OBJECTIVES FOR THIS SESSION

• Understand your legal, ethical, and professional responsibilities as a PLA

• Identify strategies to deal with issues and responsibilities that arise as a PLA

• Analyze and problem solve several scenarios that may arise as part of your PLA experience

• Examine some roles you may play as a PLA and strategies for dealing with those roles
YOUR ETHICAL AND LEGAL RESPONSIBILITIES AS A PLA

- Your decisions affect the quality of our students’ education, the department’s and university’s reputations, and your own reputation

- You are responsible for knowing the rules: what to do and what not to do

- *When in doubt:*  
  - Err on the side of caution  
  - Ask your professor!
KEY ISSUES FOR PLAs

- Academic Honesty
- Confidentiality
- Record Keeping
- Fairness and Conflict of Interest
- Dealing with Challenging Students
ACADEMIC HONESTY AT WPI

“Any act that interferes with the process of evaluation of a student’s level of knowledge... by misrepresentation of the relation between the work being evaluated and the student's actual state of knowledge is an act of academic dishonesty.”

http://www.wpi.edu/Pubs/Policies/Honesty/

As a PLA, you have a dual responsibility to both AVOID being party to academic dishonesty AND to report it to your professor if and when you discover it among your students.
Categories of ACADEMIC DISHONESTY

- **Cheating (examples)**
  - Copying on exams, homework, Use of unauthorized materials or sources of information, Assistance of another person in cases where prohibited

- **Fabrication (examples)**
  - Altering grades or other official records, Changing exam solutions after the fact, Inventing or changing laboratory data

- **Plagiarism**
  - Misrepresenting the work of another as one's own, Inaccurately or inadequately citing sources

- **Facilitation (examples)**
  - Assistance in any act of academic dishonesty of another student
  - Allowing another student to copy your work, giving test or homework solutions to another student
PRESERVING ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

PLAs should:

- be vigilant
- grade normally (equally for all students)
- make copies of the student(s)’ work in question
- turn in reports/copies to instructor and point out the concern immediately

PLAs should **not**:

- confront or threaten the student(s)
- decide on a punishment on your own
- discuss the situation with anyone besides the instructor
- make a “deal” with the student(s)

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FERPA - PRIVACY & CONFIDENTIALITY

Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act

- Guarantees students access to their academic records
- Prohibits unauthorized access by others
- Grades & other academic information must be kept confidential.

- Do NOT
  - Post lists of grades by name, SS#, or ID#.
  - Allow students to see other students’ graded papers or grade records
  - Discuss a student’s academic progress with anyone except the student or other course staff

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Grade records are arguably the most important records that WPI maintains!

PLAs must

- Double check every grade calculation and entry
- Keep copies of any graded material which may be involved in a disputed grade
- Back up the grade file frequently, on a disk or separate computer
- Send updated grade files to course instructor regularly
FAIRNESS

- Equality is the law — gender, race, class, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion
- Be cautious about unintentional bias or pre-judging of student work
- Opportunities given to one student must be given to others (e.g., turning in late homework, re-doing an assignment)
CONFLICT OF INTEREST

- A *situation* in which a person has a personal interest sufficient to *appear* to influence the *objective* exercise of his or her duties as an employee or professional.

- Grading the work of a friend or acquaintance is a conflict of interest.

**PLAs must:**
- Recognize conflict of interest
- Disclose conflict of interest to your supervisor

**You may:**
- Be told not to grade that student’s work
- Be asked to grade blindly

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HANDLING CHALLENGING STUDENTS

- Maintain an even temper
- Do not tolerate disrespect to self or others
- Do not hold a grudge when grading student’s work
- Inform course instructor and let course instructor make most determinations
- If there is an immediate threat to your safety, call Campus Police (x5555)
REAL-WORLD SCENARIOS: PLA ethics

For each scenario that your group is assigned, discuss:

1) What is the ethical and/or legal problem(s), if any?
2) What should the PLA do, and/or how could the situation have been avoided?

Identify one person to report out to the whole group.
Ethics: SUMMARY

- As part of the teaching staff, you have a responsibility to your department and the university.
- Things may be different here than elsewhere.
- You are responsible for knowing what to do and what not to do.
- When in doubt:
  - Err on the side of caution
  - *Ask your instructor*
Common PLA responsibilities: Grading

Grading consistently
...and efficiently
...and effectively

is HARD!
Same CS exam problem graded by 13 TAs:
Average and standard deviation

Points Awarded

Student A  Student B  Student C  Student D  Student E

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Same calculus exam problems graded by 11 TAs: Average and standard deviation
USING RUBRICS TO GRADE MORE CONSISTENTLY AND FAIRLY

- Understand the solution(s) before you begin grading.
- Before starting, look at a few papers to get an idea of the range of answers.
- Develop a rubric (if you are not given one)
  - Descriptions of levels of understanding (✓+, ✓, ✓-)
  - Certain number of points for certain elements of problem solution
  - Certain point deductions for certain types of mistakes
- Make notes about rubric adjustments and details as you grade
TIME TO DO SOME GRADING!

- Individually, review the following materials:
  - the instructor’s solution
  - the solutions submitted by two sample students
  - The two grading rubrics

- Individually, grade the student solutions using the two rubrics: the quantitative rubric, and the qualitative rubric

- Record each student’s grade

- ONLY when everyone in your group is done, compare grades and discuss, but do not change your original grade!
Using Rubric A, what grade did you assign to Response 1?

A. 3
B. 4
C. 5
D. 6
E. 7
F. 8
G. 9
H. 10
Using Rubric A, what grade did you assign to Response 2?

A. 3
B. 4
C. 5
D. 6
E. 7
F. 8
G. 9
H. 10

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Using Rubric B, what grade did you assign to Response 1 for content?

A. Check +
B. Check
C. Check -
Using Rubric B, what grade did you assign to Response 1 for organization?

A. Check +  
B. Check  
C. Check -
Using Rubric B, what grade did you assign to Response 2 for content?

A. Check +
B. Check
C. Check -
Using Rubric B, what grade did you assign to Response 2 for organization?

A. Check +
B. Check
C. Check -
ADDITIONAL TIPS AND BEST PRACTICES

- *Be proactive:* Share grading rubrics (NOT ANSWERS!!) with students when possible. Ask your instructor for rubrics, but if you do not receive them set your own.
- Grade all Question 1s, followed by all Question 2s, etc.
- Provide feedback: Identify errors and write positive comments, if possible, on each student’s paper.
- Set a time limit for each paper.
- Take frequent breaks.
- Communicate with professor and/or students about common misunderstandings.