The Honor Code: Preventing Problems, Handling Issues

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Session objectives:
- Know the pitfalls that lead to cheating
- Have a plan in case an honor code issue arises
- Feel comfortable interacting with the Board of Control (BoC) and Graduate Honor Council (GHC)

Preventing Problems

In this section:
- Information about collaboration policies
- Examples of good collaboration policies and ones to avoid
- Tips for other risky situations

Collaboration Policies

One of the most common reasons for students to be referred to the GHC or BoC, groups that facilitate the Honor Code for graduate and undergraduate students, is violation of a collaboration policy. Collaboration policies define how the Honor Code applies to a specific class, and are often very permissive. **Very few actions are considered honor code violations if the collaboration policy does not specifically forbid it.** Problems arise when collaboration policies are not clear and students take actions which are ambiguous under it.

As a TA, you may be asked to write a collaboration policy. Even if you are not, you can act as a proofreader, and alert the instructor to possible holes in the policy which may confuse students before a problem arises. **Ideally, students will clarify before taking questionable action (you should encourage them to!), but more often they will assume anything not explicitly forbidden is okay.**

Examples of good collaboration policies:

While working, you may consult:	PS	Exam
Required texts	√	√
Recommended texts	√	√
Reference books (CRC, Merck Index, etc.)	√	√
Any other texts	√	√
Comments: There are no prerequisites for the course.		

Internet use.	PS	Exam
You may use the Internet.	√	
Comments:		

As for notes, you may use:	PS	Exam
Your class notes (taken in lecture)	√	√
Hand copies of the class notes of others	√	√
The class notes of others (original or Xeroxed)		
Anything written in your own hand	√	√
Class handouts	√	√
TA/section handouts	√	√
Homework/exams of this year	√	
Comments: You may not consult any homeworks or exams from previous years		

For computational aides, you may use:	PS	Exam
Four function/scientific calculators	√	√
Graphing calculators	√	√
Symbolic manipulators	√	√
Mathematical reference tables (integrals, Laplace transforms, etc.)	√	√
Comments:		

The following types of collaboration are allowed:	PS	Exam
Basic discussion of the problems	√	
Look at communal materials while writing up solutions	√	
Look at other's non-communal work (i.e. writeups)		
Turn in a set with more than one name on it		
Comments: No collaboration on exams. Homework must be written by you and not copied from someone else.		

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This type of collaboration policy in a checklist style is not required, but is simple, clear, and nearly exhaustive. If asked to help write a collaboration policy, consider providing the instructor with a similar checklist to fill out!

CDS 101/110a, Professor Doug MacMartin
http://arc.caltech.edu/files/NarrativeCollaborationPolicy.pdf

"Collaboration on homework assignments is encouraged. You may consult outside reference materials, other students, the TA, or the instructor, but you cannot consult homework solutions from prior years and you must cite any use of material from outside references. All solutions that are handed in should be written up individually and should reflect your own understanding of the subject matter at the time of writing. Python or MATLAB scripts and plots are considered part of your writeup and should be done individually (you can share ideas, but not code). No collaboration is allowed on the midterm or final exams."

This collaboration policy is not as exhaustive as the first example, but still sets expectations by clarifying the "spirit" of the policy.

What to avoid in collaboration policies:

- Vagueness
  "You may use notes on the exam, but no other resources."
  Does this mean class notes only, or can I copy down passages from the book? Can I print out notes from the internet? Photocopy a friend's notes?

  Better version: "You may use up to 2 front-and-back pages of notes on the exam. These notes may reference any source, but must be typed or hand-written yourself."

- Over-permissiveness
  "Any amount of collaboration on the homework is permissible, so long as the names of all collaborators appear on the homework when it is turned in."
  This potentially lets students turn in one homework with all of their names on it! The honor code does not, by itself, forbid many actions other than plagiarism.

  Better version: "Close collaboration on the homework is encouraged, but each student must write up their own answers. Additionally, the names of all collaborators must appear on the homework when it is turned in."

Other Risky Situations
      While the honor code does mean you should trust students to act honestly even when they have opportunities to cheat, minimizing those opportunities should be a priority whenever the benefit gained from them is small. For example, self-proctored

tests are common at Caltech because the benefits for students (flexible study time, taking the test in a comfortable location and when the student feels most alert) far outweigh the cheating risk from the lack of supervision.

The following are situations we recommend you avoid:
- Unmonitored boxes for homework/exams
  Tests can be retrieved from these too easily for copying, and very little convenience is lost by leaving the box in a room where someone (professor, TA, administrative assistant) will be able to keep an eye on it. May also violate FERPA. If after-hour exam turn-in is necessary, students can slip their tests under the office door of a professor or TA, or there can be a locked drop box for the students.
- Easily available old exams/problem sets online
  Most problematic when you plan to re-use old problems. Unless the aim is to provide students with examples they are allowed to use, it is best to attempt to secure them. A common solution is to use Moodle, the Caltech course management site, so that only students in the class can see problem sets, exams, and solutions. If old problems are being reused, the collaboration policy should explicitly prohibit the use of old solution sets.

Handling Issues
In this section:
- Do's and don't's for reporting honor code violations
- An overview of the GHC and BoC processes
- Typical outcomes for typical violations

 If you think one of your students has violated the honor code:

Do...	Don't...
Report directly to the BoC (if the student is an undergraduate) or GHC (if the student is a graduate) using ghc@caltech.edu or boc@ugcs.caltech.edu	Make a report to the student's advisor, department chair, etc.—honor code proceedings are confidential!
Let the instructor know you are making a report	Confront the student or notify them about the report
Grade as if no violation occurred	Take punitive action yourself, including deducting points for cheating
Make copies of relevant materials after grading	
Return originals to students as normal	

Graduate Honor Council – Summary of Process
1) Report made to ghc@caltech.edu by TA or professor
    a. Interview scheduled between GHC co-chairs and reporting party
    b. Reporting party explains the details of the potential violation
    c. Photocopies of submitted assignments and other relevant documents (syllabus, answer key, etc.) are given to the co-chairs
    d. Co-chairs ask questions and review the process moving forward
2) Co-chairs interview the accused party
    a. Interview is scheduled to discuss the violation in person
    b. Allegations are summarized to the accused party
    c. Accused party is allowed to respond and provide their own evidence
3) Co-chairs decide whether to bring the case to a hearing or dismiss it
    a. Almost all cases reported result in a hearing
    b. Cases are only dismissed at this step if the alleged actions of the accused party clearly do not constitute an Honor Code violation
4) Co-chairs organize a GHC hearing
    a. Seven members of the council chosen at random serve on a hearing, pending availability and conflicts of interest
    b. Co-chairs present evidence and contents of preliminary interviews
    c. Council deliberates, identifies information they still require, and forms a list of questions for witnesses and the accused party
    d. Council brings in witnesses and the accused party for an additional interview
    e. After a final deliberation, the council votes on whether a violation occurred. If on recommendations for nullifying undue credit and protecting the community from future violations
5) Meeting with the Dean of Graduate Studies and the co-chairs
    a. Co-chairs present a summary of the investigation and hearing
    b. Review and discuss recommended nullifications and protections
6) The Dean of Graduate Studies issues all final decisions and enacts the nullifications and protections
    a. Grades can be changed after a class has ended in collaboration with the professor and the Registrar
    b. Professors are always notified of the outcome, if the reporting party is a TA they may not be notified but will be told the investigation has concluded

Graduate Honor Council – Typical Violations and Protections
1) Example Violations (not exhaustive)
    a. Accessing **unauthorized resources** that violate the collaboration policy to complete a homework or exam

        i. Requesting help on an online internet forum
        ii. Looking at a textbook solutions manual
        iii. Using an answer key from a prior year of the class
        iv. Asking another student for help
  b. Sharing of student-generated material that violates the collaboration policy
        i. Submitting computer code generated by another student is most common example
        ii. Copying verbatim the work that multiple people have worked on together on a white board
  c. Retrieving the problem set or exam of another student from an unmonitored turn in location (mailbox, drop off box outside an office, etc.)
        i. Not only does this make cheating easy, it is also a FERPA violation
        ii. If a professor wants to do this, please suggest an alternative, such as collecting during class or turning in to an administrative assistant
  d. Plagiarism
        i. Lack of or improper attribution of credit to a source of information
        ii. Possible to plagiarize in a variety of forms, but most commonly occurs by plagiarizing a research article

2) Example Protections (not exhaustive)
  a. Typically varies and decided on a case-by-case basis
  b. Meetings with the Dean and Associate Dean to discuss academic integrity
  c. Notification of the research adviser
        i. Typically only occurs if the nature of the violation indicates behavior that could result in research misconduct
  d. NSF Responsible Conduct of Research Course
  e. For repeat violators, dismissal from the institute is considered. Extremely rare!

Board of Control – Summary of Process

Can also be found at http://donut.caltech.edu/ascit/BoC_Reps

Cases begin with a report of a potential Honor System violation. After receiving the report the chair and secretary for the case will meet separately with defendants and other relevant people in preliminary meeting to share the

reported concern and to discuss general circumstances around the incident under investigation.

At this point the chair and secretary may dismiss the case without proceeding to a full hearing. If there is a significant lack of evidence or if it is abundantly clear that a defendant has not committed an Honor Code violation then the chair and secretary may dismiss the case without a full Board hearing. In the case of any ambiguity the chair and secretary will err on the side of proceeding to a full Board hearing. Please understand that the decision to proceed to a full Board hearing does NOT imply your guilt and does NOT mean you will be convicted. Plenty of cases get dismissed before the full Board.

If the case goes to a full Board hearing, sometime in the next couple of weeks the chair and secretary will organize an appropriate meeting time with the defendant(s) and witnesses. The defendant is asked to submit any dismissal requests (people that he knows well or feels would be unfairly biased); after the dismissals are processed a board of seven representatives is assembled. At this meeting the BoC will review all the relevant evidence and speak with the defendants and any relevant witnesses. Defendants will be shown all the concerns of the Board and will be given reasonable opportunity to respond. The chair and secretary who collected the report and ran the preliminary investigation will not have a vote on the Board.

After the Board has reviewed all relevant evidence and spoken with all relevant people, they will deliberate until a decision is reached.

Decisions

The Board makes up to three decisions: a conviction decision, a nullification decision, and a protection decision. (The last two, nullification and protection, are only made if the defendant is convicted.) *All cases are unique and all decisions are made on a case-by-case basis; the following is merely meant to give a general impression of how the Board reaches its decisions, and is by no means a strict criterion by which cases are decided.*

Conviction: Whether or not an Honor Code you have committed an Honor Code violation. The standards for conviction are somewhat analogous to the "preponderance of evidence" standard used in US civil courts. This decision is primarily evidence-based; if the Board believes there is not enough evidence then you will be dismissed. A 6/7 vote is required for conviction and a 4/7 vote is sufficient for dismissal.

Nullification: How to remove the unfair advantage gained. This decision is meant to be as precise as possible. For example, if a person is convicted for

plagiarizing a paragraph of a long paper, then the essay will be submitted for re-grading with the plagiarized paragraph removed. If a person is found to have copied certain problems from another student's exam, then credit for only these problems will be removed. The Board is careful to remove credit only for those things which we believe (and have evidence to support this belief) have been unfairly gained. Thus the intent is that a student will be given credit for all portions of the assignment that were done fairly. A 6/7 vote is required for the nullification decision.

Protection: How to protect the Caltech community from future violations. At this point the Board is informed of any previous Honor System violations committed by the defendant. This decision is very much dependent on circumstances. Being straightforward and honest with the Board, whether or not you have any prior violations, and your understanding of and respect for the Honor Code are all important for this decision. This decision requires a 6/7 vote for approval.

In cases where a defendant has been straightforward with the Board and has no prior conviction, the BoC will make an education-focused protection decision. Educational decisions may be (for example) a reflective essay, a meeting with representatives of the Board to discuss your case and how to avoid future Honor Code violations, or a meeting to discuss how to avoid plagiarism.

In cases where a defendant has been dishonest or who has one or multiple prior convictions, the BoC will consider stronger measures. A defendant may be given a unit cap for future terms of enrollment, or may be required to meet periodically with BoC reps to discuss the status of their work. In the more extreme cases, if the Board feels that you pose an immediate threat to the community or that the violations will continue unless some more serious action is taken, you may be placed on academic suspension. Defendants who have been put on leave are eligible to apply for reinstatement after a set number of terms has passed. Expulsion is academic suspension without the possibility of future reinstatement. Expulsion decisions are extremely rare, and are reserved for defendants who cannot be trusted in the community at any point in the future.