Acknowledging Intellectual Debts

(Adapted from Prof. Ethan Bolker, Prof. Carl Offner)

You are taking this course in order to learn as much as you can about the material it covers. No learning occurs in a vacuum. You learn from lectures and reading, by playing with ideas, by talking to other people about what you are trying to learn. That is particularly important in Computer Science. A kind of terminal-room-and-email camaraderie develops that makes learning easier and a lot more fun. But part of the ethical code under which we function at a University requires that we acknowledge the sources of ideas we use in work of our own – papers, assignments and programs. When you turn in work that you have discussed with someone, or which contains ideas that you found in a book, you must indicate that fact. I expect you to talk to each other and to read materials other than those assigned. I also expect to see in your work evidence that you have done so. I cheer when I see a reference, say, to another book on computer science, or a comment in your code that says that you didn’t understand continuations until Susan Jones helped you out. Learning to acknowledge intellectual debts is part of learning. It has nothing to do with grades or dishonesty. You should be reading, talking to each other, and telling the world that you have done so.

Some kinds of sharing, however, are unacceptable. You may not copy someone’s work and submit it as your own any more than you may use a Xerox machine to steal someone else’s words – even if you acknowledge that theft! You may not have your friends do your work for you. Versions of some of the assignments in this course have been given in previous years. You may not use answers to those assignments. To any of you who may be tempted to cheat: the best reason not to is that it’s wrong. Another is that if you cheat you learn considerably less. A third reason is that you will be caught more often than you think. If I find evidence of cheating I will immediately present that evidence to the appropriate University committee.

The penalties for infractions are severe: Depending on the severity of the cheating/plagiarism and whether this is your first offense or not (in this course or any other course!), the sanctions will range from getting a 0 for that particular assignment to getting an F in the entire course. The university administration may impose further sanctions up to and including being expelled from the program. You will be penalized whether you are the giver, receiver or collaborator.

Specific Expectations For CS 624

Adapted from Prof. Carl D. Offner

- I do expect you to discuss everything in the course with other students (or professors) and to read other books. I do expect you to state in your writeups any help of this sort that you have received, as discussed in Prof. Bolker’s essay above. Acknowledging such help does not lower your grade.

- However, the work you hand in must be entirely your own. Copying, no matter how trivial it may seem to you, constitutes plagiarism. I am quite willing to help out with any difficulties you may have. However, copying another student’s work, or having another student prepare a solution or a proof for you, or copying something out of a book or off a webpage, or generally passing in anything that you did not write yourself, by yourself, is completely unacceptable.

- I should emphasize that even if you find the answer to a question in other sources such as a webpage, a book or a friend, you may not copy the answer verbatim even if you acknowledge the source. You should phrase it in your own words so that it will be clear to me that you understood the answer enough to put it in your own words.