CS4 Collaboration Policy

1 Introduction

Our goal is to help you learn the material in this course. Studies have shown that students perform better in the long run when their introductory CS experience is collaborative. Hence, collaboration on all assignments except exams is strongly encouraged in CS4.

At the same time, we want to make sure that by the time you leave this course, you will have internalized the material yourself. Therefore, we have adopted a collaboration policy that generally encourages teamwork while establishing a few boundaries that help make sure you understand everything you hand in.

Please keep in mind that this policy is specific to CS4. Policies vary widely from course to course.

2 Course Assignments

Below, we detail our course collaboration policy. If you have any questions about this policy, please raise them with the HTAs or the professor. The consequences of violating this policy are severe.

3 Homeworks

You are encouraged to discuss homework assignments with other students. You may even work out solutions together. However, you are not allowed to take away any notes, diagrams, or code from joint work sessions. Emails, online chat conversations, photos, and the like all constitute “notes.”

No other student should ever possess a copy or a portion of your work, regardless of format. Similarly, you should never possess or consult a copy or portion of another student’s work.

We expect you to fully comprehend everything you hand in. To that end, you must write up your solutions entirely on your own. Debugging should be entirely on your own as well; however, if you are really stuck, you may ask a TA or another student to help you develop an appropriate debugging strategy. Do not rely on anyone to actually find or fix your bugs. Your ability to independently implement solutions is a strong indication that you understand them.

4 Projects

Depending on the project, you may have the option to complete the assignment by pair programming with a partner (see the Pair Programming handout for further information on the motivation behind and description of the methodology, as well as our course policies on pair programming). We will require you to complete some projects on your own.

When discussing projects with students other than your partner, you should follow the take-away-no-notes-or-code-from-joint-work-sessions policy that applies to homeworks. Under no conditions should you share any of your code with anyone other than your assigned project partner(s). See the Homeworks section for the full list of do’s and don’ts.
5 Exams

Exams are the only assignments in the course on which every form of collaboration is expressly forbidden. Exams are in-class and closed book, unless otherwise indicated. No collaboration whatsoever is allowed on exams.

Please refrain from discussing an exam until it is returned. Students may have rescheduled their exam for various reasons, and it would be unfair for these students to be at an advantage. Even comments saying the test was easy/hard/short/long give students an unfair advantage.

6 Online Resources

We are very lucky to live in an information age where people can share knowledge so easily, giving us so much knowledge at our fingertips. We want to encourage you to take advantage of the available knowledge pertinent to CS4, but at the same time, our goal is to teach you to solve problems, and you cannot develop this skill if you consistently turn to other sources for their solutions.

The CS4 website includes links to all the course slides and assignments, as well as various supplementary documents, some of which we have written and some of which we have not. You are free to access all materials linked to on the course website. You are also free to search the Web, which on occasion could help enhance your understanding of a language construct, a data structure, or an algorithm presented in class. Mathworks’ MATLAB Documentation Center is an especially useful resource.

However, you are not permitted to search for any information regarding specific CS4 assignments. Do not search for solutions, in MATLAB, Python or another language.

In the event that you inadvertently stumble upon information relevant to a solution to a specific problem and use this information to derive your solution, please cite your source. Most probably, you will not receive credit for your solution, but a citation will protect you from being charged with violating the course collaboration policy.

Please be advised: our staff is trained to recognize solutions that are not typical of CS4 students. If we encounter one, we can easily do the same search as the student to uncover the source.

7 Piazza Online Forum

In CS4, we use an online academic forum called Piazza, where students can convene virtually to further explore the course materials. We use this forum to provide students with an additional avenue for discussion. However, when using this forum, you must take extra care not to reveal or hint at the solutions to any assignments.

What you can do on Piazza is to ask or answer clarification questions about course materials, including assignments, so long as they do not pertain to solutions to any assignments. When posting questions on the Piazza forum, please be sure to submit them so that they are directed only to the Instructors. The Instructor or a TA will answer your question, and make it public only if it is a question that is helpful for the entire class and does not reveal any component of the problem solution.

8 Protecting Your Workspace

If another student copies any of your work because you have neglected to set the appropriate file permissions, left your terminal session unlocked, or left loose printouts lying around, you will be held partly responsible.

Therefore, it is important to make sure that the parts of your home directory where you keep your code are not readable by anyone else. You should also be sure to lock your terminal session when you are away from it, and keep careful track of all of your printouts.

Under the standard home-directory organization, which you will have set up in lab, all of your course-related work is in your « course» directory. To prevent it from being read by people other than yourself, open a terminal in the CS department and enter the following: chmod 700 ~/course.
To lock your screen in Gnome (the default Linux window manager), click on your name in the top right corner of your screen, and then select “Lock Screen” from the menu that pops up. Unlike logging out, locking your screen will save all open programs. If you are leaving for a longer period of time, select “Log Out” to end your session on the machine. Note that this option will not preserve your open programs.

9 Policy Enforcement

The TA staff is trained to look for policy abuses and makes use of software designed to recognize similarities across programs. This software is run on all assignments and is remarkably good at detecting unanticipated use of shared code (i.e. plagiarism).

Because our course design is team-oriented, it is all the more important to understand (and remember!) what the boundaries are. Violating the collaboration policy is a violation of the Academic Code1 and can result in some or all of the punishments detailed by the university.

Once again, if you have any questions at all about this collaboration policy, ask for clarification! Misunderstanding the policy is not an acceptable excuse for not abiding by it.

10 Collaboration Policy Agreement

You must fill out the agreement in the online form here by the end of your first lab session in order to obtain a login for the course.