Cheating at UCSC

Continued from front page

will meet with the student and keep a copy of the letter on file. UCSC's computer science department head Phokion Kolaitis said he's received copies of 12 such letters during the past two quarters.

Still others are planning—planning exactly where each one will sit; seeing who studied which chapter; planning to cheat.

Computer science graduates might be asked to write "critical software" for the medical, construction and banking industries. A single programming mistake could cost millions of dollars, or the life of a patient. "We take this very seriously," Kolaitis said.

Many self-identified cheaters told Fish Rap that their goal was to graduate and become professional programmers for software companies.

But will software companies hire cheaters?

MetaCreations, a company which sells Kai's Power Tools and other popular graphics software, has its experienced programmers interview prospective employees. Mark Zimmer, the chief technical officer of MetaCreations, has worked as a programmer for over 23 years. He is one of those who interview job candidates, including students fresh from universities.

When reviewing applicants, "you can look at scores and such, but it doesn't give you much," Zimmer said. "They may have made a compiler or a cool renderer, or whatever, but the real issue is, is that person mature? Ready to join the workplace and ready to work as part of a team? And whether they cheated or not too expected.

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Cheaters prosper

Trouble in the CS department

By Dent Earl
Staff Writer

As the doors to the massive 320-seat lecture hall creak open, the crowd of students surge forward, about to determine their fate via an exam. Outside, groups of students congregate. Some engage in fidgety chitchat, others in a bit of last-second cramming. Still others are planning—planning exactly where each one will sit; seeing who studied which chapter; planning to cheat.

Steven Hauppe* lay on his bed in a cramped fourth floor dorm room. His glasses gleamed in the light as he furrowed his brow, saying, "Yeah, I've cheated." Hauppe is a computer science student at UC Santa Cruz. He admits to participating in various forms of collaboration, unauthorized teamwork and exam copying. "All I want is that piece of paper that says 'BS in computer science,'" he said. "That's what you need to get a job."

"Academic dishonesty" is the official term used in the UCSC Rule Book to describe cheating. The Rule Book devotes about one page to the subject of academic integrity, outlining the responsibilities of faculty members, provosts, deans and students. It reads in part, "No student shall plagiarize or copy the work of another person and submit it as his or her own work."

It continues by explaining that if a student is caught cheating by a professor, the professor is to write a letter to the student's college provost.

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is probably irrelevant to that decision." However, Zimmer pointed out that any new rules that are not put in place will have "not long ago.

Harold Irandi, a computer science major, habitually works with a group of students on projects meant for individuals. However, he claimed there is merit in this practice. "It's a learning tool. We look at each other's code to help with word for word, but to get past obstacles," said Irandi. "We help each other out." However, Irandi expressed disdain for student groups and individual students who were more interested in copying than in learning.

Computer science department chair Kolitsis was not convinced that his department suffers from an unusually large amount of cheating. It could actually be easier for students with essays to write, Kolitsis explained, to take them from the Web than it would be to steal another student's code. "It is not the cheating problem, rather it is more towards computer science or to computer engineering than to other disciplines, and that's not clear to me."

Economics Professor John Ibister has been at UCSC for 31 years, 15 of which he has spent as the provost of Merrill College. "I would say [students from faculty] do come more than proportionally from computer science and computer engineering," Ibister said.

Crow College Provost Judith Habicht-Mauche has had similar experience with faculty letters regarding cheating. "Most of [the letters] come from computer science," she said.

But this does not necessarily mean that there is any more cheating within the computer science and engineering majors than other disciplines. Many professors and provosts, including Kolitsis and Ibister, were quick to point out that computer science and engineering faculty may catch and report academic dishonesty more often than faculty in other disciplines.

Cowell Provost and linguistics Professor Bill Ladusaw, whose office has served as a campuswide clearinghouse for reports of cheating, said, "I hope that we will be able to publish a report on campuswide instances of cheating this year based upon the information that we've been collecting."

The report should be similar to the campus' annual sexual harassment report, which details instances of harassment and how they were resolved without releasing any names.

"Professor of computer engineering Richard Hughey has long been concerned about the lack of campuswide statistics. He became aware of the lack of information after what he described as an extreme case of academic dishonesty occurred in one of his courses. According to Hughey, one student was grossly unprepared for the rigorous requirements of the course and resorted to stealing another student's disk and attempting to turn it in as his own. The incident became worrisome when the course's teaching assistant asked the student to explain his code for the program. The student floundered, clearly unable to understand the stolen code."

Hughey said the issue of academic dishonesty lies in a murky world between faculty and administrative domains. "If you look at the [UCSC] Rule Book on it," he said, "it says it's an academic issue. Well, the faculty is in charge of that. It also says it's an administrative issue, and the provosts are in charge of that. That makes it a little strange at times."

Hughey described a few situations where he had written letters informing provosts of students' actions and received no response. He said a lack of standard procedure among provosts causes confusion among professors.

Provo Provost said that each case of cheating is dealt with individually. "I talk to every student and usually what I hear from the students is that they cheated because they were desperate," Ibister said. "They were over their heads and afraid they were going to fail."

Josh San is one such student. "I felt like I needed to cheat," San said as he discussed UCSC's introductory programming courses. His face contorted as he described worrying constantly about what he heard from the students is that they cheated because they were desperate, Ibister said. "They were over their heads and afraid they were going to fail."

"I talk to your friends figuring out where you will sit before you go into class, what hand they write with, which ones wear glasses, how long their hair is, who's going to wear a hat."

Hats and long hair, San explained, could obscure an exam proctor's view, while glasses and a student's writing hand could obscure the views of other students.

Richard Morrows, a computer science major, claims to have seen and heard about various forms of cheating, from the ubiquitous code exchanging to a more serious transgression. "One student was working on a lab computer and all of their code was there," said Morrows. "Another student came in while the author of the code was away and stole all the code and submitted it. The student who authored the code then re- turned and submitted his work and got accused of cheating."

The project was a small homework assignment, according to Morrows, so there was no seri- ous penalty. He was certain the author would have found himself in jeopardy had the code been part of a larger assignment.

Computer engineering Professor

Kevin Karplus has been teaching at UCSC for 17 years. "The largest amount of cheating comes in lower division classes," Karplus explained. "This is where students are still thinking of high school students. It may have worked in high school, but it's generally not a good idea here."

Frank Andrews, a chemistry professor, has been at UCSC for the past 32 years. He teaches, among others, a course titled "Science and Human Values," and he has been vocal in all of his courses about academic integrity. "Cheating is a trashcan of a social good for the benefit of an individual," Andrews said. "Enough people do that, and follow that logic, and you destroy society."

But there are many computer science and engineering students who are academically honest. Computer engineering major Laura Havelin is one of many who don't understand the allure of cheating. "I really don't think it helps very much, because everything builds on everything else," Havelin said. "You'll only end up hurting yourself."

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*Names changed upon request.*

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