Acknowledge Intellectual Debts

Adapted from Prof. Ethan Bolker

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 runtime until Susan Jones helped you out or until you looked it up. 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 use the computer to copy 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 and it will reflect in your in-class exams and in future courses. 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: If you cheat in a homework assignment and this is your first infraction you will certainly get an 0 for the assignment (whether you are the giver, receiver, or collaborator). If your cheat in an exam OR this is not your first infraction (in this course or otherwise – I will look up your records), you will certainly get an F in the course. Notice that the university may impose other sanctions such as probation, and in extreme cases even suspension or expulsion.

Specific expectations for CS310

- I do expect you to discuss everything in the course with other students (or professors) and to read other books or resources. 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. We all consult with colleagues and books/websites, myself included.

- However, the written answers and code you write must be entirely your own. “Code sharing”, no matter how trivial it may seem to you, constitutes plagiarism. I am quite willing to help out with any programming problems you may have. However, copying another student’s answer, or having another student type in code for you, is completely unacceptable.

- The TA or I will read the code and use a plagiarism-detecting program that is quite sophisticated. (Obviously, most students are completely honest, and I don’t want to make you feel paranoid. I just want to make it clear that I do take this quite seriously.)

- I don’t take pleasure in enforcing disciplinary measures. However, I will do that if necessary.