

A Plea For Integrity

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Today you begin a new semester. This is an opportunity to start anew and to make a concerted effort to live the life that God has called you to. As part of this new beginning, I ask that you seriously consider making academic integrity a major priority in your life beginning today.

Academic integrity applies to both faculty and students. It's doing what we say we will do and being trustworthy in all areas, even when it's not the easiest thing to do. It's being honest and considerate of others and exercising our God-given talents to the full. It's providing an academic environment that emphasizes true learning and excellence. In essence, it's what being a Christian in the classroom is all about.

In my plea for academic integrity, I want to first appeal to your practicality. Would you want to be treated by a doctor who cheated her way through medical school? Would you be comfortable flying in an aircraft designed by an engineer who cheated his way through college? How about being defended in court by a lawyer who copied off someone else's bar exam in order to practice law?

You may be thinking, "Well, of course academic integrity is important for those types of people, but this is a programming class... and I'm not even a computer science major!" I suggest that integrity is just as important in this course as it is in all areas of your life. If you don't show integrity in areas that don't seem that important, how will you be able to exercise integrity in the bigger things? If you cannot be trusted with little, how can you be trusted with much? (Matthew 25:14-30) Jesus made it very clear that we should be people of integrity, that others should be able to trust that our yes means yes and our no means no. (Matthew 5:37)

A lack of integrity in one area of your life can slowly make its way into other areas if left unchecked. It can affect your relationship with your boss and coworkers, with your friends, and with your spouse and children. At the very worst, it can undermine your Christian witness and make a mockery of Christ.

Integrity is something that can only be achieved by discipline and practice. It's not always natural. It's usually not very easy. But it's something that I feel is pivotal to your success here at Harding and later in the workplace. Without integrity, your educational experience at Harding becomes nothing but an exercise in self-deception.

Let's examine some specific ways that both you and I can display integrity this semester.

I. Preparation for Class

Academic integrity requires me to come prepared for class so that I can provide you a worthwhile academic experience. This requires that I:

- prepare or look over my notes that covers the day's topic,
- identify tricky parts of the lesson that may need more explanation,
- keep the curriculum current by carefully monitoring new technology and trends,
- complete projects and homework that I assign *before* I assign them,
- plan the session so it is worth your time to be present.

Academic integrity requires that you also prepare for class so you can make positive contributions to class discussions. This requires you to:

- read the assigned reading before coming to class,
- identify the parts of the text that you have trouble understanding and formulate questions that you might have,
- get proper rest and exercise so you are not fighting sleep during class.

II. In Class

Academic integrity requires me to treat you with respect and do my best to teach effectively. This requires that I:

- show up for class unless I'm unable to do so,
- arrive on time, dismiss class on time, and do not waste class time,
- do my best to answer your questions in a timely manner,
- never make fun of a question you ask or allow others to treat you disrespectfully,
- encourage you to participate in class discussions, even when you don't raise your hand,
- provide a compelling lecture and examples that fulfill the learning objectives,
- make you laugh at least once. ;-)

Academic integrity requires you to take me and this course seriously and to treat your fellow students with respect. This requires you to:

- show up for class unless you're unable to do so,
- arrive on time so you don't distract others,
- participate in class discussions and be engaged in what's going on,
- ask questions about anything you don't understand, even if you think it might be a "stupid" question,
- use your computer *only* for taking notes or other class-specific purposes,
- respect others by avoiding distracting behaviors: holding side conversations, using your computer for non-class purposes, and using your cell phone.

III. Exams

In regards to exams, academic integrity requires that I:

- do my best to devote adequate class time to prepare you for the exam,
- be available during office hours or other arranged times to help you prepare for the exam,
- create exam questions that accurately assess your knowledge of the course material,
- carefully monitor the exam so that cheaters do not gain an advantage over honest students,
- grade your exams in a timely and careful manner,
- devote class time to go over the exam so you can understand what you missed and why,
- provide you an opportunity to tactfully challenge the way an answer on your exam was graded.

In regards to exams, academic integrity requires that you:

- come to class having done your best to prepare for the exam, including seeking my help if you need it,
- make full use of the time available to provide the best answers you can,
- avoid using cheat sheets, copying, etc. in an effort to better your exam score,
- do not give help to other students or make it easy for others to copy off of you,
- make sure you understand everything you missed on the exam when we go over it in class,
- ask me questions if you do not completely understand why an answer was marked on your exam.

IV. Homework and Projects

In regards to homework and projects, academic integrity requires that I:

- create meaningful assignments that emphasize the material covered in class and provide you an opportunity to learn the material more completely,
- provide a clear description of the assignment so that you know what is expected of you and what I'll be looking for when I grade it,
- grade your homework or project in a timely manner and give helpful comments when evaluating it,
- confront you if I suspect you have turned in work that is not entirely your own.

In regards to homework and projects, academic integrity requires you to:

- start on your homework or project early enough to ensure that you have enough time to do your best,
- only be satisfied when you have turned in your best work,
- seek only appropriate help from others (getting an explanation of how something works, not copying someone's code),
- turn in work that is yours and not someone else's,
- read carefully through all comments made on your graded homework or project,
- ask me if there are any questions you have on how your homework or project was graded,
- give full and proper credit to your sources when appropriate.

V. Final Grades

In regards to your final grade, academic integrity requires me to carefully weigh all your grades from the semester, including other factors that may affect your grade as spelled out in the syllabus, before assigning a final grade.

If you feel I have made a mistake in how your grade was calculated, you have the responsibility to come to me as soon as possible, prepared to show why you think I've made a mistake.

VI. Failure to Uphold Academic Integrity

I will do my best to live up to the responsibilities I have just stated, and if you think I have failed to do so, please tactfully confront me on it. This is not only your right but also your responsibility. I also have the responsibility to confront you when you have failed to uphold the principles of academic integrity. We are tasked with holding each other accountable.

You are also accountable to your fellow classmates. This is probably one of the most difficult responsibilities when upholding academic integrity. If you become aware of academic dishonesty in your fellow classmate, you should first approach your friend. This is how Jesus commanded us to treat others who sin against us (Matthew 18:15). If your friend is sorry and recognizes they have done wrong, encourage him or her to admit it to me. If you are unable to confront your friend or your friend is unrepentant, you need to let me know.

Another alternative is to talk to Dr. Marty Spears (mspears@harding.edu), Assistant VP of Academic Affairs, in private about the cheating. Dr. Spears will hold your name in confidence and will tell me what I need to know about the situation.

VII. Acknowledgements

This document is largely based on and inspired by William M. Taylor's *Academic Integrity: A Letter to My Students*. Available online at http://www.academicintegrity.org/educational_resources/pdf/Letter_To_My_Students.pdf

May God bless you this semester as you pursue academic integrity.