Academic integrity and Comp Sci

- VIU official academic code of conduct is here:

  www.viu.ca/registration/general-regulations#codeofconduct

- Important for all students to read and understand these, and to be aware of possible consequences

- I also want to be clear about expectations in computer science courses in general, and my courses specifically

- e.g. *When/how is it ok to use code I've found elsewhere (online, books, etc)?*

- e.g. *When/how is it ok to help other students or get help from them?*

Why make such a big deal of it?

- when a student "cheats" and gets away with it
  - they're more likely to fail subsequent courses because they don't really know the pre-requisite material
  - in waitlisted courses they're taking a seat away from a deserving student
  - for scholarships and courses/programs with competitive entry (where grades are a factor) they're gaining an undeserved advantage over other students

Using code from other sources

- argument: "in industry, if I need to know how to do something specific it's ok to google it, so why not in class?

- in industry it's still highly dangerous to use code you don't *thoroughly* understand:

  - you put your company at risk of legal action if the code is proprietary

  - you put your clients at risk if the code turns out to be buggy or malicious

  - posted code is often from different versions of languages than used on your system, or has underlying assumptions different than your use/needs leading to unexpected bugs/side effects

Why copying isn't ok, cont.

- The objective of producing code in an academic situation is also much different than in industry
  - industry objectives are to get the product working and meet all client expectations
  - academic objectives
    - to learn the design/debugging skills associated with a kind of problem
    - to demonstrate that *you* have mastered those skills ... showing you found someone else who had mastered the skills isn't the same
    - to learn how the solutions work "under the hood", so you undestand how/why different possible solutions behave the way they do
  - designing and debugging code yourself is much different than reading someone else's solution and thinking you understand it

Helping/getting help from others

- vast difference between helping someone learn to solve a problem vs actually solving parts of the problem for them, things that are ok include:

    - helping someone with the syntax of a language feature

    - helping someone work their debugging problems by understanding the compiler error messages and tracing those to their code ... but guiding them, not giving answers

    - helping each other with code inspections to spot ways they're not following code standards

    - discussing the meaning of posted problems, possible approaches to solving them, or how different algorithms work

not ok in coding labs/projects:

- it is not ok to give, in any way, any portion of the actual code to solve a problem
  - cannot give them printouts of the code
  - cannot give them electronic copies of the code
  - cannot dictate the code to them so they type it in themselves (that does NOT constitute them doing their own code)
  - etc

Citing code from other sources

- sometimes an instructor will specifically allow the use of code from outside sources for parts of a program or project

- even then, every code segment you get from another source must be clearly cited in your program and supporting documentation:

    - the name of the actual author

    - the exact code segment used

    - the date/URL if from an online source, the book/title/page if from texts or papers

- failing to do so is plagarism (a form of academic misconduct)

In exams/quizzes

- unless the instructor very clearly, very explicitly says otherwise

  - assume zero discussion or sharing of exam content or solutions is permitted from the moment you see the exam until the moment the exam time (for everyone) has ended

A possible inquiry process (my very informal, unofficial look at a process)

- if an instructor thinks an instance of academic misconduct may have occurred, they first talk to the student(s)

- if they still think it constitutes academic misconduct they file a report with the Dean of the relevant faculty

- the Dean talks to the student to get their perspective

- the Dean makes a decision, notifies student & instructor

  - 1st offense penalty may be 0 on the assignment

  - 2nd offense may be automatic fail of the course

  - subsequent offenses might result in suspension

  - offense counts are cumulative across all courses