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SoC Faculty Letter to Students Regarding Academic Honesty

Dear School of Computing Students,

We would like to briefly address the issue of academic honesty in the School of Computing (SoC). We believe that the vast majority of you work hard and complete your work fairly and honestly. Unfortunately, some students may cheat. Academic dishonesty is a national and international problem, not a problem that is particular to Binghamton. Therefore, we as faculty must take steps to promote honesty and to detect and deal with cheating when necessary. We do this to protect the value of your degree and the reputation of the School, and to encourage and reward hard work. No Binghamton SoC instructor relishes this task. Deterring cheating can be inconvenient, and dealing with it is always unpleasant, at least. But collectively we do feel that it is a necessary part of our jobs.

We strive to be available and helpful, and we encourage our Teaching Assistants to be the same. We hope that our assignments and assessments challenge you enough to promote learning, but are not so difficult that you feel you must resort to dishonesty to succeed. We try to be transparent about our efforts to discourage and detect cheating; we thereby hope to avoid adversarial relationships, and to instead build student-faculty relationships that maximize your learning. Please be open and honest with us if you feel that our assignments, requirements, or policies are unfair, or that instructors are not providing you the foundation, material, and help that you need to be successful. To communicate these sentiments, please talk to your individual instructors directly, visit the School Director or other trusted faculty member if necessary, and provide candid comments on our SOOT evaluations, which we consider carefully.

Please do not feel insulted or take it personally when we apply measures to discourage and detect cheating. We approach each individual student with the steadfast belief that you are 100% honest. We hope that students who are above reproach will share our belief that our measures help protect the value of your degrees. Students who otherwise might be tempted down an imperfect path may instead remain on an honest one; those students will be better off in the long run and will feel a larger sense of pride when they do earn their degree. When students are dishonest, we hope they will recover to pass the class, earn a degree, and even eventually to appreciate our coercing them back on track.

Recent advances in large language models (LLMs) and generative AI tools such as ChatGPT, including for AI-assisted code development, challenge the School—faculty and students alike—to ensure that your learning and development continues uncompromised. As faculty, we will consider our AI use policies carefully, and articulate them in our syllabi clearly, always with your learning and best interests as the primary consideration. As students, please make yourselves acutely aware of the AI use policies for each course, especially because they may differ across instructors and classes, and follow them closely. Please always ask questions if you have doubts about what is acceptable and appropriate.

You can help us by not only doing your own work and collaborating only when appropriate and permitted, but also by keeping your solutions and code—including documents on shared file systems and repositories in GitHub—protected and private. Teach and learn from one another, but please do not give or receive answers and solutions.

Students, faculty, and the School as a whole are significantly better off when every grade and degree is earned fairly. We strive to educate and train computer scientists who can go on to earn advanced degrees at top universities, land the best jobs at companies that are changing the world, and otherwise make the School proud and enhance our reputation. Making sure you earn your degree without shortcuts, learning as much as you can while you are here, advances that goal.

Sincerely,
The School of Computing Faculty