I take academic integrity very seriously: it is a core value for a teacher and researcher. Therefore, I want to state unequivocally what behavior I expect from everyone in this course. Although I do not want to brow-beat you on this topic, I have learned from past experiences that it is best to deal with this issue early and clearly, before any questionable incidents occur. So, as a preventative measure, I am asking everyone to read and sign and date this document. A blank copy is available on the Handouts link on the course web page. I will not record your grades until you sign, date, and return this document to me.

Homework for the Lectures: These are not graded, so you may collaborate with anyone and do not need to acknowledge collaboration on your work. In fact, I encourage collaboration on these problems.

Take Home (Open Book) Quizzes: All course materials, books, the world-wide web, etc. are acceptable resources for finding answers to these questions, and you may spend as much time on these quizzes as you want. But, students may not discuss the material on these quizzes: they may not collaborate with each other, nor receive written or oral help from anyone (except the instructor), whether it be in person, by phone, e-mail, bboard, etc. No one should publish or look at solutions to these problems on the web.

I generally grade all the quizzes by myself; first grading question 1 for every student, then question 2, etc. I often read an “interesting” answer that sticks in my head: an answer that is very good, very bad, or just very strange (sometimes in its use of terminology or notation, or just strange code). If I come across a similar answer on another quiz, I will carefully compare all the other answers on these quizzes, looking for other similarities. I often find cheating using this protocol.

Programming Assignments: Many programming assignments mandate (and others allow optionally) students to work in pairs, submitting one copy of their joint work. Obviously in these situations, designing, synthesizing, documenting, analyzing, and debugging code while discussing it with your partner is an integral part of the assignment; all are important skills that we expect you to acquire. In addition, you are welcome to discuss high-level ideas about a programming assignment with anyone else. It is fine to discuss its specification and approaches to designing/solving the problem, to draw class hierarchies or object diagrams, etc. In fact, you are even welcome to discuss how to debug your code with other students.

But the student/pair seeking help may not examine code written by any other students/pairs, and anyone helping debug a program should not rewrite it into the code that they wrote. I don’t want to limit high-level discussions about the assignment, but you absolutely cross a real boundary when you examine someone else’s code: I expect you to wrestle with some problems on your own (or jointly, with your partner). Think of a history paper: you can discuss the material, in class and with other students, but must use all your own words when you write a paper. Looking at someone else’s paper invites plagiarism.

If a “friend” asks you to show him/her your code (especially if the request is to receive a copy of your code), you are opening the door wide for a possible charge of academic misconduct for both of you. I have seen friendships crumble when student A innocently supplies a copy of his/her code to student B, who then plagiarizes it, getting both in trouble. Do not be an accessory; truly help a friend by saying no.

The best source for help on these assignments is the instructor or staff (either in person, by e-mail, online, or on the course bboard). We are experienced at providing the right kind of information and help. The help that we give is designed not only to solve your immediate problem, but other similar ones that may arise.
I use the program moss (measure of software similarity) to analyze all submitted programs. Moss does a thorough job of comparing code (in ways designed to detect cheating: so operations like changing names, moving code around, etc. don’t fool it). This information is automatically indexed on a web page that makes it very efficient for me to examine the similarities that it detects (adding in my 30 years of experience with this issue). The programs that I choose to examine closely have similarity metrics a few standard deviations above the mean (they are very very similar). When I use assignments from previous semesters, I run moss with solutions from those semesters as well. I will demonstrate moss during one of the lectures, so you can see it in action.

In-Class (written/programming exams): Students are expected to do all their own work, quietly in the classroom, and do it during the allotted time (stopping when directed to), with the benefit of only the materials explicitly allowed during the exam. Students may not bring in any other materials, nor access such materials nor communicate with each other directly or via any technology: cell-phones, PDAs, calculators, pagers, IM, e-mail, miniature TV cameras, etc.) Information about in-class work should not be discussed with students in other lectures or recitations that I teach until the end of the day.

We make the JavadDoc API available during all programming exams. Students have been caught bringing unauthorized notes into exams. I have never come across anyone using technology to cheat, but stories about such events circulate with increasing frequency in academic circles.

Penalties: The penalty for violating my rules is a grade that is the negative of the number of points that the assignment is worth (i.e., cheating is worse than failing by not handing in an assignment). In addition, I will send a letter to the Dean of Student Affairs, who will meet with you and determine whether to sanction any University-level penalty. The Dean and an Academic Review Board resolve any disputes.

A Safety Clause for Collaboration: If you collaborate with anyone, document it on the work that you submit, by including the name of that person and the nature of the collaboration. Doing so helps insulate you from any University-level action. While I might call in all the students involved, to discuss appropriate and inappropriate levels of collaboration in case you crossed a boundary that is fuzzy to you, I will be very reluctant—for first time offenders—to ask for any University-level penalty from the Dean. Certainly I cannot levy a charge of plagiarism when a citation of collaboration appears on the work.

General Advice: If you are unable to perform well on an assignment, contact me immediately to discuss the problem (you will be at a great advantage if you do not wait until the last-minute to start your assignments: the biggest reason students cheat is poor time management skills); such problems can be resolved in many ways. I should be your first contact point in stressful situations. If a friend comes and asks to see homework prohibited by this agreement, don’t show it to him/her. I understand the peer pressure to “help a friend”, but let me assure you that this is truly not the way to help: you are exposing your friend—and yourself—to a negative grade, and a possible University-level penalty; a friend wouldn’t ask you to expose yourself in this way. During in-class exams, I even suggest that you not sit near your friends. If a student feels guilty and admits to cheating before I grade the work, he/she will receive only a grade of 0 (no University-level action).

Bottom Line: Faculty are here (and assignments are designed) to maximize your learning and ensure that you receive a fair grade. If you cannot trust us to perform this function faithfully, and cooperate with us to do so, you are missing something important in your education at CMU. I want to create a positive environment, where students truly help each other. But, you must know which boundaries not to cross.

Signature: I have read this document, understand it (see me if you need any clarification). I promise to adhere to the letter and spirit of its content during this course, or suffer the stated penalties.

Name (signed) ____________________________ Date ______________

More information about this topic is available in the Syllabus, under the topic of Academic Integrity.