Academic Integrity, Plagiarism & Cheating

Academic Integrity is one of the most important principles of Bilkent University. Anyone who breaches the principles of academic honesty is severely punished.

It is natural to interact with classmates and others to "study together". It may also be the case where a student asks help from someone else, paid or unpaid, to better understand a difficult topic or a course as a whole. However, what is the borderline between "studying together" or "taking private lessons" and "academic dishonesty"? When is it plagiarism, when is it cheating?

It is obvious to all students that looking at another student's paper or any source other than what is clearly allowed during the exam, is cheating and will be punished. However, it is known that many students come to university with very little experience concerning what is acceptable and what counts as "copying", especially for assignments.

The following[1] are attempted as guidelines for students of the Faculty of Engineering, to highlight the philosophy of academic honesty for assignments for which the student will be graded. Should a situation arise which is not described below, the student is advised to ask the instructor or assistant of the course whether what they intend doing would remain within the framework of academic honesty or not.

A- What is acceptable when preparing an assignment?
1- Communicating with classmates about the assignment in order to understand it better
2- Putting ideas, quotes, paragraphs, small pieces of code (snippets) that you find online or elsewhere into your assignment, provided that i) these are not themselves the whole solution to the assignment, ii) you cite the origins of these
3- Asking sources such as BilWrite for help in guiding you for the English language content of your assignment.
4- Sharing small pieces of your assignment on Moodle to create a class discussion on some controversial topic.
5- Turning to the web or elsewhere for instructions, for references, and for solutions to technical difficulties, but not for direct solutions to the assignment
6- Discussing solutions to assignments with others using diagrams or summarized statements but not actual text or code.
7- Working with (and even paying) a tutor to help you with the course, provided the tutor does not do your assignment for you.

B- What is not acceptable?
1- Asking a classmate to see his or her solution to a problem before submitting your own.
2- Failing to cite the origins of any text (or code for programming courses) that you discover outside of the course's own lessons and integrate into your own work
3- Giving or showing to a classmate your solution to a problem when the classmate is struggling to solve it.

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[1] This summary is based on the section concerning Academic Honesty within the course syllabus for CS50 at Harvard University, by David J. Malan, and the "Code of Honesty" for CS201, Bilkent University.

4- Paying or offering to pay someone for work that you may submit as (part of) your assignment.
5- Searching for or asking others to find direct solutions to assignments, online or elsewhere.
6- Splitting an assignment's workload with another individual and combining your work later.
7- Submitting (even after modifying) the work of another individual beyond allowed items outlined in A-2 above.
8- Using resources during an assignment beyond those clearly stated as allowed in the assignment's instructions.
9- Viewing another person's solution to an assignment and basing your own solution on this.

C- What is plagiarism, what is not?

The following[2] are attempted to clarify the gray area between "acceptable" / "good behavior but still plagiarism" / "plagiarism" / "downright cheating".

CASE 1. A student copies the source code or a few paragraphs of text from his/her own assignment that was previously submitted for another course and incorporates these into a new assignment for this course.

   1.1. The student explicitly acknowledges re-use of his/her previous work as a comment or footnote
      This is acceptable

   1.2. The student simply incorporates the code or text into his/her new assignment and submits it
      This is "self-plagiarism" and is not acceptable

CASE 2. A student copies code or text from a book into the assignment that he/she submits.

   2.1. The student submits the assignment without mentioning that he obtained the code/text somewhere else.
      This is plagiarism and is not acceptable

   2.2. The student acknowledges that the code / text is sourced from a book / the internet / a discussion forum, etc, but has forgotten the source so the reference he cites is incorrect.
      This is still technically plagiarism and is not acceptable

   2.3. A group of students copy the same code/text from an outside source and submit a group project with all references complete
      This depends on how the project was assigned. If they were expected to work individually, this is not acceptable, although the group of students showed "good behavior" by submitting the project as a group project, not "attempting to deceive" by submitting the same code/text reused as individual assignments.

   2.4. The student consults two textbooks just to "read for ideas" and "gain inspiration," but completes the assignment alone. However, he does not cite his references since he claims he has not "copied" the code/text.
      Citing references is necessary not only for "copying", but also for "getting ideas". If you have based your ideas on the work of someone else, this must also be acknowledged in your assignment.

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[2] These cases are summarised and generalised from the paper "Source Code Plagiarism—A Student Perspective" by Mike Joy, Georgina Cosma, Jane Yin-Kim Yau, and Jane Sinclair, IEEE TRANSACTIONS ON EDUCATION, VOL. 54, NO. 1, FEBRUARY 2011

CASE 3. A student copies code or text from another student.

    3.1.   The student copies and modifies code / text from another student's project

          This is definitely cheating – not only plagiarism but awareness of the fact as well

    3.2.   The student pays a student in the year above him to write part of his assignment

          This is definitely cheating

    3.3.   The student copies the contents of an uncollected printout found near a printer

          This is definitely cheating

CASE 4. The instructor has emphasized that the project must be "individual". However, this instructor generally encourages students to "work together".

    4.1.   Two students work together on the assignment and submit very similar pieces of work without acknowledging they worked together.

          Since the assignment was emphasized to be individual, this is cheating.

    4.2.   Two students work together on the assignment then submit the assignment as a group project.

          This may be "good behavior" but it is still not acceptable, since the assignment was emphasized to be individual.

    4.3.   Two students of different groups exchange parts of their work and included them in their own groups' submissions.

          Since the assignment was emphasized to be individual, (even if it is a group project, it is individual to each group) this is cheating.

CASE 5. A student converts code in one programming language from another source into another programming language to submit as his assignment.

    5.1.   The student asked to write a C++ program found equivalent code in a Java text-book, converted this to C++, and submitted the program without reference to the textbook

          This is plagiarism (see case 2.4)

    5.2.   The student converted part of a Visual Basic program he had previously written for a high-school project into Java for his first year Java assignment, but mentioned this fact in the Java program "in the form of a comment."

          This is acceptable (see case 1.1) – and, if in doubt, reference!

CASE 6. A student falsifies the contents of an assignment

          The student failed to get a program to compile and run and therefore modified the program output to make it produce the desired output, even though the rest of the program was not functioning as the assignment required it to, and then submitted this work.

          This is not plagiarism. However, it is definitely cheating!

D- Don't forget that…

1- When the question of academic dishonesty arises, both giver and receiver of information are considered guilty. If you have deliberately given your assignment/solution/program to another before the other student has submitted his/hers, you are in deep trouble.

2- Similarities in solutions to assignments are immediately obvious to those in charge of grading, even if you struggle to modify another person's solution.

3- The code of discipline at Bilkent University treats academic honesty in the same way for any type of assessment, be it a quiz, a final exam, homework or a project.
4- It is easier to explain a low grade rather than a penalty for cheating.

E- Be aware that…
1- Working together in general is acceptable but working together to produce the same/similar assignment is not
2- Provided that the use of external sources is allowed by the instructor, using the ideas in a book you read for background information is only acceptable if the book is referenced
3- Incorrect referencing is treated as plagiarism
4- You may use your own work of a previous assignment (for the same course or another) only if referenced
5- You may use code converted from a different programming language only if referenced

F- To plagiarize[3] …
1- Is stealing the effort and knowledge of others
2- Shows you are not learning
3- Is not fair to other students
4- Is not fair to the instructor
5- Is not professional
6- If caught and punished, may ruin a future academic career
7- If caught and punished, will remain as an irremovable stain during future interviews

G- Useful links …
How to cite references (prepared by the Turkish Department and required for essays in Turkish)
http://web2.bilkent.edu.tr/turkce-birimi/

How to cite references (prepared by the English Department and required for essays in English)
http://bilwrite.bilkent.edu.tr/citation.html

MIT gives a comprehensive set of guidelines concerning Academic Integrity and what to reference and how at http://web.mit.edu/academicintegrity/handbook/handbook.pdf

Oxford University explains why "working together" may lead to academic honesty:
http://www.ox.ac.uk/students/academic/guidance/skills/plagiarism

Carnegie-Mellon University stresses "Unauthorized Assistance" as a part of academic dishonesty:
http://www.cmu.edu/academic-integrity/plagiarism/index.html

Stanford University offers references to how to avoid plagiarism and how to cite references:
https://communitystandards.stanford.edu/student-conduct-process/honor-code-and-fundamental-standard/additional-resources/what-plagiarism

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[3] Adapted from the article by Neal R. Wagner, "Plagiarism by Student Programmers", University of Texas at San Antonio, 2000