Academic Honesty

Part of the academic endeavor is a notion that academics (students, faculty, researchers, staff) must follow high standards of honesty in their academic work. One component of academic honesty is that academics must clearly indicate which work (ideas, writing, etc.) is theirs and which belongs to others.

Grinnell's student handbook includes the following statement:

> When you study at the College, you join a conversation among scholars, professors, and students, one that helps sustain both the intellectual community here and the larger world of thinkers, researchers, and writers. The tests you take, the research you do, the writing you submit - all these are ways you participate in this conversation.
>
> The College presumes that your work for any course is your own contribution to that scholarly conversation, and it expects you to take responsibility for that contribution. That is, you should acknowledge what is your own individual work and what you have derived from others so that other members of the community can trace the evolution of your ideas.
> (Grinnell College 2008-2009 Student Handbook, p. 39; Downloaded from
> `http://www.grinnell.edu/offices/studentaffairs/shb/includes/ACADEMIC%20POLICIES%20AND%20PROCEDURES.pdf`
> on 19 August 2009.)

However, there is much more to academic honesty than just making sure to cite work you've used. In particular, you are expected to provide a true and accurate representation of your work in experimental endeavors (e.g., it is academically dishonest to invent or modify experimental results). It is also academically dishonest to aid another in an academically dishonest act (e.g., to provide aid on a no-aid exam, to write a paper for another student).

Why do we care so much about academic honesty? As the Student Handbook suggests, the advancement of knowledge requires that a trail of ideas be available so that successes and failures can be traced backward. More importantly, your own personal integrity should require you to be academically honest.

In Fall 2000, I had my first serious encounters with academic dishonesty at Grinnell. Since that time, I have tried to be careful in spelling out what I expect from my students. What follows are some general expectations.

I expect you to follow the highest principles of academic honesty. Among other things, this means that any work you turn in should be your own or should have the work of others clearly documented. However, when you explicitly work as part of a group or team, you need not identify the work of each individual (unless I specify otherwise).

You should never "give away" answers to homework assignments or examinations. You may, however, work together in developing answers to most homework assignments. Except as specified on individual assignments, each student should develop his or her own final version of the assignment. On written assignments, each student should write up an individual version of the assignment and cite the discussion. On non-group programming assignments, each student should do his or her own programming, although students may help each other with design and debugging. If someone else (e.g., a classmate or class

mentor) helps you on an assignment, please include a note in the assignment that indicates that you received such help.

When working on examinations, you should not use other students as resources.

If you have a question as to whether a particular action may violate academic standards, please discuss it with me (preferably before you undertake that action).

Collaborative Work

Most of my teaching involves *collaborative work*. I believe (and have found) that students learn better when they can consult with each other. There are few better ways to learn something than to explain that thing to someone else. In computer science, collaboration is particularly important because you often encounter small problems that a second set of eyes can easily identify and fix and because "real world" computer science is almost always a collaborative activity. For example, *pair programming* is a key aspect of a new software design methodology known as Extreme programming.

In each assignment I give, I do my best to make it clear whether the assignment is intended to be primarily collaborative or primarily individual.

Categories of Work

In my classes, I assign a variety of types of work. Different categories have different expectations.

Laboratories are almost always collaborative. You should generally plan to work on laboratories with at least one other student. When you're stuck on a problem, you should feel free to ask for help from almost anyone (me, the class mentor, another student, a TC, a friend, etc.), but include a note that you received such help. If I ask you to write up a laboratory, you and your partner or partners should do only one writeup. You should not copy text from another group's writeup.

Homework assignments may be individualized or collaborative. For either kind, you should feel free to ask for help from almost anyone (me, the class mentor, another student, a TC, a friend). If I give an individualized homework, I expect each individual to write up his or her answers individually (no copying!). However, you may certainly ask a colleague to proofread or comment on your answers, provided you cite that person. If I give collaborative homework, each group should write its own single set of answers. However, you can still ask colleagues in other groups to proofread or comment on your answers.

Take-home examinations are always individualized. You may refer to any written materials (e.g., textbooks, Web pages, your personal notes) that you wish. However, you may not talk to anyone (except me or other faculty teaching the same course) about the examination or related issues. I'm very strict about this issue; I want you to avoid *all* discussion about the exam, not just questions about the material on the exam. You certainly can't ask someone how to do a problem. But you can't ask about other things, either. For example, you may not even ask a TC how to use the programming language for the exam. Similarly, you may not ask a colleague how much they've done on the exam or whether they've finished a problem (and you can't brag about finishing a problem either). At times, I may give you permission to talk to the course mentor about an exam.

In-class quizzes and examinations are also always individualized. You may not talk during class or discuss the exam with anyone in class. You may ask me questions. My in-class examinations are typically closed-book and closed computer. However, I typically allow students to bring one sheet (8.5 x 11 inches) of hand-written notes to the exam.

Citing Program Code

Note that computer programming shares with normal writing a need to cite work taken from elsewhere. It is certainly acceptable practice to borrow other code for your assignments. However, you must cite any code that you use from elsewhere. Each piece of code you take from elsewhere must include a comment that specifies:

- the author of the original code;
- the date the original code was written and the version of the code (if available);
- the date you incorporated the code into your program;
- a summary of the modifications (if any) you made to the code;
- instructions for getting the original code.

This applies not only to the code you get from the Web and elsewhere; it also applies to code you get from me and from the textbook.

You need not cite the libraries you use, as the command to include libraries within a program provides sufficient citation.

Citing Web Pages

The advances of the Internet and the World Wide Web have led to challenges in citation. Some seem to believe that it is acceptable for a citation to consist of a URL. However, a citation should provide much more information. Consider what a typical citation to the printed literature contains: Author, Date, Publisher, Title of Article, Publisher, etc. Your Web citations should contain at least as much detail. That is, you must include not just the URL, but also the author of the page (using "Anonymous" or an institutional author, if necessary), the title of the page, the publisher (the site), and the date.

The date is particularly important. Unlike printed sources, which have new editions when they change, electronic resources often change unexpectedly. By including the date the page was accessed and modified, you at least provide some indication of when the ideas you were using were available at the specified location.

Here is a sample citation for this page, using a slight variant of the APA format.

> Rebelsky, Samuel (2009). Academic Honesty. Grinnell College Department of Computer Science. Available at http://www.cs.grinnell.edu/~rebelsky/Courses/CS151/2009F/Handouts/academic-honesty.html (Last modified 21 August 2009; Visited 21 August 2009).

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