

Academic Integrity

Department of Computer Science, Hunter College

Overview:

Hunter College and CUNY have articulated academic integrity policies. They can be found on-line at the following URLs: [Hunter College Policy on Academic Integrity](#) and [CUNY Policy on Academic Integrity](#).

The preamble of Hunter's policy begins with:

"Academic integrity is a guiding principle of the Hunter College learning community because all students should have the opportunity to learn and perform on a level playing field.

"Academic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to, cheating, plagiarism, obtaining an unfair advantage, and falsifying records or documents (see examples) whether intentional or not."

Academic dishonesty has a great impact on the quality of the education we provide in the Computer Science Department. Since it has become endemic, many faculty have reshaped their curricula

- to discourage it,
- to mitigate its effects, and
- to identify those students committing the most egregious acts of it.

The changes in curriculum have included changing the nature and types of assignments and exams, changing the weights of the various grading components, and changing how group work is conducted and graded. These changes have been largely ad hoc, not consistent, and not always effective or in the best interest of the class at large. In addition, the prevalence of academic dishonesty has caused many faculty to spend much more time in matters that do not directly contribute to the quality of instruction or their research activities.

The purpose of this document is

- to inform the faculty of the rules and procedures to take when violations are suspected, and
- to provide guidance and suggestions for how to prevent or reduce academic dishonesty.

It is hoped that if we all work together to reduce academic dishonesty, we can focus on teaching without having the burden of being academic "police".

Practicalities, Tools & Templates:

Syllabi: Hunter College Senate requires syllabi for all courses and provides a checklist [Hunter College Syllabus Checklist](#). Including the required sections from the checklist communicates college policy to the students and is useful if disagreements arise that are adjudicated both inside and outside the department. The portion related to Academic Integrity is:

Hunter College Policy on Academic Integrity (required on all syllabi by Senate resolution):

"Hunter College regards acts of academic dishonesty (e.g., plagiarism, cheating on examinations, obtaining unfair advantage, and falsification of records and official documents) as serious offenses against the values of intellectual honesty. The College is committed to enforcing the CUNY Policy on

Academic Integrity and will pursue cases of academic dishonesty according to the Hunter College Academic Integrity Procedures."

Documenting Academic Integrity Incidents: There are several standard tools for identifying similarity and copying. Some that are well-known to the Office of Student Conduct are:

- **Measure of Software Similarity (MOSS):** From Alex Aiken's group (UCB/Stanford), it uses a local [fingerprinting algorithm](#) to assess similarity. While it can be run directly on text files, the implementation available via the Stanford servers or via Gradescope can be customized to the programming language and compares the underlying code structure (i.e. it compiles the code and strips out the symbol tables to identify similar code despite reordering and renaming of identifiers). Stanford provides a [web service](#) to faculty. To use, you need to pre-register via your university email. Verification can take several days.
- **Gradescope Review Similarity:** Gradescope provides a straightforward way to access MOSS for programming assignments. Once students have submitted programs, click on the "Review Similarity" in the left hand menu of the assignment's page. You can then specify the underlying language and include an optional template if used in the assignment. It will report the similarities and generate pdf reports suitable for sending to the Office of Student Conduct. See the [tutorial](#) to get started.
- **TurnItIn Scores:** Primarily used for essays, this tool is available on Blackboard. It compares submitted work to a database of assignments as well as other work in the course. It is widely used in high schools and in the humanities. An easy way to explain MOSS to students and administrators is to say: "MOSS is TurnItIn for programs".

Reporting Academic Integrity Incidents: This is a multi-stage process:

1. Inform student of the incident either in person or email (template below) and ask for their response. Under the Academic Integrity Policy, the student has the following options:
 - Student admits to the charge of cheating, plagiarism, academic dishonesty, or falsification of records and accepts the academic sanction imposed.
 - Student admits to the charge of cheating, plagiarism, academic dishonesty, or falsification of records, but does NOT accept the academic sanction.
 - Student denies the charge of cheating, plagiarism, academic dishonesty, or falsification of records.
 - Student is unresponsive to the allegation.
2. By department policy, you need to inform the department. An easy way to do this is to copy the department coordinator and department advisor on your email to the student above.
3. Report the incident to the Office of Student Conduct via their [web form](#). The form includes the incident, sanction, the student's response, as well as documentation. The form allows you to upload pdf's of your syllabus (with the required statement on academic integrity), MOSS reports or other evidence of similarity, and student's response.
4. The Office of Student Conduct will acknowledge your report within 2 business days. No matter how the student responded, the office will meet with the student. The office will assess the incident, provide counselling on academic integrity (often reading or an on-line workshop), and recommend additional support services to prevent future incidents. If the student ignores their emails, the Office

of Student Conduct puts holds on their accounts of increasing severity until they meet with them. Depending on the number of reported cases before yours in the queue, it can take several days to many weeks to hear back from the Office of Student Conduct.

5. After meeting with the student, the Office of Student Conduct will often reach out with questions. If the student denies the cheating, you may be asked to meet with the student and a representative of the Office of Student Conduct. Having quantitative measures (e.g. "the 200-line program had MOSS similarity of 95%") makes for a stronger case than qualitative measures (e.g. "these programs used the same unusual structure"). While both are equally valid, the latter is more difficult to explain to the non-technical representatives and may require multiple meetings. With the former, students often admit when first informed and no meetings are needed.
6. The Office of Student Conduct will write you with their decision. If it is the student's first violation, it is rare that additional sanctions, beyond the academic ones you imposed, are given. For multiple violations, disciplinary sanctions, such as notations on the transcript and dismissal from the college, can be given.

Best Practices:

Communication: Communicating the policy and setting clear guidelines at the beginning of the term can be time-consuming, but it will dissuade some students. It also makes the reporting simpler since the reporting forms include questions about whether the students were informed of the policy.

- Include the academic integrity information in syllabus (see above).
- Give clear examples of what plagiarism and cheating is during the first lecture.
- Include questions on an early quiz that the student acknowledges that they have read the policy. This is done as a "warm-up" quiz for many of the introductory courses to make sure students can use the system. Also, include a statement on the front page of written and on-line exams that the student acknowledges that they have read the policy.
- Clearly state your guidelines for sanctions. Many students are inured to vague warnings that you will not tolerate cheating. Making the criteria and penalties concrete gives weight to your statements. Explaining that incidents are reported and adjudicated by the Office of Student Conduct, demonstrates knowledge of the process (many students count on faculty not knowing how to report cheating). Also, stating that the department also keeps records of incidents may deter some students since many students would like research or teaching assistant positions or departmental recommendations for technical internships.

Assessment Design: Some approaches to lessen cheating in graded work:

- Do not reuse exams from semester to semester. Images of exams are posted on discord and chegg **during the exam** by students seeking others to help them. By the following semester, your exam questions can be found on chegg, discord, and often by typing a few words of your question into a search engine.
- Avoid multiple choice questions. Instead, if using Blackboard, use calculated answers (Blackboard has a reasonable regular expression checker as well as allows algebraic computations). There are options to vary parameters to generate hundreds of versions of each question, instead of just a single one.
- For on-line exams, randomize the question order and do not allow backtracking. This makes copying harder, as well as, makes it easier to identify copying (Blackboard keeps access times for each

question).

- For timed coding questions, use a system like HackerRank (CUNY has a site license) that has built-in plagiarism warnings and flags.

Sanctions: The college lets faculty set the academic sanctions for their courses. Some suggestions on setting and applying sanctions:

- An effective approach is to increase the sanctions for multiple incidents. Having a light sanction for the first incident mostly serves as a warning. It also is more likely to be accepted by the student and upheld by the Office of Student Conduct. While the student may still protest harsher sanctions for subsequent violations, adjudicating bodies view the student as forewarned by the previous sanction. For example,
 - 0 for the assignment for the first incident of cheating on a programming assignment.
 - 0 for the semester programming grade for second incident of cheating on a programming assignment.
 - 0 for the course for third incident of cheating on a programming assignment.
- When possible, use standardize metrics such as MOSS (available on Gradescope via "Review Similarity" on programming assignments) or TurnItIn scores (available on Blackboard).
- Use standardized thresholds and apply to all students. Students are less likely to feel "singled out" or argue that they have been wrongly accused, when all students with 95% similarity on the assignments are submitted to the Office of Student Conduct.
- Do not come to private deals with students to not report them if they accept a 0. If the incident is not reported, the student has the right to file a grievance against you that you discriminated by grading them differently than others. Since students are to be graded equally, such appeals have been successful and the points reinstated.
- Note that failing to safeguard their work or giving their work to others is also an academic integrity policy violation. Reporting both the students that copy and the students that provided the answers will deter the better students from violating academic integrity.

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Template for Notification Email:

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Dear STUDENTNAME,

As stated in the syllabus, "Hunter College regards acts of academic dishonesty (e.g., plagiarism, cheating on examinations, obtaining unfair advantage, and falsification of records and official documents) as serious offenses against the values of intellectual honesty. The College is committed to enforcing the CUNY Policy on Academic Integrity and will pursue cases of academic dishonesty according to the Hunter College Academic Integrity Procedures."

Submitting others' work as your own is plagiarism and obtaining unfair advantage.

INSERT DESCRIPTION OF VIOLATION HERE, e.g.:

- Submitting identical code for programming homework (100% match).
- Submitted identical, idiosyncratic code (to multiple students and chegg) without acknowledging resources consulted.

See attached documents.

The academic sanction is:

- Second violation: A grade of 0 for programming grade (25% of overall course grade).

All incidents of cheating will be reported to the Office of Student Conduct in the Vice President for Student Affairs and Dean of Students office. Under the Academic Integrity Policy, you have the following options:

- Student admits to the charge of cheating, plagiarism, academic dishonesty, or falsification of records and accepts the academic sanction imposed.
- Student admits to the charge of cheating, plagiarism, academic dishonesty, or falsification of records, but does NOT accept the academic sanction.
- Student denies the charge of cheating, plagiarism, academic dishonesty, or falsification of records.
- Student is unresponsive to the allegation.

Let us know which option you choose within one week.

--Prof. YOURNAME