

Academic honesty in mathematics courses

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The mathematics department expects that students in mathematics courses will not engage in cheating or plagiarism. The purpose of this document is to clarify these expectations. Many of these expectations are essentially the same throughout the university, but there are also some issues which are specific to mathematics courses.

Broadly speaking, cheating means violating the policies of a course or of the university in order to gain an unfair advantage over fellow students. A particular kind of cheating is plagiarism, which means taking credit for someone else's work. Cheating and plagiarism hurt your fellow students in the short term, they hurt yourself in the long term, and they will not be tolerated. In exams, the most basic kind of cheating is copying off of someone else's paper. Graders notice when two exam papers look unusually similar. Even glancing at someone else's paper to check your answer is cheating. If you write the correct answer to a computational problem without any justification leading to this answer, it raises strong suspicions that you cheated, and most likely you will not receive any credit anyway.

Electronic devices such as phones are also not allowed in exams (unless explicitly allowed by your instructor), not even to tell the time (which the instructor will write on the board if there is no clock in the room). There are too many ways to cheat using software and the Internet. Exams are not intended to test your ability to find the answer by any means necessary. The questions are too easy for that! Rather, exams are supposed to test your understanding of the course material, which you will need in order to use math correctly in the real world or in subsequent courses.

Homework and term papers are expected to be your own work, unless otherwise allowed by the instructor. Some classes allow or encourage collaboration on homework; in this case you must acknowledge your collaborators or else it is plagiarism. Obtaining answers to homework problems from solutions manuals, Internet question and answer sites, computational software, or other sources, is cheating unless specifically allowed by your instructor. When allowed, if you use proofs or calculations from textbooks or other sources, you need to cite these sources, even if you have rewritten the material in your own words, otherwise it is plagiarism.

In the case of homework and exams involving programming assignments, you should write, compile, and run the programs yourself. It is not acceptable to copy, in whole or in part, the basic ideas and program flow from other students or other sources without direct attribution. The basic rules of plagiarism still apply: you need to write the code yourself, and if you take program flow or basic ideas (including ideas stemming from algorithms) from other sources, you need to cite them.

It is your responsibility to take reasonable precautions to prevent cheating. In exams you should sit as far away from other students as the room permits, and hold your exam papers in such a way that they are not easily visible to other students. Homework assignments should not be left in places where other students can easily copy them without giving you proper credit. If you know or suspect that other students are cheating, you should immediately inform your instructor. Students may be cheating in ways that your instructor has never even heard of. Even if you don't mention any names, the sooner you inform your instructor what is going on, the sooner your instructor can take measures to put a stop to it.

If you are suspected of cheating, your instructor may pursue a variety of actions depending on the particular nature of the incident. If you accept responsibility for academic misconduct, the matter can often be resolved between you and the instructor with possible academic sanctions ranging from losing points on an assignment to failing the class, and a report will be sent to the Center for Student Conduct. In serious incidents, or if you maintain that you are not responsible for academic conduct, the case may be forwarded to the Center for Student Conduct.

We hope that the above clarifications will help prevent cheating. If you have any questions about the rules or expectations, you should not hesitate to ask your instructor or the vice chair for undergraduate affairs.