Ethics when Tutoring and Helping Taught Course Students
A Note for Heriot-Watt Computer science PhD Students and 4th years

This note about ethics (rules of conduct) is for PhD students who are official tutorial helpers or who provide informal help to students studying taught courses including undergraduate, MSc and CDT courses. We use the term "teaching" below to cover all lecturing, tutoring, lab-helping and informal help.

As a PhD student involved in teaching you have a trusted position, which comes with various responsibilities. There are some simple rules, which you (and indeed all teaching staff) are expected to follow, including:

- You should respect the privacy of the students you are teaching and not use any personal information you find out about them for your own advantage, or give it to any other person who is not entitled to have that information. This information includes exam results, reasons for absence, home contact details, etc.
- You should not use or appear to use your position of authority to extract favours from students you are teaching.
- You should not help a student to commit plagiarism or to cheat, e.g. by doing their homework for them or by divulging details of what is going to be asked in tests and exams if you happen to come across that information.

Breaking these rules above could result in punishment under the university's discipline code.

Notes on Plagiarism and Cheating in Taught Courses

An aim of exams and assignments is to find out what the student being examined knows about a topic and not what the teacher knows about it. Most students will not get full marks on every question. It is our job as teachers to give them the information to learn how to do things well, but not to do their tests for them.

The Heriot-Watt Guidelines state "Plagiarism involves the act of taking the ideas, writings or inventions of another person and using these as if they were one's own, whether intentionally or not. Plagiarism occurs where there is no acknowledgement that the writings or ideas belong to or have come from another source."

Bad behaviour
If you do all or part of the homework for a student on a taught course (undergraduate, MSc or CDT), and your help is not acknowledged and explained clearly for the marker, then you have helped the student commit plagiarism. This could involve writing computer code, providing a copy of work you did on a similar course for them to copy from, telling them directly what to write etc. **Both they and you have committed an offence in the university's discipline code and you are both are liable to a penalty**.

Bear in mind that many assignments are checked using Turnitin and other web-based anti-plagiarism software. Assignments you may have submitted yourself as an undergraduate or MSc student are still on the Turnitin system and will show up for the course lecturer as a match with a current student's work if they copy it. It is relatively easy to identify the source of a piece of work that has been copied in this way and **both the supplier of the source material and the student who copies from it have committed an offence.**

Good behaviour
So how do you deal with taught course students asking for help? If a student asks for help with an assignment or homework then it is fine to help them find similar problems in their notes, to give general pointers (e.g. the question mentions topic X, why not look that up in your notes?) and help to make computer codes run (e.g. getting the semicolons correct) without getting into details of fixing the actual calculations that they are trying to do. Ask the course lecturer for advice if you are in any way unsure about what to do.

If a student asks for help that appears to involve them in plagiarism or cheating, then explain why you cannot give it. If they keep asking (you or someone else), then tell the course lecturer. It is better to stop an offence happening than to apply punishment after it has happened.

Guidance for Lab Helpers/ Assistance in Teaching Activities

This document gives guidance to what you should expect as a Lab Helper
or tutor. The list is not exhaustive!

What do we expect from you?

- Support students during specified contact hours (lab or tutorial).
- Approach students to see if they have any queries.
- Support students with their queries - this does not mean telling them the answer!
- Report back to lecturer on how the session went (i.e. issues with subject area or a student).
- Take attendance if asked.
- Ticking off student completion of short assignments (you should
receive guidelines from the lecturer as to what is acceptable).
Note: you will NOT be expected to mark assignments.
- Consult lecturer or other staff if necessary.
- Look through session material before session.
- Pursue gaining Approved Tutor status (including attending EDU
course).

What should you expect from us?

- Guidance on how we expect the session to run.
- Introduction at first session of a module by lecturer.
- Lecturer attendance at first session you help at in the department.
- Session material in advance (to allow you to prepare).
- Time to deal with any queries you may have.
- Observation and feedback in support of becoming an Approved
tutor.
- Feedback on your approach should you wish it.

Useful Information

Information about Approved Tutor Course "Introduction to Teaching Skills" run by the Educational
Development Unit (EDU). http://www.hw.ac.uk/AEteam/LEADS.html