

HONOR CODE SUGGESTIONS FOR PROFESSORS

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Graduate students sometimes cheat. There is no excuse for it, but professors can help decrease the temptation and decrease misunderstandings. This is a list of suggestions from the Graduate Review Board (GRB). We are the graduate equivalent of the Board of Control (BoC).

The honor code:

"No member of the Caltech community shall take unfair advantage of any other member of the Caltech community."

There is a lot of ignorance about the honor code. Talk to students about acceptable behavior in class and in lab.

Clarity in class policies can only be helpful. Using a sheet like the one written by the BoC that covers acceptable resource use in many classroom situations is a proactive step towards reducing confusion. <http://donut.caltech.edu/about/boc/policy-sheet.pdf>

Do not assume students know how and when to cite resources. Teach them about plagiarism. This is especially necessary in mathematical concepts. Many students will say, "It's a proof. Why do I need to cite it?" Indiana University has good, general information. <http://www.indiana.edu/~wts/wts/plagiarism.html>

Reporting violations is a necessary part of the GRB process. Dealing with problems by oneself has, in the past, sometimes led to more problems for all concerned. For example, students with histories of cheating have gone undetected. The GRB has a formal, legal, institute-approved process. It has a commitment to take everyone, including the faculty, seriously. In particular, the GRB chair or Secretary (Catherine or Sid) will report back to faculty who are involved in each case.

Encourage lab safety and good lab practices. Not only is this necessary legally and ethically, if unsafe or poor laboratory practices impair on other's ability to do work, the violation falls under the purview of the GRB.

Reducing the possibility of temptation automatically makes it easier for students to remain within the Honor Code

- Change exams every year.

- Tell students if they can look at previous exams/homeworks.

- Tell students if they can look at previous years' solutions to exams/homeworks.

- Turn-in boxes have led to problems with copying. Consider allowing students to slide problems under a locked door for after hours.

Multiple evaluation techniques reduce pressure. Classes with any single evaluation scheme (one final exam or paper) make it much more tempting to cheat. Having multiple evaluation schemes have the added advantage that it allows the professor to know more about how the students are doing, and it is easier to detect cheating.

Scaling the difficulty level of exams so that the class average is reasonable is a good idea. A suggested range would be a lower bound of averages is 40-60 percent.

Make exams which are possible to complete within time limit.

Talk to your TA about reporting honor code violations. Remember s/he is honor bound to report all violations and, for confidentiality, the less people that know about the suspected violation, the easier it is to keep confidentiality.

Note that taking steps to reduce temptation is not equivalent to not trusting students to follow the Honor Code. It does, however, mean that the possibility for confusion by students is reduced, and the message to the students is clear - the professor takes the Honor Code seriously, and will make efforts to ensure that isolated individuals cannot hold it hostage. There must be a balance between not trusting students (for example, having strict in class tests with desks 4 feet apart), and providing excessive temptation (for example, giving the solutions to exams on the same sheet of paper as the exams themselves). We hope these suggestions provide a middle ground that helps both students and professors.

More information at the GRB website. <http://www.its.caltech.edu/~grb>

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