

Academic Honesty Activity

CSCI 241

Every quarter a few students are caught cheating. The usual excuse when confronted is some variation of “I didn’t know that wasn’t allowed.” Sometimes it is difficult to tell the difference between behavior that is valid and honest from behavior that is academically dishonest.

At the end of this exercise, you should be able to differentiate academic dishonesty from valid academic exploration.

The following are examples of things that have actually happened. Yes, the names have been changed. Read the four scenarios and answer the questions at the end with your team.

Thomas

The problem seemed straight forward enough, but Thomas could not get his program to pass the test cases. He tried rereading the textbook and reviewed his notes from the last few weeks of class. In frustration, he made random changes to the code hoping to stumble upon a workable solution. Without success, Thomas turned to the Internet.

A Google search led to Wikipedia and a short, but complicated solution to the core problem. Thomas did not cut-and-past code from Wikipedia; it was pseudo-code anyway. He reproduced the algorithm and his solution started passing the tests. He did not understand the Wikipedia solution. He commented the portions of the code that he developed on his own. He left the other parts undocumented and submitted the assignment.

Janet

There was going to be an in-class, team exercise on the assigned reading. Janet is particularly uncomfortable with these exercises. They go beyond the assigned reading and she likes to fully understand a problem before working on a solution. There just isn’t time in class for this. So she read the assigned sections. The textbook includes a bibliography at the end of each chapter. She found the referenced papers online and read a few that were cited in the assigned reading.

The in-class exercise was based on the example from one of the papers. She steered her team’s discussion to the paper’s solution. Her team presented the solution to the entire class at the end of the hour.

Tucker and Andy

Tucker and his roommate Andy are both taking the same CS class. Andy started working on the assignment a week before the deadline, but Tucker had been extremely busy with midterms and a project in his other classes. The night before the assignment is due, Tucker is struggling with a particularly tricky method. Andy offers to help by explaining his approach.

Andy tries to explain the steps out loud, but Tucker is still struggling to fully understand. Andy opens up his code so he can point at the different steps while explaining it again. With

this explanation, the solution finally “clicks” for Tucker. Tucker immediately writes up his own version of the method; it passes all the test cases and he moves on to the next part of the assignment. The method he wrote is not a direct copy of Andy’s code—some of his choices of variable names are different, and he’s written his own comments to show that he understands the code he’s written.

Marshall

Marshall and Anne are not exactly friends. They are polite to each other since they sit next to each other in the back of the classroom every day. Otherwise, they never see each other on campus.

The class was a loosely structured discussion around a core problem to the current project. In an attempt to focus the discussion, the teacher asked how the program’s performance could be improved if it is already CPU-bound. The answer was obvious to Anne: concurrency. She said this out loud, but her answer went unnoticed. Marshall parroted her answer loudly enough to be noticed. The teacher confirmed his answer and the discussion moved forward.

Questions

1. Order the four students from most to least egregious behavior.

2. Where is the “line” between academic dishonesty and ethically dubious? That is, who should be reported to the registrar?

3. What simple guidelines, if followed, would prevent these situations?

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