

You see two classmates helping each other on a homework that was supposed to be carried out independently.

“Before I took the Stats 810 class, I’d like to ignore it, doing nothing. Now, I would like to warn them, reminding them that the homework of this class should be carried out independently.”

You are fairly sure that the classmate on your right in an in-class test is copying from the student on their right.

“Confront them by asking are you copying from that student?”

“Perhaps indicate on my exam what was happening, or let the professor know after the exam.”

As an undergraduate, a friend asks to borrow your homework. You know that your friend considers he/she needs an A to get in to medical school. The friend is reasonably capable in this class, but has not left enough time to do this assignment before it is due.

A. *“I would probably let him/her copy the assignment but also make sure that he has understood the work of the assignment. i would try to persuade him to work on the assignment again later on his own and point out the mistakes he has made.”*

B. *“Tell them too bad.”*

As an undergraduate, a friend asks to borrow your homework. You know that your friend considers he/she needs an A to get in to medical school. The friend is reasonably capable in this class, but has not left enough time to do this assignment before it is due.

NOW, SUPPOSE THAT THE MATERIAL IN THE CLASS IS NOT NECESSARY FOR THE FRIEND'S FUTURE COURSES, THE PROFESSOR MAKES THE COURSE BORING, AND IT SEEMS STUPID THAT THIS BUREAUCRATIC REQUIREMENT COULD POTENTIALLY ELIMINATE YOUR FRIEND FROM GETTING IN TO A GOOD MEDICAL SCHOOL.

IN SUCH SITUATIONS, IT CAN SEEM INHUMAN TO REFUSE HELP TO YOUR FRIENDS. IS IT REASONABLE TO HOPE THAT A GOOD FRIEND WOULD NOT ASK FOR THIS FAVOR?

As an undergraduate, a friend asks to borrow your homework. You know that your friend considers he/she needs an A to get in to medical school. The friend is reasonably capable in this class, but has not left enough time to do this assignment before it is due.

“If I’m being completely honest, this is something I’ve more or less been on both sides of. If I trust that my friend won’t verbatim copy me, and I know that he generally knows what hes doing, I’d give him my homework. It’s an understandable situation, and one homework assignment is likely not a huge component of the grade. But is this course of action RCRS approved? Certainly not. So I’d have my qualms, but ultimately I’d still give him the homework.”

Churchill: Madam, would you sleep with me for five million pounds?

Socialite: My goodness, Mr. Churchill. Well, I suppose we would have to discuss terms, of course.

Churchill: Would you sleep with me for five pounds?

Socialite: Mr. Churchill, what kind of woman do you think I am?!

Churchill: Madam, we've already established that. Now we are haggling about the price.

(This is a very old joke where the participants vary dramatically from each telling. It's very unlikely though not impossible that the joke originated from Churchill.)

<http://www.barrypopik.com>

It is sometimes asserted that “those who cheat only hurt themselves.” Explain to what extent you agree with this statement.

“In the long run, it would be nice if cheaters mainly harm themselves. But in a class setting, if students are graded on a relative scale, then cheaters can artificially reduce the score of other students.”

“I think there are 2 ways this can be untrue. First is sometimes cheating really does not hurt you. If you are forced to take a class but it is not going to be important for you to actually know the material afterwards, then cheating (while maybe morally wrong) is unlikely to really hurt you unless you get caught. Second if the class is curved in any way cheating hurts everyone else in the class by raising the curve. I think the statement is much more true in grad school, where we actually need to know and understand the material not to take an exam, but to be able to effectively do research.”

The Washington Post,

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A57836-2004Sep2.html>

“The argument that cheaters hurt only themselves is false. Cheaters do hurt other people, and they do so to help themselves. Students cheat because it works. They get better grades and more advantages with less effort. Honest students lose grades, scholarships, recommendations and admission to advanced programs. Honest students must create enough peer pressure to dissuade potential cheaters. Ultimately, students must be willing to step forward and confront those who engage in academic dishonesty.”

Grades are not the only thing that matters, but they do matter.

If someone cheats to get from $B+$ to A , then someone else who would have gotten an A gets $A-$ and someone who would have gotten $A-$ gets $B+$.

Why do (and don't) grades matter in a PhD program?

Suppose that, while grading homework as a GSI, you suspect that a student has used material from the internet inappropriately in their homework. What would you do?

“I will discuss this matter with the instructor. I think it is the instructors responsibility to deal with this situation.”

As a professor, some options to deal with suspected academic misconduct are as follows:

(A) Do nothing. You see that the students involved are doing very poorly in the class, and they will get their eventual reward anyhow with a poor grade. Besides, you are less than 100% sure about your suspicions, and it would be bad for all concerned to make an accusation that turned out to be false.

(B) Give a warning, but take no punitive action. Acknowledging that the students who are cheating are stressed by academic pressures and may not have adequate ethical training, you give the whole class a warning to clarify the situation, but take no individual action. This also deals with your concerns about being less than 100% sure about your suspicions.

(C) Let the student(s) know you suspect misconduct and tell them they will score zero for this assignment. Let them know they will fail the course if this happens again.

(D) Write up a description of your suspicions and turn it in to the office of the Office of the Assistant Dean for Undergraduate Education. The student(s) will go through the formal process described at <http://www.lsa.umich.edu/academicintegrity/students/>

“Situation (D) should be reserved for severe cases, like cheating on an exam or other blatant misconduct. Referral to the Assistant Dean can have major consequences for a student, so you should be quite sure in your accusation. This action may not be appropriate for smaller offenses, as it is quite severe.”

A COMMON SENTIMENT. BUT, WILL THE ASSISTANT DEAN GIVE MAJOR CONSEQUENCE FOR A RELATIVELY MINOR FIRST OFFENCE?

ALSO, THE OFFICIAL REPORT MAY EXONERATE THE STUDENT. I SUPPOSE THAT, IF THE PROFESSOR WANTS TO TAKE JUSTICE INTO HIS/HER OWN HANDS, THE STUDENT SHOULD BE GIVEN AN OPTION OF ASKING FOR A FORMAL MISCONDUCT JUDGEMENT.

“A) should never be used, because B) is more effective and also doesn't carry damages if your suspicions are incorrect. D) is obviously what should be done if you are confident in your suspicions. C) is less work than D) but may potentially create danger if you are incorrect in your suspicions and gave a 0 for nothing.”

Many were reluctant to use (D). In my experience, several excellent teachers I know use (D) quite frequently—I should practice it! Why might good teachers use (D) more? Does using (D) make you a better teacher?

Beyond dealing with misconduct, sometimes such issues can be avoided by changing the structure of the class. Perhaps teachers can run the class in ways that make cheating less possible. Suggest one feature a class might have that encourages misconduct (but might have some other academic benefit) and another that discourages misconduct (but might have some other academic cost).

“A feature that encourages misconduct is reusing previous exam or homework problems. There may be an academic benefit of reusing those problems if they are especially useful for teaching the course concepts. A feature that discourages misconduct is writing many versions of an exam that are randomly distributed to students. This may incur a cost if the exam questions need to be easier or less interesting in order to make so many versions.”

“One way of encouraging misconduct is to more heavily weight homeworks (which are easy to cheat on) and less heavily weight exams. This makes cheating easier, but also likely has some benefits, as it ensures students focus on each homework, where much of the learning actually happens, especially for STEM classes.”

“ One way of discouraging misconduct would be to assign groups yourself during group assignments. This makes it harder for students to work with their friends (where is it more likely some students will carry the majority of the weight). However it does add another layer of work to the group assignment, so students may be less able to focus on the academic side as they deal with the communication side.”