Ethical and Legal Responsibilities of Teaching Assistants
Ethical & Legal Choices

Your ethical and legal choices affect:

- The education our students receive
- Your professional reputation
- The reputation of WPI
- Whether or not the university is sued.
Your Responsibilities

- As part of the teaching staff, you have a responsibility to your department and to WPI.

- You are responsible for knowing **what to do** and **what not to do**

- When in doubt:
  - Err on the side of caution
  - Ask a professional
Session Overview

- The rules and the laws
- Your responsibilities
- Discussion of real case studies
Rules

- Academic Honesty
- Privacy and Confidentiality
- Record Keeping
- Harassment
- Fairness and Conflict of Interest
- Students with Disabilities
- Dealing with Challenging Students
Academic Honesty at WPI

You must read

http://www.wpi.edu/offices/policies/honesty/

Any act that interferes with the process of evaluation of a student’s level of knowledge and understanding by misrepresentation of the relation between the work being evaluated (or the resulting evaluation) and the student's actual state of knowledge is an act of academic dishonesty.

Number of Potential Academic Dishonesty Cases Reported

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Cases</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2013-2014</td>
<td>162</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012-2013</td>
<td>132</td>
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<tr>
<td>2011-2012</td>
<td>160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010-2011</td>
<td>77</td>
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</tbody>
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Academic Dishonesty

- **Fabrication (examples)**
  - Altering grades or other official records
  - Changing exam solutions after the fact
  - Inventing or changing laboratory data
  - Falsifying research
  - Inventing sources
  - Sabotage of another student's work or academic record

- **Plagiarism (examples)**
  - Misrepresenting the work of another as one's own
  - Inaccurately or inadequately citing sources, including those from the Internet
Academic Dishonesty

- **Cheating (examples)**
  - Use of purchased term papers
  - Copying on exams, homework
  - Use of unauthorized materials or sources of information (e.g., cheat sheet, preprogrammed calculator)
  - Assistance of another person in cases where prohibited

- **Facilitation (examples)**
  - Assistance in any act of academic dishonesty of another student
  - Sharing test questions or answers from exam with another student
  - Letting another student copy a solution to a homework problem, exam or lab
  - Taking an exam for another student
Preserving Academic Integrity

TAs should:
• be vigilant
• grade normally
• make copies of anything suspicious
• turn in reports/copies to instructor and point out the concern immediately

TAs should not:
• Confront or threaten the student(s)
• Discuss the situation with anyone besides the instructor
• Make a “deal” with the student(s)
Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act

- Guarantees students access to their academic records
- Prohibits unauthorized access by others
- Grades & other academic information must be kept confidential.
- Do NOT
  - Post lists of grades by name, SS#, or ID#.
  - Allow students to see other students’ graded papers or grade records
  - Discuss a student’s academic progress with anyone except the student or other course staff - refer parents to instructor

http://www.wpi.edu/offices/policies/ferpaguide.html
Record Keeping

- Grade records are arguably the most important records that WPI maintains!

- TA must
  - Double check *every* grade calculation and entry
  - Keep copies of any graded material which may be involved in a disputed grade
  - Back up the grade file frequently, on a disk or separate computer
  - Send updated grade files to course instructor regularly
Harassment

- Display or circulation of materials degrading to either gender or to racial, ethnic, or religious groups
- Verbal abuse or insults directed at or made in the presence of members of a racial, ethnic, or minority group.
- Sexual harassment
- Treat students in a friendly but professional manner
- You must not:
  - Touch a student, sexually or otherwise
  - Date a student
  - Use offensive language
  - Display offensive material

http://www.wpi.edu/offices/policies/antiharassment.html
Fairness and Favoritism

Ethics, State and Federal law

- Equality is the law - gender, race, class, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion
- You must not pre-judge or display bias
- You may not like every student, but you owe each of them a fair share of your time and attention
- Avoid perception of favoritism, e.g. gifts
Conflict of Interest

- A *situation* (not an accusation) in which a person has a personal interest sufficient to *appear* to influence the *objective* exercise of his or her duties as an employee or professional.
- Grading the work of a friend or acquaintance is a conflict of interest.

**TA obligations:**
- Recognize conflict of interest
- Disclose conflict of interest to your supervisor

**You may:**
- Be told not to grade that student’s work
- Be asked to grade blindly
Students with Disabilities

Federal Law → WPI policy
http://www.wpi.edu/offices/disabilities.html

- Student responsibility
  - Present documentation from WPI’s Office of Disability Services (ODS) to faculty

- Faculty responsibility
  - Provide accommodations as requested by ODS
  - Student may need extended time on exams, separate & quiet testing area, assistive technology

- TA responsibility
  - Administer accommodations as requested by ODS and faculty
  - Maintain confidentiality
Handling Challenging Students

- Maintain an even temper
- Do not tolerate disrespect to self or others
- Do not hold a grudge when grading student’s work
- Enforce safety rules without making threats or having physical contact
  - Do not meet with student alone if it gets to this point
- Inform course instructor and let course instructor make most determinations
- If there is an immediate threat to your safety, call Campus Police (x5555)
"The Four Agreements"

- Be impeccable with your word
  - Know that your words have power - use them for good
- Don't take everything personally
  - Other people do things for their own reasons
- Don't make assumptions
  - Don't project your motives/beliefs onto others
- Always do your best
  - Forgive yourself for your mistakes, learn, move on

Don Miguel Ruiz, "The Four Agreements: A Practical Guide to Personal Freedom (A Toltec Wisdom Book)"
Conclusion

- As part of the teaching staff, you have a responsibility to your department and the university.
- Things may be different here than elsewhere.
- You are responsible for knowing what to do and what not to do.
- When in doubt:
  - Err on the side of caution
  - Ask a professional