Statement on Academic Integrity for Programming Assignments

**Important:** It will be assumed that you have read the following statement thoroughly. If you have any questions contact the instructor or the TAs immediately.

Academic integrity is a problem on programming assignments. Students naturally want to work together, and it is clear they learn a great deal by doing so. Getting help is often the best way to interpret error messages and find bugs, even for experienced programmers. In response to this, the following rules will be in force for programming assignments:

- Students are allowed to work together in designing algorithms, in interpreting error messages, in discussing strategies for finding bugs, but **NOT** in writing code.

- Students may not share code, they may not copy code, and they may not discuss code in detail (line-by-line or loop-by-loop) while it is being written or afterwards. This extends up to two days after the submission deadline.

- Similarly, students may not receive detailed help on their code from individuals outside the course. This restriction includes tutors.

- Students may not show their code to other students as a means of helping them. Sometimes very good students who felt sorry for struggling students have provided them with “just a peek” at their code. Such “peeks” often turn into extensive copying, despite prior claims of good intentions.

- Students may not leave their code (either the electronic versions or the printed copies) in publicly accessible areas. Students may not share computers in any way when there is an assignment pending.

We use an automatic code comparison tool to help spot assignments that have been submitted in violation of these rules. The tool takes all assignments from all sections and compares them, producing a ranked order of pairs that are most similar. It produces a web page for each pair, highlighting the regions of the code that are similar. The results are striking. Code submitted by students who followed the rules produces less than 10%
overlap (even when starting from code we’ve provided). Code submitted by students who broke the rules produces anywhere from about 30% to 100% overlap. (The tool is somewhat conservative.)

We (the instructor and the TAs) check flagged pairs of assignments very carefully ourselves, and make our own judgment about which students violated the rules of academic integrity on programming assignments. When we believe an incident of academic dishonesty has occurred, we contact the students involved for an explanation before imposing any punishment. Students should be forewarned, however: the evidence of the code is generally so strong that similarities can not be “explained away”.

Students caught cheating on programming assignments will be punished. The standard punishment for the first offense is a 0 on the assignment and a 5 percentage point penalty on the semester average. Students whose violations are more flagrant will receive a higher penalty. For example, a student who outright steals another student’s code will receive an F in the course immediately. Students caught a second time will receive an immediate F, regardless of circumstances. Each incident will be reported to the Dean of Students office.