

Test and Term Paper Files

The maintenance of chapter test and term paper files poses several ethical and educational problems. The use of such files tends to promote academic dishonesty. Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi defines academic dishonesty ("cheating" and "plagiarism") as follows:

University students are expected to conduct themselves in accordance with the highest standards of academic honesty. Academic misconduct for which a student is subject to a penalty includes all forms of cheating, such as illicit possession of examinations or examination materials, forgery, or plagiarism. (Plagiarism is the presentation of the work of another as one's own work.) For more information please refer to: http://falcon.tamucc.edu/~students/hndbk_rules_n_regulations.htm.

Cheating . . . is defined as the act of obtaining or attempting to obtain credit for academic work by the use of any dishonest, deceptive, or fraudulent means. Examples of cheating include, but are not limited to: copying, in whole or in part, from another's test or examination; discussing answers or ideas relating to the answers on a test or other examination when such discussion is prohibited by the instructor; obtaining copies of a test, an examination, or other course material without the permission of the instructor; using notes, "cheat sheets" or other devices considered inappropriate under the prescribed testing condition; collaborating with another or others in work to be presented, contrary to the stated rules for the course; falsifying records, laboratory work, or other course data; submitting work previously presented in another course, if contrary to the rules of the course; altering or interfering with the grading procedures; plagiarizing, as defined; and knowingly and intentionally assisting another student in any of the above.

Plagiarism . . . [is] defined as the act of incorporating ideas, words, or specific substance of another, whether purchased, borrowed, or otherwise obtained, and submitting same . . . as one's work to fulfill academic requirements without giving credit to the appropriate source. Examples of plagiarism include, but are not limited to: submitting work, either in part or in whole, completed by another; omitting footnotes for ideas, statements, fact, or conclusions which belong to another; omitting quotation marks when quoting directly from another; and submitting artistic works, such as musical compositions, photographs, paintings, drawings, and sculptures, of another.

By definition, therefore, maintaining test files, unless the instructors have specifically authorized the use of the tests for that purpose, constitutes cheating. Use of such a test file can result in disciplinary action taken by the University against members, and maintenance of the file can result in the University taking disciplinary action against the chapter. Further, regardless of whether the test files fall within the technical definition of cheating, other ethical and educational issues are involved. By having access to material not available to other students in a class fraternity/sorority members are being given an unfair advantage. Students who use test files end up trying to memorize answers for tests rather than learning the important course concepts. Finally, the mere existence of these files contributes to the often negative attitudes many faculty members have toward fraternities and sororities. Some argue that test files give students an idea of the instructor's testing style. In reality, most instructors, especially if asked, will be quite specific in terms of the type of test questions they ask, the relative importance of material, and how to best prepare for the test.

If your chapter is intent on having a test file, two requirements are strongly recommended for accepting tests. First, the instructor must have authorized the chapter to have the test on file. In fact, some instructors are willing to give out old tests for students to use as study aids. It is more likely that instructors who give quantitative tests where students calculate numerical answers to problems, as is common in

mathematics, statistics, accounting, and some science classes, will supply sample tests. Second, the tests should not have the answers written on them. The purpose of a sample test is for students to learn the material by reviewing notes and practicing problems, not for rote memorization. While test files meeting these criteria are acceptable, keeping term paper files clearly promotes plagiarism and therefore cannot be justified.