Policy on Cheating

See Honor Code

Cheating in Computer Science classes is a serious problem, as it devalues the hard work of honest students. Therefore, the department is determined to eliminate it by making the chances of getting caught high enough, and the penalties severe enough, that any student considering cheating will choose instead to just do their best, honestly, even if it means a low grade.

On our campus, professors have very wide discretion in determining what constitutes cheating in their classes and what penalties will be applied. However, the department has adopted the following guidelines for penalties. Professors are encouraged to apply penalties at least as severe as these. Some course web pages may simply link to this page for the course cheating policy.

Recommended policy for cheating in CS courses

- First offense for cheating on
  - an exam: zero on the exam
  - a programming assignment or written homework: zero on the assignment and final course grade is lowered by one whole letter grade.

- Second offense for cheating of any kind: failure in the course

Other Penalties

As noted above, an instructor has wide flexibility in imposing penalties, and may be either stricter or more lenient than this. An additional penalty often imposed by faculty is to place a letter in the student's permanent record about the incident.

Note that all cheating cases, once resolved (see Procedures below), are reported to the department and the college. If a student is found cheating in two separate courses, the department or college may take action beyond the instructor's penalty, including possible expulsion from the university.

What is cheating?

Cheating on exams or written assignments is clear to everyone, because it is an issue in almost every class. (The Campus Code of Policies and Regulations contains a detailed discussion about what constitutes an "Infraction of academic integrity," as they call it.)

For programming assignments, the principle is the same, but the application is sometimes unclear to students. As with any assignment, it is perfectly legal, and encouraged, to discuss the concepts with your classmates or anyone else, but when it comes to writing the program, you must do it yourself (unless the instructor has said otherwise). The formula often used is something like, "You can talk to anyone, but as soon you start to write your solution or type it, you should work alone." In other words, if you are copying text directly from someone else - whether copying files or typing from someone else's notes or typing while they dictate - then you are committing plagiarism - that is, cheating. The source can be a classmate, former student, website, program listing found in the trash, or whatever. Furthermore, plagiarism even on a small part of the program is cheating.

Finally, aiding someone else's cheating also constitutes cheating. Leaving your program in plain sight or leaving a computer without logging out, thereby leaving your programs open to copying, may or may not constitute cheating, depending upon the circumstances. However, you should always take care to prevent others from copying your programs, as it certainly leaves you open to accusations of cheating.

Procedures

The procedures to be followed by professor and student in cases of "Infractions of academic integrity" are laid out in the Campus Code. It is somewhat dense reading, but the basics are these (refer to the link above for the definitive version):

1. The professor or TA sends a message informing you that you are being accused of cheating.
2. You have eight (8) days to respond. You may state that you admit guilt or deny it or offer whatever explanation you like; if you deny guilt, you will normally be asked to meet with the professor to discuss the case. (If you fail to respond within the eight days, that failure will be taken as an admission of guilt.)
3. After considering your arguments, the professor will make a decision in the case, and if he or she still believes you're guilty, will impose a penalty. You will be informed of the decision and the penalty; at this time, the professor will also inform the Academic Office (and we will in turn inform the college).
4. If you feel you have been treated unfairly, you may appeal the decision to a faculty committee. Students normally see or write to me (pitt@cs.uiuc.edu) before pursuing an appeal, to see if the case can be resolved without it. If you decide to pursue the appeal, there are two cases listed below. In either case, the decision of the committee is final; there is no further officially prescribed appeal process.
   - If the penalty is failure in the course, you will file your appeal with the College of Engineering (206 Engineering Hall).
   - Otherwise, you will appeal to the department, specifically the Student Grievance committee. (Note that I am not on the grievance committee, so you can speak freely to me without fear of prejudicing the committee before the appeal.)