Computer Science 167 and 169
Collaboration Policy
Spring 2013

IMPORTANT: Please read this document carefully and sign below. Return it to a TA on hours or
after class. You will not receive credit for any assignments until we have this on file.

This document extends the policies of Brown’s Academic Code, which can be found at
http://www.brown.edu/Administration/Dean_of_the_College/curriculum/documents/academic-
code.pdf. Our intent is to make it clear what sorts of collaboration are and are not allowed in this
course.

The basic premise is that you should do your own thinking, your own design, and your own
coding. You’re allowed to talk to other students about the content of the lectures and of the
textbook and about high-level concepts in general. You may answer questions from other students
about packages used for assignments, as long as the questions are strictly about how to use the
packages. You may also help other students with coding issues that are strictly language-related.
Finally, you may assist other students with debugging if they are stuck with specific low-level
problems that have been impeding progress on their work, but your assistance must be restricted
to these low-level problems.

On a general level, what is not allowed is that you let yourself be led by another student to the
extent that your task becomes significantly less challenging because of your discussion with him
or her. More specifically, you should do your own problem solving, program design and
decomposition, and design your own data structures. In conversation with other students, be sure
not to venture into design and coding specifics, and especially never sit down to discuss an
assignment with someone else before you’ve analyzed the problem in depth on your own.

The most blatant violation that can occur is code-copying, and this is absolutely not tolerated. We
reserve the right to do a “wire-pull test” (i.e., ask you to explain your program) and to use all the
tools at our disposal to compare your code to that of other students (including assignments from
years past) as well as to code on the web. In a similar vein, make sure that all your coursework on
the file system has the proper permissions so that other students cannot view and potentially copy
your work. See chmod(1) or ask a consultant for help if you don’t know how to go about this.
Failure to do this can be viewed as an academic-code violation in itself.

Similar guidelines hold for written homework assignments. You may discuss homework
problems in groups, but you may not take any written notes from such discussions. If you used a
whiteboard or equivalent you must erase it after the group meeting and before you write up your
answer. You must completely understand the answers you give, and we reserve the same “wire-
pull test” rights as for programs. You should not seek the answers to homework problems from
the web. If, in the process of clarifying a question on the web, you inadvertently find the answer,
you should state in your hand-in that you found the answer on the web, providing the URL of the
web page. If you provide an answer that was taken from the web without giving proper
attribution, you are likely to be charged with an academic-code violation.

We believe that this policy is explicit enough to guide your judgment and that we have not left
you many gray areas. If you are ever in doubt about the legality of your actions, be sure to clear
them with the professor or a TA, even if only after the event has occurred. When we confront a
student with a case of suspected violation, an answer of “I didn’t know that this was wrong” is not likely to find much sympathy.

Again, note that you are expected always to approach a problem initially on your own and seriously attempt to find a solution. You are honor-bound to preserve your independence of thinking. And remember that the TAs and your professor should always be your first resource when you have a question or problem.

TA hours are intended for students to use as a resource for help with assignments (both programs and homeworks). It is expected that, before coming to a TA for help, you have made a significant attempt on your own to resolve your difficulties. For homeworks, this means that you have thoroughly considered the question and possible solutions and are, perhaps, unclear on the nature of the question or some of the concepts involved. For programs, in order to receive help, you must have made a serious attempt to trace your bug to its source, or at least isolate its occurrence to a few specific scenarios (most likely using gdb). Simply stating “I have a bug” will yield no help whatsoever from your TA other than the friendly suggestion that you try using gdb. If you think you have found a bug in any of the TA-supplied code, don’t just go crying wolf. Please isolate the bug and give the TAs a few explicit scenarios in which it occurs so that we can reproduce and then fix the problem.

Asking TAs for help during times not explicitly designed as their hours is forbidden.¹

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I have read and agree to abide by the above policy.

________________________________________________________________________
Name (please print)       login (please print)

________________________________________________________________________
Signature       Date

☐ I don’t have a CS account

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¹ Note that this doesn’t necessarily apply to CS 169 mentor TAs — please discuss with them the protocols for contacting them.