As noted in the University’s policy on Academic Honesty (https://studentmanual.sites.uchicago.edu/Policies#Honesty), “it is contrary to justice, academic integrity, and to the spirit of intellectual inquiry to submit another’s statements or ideas of work as one’s own”. Although you probably have an informal notion of what “academic dishonesty” entails (“don’t copy a homework assignment from a classmate”, “don’t cheat in an exam”, etc.), there are many collaborative activities in IT, and in computer science culture in general, that are commonplace in a work environment, but which would traditionally be forbidden in an academic environment. This document provides guidelines and examples to help you understand what does and does not constitute academically honest work in your classes.

Additionally, there are other schools and other educational systems where “cheating” and “copying” typically receive only minor penalties. If so, it is very important for you to understand that cheating, copying, and all forms of plagiarism and academic dishonesty are considered a SERIOUS OFFENSE at the University of Chicago. Even what you may consider to be a “minor offense” (e.g., you used part of a classmate’s solution in a homework but didn’t copy the whole homework, you used a couple lines of code you found on the Internet but didn’t download a complete solution from the Internet, etc.) will result in harsh penalties, including an automatic F in a class, or even suspension or expulsion from the University of Chicago.

Academic Honesty vs. Collaboration
Academically honest work is typically understood to be the following:

1. Work that has been done exclusively by you, without any outside assistance.
2. Work that has involved some outside assistance (such as other students and reference materials found in the library or the Internet), but which includes proper attribution.

In other words, academically honest work does not necessarily preclude collaborating with other students or taking advantage of resources found on the Internet. However, you have to make sure you follow these three very simple rules:

1. **Attribution**: Always list any external sources you consulted in your work. This includes not only books or websites you consulted, but also students that you discussed your solution with.
2. **Never use another student’s work**: Never submit any work that has been written by
another student. This is unacceptable even with attribution. You can discuss the high-level aspects of an assignment with other students, but the work you hand in must always be your own.

3. **Never share your work with others or post it on a publicly-accessible website**: You should never share your solution to an assignment with other students: this is considered a serious offense. If the student you shared your solution with submits that work as his own, you will be penalized too, even if you did not know that the student intended to copy your work.

You should also never upload your code to public GitHub repositories, code-snippet sharing sites like pastebin, etc. If someone copies your code from such a site, you will be penalized, even if you did not intend for your code to be used in that way.

If you are ever unclear on whether you are following the rules correctly, just ask your instructor before an assignment is due.

**Examples**

If you follow the above two rules, you will avoid getting in trouble. However, sometimes the line between acceptable collaboration and unacceptable academic dishonesty is not entirely clear. The following examples intend to clarify where that line lies in commonplace scenarios:

**Discussing assignments with other students**

Collaboration between students is allowed (and encouraged) as long as you don't hand someone else's work as your own. You can discuss the high-level aspects of assignments with other students, but you should always write your work on your own. For example, if an exercise requires you to write a proof, you are allowed to discuss approaches to the proof with other students in a study group; however, you must be able to then write the whole proof entirely on your own and in your own words (without the assistance of the study group).

Furthermore, if you have discussed an exercise with other students, you must disclose this information in your submission. For example:

**Homework #3**

Note: I discussed exercises 2, 3, and 5 with Jane Doe and Alice Foo.

If another student provided a substantial insight on how to solve a problem, you should make sure to say so. For example, in a programming assignment, you could include a comment like this at the top of the file:
That way, if the grader sees that two students followed similar approaches to a problem, but encounters notes like the above, she will be reassured that the collaboration took place in an academically honest way (as opposed to one student copying another).

For avoidance of doubt, attribution (adding the notes/comments above) is not a silver bullet that magically makes copying/cheating/plagiarism/etc. acceptable. These notes/comments are only acceptable in cases where you discussed high-level aspects of an assignment with other students. Handing in someone else's work, even with attribution, is always unacceptable.

For example, if you write a solution to a homework assignment with another student, and you both hand in the same solution, that is unacceptable. You cannot make it acceptable just by adding a note like this:

**Homework #3**

Note: I wrote the solution to exercise 2 with Alice Foo

Or a comment like this:

/** Programming Assignment #3  
*  
* Note: To manage the set of users connected to the server, I used  
* hash table code written by Carol Smith.  
*  
*/

To reiterate, the above two examples do not constitute acceptable attribution. With or without attribution, they would be considered academically dishonest and would result in harsh penalties.

**Using external references**

When working on assignment, it is not uncommon to consult external references, including books, academic papers, and online resources. In particular, many computer scientists and IT professionals use online forums, such as Stack Overflow, and online references, such as
Wikipedia, to solve issues they have never encountered before. If you find yourself consulting an external reference to complete an assignment, you **must** cite this in your submission.

A common way of doing this is to include a code comment in the place that is most directly affected by what you read in the external reference:

```c
/* I wasn't sure how to return multiple values from a function in C.
   I used the approach described in this Stack Overflow post:
       http://stackoverflow.com/... */
void computeStats(int *a, float *avg, float *stddev)
{
    ...
}
```

Take into account that this is only acceptable if the issue is orthogonal to the homework assignment. In other words, you cannot use an external reference that provides a complete (or nearly complete) solution to the assignment. You can only use them for issues that are independent of what the homework assignment is asking you to do (such as, in the above example, figuring out a specific best practice in the C language, something that you could reasonably be expected to find out on your own in a book or other reference material).

Of course, sometimes you will stumble upon materials that do provide a complete solution to an assignment. These resources can only be used as inspiration on how to solve a problem. You are still expected to write the solution on your own and in your own words, and must always cite the resource you consulted. For example:

**While working on this assignment, I consulted the following sources:**

- Chapter 5 of *The Art of Computer Programming*, D.Knuth

**My solution follows the general approach shown in these resources, but I did not use any of the code presented there and wrote the solutions from scratch on my own.**

This example also shows why attribution is important: the instructor could determine that you did not do enough individual work by consulting those resources, but by providing attribution you are behaving in an academically honest manner. However, take into account that this does not preclude the instructor from deducting points or giving you a zero in the assignment, if they feel you relied too heavily on outside sources. When in doubt, always ask the instructor (before handing in an assignment) whether your use of external sources is acceptable.
Asking questions on online forums

Similarly, it is not uncommon to actively seek solutions on online forums by asking questions. These forums can provide an excellent way of tapping into a wider collective knowledge, including established experts in the field. You are certainly welcome to use them, as long as the questions you ask are not uniquely tied to your homework assignment. In other words, you must be able to ask your question without first explaining your homework assignment.

For example, the following types of questions are generally acceptable:

- Questions about language features (e.g., "How do I return more than one value in a C function?")
- Questions about libraries (e.g., "Can someone recommend a Java library for statistical analysis?")
- Questions about general concepts (e.g., “Can someone explain how backtracking works?”)
- Requests for additional sources (e.g., "Can someone recommend a good tutorial on how the TCP Sliding Window algorithm works?")

On the other hand, you should never ask questions where you ask the online forum to solve a homework problem. For example, the following questions are unacceptable:

- How do I solve the N-Queens problem with backtracking?
- If NP and co-NP are not equal, how do I prove that no NP-complete problem is in co-NP?
- Does anyone have a good implementation of k-means clustering in Java?

Similarly, you should never post your solution (partial or complete) in a publicly accessible venue. Some instructors may allow you to post solutions publicly after the assignment deadline, but you should not do so unless the instructor has explicitly given you permission to do so.

Using code available on the Internet

In general, when writing a solution to a programming assignment, you cannot use any code you find on the Internet. As far as academic honesty is concerned, this is just as bad as submitting code written by another student.

Take into account that it does not matter whether you only take parts of the code. Any code from an external source is unacceptable. This includes cases where you find code that does not solve the homework assignment, but which you can adapt to work in your assignment. Even if you modify the code to meet the needs of the assignment, it is still code written by someone else and it cannot be handed in as your own.
However, as with any external source, it is ok to use online code as inspiration for your solution. However, you must always include a citation in your submission. For example:

/* Programming Assignment #3
 * Note: To manage the set of users connected to the server, I consulted the code available at http://github.com/...
 * The code in that GitHub project provided the insight that the best way of quickly locating a user is using a hash table. I structured my code in a manner similar to that Github project, but still wrote all my code from scratch.
 */