CS4 Collaboration Policy

1 Introduction

Welcome! CS4 will be a broad and comprehensive to the fantastic field of computer science. In this class you will gain a strong understanding of the fundamentals of computer science and learn how to apply them to a wide range of data analysis, visualization and simulation problems. To this end, it’s imperative that each student independently develop a thorough understanding of the material. And so, we - the CS4 course staff - are working to ensure that the work you're submitting is entirely your own. This document details what is and what is not acceptable collaboration for this class.

NOTE: Due to course changes, this collaboration policy is stricter than in semesters before 2019.

2 Discussion of Course Material

Importantly, you may absolutely discuss general CS4 concepts with anyone, including other current students. The following falls into this category:

- Going over CS4 lecture slides, our (non-assignment) handouts, Python documentation, etc.
- Discussing mathematical concepts such as linear regression.
- Discussing broad programming concepts like recursion or array indexing

3 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.

4 Homeworks and Projects

You may discuss high level concepts that may pertain to the homework with other students and you may take notes or diagrams in order to solidify understanding of these concepts. You may not discuss homework solutions with other
students - this means you should never possess or consult a copy or portion of another student’s work, you never discuss specific solutions, and you may never help debug another student’s work. 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.

5 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 to 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 CS 0040 students. If we encounter one, we can easily do the same search as the student to uncover the source.

6 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.
7 Protecting Your Workspace

The below advice pertains to if you are coding on the CS machines, which use the UNIX/Linux filesystem. 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 accountable. 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 section, 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. If you are coding from your laptop, please ensure that you take the necessary steps to avoid plagiarism, i.e. logging out or locking your session when leaving your laptop temporarily.

8 TA Hours Policy - Section and Open Hours

TA office hours for CS 0040 will be held in a space that we have reserved for sections. We will use signmeup to manage the line at hours. When you arrive at hours, please submit a ticket in the CS4 Hours queue and you will be helped in the order displayed. If you hit a bug, you should have put significant effort into fixing it on your own before seeing a TA. You should be able to show relevant evidence - including design, pseudocode, printlines, or debugger use. As an informal community guideline, please use your “fair share” of TA hours, especially for debugging questions, to avoid overloading the TAs and allowing other students to ask their own questions, too. To ensure that we are helping all students, there will be a 15 minute cutoff. This does not mean you are guaranteed to be helped for all 15 minutes, just that after 15 minutes have passed, the TA helping you reserves the right to move onto the next student. That being said, TAs always reserve the right to move onto the next student if they feel like they’ve helped you adequately. We want you to get the help you need, but keep in mind that struggling through hard bugs on your own is the fastest route to becoming an expert debugger. If you are rude or display inappropriate behavior to a TA during TA hours on multiple occasions (the first time you will be issued a warning), you will be banned from TA hours. If you have a grade complaint, please email the TA who graded your assignment - do not confront them during TA hours. Finally, please direct all course-related inquiries, policy-related questions, and general frustrations to the HTAs.
9 Policy Enforcement

The TA staff are 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). It is also used to compare all this year’s solutions with prior solutions. 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 Code 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 time you submit the first homework in order for the course staff to begin grading your work.