



Ethical and Legal Responsibilities of Teaching Assistants



WPI

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

2013-2014	162
2012-2013	132
2011-2012	160
2010-2011	77

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)

FERPA - Privacy & Confidentiality



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