University of Central Punjab

(Incorporated by Ordinance No. XXIV of 2002 promulgated by Government of the Punjab)

Policy Document

on

Retraction of Research Articles (2026)

Office of Research, Innovation and Commercialization

(ORIC)

UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL PUNJAB

1. Introduction and Purpose

At the University of Central Punjab (UCP), we hold ourselves to the highest standards of academic honesty and legal compliance. This policy establishes a clear framework for handling the retraction of research articles in accordance with the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) and the Higher Education Commission (HEC) of Pakistan guidelines.

The primary goal of a retraction is to correct the scientific record and maintain public trust, not simply to punish researchers. Because research volume and citation metrics heavily influence global university rankings (such as QS, THE), ignoring ethical issues can directly harm UCP's academic standing, lower our normalized impact scores, and restrict our access to future research funding.

2. Institutional Authority and Committee Structure

An institutional committee has the formal authority to investigate and resolve all matters falling under this policy.

2.1 Committee Composition

The Retraction Committee is formally constituted by the Pro-Rector, UCP, to ensure fair, objective, and rigorous evaluation of all cases. The Pro-Rector retains the authority to determine the size, leadership, and specific membership of the committee, as well as to induct external or ad-hoc subject matter experts whenever a case requires specialized technical oversight.

2.2 Terms of Reference (TORs)

The Committee is officially mandated to:

- Review and examine cases involving the retraction of published research articles.
- Investigate formal complaints or allegations concerning text duplication and unethical publishing practices.
- Request official clarifications from the concerned authors, supervisors, or academic departments.
- Recommend fair corrective, disciplinary, or remedial measures to the Competent Authority in line with this policy and university guidelines.

3. Grounds for Retracting a Publication

Journal editors or the university committee will initiate retraction proceedings if they lose confidence in the reliability, findings, or ethical foundation of a paper. Valid grounds for retraction include:

- Unreliable Findings: Major errors in data or analysis, fabricated data, experimental or mathematical mistakes, or manipulated and duplicated images.
- Deception and Misrepresentation: Academic fraud, using paper mills, identity theft, fictitious authorship, or failing to disclose the unverified use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in generating content.
- Plagiarism and Redundancy: Unacceptable text overlap or publishing the same work twice without proper attribution, permission, or disclosure.
- Legal Invalidation: Clear cases of copyright infringement, libel, or privacy violations within the article.

- Compromised Process: Manipulating peer review (such as using fake reviewers or citation rings) where the scientific integrity of the paper cannot be supported.
- Ethical Lapses: Conducting research without proper Institutional Review Board (IRB) clearance, lacking subject consent, or failing to disclose a major conflict of interest.

4. When Retraction is Not Appropriate

Retraction is a serious step and should not be used to resolve administrative issues or minor errors. Alternative corrections or expressions of concern will be applied in the following scenarios:

4.1 Authorship Disputes

If there is no reason to doubt the validity and authenticity of the data, an authorship dispute alone does not justify a retraction. The editor will instead notify the parties that they must provide formal documentation of a consensus, allowing the journal to publish a correction notice to update the author list. All original and proposed authors must agree to this change in writing.

4.2 Unpaid Publication Fees

While outstanding fees are a valid reason to pause a paper before publication, they have nothing to do with the actual scientific content. Articles will never be retracted post-publication due to unpaid publication fees.

4.3 Minor Conflicts of Interest or Errors

If a correction can adequately fix a minor error or handle a late conflict of interest disclosure without affecting the main conclusions of the research, a simple correction notice will be used instead of a full retraction.

5. Procedural Standards and Formats

All retractions must be handled transparently so the academic community can clearly track the status of the literature.

5.1 Retraction Notice Requirements

Every retraction notice must be published promptly and remain completely open-access. The notice must explicitly link to the original article, clearly identify it by its title and author list, and explain the objective reasons for the retraction. If an 'in-press' or preprint paper is retracted before its final appearance, the online version must still be retained with a clear notice and logged in bibliographic databases.

5.2 Special Retraction Modalities

5.2.1 Retraction with Replacement

When an honest, serious error changes the findings significantly but the underlying methods and scholarship remain sound, the paper may be retracted and replaced. Copies of the original article, with the mistakes and corrections highlighted, will be attached as supplements to the newly corrected version.

5.2.2 Retraction with Removal

In rare cases involving court orders, extreme privacy violations, or severe health and environmental risks, the content may be physically removed. The metadata and an explicit explanation for the removal must remain permanently on the webpage.

5.2.3 Batch Retractions

This approach is appropriate if systematic manipulation or coordinated fraud (such as paper mills) is uncovered across a group of articles.

6. Rules for Republishing Retracted Content

If a paper was retracted due to flaws but contains reliable parts that the authors wish to salvage and republish, they must follow these strict guidelines:

1. Notify the Editor: The authors must explicitly inform the editor of the new journal about the previous retraction history during submission.
2. Cite the Retraction: The new paper must transparently cite the original retraction notice, explaining what went wrong and what has been omitted or corrected.
3. Obtain Permission: The authors must get formal written permission to republish from the copyright holder of the original retracted work.

7. Accountability and Disciplinary Framework

To ensure absolute fairness, the university evaluates accountability and applies penalties using a clear, three-tiered framework based on intent, severity, and authorship roles.

7.1 Culpability Categories

7.1.1 Category A: Honest Errors (No Punishment)

If authors discover an unintended mistake in their math, coding, or data analysis after publication and proactively approach or the journal to issue a self-retraction, they will not face any disciplinary action or career damage. COPE explicitly encourages self-retractions to keep the scientific record clean, and punishing honest mistakes would discourage researchers from being transparent.

7.1.2 Category B: Academic Negligence (Mild to Moderate Penalties)

This category applies to situations where authors themselves inform the ORIC with in ten (10) days on their retraction of articles and there was no malicious intent to fake results, but the authors displayed severe carelessness. Examples include failing to verify where data came from, bypassing institutional review boards (IRBs), or failing to secure proper consent from research subjects.

Recommended punishments for negligence include:

- **Formal Censure:** A written warning letter placed in the faculty member's permanent institutional file.
- **Clawback of Financial Benefits:** Mandatory return of any university-issued publication bonuses, cash incentives, or research awards tied to the paper.
- **Reversal of Academic Credit:** If the paper was used to secure a promotion, annual increment, or tenure, those milestones are re-evaluated or frozen.

- Any other action recommended by the committee based on the notice on retraction of article.

7.1.3 Category C: Intentional Misconduct (Severe Penalties)
When a retraction is triggered by deliberate malpractice—such as data fabrication (making up data), data falsification (manipulating results), plagiarism, or structural peer-review fraud—the punishments are severe and career-ending.

Recommended punishments for negligence include:
- **Blacklisting by Funding Bodies:** The HEC or international grant agencies can ban the researcher from applying for, or receiving, any research grants for a period of 1 to 5 years (or permanently for repeat offenders).
- **Demotion or Termination of Employment:** The university terminates the researcher's contract for violating basic terms of employment and professional ethics. If tenure has already been granted, it is revoked.
- **Supervisory Status:** The author is permanently stripped of their status as an approved PhD supervisor and removed from all academic committees and institutional review boards.
- **Journal Bans:** Publishers (UCP Journals) place a temporary or permanent ban on all co-authors, refusing to review any future submissions bearing their names.

7.2 Authorships Accountability

The First or Corresponding Author carries primary accountability because they executed the study and guaranteed the integrity of the data. They will always face the maximum severity of the prescribed category penalty.
Co-Authors share legal and professional responsibility because they signed off on the submission. They will be penalized for negligence or a failure of oversight, even if they were not the ones who generated the specific flawed data point. To protect the scientific record, the university or journal editor will proceed with a retraction or an expression of concern even if some or all co-authors disagree with the decision.

8. Right of Appeal
Any faculty member, researcher, or student aggrieved by a decision, institutional penalty, or retraction recommendation issued by the Retraction Committee reserves a formal right of appeal.

Appellate Authority: The appeal must be submitted directly to the Pro-Rector, UCP.

Timeline: The written appeal, along with all supporting documentary evidence and justifications, must be filed within fifteen (15) days from the official date of issuance of the Committee's decision.

Finality: The decision made by the Pro-Rector regarding the appeal shall be considered final and binding on all institutional parties.