

Academic Honesty

Part of the academic endeavor is a notion that academics (students, faculty, researchers, staff) must follow high standards of honesty in their academic work. One component of academic honesty is that academics must clearly indicate which work (ideas, writing, etc.) is theirs and which belongs to others.

Grinnell's student handbook includes the following statement:

The college expects Grinnell students to demonstrate a high code of personal honor in all their relationships. Further, the college seeks to protect the integrity of the operations in which grades are involved: the granting of degrees, the conferring of honors and privileges, and the certification and transfer of credits to other institutions. Accordingly, students who are dishonest in the preparation of assignments or in examinations may incur the penalty of probation, immediate failure in the course, suspension, or dismissal from the college.

Dishonesty in academic work often involves plagiarism. A student is expected to acknowledge explicitly any expressions, ideas, or observations that are not his or her own. In submitting a report, paper, examination, homework assignment, or computer program, he or she is stating that the form and content of the paper, report, examination, homework assignment, or computer program represents his or her own work, except where clear and specific reference is made to other sources. Even when there may be no conscious effort to deceive, failure to make appropriate acknowledgment may constitute plagiarism. Therefore, students should comply with [appropriate requirements for acknowledging sources]. (Grinnell College 2000-2001 Student Handbook, p. 51)

However, there is much more to academic honesty than just making sure to cite work you've used. In particular, you are expected to provide a true and accurate representation of your work in experimental endeavors (e.g., it is academically dishonest to invent or modify experimental results). It is also academically dishonest to aid another in an academically dishonest act (e.g., to provide aid on a no-aid exam, to write a paper for another student).

There are also more reasons to care about academic honesty than simply the "integrity of operations". First, academic advancement requires that a trail of ideas be available so that successes and failures can be traced backward. Second, your own personal integrity requires that you be academically honest.

In Fall 2000, I had my first serious encounters with academic dishonesty at Grinnell, so I'm now trying to be extra-careful in spelling out what I expect from my students. What follows are some general expectations.

I expect you to follow the highest principles of academic honesty. Among other things, this means that any work you turn in should be your own or should have the work of others clearly documented. However, when you explicitly work as part of a group or team, you need not identify the work of each individual (unless I specify otherwise).

You should never “give away” answers to homework assignments or examinations. You may, however, work together in developing answers to most homework assignments. Except as specified on individual assignments, each student should develop his or her own final version of the assignment. On written assignments, each student should write up an individual version of the assignment and cite the discussion.

When working on examinations, you should not use other students as resources.

If you have a question as to whether a particular action may violate academic standards, please discuss it with me (preferably before you undertake that action).

Collaborative Work

Most of my teaching involves *collaborative work*. I believe (and have found) that students learn better when they can consult with each other. There are few better ways to learn something than to explain that thing to someone else. Collaboration is also central to workshop-style learning, and so I generally consider collaborative work appropriate. At the same time, each student is responsible for ensuring that she or he understands the material (and, preferably, that his or her collaborators also understand).

Categories of Work

In my classes, I assign a variety of types of work. Different categories have different expectations.

Laboratories are almost always collaborative. You should generally plan to work on laboratories with at least one other student. When you’re stuck on a problem, you should feel free to ask for help from almost anyone (me, a TA, another student, a MathLAN UC, a friend, etc.).

Homework assignments may be individualized or collaborative. For either kind, you should feel free to ask for help from almost anyone (me, the class mentor, another student, a friend). If I give an individualized homework, I expect each individual to write up his or her answers individually (no copying!). However, you may certainly ask a colleague to proofread or comment on your answers. If I give collaborative homework, each group should write its own set of answers. However, you can still ask colleagues to proofread or comment on your answers.

In-class quizzes and examinations are also always individualized. You may not talk during class or discuss the exam with anyone in class. You may ask me questions. My in-class examinations are typically closed-book and closed computer. However, I typically allow students to bring one sheet (8.5 x 11 inches) of hand-written notes to the exam.

Citing Web Pages

The advances of the Internet and the World Wide Web have led to challenges in citation. Some seem to believe that it is acceptable for a citation to consist of a URL. However, a citation should provide much more information. Consider what a typical citation to the printed literature contains: Author, Date, Publisher, Title of Article, Publisher, etc. Your Web citations should contain at least as much detail. That is, you must include not just the URL, but also the author of the page (using “Anonymous” or an institutional author, if necessary), the title of the page, the publisher (the site), and the date.

The date is particularly important. Unlike printed sources, which have new editions when they change, electronic resources often change unexpectedly. By including the date the page was accessed and modified, you at least provide some indication of when the ideas you were using were available at the specified location.

Here is a sample citation for this page, using a slight variant of the APA format.

Rebelsky, Samuel (2008). Introduction to Statistics: Academic Honesty. Grinnell College Department of Computer Science. Available at <http://www.cs.grinnell.edu/~rebelsky/Courses/MAT115/2008S/Handouts/academic-honesty.html> (Last modified 19 January 2008; Visited 20 January 2008).

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