400.

Ratto, Matt. 2011. "Critical Making: Conceptual and Material Studies in Technology and Social Life." *The Information Society* no. 27 (4):252-260. http://www.tandfonline.com.proxy.library.uu.nl/doi/abs/10.1080/01972243.2011.583819.

5. Course materials

Please check the UU BlackBoard area for this course regularly for updates and announcements. All compulsory readings can be found in the weekly outline above, and are accessible online. All the assignment materials created by the students will need to be posted in their individual thread on BlackBoard.

Also check out our own work in progress *New Media Studies Method Reader*, third Edition (available from www.newmediastudies.nl/pdf/Method_Reader.pdf).

6. Course evaluation

Since this is a new course within our programme, we are very keen to receive your insights and feedback on what went well or you found meaningful, what perhaps went not so well, and how to potentially improve upon it. We may discuss this in the last week of the course, and you are also requested to fill out the online Caracal evaluation at https://caracal.science.uu.nl.

7. Fraud & plagiarism (the fine print)

Academic integrity is the foundation of scientific learning. Utrecht University therefore considers any form of academic dishonesty to be a very serious offense. Utrecht University expects each student to be familiar with and to observe the norms and values that ensure academic integrity. The most serious forms of deception that can impair this integrity are fraud and plagiarism. Plagiarism is a form of fraud and is defined as the wrongful appropriation of another author's work without proper citation. The text below provides further elaboration on what may be considered fraud or plagiarism, along with a number of concrete examples. Please note that this is not a comprehensive list!

If the university discovers a case of fraud or plagiarism, then the study programme's Examination Committee may implement sanctions on the offender. The most serious sanction that the Examination Committee may implement is the submission of a request for expulsion to the Executive Board.

Fraud may include:

- copying answers from another person during an exam. The person providing the opportunity to copy is considered an accomplice to fraud;
- possession of tools including, but not limited to: pre-programmed calculators, mobile telephones, books, syllabi, notes, etc., during an exam, unless the possession of such has been expressly permitted;
- allowing others to complete all or part of an assignment;
- acquisition of the questions or problems from an exam prior to the time the exam is to take place;
- fabrication of survey- or interview answers or research data.

Plagiarism is the appropriation of another author's works, thoughts, or ideas and the representation of such as one's own work. Writers must always accurately cite the sources of ideas or insights used in a work, and must always be alert to the difference between citing, paraphrasing and plagiarizing. They must be exercise extreme care in citing the sources of information, not only when using printed sources, but especially when using information gathered from the Internet. The following are some examples of what may be considered plagiarism:

- copying and pasting text from digital sources, such as encyclopaedias or digital periodicals, without using quotation marks or footnotes;
- copying and pasting text from the Internet without using quotation marks or footnotes;
- using excerpts from printed material such as books, magazines or other publications or encyclopaedias without using quotation marks and referring to the source;
- using a translation of the texts listed above in one's own work, without quotation marks or footnotes;
- paraphrasing from the texts listed above without a (clear) reference: paraphrasing must be marked as such (by explicitly linking the text with the original author, either in text or a footnote), ensuring that the impression is not created that the ideas expressed are those of the student;
- using another person's audio, video or test materials without reference and in so doing representing them as one's own work;
- resubmission of the student's own earlier work without source references, and allowing this to pass for work originally produced for the purpose of the course, unless this is expressly permitted in the course or by the lecturer;
- using other students' work and representing it as one's own work. If this occurs with the other student's permission, then he or she may be considered an accomplice to the plagiarism;

- when one author of a joint paper commits plagiarism, then all authors involved in that work are accomplices to the plagiarism if they could have known or should have known that the other was committing plagiarism; - submitting papers provided by a commercial institution, such as an internet site with summaries or papers, or which have been written by others, regardless of whether the text was provided in exchange for payment.

The Education and Examination Regulations (Article 5.15) describes the formal procedure to be followed in the event of suspicion of fraud or plagiarism, as well as the sanctions that may be implemented as a result.

Ignorance is not an excuse. Each student is responsible for his or her own behaviour. Utrecht University assumes that each student is familiar with the definition of fraud and plagiarism. For its part, Utrecht University ensures that students are instructed in academic principles early on in their study programme and are informed of the institution's standards for fraud and plagiarism, in order that students may know which norms and values they are expected to uphold.