Ethics, Legal Rights and Responsibilities

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Acknowledgments:
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Why this Session?
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Because your ethical and legal choices affect:

– The education our undergraduates receive;
– Your professional reputation;
– The reputation of the university;
– Potentially, whether or not the university is sued.
Overview of this Session

• The rules and the laws
• Your responsibilities
• Discussions of sample situations
The take-home messages

• As part of the teaching staff, you have a responsibility to your department and WPI.
• Things may be different here.
• You are responsible for knowing what (not) to do.
• When in doubt:
  – Err on the side of caution;
  – Ask a professional.
The rules (and common sense)

- Academic honesty
- Privacy and confidentiality
- Record keeping
- Harassment
- Fairness
- Students with disabilities
- Dealing with challenging students
WPI Academic Honesty Policy

http://www.wpi.edu/Pubs/Policies/Honesty/

- Definition, procedures
- Responsibilities of faculty
- Responsibilities of TAs:

**Do:**
- Be vigilant.
- Grade normally.
- Make copies.
- Turn in reports/copies to instructor and point out the problem.

**Do NOT:**
- Confront or threaten the student(s).
- Discuss the situation with anyone besides the instructor.
Privacy and confidentiality (federal “Buckley Amendment”)

• Grades and other academic information must be kept strictly confidential.

• Things you must NOT do:
  – 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.
Record keeping

• Grade records are arguably the most important records that WPI maintains!
• TA responsibilities
  – Double check *every* grade calculation and entry
  – Keep graded papers for at least a year
  – Back up your grade file frequently, on a disk or separate computer
Harassment (WPI policy, federal/state law)

http://www.wpi.edu/Pubs/Policies/Judicial/sect8.html

• Definition—
  – sexual advances
  – creation of a hostile environment

• Your responsibility: treat students in a friendly but professional manner

• Things you must not do:
  – Touch a student, sexually or otherwise
  – Date a student
  – Use offensive language
  – Display offensive material
Fairness and favoritism (ethics, state and federal law)

• Equality is the law—gender, race, class, ethnicity, sexual orientation

• You may not like every student equally, but you owe them all a fair share of your time and attention

• You must treat everyone equally

• You must not pre-judge or display bias

• Avoid perception of favoritism—e.g. gifts
Students with disabilities (federal law, institutional policy)

http://www.wpi.edu/Admin/Disabilities/Services/

- Student responsibility: Self-identify with Disability Services Office documentation
- Faculty responsibility: Provide accommodations as requested by DSO
- TA responsibility: Administer accommodations as requested by DSO and faculty (extended time, quiet testing, assistive technology); maintain confidentiality
Dealing with challenging students

• Maintain an even temper; show tolerance.
• Do not tolerate disrespect to self or others.
• Never hold a grudge when grading student work.
• Enforce safety rules, without threats or physical contact.
• Let course instructor make most determinations.
• If there is an immediate threat to safety, call Campus Police.
Case Studies: for each, discuss

What are the issue(s)?
How could this situation have been avoided?
What should the TA do?
Case Study #1

TA
It is past closing time and a student team refuses to leave the lab. When you ask them again one of the students tells you “I’m paying your salary with my tuition, I’ll stay as long as I want” and continues to ignore you.
Sue - “Hi Dan, I talked to the TA about my grades. S/he showed me the grade sheet and I noticed you failed the last exam. I would be happy to help you on the next one.”

Parent to TA - “I would like to talk to you about how my daughter is doing in your class.”

TA to Parent - “What do you want to know?”

Parent to TA - “Everything, I'm paying the tuition after all!”
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Situation #1</th>
<th>Two homework papers are essentially identical, including the same errors.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Situation #2</td>
<td>Two students sitting next to each other in an exam have nearly identical solutions to one problem. One of the exam sheets looks like it has been erased.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Situation #3</td>
<td>A student turns in a research paper that contains inconsistent writing styles and several key words in <em>italics</em>.</td>
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Case Study #5

**Situation #1** - A TA is repeatedly late for discussion sections, and often not prepared.

**Situation #2** - A TA leaves campus the day after classes end, and returns the day the next semester starts.

**Situation #3** - A TA turns in a set of grades for an assignment that are all either A or A+.
The take-home messages

• 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.