

CSUS

COLLEGE OF ENGINEERING AND COMPUTER SCIENCE

Department of Computer Science

Ethics in Computer Science Classes

Introduction

As computers become pervasive in today's society, issues of privacy, security, and accuracy become increasingly important. Professionals in the field of Computer Science, as well as those studying to become professionals in the field, have an important obligation to understand and abide by a set of ethical guidelines in the everyday work associated with their profession and/or studies.

For students, this translates into the need to understand and follow a set of guidelines related to ethical behavior both in the classroom and while doing assigned work outside of class. This document is an effort to help make clear some of the ethical issues which arise during the study of Computer Science as an academic discipline helping to prepare students for Computer Science as a profession.

Professional Guidelines

Recognizing the need for a clear statement of ethical guidelines at the professional level, the Association for Computing Machinery (ACM), the oldest and largest professional organization for Computer Scientists, developed the [ACM Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct](#). Included among the principles enumerated in the ACM Code of Ethics are the following specific professional responsibilities (among many others):

- Honor contracts, agreements, and assigned responsibilities.
- Know and respect existing laws pertaining to professional work.
- Access computing and communication resources only when authorized to do so.

These professional responsibilities can be viewed as forming a basis for guidelines for work done in an academic setting. The following section lists some of the many ethical responsibilities expected of students in Computer Science courses at CSUS.

Student Guidelines

Computer Science students are expected to adhere to the following behaviors. Failure to comply with any one of these constitutes unethical behavior on the part of a student. Unethical behavior is grounds for dismissal from the University.

- When taking exams or quizzes in a classroom, use only those resources which the instructor has specifically stated are allowed. Do all work solely on your own. Things to avoid during an exam or quiz include shifting your eyes in the direction of another student's paper; open backpacks or notebooks; unnecessary or forbidden materials on or around the desktop; looking at a pager or cellular phone. (If you are expecting an emergency call, leave your pager or phone with the instructor; otherwise, turn it *off* or better yet don't bring it to the exam.)
- When working on take-home exams, use only those resources which the instructor has specifically stated are allowed, and make sure all the work you submit is solely your own. Do not discuss the exam content, or your answers, with any other student; do not provide any other student with access to your work, either before you hand it in or afterwards, unless specifically told by the instructor that this is acceptable.
- When developing code solutions to programming assignments or written answers to assigned problems, make sure all work you submit is solely your own. A certain amount of discussion between students regarding the nature of an assignment and the general nature of possible solutions is a valuable part of the learning process and is normally acceptable. However, it is *not* acceptable (unless specifically stated otherwise by the instructor) to collaborate with other students in developing the details of program code or a problem solution to the extent that the work you hand in is not completely and solely your own.
- Make sure no one else has access to your program code or written problem solutions. It is your responsibility as a student to carefully guard your own work so that it may not be unethically used by others. This includes making sure you do not leave printed copies of work in labs or other accessible locations, and also making sure you do not leave machine-readable ("soft-copy") forms of your work on lab or network-accessible machines where it can be obtained by others. Keeping your own work secure from others is *your* responsibility.