Creating a Climate of Academic Integrity:
Tips to Prevent Cheating

UC Merced has a tradition of honor and integrity supported by the Academic Honesty Policy established in 2005. Under the Student Conduct Code, students, faculty, and administration share responsibility for maintaining academic integrity and upholding this tradition. UC Merced students are expected to be honest and fair, and to treat others with respect. In turn, faculty maintain high academic standards by encouraging honest work, setting and communicating clear standards, using assignments and test formats that discourage cheating, and reporting violations to Student Judicial Affairs. (SJA). The following suggestions can help you promote academic integrity.

Promoting Academic Integrity

- **Stress the importance of integrity to the learning process.** Honest work builds self-esteem, knowledge, and skills. In contrast, cheaters don't learn, they undermine the quality of the education UC Merced provides, and they devalue our reputation and the degrees we confer.
- **Highlight our Student Code of Conduct and the importance of honesty** (e.g., in class and in your syllabus); remind students of the Code before exams; link your website to the Code; and refer suspected violations to SJA. Encourage students to tell you immediately if they see cheating.
- **Set clear standards for assignments and grading;** stress rules for proper citation. Tell students if they may collaborate and, if so, how much. Refer in your syllabus to SJA handouts (or distribute them to students) such as Collaboration: When You Can and When You Can't Work with Others.
- **Enlist students' help in creating a climate of integrity in your class.** Tell them you know that most students don't cheat, and that you appreciate honest students who want to learn.
- **Discuss ethical standards for your class/subject,** especially those relevant to the course and to students' future careers. Give criteria for the "hard choices" in your field, with examples of how ethical issues can and should be resolved.
- **Inspire, encourage, and model integrity.** You don't have to threaten or scold. Positive reinforcement works better than scare tactics, and internal constraints (morals, ethics, character) are the most effective. As educators, faculty influence students' attitudes and development and reinforce student integrity by helping them to make the right choices.

For more information, see McCabe, D. and Pavela, G., "Ten Principles of Academic Integrity," http://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/40177967.pdf?_=1463161646036

SJA offers the following suggestions based on faculty experiences here at UC Merced and elsewhere; we hope that they are helpful to you.

General preventative steps

- Have students sign an honor statement on exams/papers attesting that all the work they submit is their own & that they have not taken any unfair or dishonest advantage.
- Monitor exams to help students maintain academic integrity, and promptly confront any suspicious conduct.
- Prohibit talking or other communication during exams. If there are questions about the test, have them talk to you.
- Require students to turn off cell phones and put away notes, books, and all electronic devices inside their backpacks.
- Number exams (on front and on each page); use sign-in sheets for each row, by exam numbers, to record where students sit.
- Have students sign each page of the exam in ink and/or complete the entire exam in ink.
- Tell students to cover their work, and encourage them to sit apart from friends or study partners during exams.
- Require & check written excuses for make-ups and extensions.
- Don't allow students to leave exam room without permission.

How to deter copying and collaborating during exams

- Use test formats requiring short-answers, essays, or problem- solving. These are difficult to copy and require analysis and thought to derive the correct answer – guessing won't work.
- Use two or more exam versions, scrambling the order of questions or answers, or changing key variables or terms; use different colored paper for each version, so you can see whether adjacent students have the same test.

Watch for: (during exam) wandering eyes; passing notes; talking; showing paper to others; using devices (e.g., cell phones, PDAs) to transmit information by voice, e-mail, text messaging, camera, data transfer, IM, or code); (in grading) answers with no work shown or work that doesn't support answer; unique, identical wrong answers; "signals" written on exam; erroneous transcriptions of another's answer (e.g. "buck red" instead of "brick red").

- Give no credit for correct answers unless all work is shown, and the work leads to the answer.
- Use alternate seating. If no extra rooms, mix classes & alternately seat students from different classes (e.g., Math, Economics, French).
- Put multiple choice or true-false sections at bottom of page (harder to copy); have students turn in Scantrons AND tests.
- Have students remove and put away hats/dark glasses.

Adapted with permission and thanks to UC Davis, Office of Student Judicial Affairs, August 2013

How to deter use of unauthorized notes or devices

- Give clear oral and written instructions regarding what materials can or cannot be used on the test.
- Before distributing test, remind students to put away books, notes, and other study materials & store them out of sight.
- Do not permit students to use computers, calculators, etc. in completing exams.
- Instruct students to turn off and put away all electronic devices (e.g., cell phones, iPods, headphones, calculators, computers, Blackberries) during exams; inform students that unauthorized equipment found on or out during exams will be confiscated and reported to SJA.
- Change exam questions often, ideally every semester/section.
- If you provide sample questions or study sheets, do not use the exact same questions on the exam.
- Have students turn in blank blue books to you at the class period before the test, mark to indicate you've seen them, and redistribute at random, or have students exchange blank blue books (e.g., pass down a row and to the left).
- Tell students to begin writing on a certain page, to turn bluebook upside down, or to leave specified pages blank.

Watch for: use of information stored in electronic devices (see above); crib notes up sleeve, in lap, on top of backpack, on floor, or written on hand, on desk, chair, clipboard, binder; notes or answers pre-written in bluebooks, or hidden in bathroom or nearby classroom; students photographing or text messaging questions or smuggling an extra copy of the test to others outside the room who will take the test later; students leaving the room without submitting their tests (e.g., to use notes or answer key outside class); attempts to sneak finished exam back into the room at the end of exam, or into faculty office; or having an accomplice "find" and turn in a "lost" exam later.

Watch for: Erased/changed Scantron answers; new, correct answers in place of previously blank or incomplete responses; tests that have been photocopied or photographed, with original answers blanked out & redone with correct answers, forged grading marks; entire exams or inserted pages with higher scores stolen from return bin, names changed, then submitted for credit under the thief's name. Red flags: poor-quality "second generation" copy inconsistent with original exam; copies of staple holes; entire pages erased and re-written (to avoid detection of different handwriting); suspicious discrepancies with grade book (resubmitted test has score of 90, grade book shows 40). Students sneaking extra blank exam from room to be completed after test and returned for "re-grading."

How to prevent fraudulent requests for re-grading

- Mark wrong answers/blank space with an "X" or slash mark; Circle wrong, empty and/or correct answers on Scantrons. Draw a red line connecting each Scantron answer selected by a student to the next answer ("connect the dots").
- Photocopy graded tests/Scantrons before returning to students.
- If you accept tests for re-grading, require original exams to be submitted by the end of the class period in which the tests are returned with a written statement of which questions they want re-graded and why they think there has been a grading error. Make a list of all students who submit exams for re-grading.
- If you keep electronic copies, let students review on-line copies using class website and password-protected access rather than returning originals of exams. This prevents theft or unauthorized access to exams, & alterations to graded exams.
- Don't return tests--allow students to see exams during office hours only. Or return test papers but not Scantrons (tell students to keep track of their answers on their test papers as well as marking their Scantrons).
- If you re-grade an exam, keep a record of the original score in gradebook & database, including page totals, problem scores, and total exam score.
- Have one person review all re-grade requests and grade changes.

How to prevent loss/theft of tests

- Count the # of exams distributed, the # of students taking the test, and the # of exams turned in – before you leave the exam room; make sure the numbers match; use numbered exams and sign-in sheets.
- Collect exams from students while they are still seated rather than have a chaotic rush to the front.
- Have a consistent, secure method of transporting tests between class, office, and home; ensure security of computers & copy facilities; keep office & desk locked when you are out.

Watch for: theft of ungraded exams from front of room or from faculty office; theft of graded exams from return bin (thief erases owner's name, writes his own name, and submits as his work, or may copy/alter test and submit as own-- may destroy original paper to avoid detection, so that student who did the work appears not to have submitted paper); student may come to test (or to earlier section), remove a copy of the exam (or have friend get a copy) then study before own section's test or the scheduled make-up. Rarely, exam questions or answer key may be taken from faculty office or computer. Student may fail to submit paper or exam, then claim faculty error caused the work to be lost, with the goal of getting an extension or taking a make-up.

Watch for: Ringer taking test for enrolled student (who may be present or not during the exam) – ringer may do own test, then copy Scantron for friend. Ringer may do real exam while student does a fake exam; when done, they switch papers, the enrolled student writes own name and submits test, while student's exam is discarded or turned in with false name (red flag: exam with a phony name).

How to keep a "ringer" from taking a test for another

- Take periodic attendance during the semester so that you recognize who is in your class and who is not.
- Make sure you collect an exam from everyone; require students to turn in tests to their own TA from discussion section.
- Require students to have their UC Merced ID on their desks during exams and to show ID as they turn in their exams.

Collaboration:

When You Can and When You Can't Work with Others

Collaboration defined:

Collaboration is working with another or receiving assistance from someone (e.g., a classmate, friend, or parent, whether in person or by electronic media) to complete course work for a grade. Collaboration can include:

• Jointly calculating homework problems • Having another help one rewrite a paper • Sharing sources for a take-home exam
• Working in a group on a lab assignment • Checking homework answers with others • "De-bugging" another's computer program

Sometimes collaboration may be permitted, other times it is not. The following information will help you be able to know when it is O.K. to work with others.

What is unauthorized collaboration?

"Unauthorized Collaboration" means working with others without the specific permission of the instructor on assignments that will be submitted for a grade. This rule applies to in-class or take-home tests, papers, labs, or homework assignments. Students may not collaborate without faculty authorization.

What are the ground rules?

Under the UC Merced Academic Honesty Policy, all work submitted for a grade must be the student's own original, independent work, unless the instructor permits collaboration, use of sources, or outside assistance.

- If working with others or receiving assistance is allowed, any help or collaboration must be given credit and cited.
- Students must comply with the course rules, and may only work together, or receive help, to the extent allowed by the instructor.
- If unsure about the limits, students must seek the instructor's permission before working with one another.
- Even if the instructor permits collaboration, it is never ethical to copy someone's work or let them copy yours.
- If your instructor asks whether you worked with anyone on an assignment, always tell the truth.

Examples:

In a computer science class, students are allowed to discuss "general concepts," but all computer code submitted must be "individual work." Four students assume they can work in a group, since each of them writes part of the code. Have they broken the rule against unauthorized collaboration?

Yes. "Individual work" means that students must work alone. Even if they didn't copy, portions of the code submitted by each student were written by the other students – none of these four wrote all their own code as assigned. "General concepts" do not include specific solutions, answers, or code.

In his syllabus, an instructor prohibits all collaboration, and tells students not to discuss homework, solve problems together, or compare answers. During office hours a student asks about a homework assignment and the TA explains the question. Seeing this, two students work on the homework together. Have they violated the professor's rule?

Yes. Assistance provided by those who teach the course (whether in class, at discussion sections, or during office hours) does not imply or give permission for students to work together on assignments. Students may not exceed the limits set by the instructor, and may only work together as specified.

Can the rules change from one course to the next? From one assignment to the next?

Yes. Collaboration may be permitted in one class, and forbidden in another, because faculty have varying teaching strategies and goals. Different subjects – for example, English, computer science, microbiology, and drama – require different approaches. Some assignments may be designed for individual work, and others for groups. Important lessons are learned from working individually, while group work develops other abilities. Working alone builds a student's individual skills, knowledge, and self- confidence. Individual work also permits a more accurate and individually tailored evaluation of each student's strengths and weaknesses, achievements and needs for improvement. When it is allowed, collaboration gives students experience in working on a team, and they can learn from solving problems together, discussing questions, sharing strategies, and giving mutual encouragement. Students need both experiences – working alone and collaborating – to prepare for their chosen fields.

Example:

Students were assigned to do a lab experiment as partners because the apparatus needs two operators. Partners were allowed to discuss the concepts involved in the experiment and the lab report format, but calculations and write-ups (procedures and equipment used, results, graphs, and conclusions) were to be completed by each student working alone, in the student's own words. Two student partners discussed their analysis of the data and worked together to create a joint data table and graphs. Each then paraphrased the joint work and submitted the same table and graphs formatted with different fonts and spacing. Did they break the rules?

Yes. Analyzing data, preparing graphs and writing the report are important parts of the learning process; each student was required to do them alone. Even if neither copied, and they worked together only on the graphs, they still broke the rule.

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Why limit or prohibit collaboration?

- Unauthorized collaboration misrepresents joint work as the work of an individual.
- Unauthorized collaboration gives those who break the rules an unjust advantage and creates unfair competition.
- Those who always work with others are unaware of gaps in their own knowledge and skills, and do not learn all they can or should from their assignments.
- Students are held accountable for understanding and following class rules — and must ask questions if they are unsure!

Why you can't ignore the rules...

Some students disregard rules against collaboration because they think they learn more from working with others, because they don't like the restrictions, because they have been permitted to work in groups in other classes and are used to doing so, or because they get frustrated when they can't figure out the answer. Students may NOT ignore the course rules for these reasons, nor can they avoid responsibility by saying they never knew there was a rule against working together – ignorance is not a defense.

For educational reasons related to the goals and purposes of the course, instructors may permit students to collaborate on some assignments, but not on others (such as on the first two "practice" problem sets only). Or they may permit students to work together on the early stages of a project or lab, but require the final write-up to be in the student's own words. It may be okay for students to discuss general concepts of a homework task, but they may have to calculate the final answer on their own. If you're not sure where to draw the line – ASK!

How can you know which rules apply?

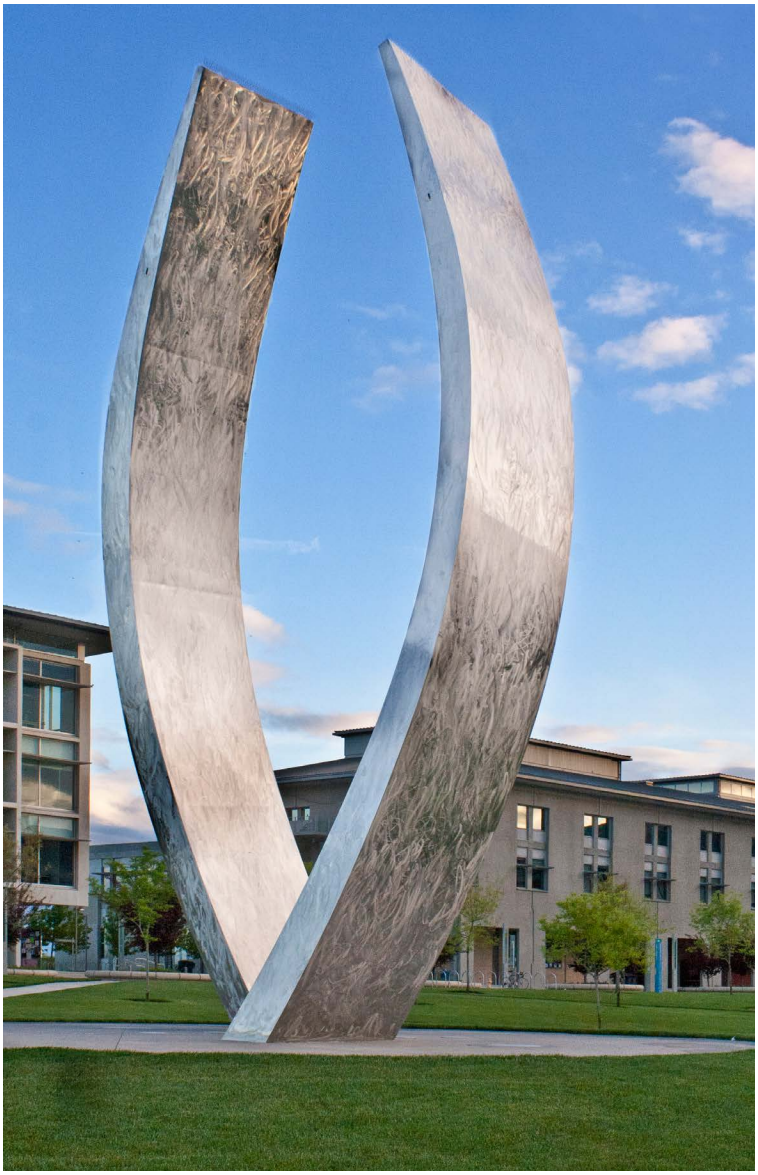
- Read the syllabus, review the course website, and follow assignment instructions.
- If you're not sure, ask the instructor. Or call SJA for help with understanding the rules.
- Don't guess or assume – if you're confused, others probably are too. You can help by raising the issue with the instructor.
- When in doubt, remember the UC Merced Academic Honesty Policy requires students to work alone unless they have permission.
- Students may consult tutors about pending work, as long as the tutor only identifies errors or demonstrates sample problems that are NOT part of the assignment. The tutor may not fix mistakes, re-write papers, or do homework for the student.
- Students may study together for tests, and may discuss concepts, readings, and notes to help each other learn the material before the test.

But other students do it...

Students referred for unauthorized collaboration sometimes say they didn't know they were breaking the rules (stating, for example, "I didn't copy, I worked with a group;" "I've seen other students doing homework together;" or "I tried to solve the problems by myself and just checked my answers with a friend"). Remember, students must know and follow the standards set by faculty. If others break those rules, it doesn't justify unfair or dishonest conduct: the UC Merced Academic Honesty Policy requires that students report the misconduct to their instructor or SJA.

Conclusion

Although new technologies and communications media make unauthorized collaboration easier than ever, it can be detected. Some students who break the rules might not get caught this time – but next time they will. Unauthorized collaboration is unfair and undermines the educational mission of the University. If you have questions about course rules, talk to your instructor. For assistance regarding these issues, please call SJA at (209) 228-5433 or see our website at http://studentconduct.ucmerced.edu



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