Science Lab Course - Hall of Shame
Every student should sit down and actually read the Code of Student Behavior, but the reality is that few do so. When students agree to come to the UofA, they also agree to abide by the Code. The Code was written by faculty and students and forms a framework for honest and respectful conduct in courses, in exams, in interactions with fellow students and instructors, and in all other aspects of student life.

All students arrive at university having heard about ethical conduct. Most have exercised such conduct in their secondary school careers and in their lives. Students also hear about academic integrity in every class at the University and instructors cite parts of the Code on the first day of class so that all students will know what to read and the expectations.

Ethical conduct is the foundation on which the University of Alberta’s reputation is built.

So what types of penalties are imposed against those who accidentally or intentionally stray to the dark side? Real examples are given below:

1) Plagiarism: Student A forgot a flow sheet for one of the lab exercises. His partner, Student B, gives Student A his flow sheet to ‘look at’ as ‘a guide’. Student A makes a hasty but near perfect copy of the flow sheet and both students hand their copies in for a mark. The students admit to the charge, but claim ignorance of the Code.

**Charge Student A:**
Plagiarism [Section 30.3.2(1)].
**Charge Student B:** Participation in an Offence [Section 30.3.6(5)]
**Penalty to both:** Zero on entire report and Letter of Reprimand.

**Letter of Reprimand** = a written reminder of the charge and a warning not to do it again. It goes in the student’s Discipline File within the Faculty of Science, which will exist for the current plus 7 years, and is copied to the University Appeals Coordinator to be held as part of the central record. The Letter of Reprimand also warns that any further transgression will be dealt with severely. All discipline files are confidential, so not seen by other professors, parents or employers. However, in some cases (eg. an application to a professional school) the school will ask the Faculty whether the student has a history of disciplinary action and we provide the student’s information with their permission. Failure to give permission is often taken as a sign that the student has something to hide.

**How to avoid this situation?**
(1) Students should hand in their own independent work.
(2) Students can choose to hand in nothing and take a zero. Who knows – the instructor might give an extension?

In the case described above, the flow sheet was 10/30 marks, out of 360 total lab assignment marks that counted 20% of the overall score, -- this amounts to 0.5% of the
final grade. Instead of accepting a small reduction in the total mark, Student A and B now have a Discipline File and are on warning for the remainder of their degree program in the Faculty of Science.

2) Plagiarism: Student C and Student D work together on writing up their lab report. They are partners and share data collected together. They hand in separate lab reports that contain very similar graphs and tables, and the discussion is largely word-for-word copy. They admit to having worked together on the reports and having prepared the text together, although they thought they were working more independently than the reports show.

Charge Student C & D: Plagiarism [Section 30.3.2(1)].
Penalty to both: Zero on entire report and Letter of Reprimand.

How to avoid this situation?
As described above, students should hand in their own independent work.
It is OK, and encouraged, for students to with their lab partner and to share data. They can even discuss how they might approach the writing of the lab report, but as soon as the pen hits the paper (or more likely, the fingers hit the keyboard), the report and the interpretations must be their own independent work.

In the case described above, the report was worth 30 marks out of 360 total lab assignment marks that counted 20% of the overall score – in other words just 1.7% of the final marks.
For this small potential gain, Student A and B now have a permanent Discipline File and are on warning for the rest of their degree program in the Faculty of Science.

3) Cheating: Student E & F independently used a calculator in a midterm exam to check their math. On the exam cover sheet it clearly stated that ‘Calculators and other electronic devices’ are not permitted. Before the exam was handed out, the professor clearly stated that ‘Calculators and other electronic devices’ were not permitted. Students had been repeatedly warned that ‘Calculators and other electronic devices’ were not permitted for lab quizzes.

Student E & F claimed that the instructions for the midterm were not clear. They also said that they didn’t need the calculator to actually do the math, but were just checking their work. However, Student F said that he finished 5 min before the rest of the class. The instructor concluded that this was maybe because Student F didn’t have to do longhand math.

Charge Student E & F: Cheating [Section 30.3.2(2)a].
**Penalty to both:** Zero on the quiz and Letter of Reprimand (plus warning that cheating on any examination—a quiz might be defined as an exam—normally results in a disciplinary failing grade in a course.

4) **Plagiarism and Participation in an Offence:** Student G & H are partners in the lab and work together on writing up their lab report. They are partners and share data collected together. They hand in separate lab reports that contain essentially identical tables, although the discussion is different between the reports. Careful examination shows that Student G likely did the Results and Student H likely did the Discussion, which were exchanged and personalized by editing. When confronted, the students said they worked on separate computers side-by-side and talked about their results, but did not copy from each other. The students were asked if they shared electronic files and they denied this.

When told that a third student (Student I) had also submitted an almost identical report, Students G & H expressed surprise and did not understand how it was possible—maybe just a coincidence because the lab book tells students how to format the data. Several hours after Student I was contacted to see the professor for an interview, Student G also contacted the professor to say that he now remembered sending his Tables to another student for use in formatting his report. Student G also remembered that unfortunately he had accidentally left his results in the Tables that he sent to his friend. Student I withdrew from the course before charges were laid. When interviewed about misconduct, he explained to the professor that he was no longer in the course and that the professor had no right to interview or charge him.

**Charges Student G & H:**
- **Plagiarism** [Section 30.3.2(1)]
  - **Penalty:** Zero on the lab report, a Letter of Reprimand, and a one step grade reduction in the course.
- **Charge against Student G with respect to Student I:**
  - **Participation in an Offence** [Section 30.3.6(5)]
  - **Penalty:** 4 month suspension.

**Charge against Student I:** **Plagiarism** [Section 30.3.2(1)]
- **Penalty:** Expulsion (Student I was a repeat offender with multiple previous offences and this offence was one more in a string of dishonest behaviours).

The lab report in question was worth 30 marks, out of 360 total lab assignment marks that counted 20% of the term summary—just 1.7% of the overall score.

It is the ACT OF CHEATING that is punished, not the expected gain. Arguing ‘it was only a lab quiz’ or ‘I have nothing to gain’ are not successful defenses. Withdrawing from the course does not erase the original problem and charges can be pursued whether or not the student comes to his/her own defense. Decisions are made of balance of probabilities after weighing the evidence and any statements made by the student. Dishonesty during the discipline process precludes any possibility of leniency when sanction is being determined.
5) **Misrepresentation of Facts.** Student J has a heavy exam schedule and decides to defer two final exams to lighten his load. He arrives at the Faculty Office after missing his exams and applies for deferred exams, providing a Medical Statement form (it was the student’s choice to do so). When the Faculty Office checks the Medical Statement, they learn it is a false declaration and concludes that the student was not ill on those days. The case is reported to the Senor Associate Dean.

**Charge:**
*Misrepresentation of Facts for Academic Advantage* [Section 30.3.6(4)].

**Penalty:** Grade of F8 in both courses and a 1 year suspension (this was a senior student who definitely knew better).