Academic Honesty

Ronald Parr
Department of Computer Science
Duke University

Why Academic Dishonesty is Bad

• It’s dishonest!
  – Misrepresents your effort
  – Disrespectful of the original authors
  – Disrespectful of students who do their work honestly

• It’s a feckless and unproductive use of your time – time spent cheating is time you could be spending learning

• It wastes instructor/TA time
  (even if you’re not caught!)
Why Academic Dishonesty in Graduate School Shows Especially Poor Judgment

• Grades aren’t that important
• Ignoring the ethical issues, the risk/reward equation doesn’t make sense – grades barely count, and the penalties are severe (small upside, huge downside)

• Unlike undergraduate education, most classes you take are on topics aligned with your interests and future plans
• You’re cheating yourself!

• Forget any bad habits or ideas about “acceptable” cheating that you had as an undergrad. Put that part of your life in the past, and leave it there.

What Happens if You’re Caught Cheating in Class

• You will be in the center of a sh*tstorm
• Automatic reduction of at least 1/3 grade for entire class per instance
• Score of zero on any assignments involved

• Undergrads: Duke honor code takes precedence
• Grads:
  – Your DGS will be contacted, the graduate school administration will be informed, and you will have a black mark on your record
  – You are likely to be put on probation (best case)
  – You may be thrown out of graduate school (worst case)
  – Your advisor (if you have one) will be contacted
  – If you have an advisor he/she may “disown” you
  – If you don’t have an advisor, you may have trouble finding one
Why Academic Dishonesty in Graduate Students Sends a Chill Down the Spine of Professors

• If you cheat in classes, why wouldn’t you cheat in research?

• The academic publication mechanism is strongly based upon trust
  – Reviewers might catch suspicious looking results
  – Impossible for reviewers to reproduce all experiments or search all archives to check for plagiarism
  – Authors usually enjoy an implicit assumption of honesty
• When trust is violated, editors, reviewers and readers are outraged

• Advisor-student relationships are strongly based upon trust
  (same as arguments for reviewers)

• A dishonest result in a paper doesn’t just bring one person down; it brings down every author

Rules of Thumb Both for Class and Research

• If you are unsure about what is permitted ASK!

• Always look for opportunities to give credit/thanks for ideas that have inspired you
  – Giving credit earns friends
  – Failing to give credit earns enemies
Stupid Cr*p Students Have Gotten Caught Doing Before

- Copying from another student during the exam
- Using mobile devices to search for answers during an exam
- Submitting code from the internet for a homework assignment
- Writing an entire paper from sentence fragments of other papers
- Copying figures from textbooks without citing them
- Submitting answers that were found on the web
- Searching the web for “similar” problems and basing answers on the solution to these similar problems
- Submitting another student’s code or proof
- Submitting answers from previous years or from similar courses taught at other universities

I give this talk every year...

- ...and yet somebody gets in deep trouble almost every year.

- I hate to see this happen, so please make this a good year for all of us!