Department of Computer Science
University of Cape Town

Policy on Academic Dishonesty for Computer Program Submissions

Introduction

The University of Cape Town has well-defined policies on copying and plagiarism, which are contained in the general Rules for Students and set out in full on the UCT website at: https://www.uct.ac.za/administration/policies. The Department of Computer Science has set out the following guide and interpretation of these rules and polices as they apply to courses involving computer programming, and the use of the computer. The rules defined here are in line with the best procedures in other institutions and, in particular, are adapted from those on academic dishonesty at Oregon State University[1] and academic dishonesty and cheating at San Francisco State University[2].

All students are expected to work individually on solutions to assigned work unless explicitly authorized to work with others by the lecturer or course convenor.

Academic Dishonesty for Computer Program Submissions

Academic dishonesty is EITHER:

- Copying and plagiarism of computer program submissions, where you present, as your own work, material produced by or in collaboration with others, without proper acknowledgment, and where implicitly or explicitly disallowed for the assigned work.

OR

- Permitting or assisting others to present your work as their own.

Guidelines for Determining Academic Dishonesty

The following guidelines are provided to help in determining if an incident of academic dishonesty has occurred. A member of staff may suspect a student of academic dishonesty if the student submits a program that is so similar to the program submitted by a present or past student, in whole or in part, in the course that the solutions may be converted to one another by a simple mechanical transformation. A member of staff may suspect a student of academic dishonesty, whether on a program or an examination, if the student cannot explain both the intricacies of his or her solution and the techniques and principles used to generate that solution.

In all circumstances, it is acceptable to discuss the meaning of assignments and general approaches and strategies for handling those assignments with other members of the Academic Community.

Any cooperation beyond that point, including shared pseudocode or flowcharts, shared code, or shared documentation, is only acceptable if specifically so permitted by the lecturer in written guidelines distributed to the entire class, either through printed handouts or on the course website or other official communications channel.

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[1] http://cs.oregonstate.edu/acad/policies/dishonesty.htm

[2] http://cs.sfsu.edu/plagarism.html

Where a student working on an individual assignment includes the work of others (e.g., algorithms transcribed from a textbook), the student must clearly indicate in the code what part(s) are the work of others.

Penalty for Academic Dishonesty

In all cases where academic dishonesty is suspected, is tested, and is deemed to have occurred, no credit will be given for the assignment in question and a record will be kept in the Department of Computer Science. A report may also be submitted to the Vice-Chancellor's office for possible disciplinary action through the University Disciplinary Tribunal, which may include expulsion, suspension, or probation, as well as lesser sanctions. In all cases, students will have the right to be heard by the lecturer, the course convener and the Head of Department before any action is finalized.

Identifying Copying and Plagiarism in Computer Program Submissions

As the Department of Computer Science believes strongly that students should only get credit for their own work, it will take all necessary steps to identify any cases of copying and plagiarism of computer submissions. These could include:

- Submitting program files to plagiarism detection sites, either locally or internationally.
- Setting a test on the techniques used in a program.
- Requesting students to explain sections of their code.

If you have any doubt or if you have any questions, you should consult with your lecturer or course convenor as to whether or not your work with other students and programs prepared for submission are appropriate.

Examples of Academic Dishonesty

The following examples illustrate situations when Academic Dishonesty has and has not occurred. Please note that these lists are not comprehensive!

Academic Dishonesty has occurred:

- When a student turns in the work of another student and represents it as his or her own work.
- When a student includes another person's work in their own submission without setting out in full what part(s) are the work of others.
- When a student knowingly permits another to turn in his or her work, including by providing access to personal files through sharing of login credentials.
- When a student copies code from the work of another student.
- When a student deliberately transforms borrowed sections of code in order to disguise their origin.
- When several students collaborate on a project (whether or not group work is allowed) and fail to inform the lecturer of this.
- When a student steals, obtains solutions, or program samples from another student’s output or personal files.
- When a student is unable to explain the working of a piece of code.
- When a student submits solutions obtained from individuals or systems on the Internet directly or indirectly.
- When the work submitted was not done by the student who submitted it.

- When a student shares computing devices with other students, knowing that the shared device contains solutions to assigned work.

Academic Dishonesty has NOT occurred:

- When students have permission to collaborate on a project, and list all collaborators.
- When students receive advice from tutors, teaching assistants, or staff members involved in the course.
- When students share knowledge about syntax errors, coding tricks, or other language-specific information that makes programming easier, except where such techniques represent the core topics being tested in the assignment.
- When students engage in a general discussion of the nature of an assignment, the requirements for an assignment, or general implementation strategies.
- When students engage in discussion of course concepts or programming strategies in preparation for an assignment or examination.
- When students copy code and cite its source on assignments for which the lecturer allows inclusion of code other than the student's own.

Conclusion

The Computer Science Department believes that encouraging students to submit their own work and actively enforcing this policy will ensure that work done is appropriately rewarded. All students will benefit from the ensuing recognition of the high standard of graduates from our programme.

Document History

v1, 2003:

First version of policy

v2, February 2016:

Revision of policy to reflect practice and changes in operations

v3, February 2023:

Revision of policy to reflect practice and changes in operations