A master can tell you what he expects of you. A teacher, though, awakens your own expectations.

-Patricia Neal

I do not believe that the policy of giving an FR grade is the best way of dealing with plagiarism and other misconducts of academic life. It indicates a lack of imagination and amounts to an act of cowardice by the faculty who choses such a path as a first course of action in case of an incident of malpractice. As an implicit student of education and a future teacher, I cannot imagine myself imposing such a rule. Even if I did, I would be greatly ashamed of the cynicism that prompts such an act. Here are a few reasons for this:-

1. Consider that the fear of getting an FR grade prevents a person from cheating. What happens when the fear is removed – when the person graduates and moves out of campus and into real life? The person may go back to his old ways of cheating. It is of utmost importance for a student to realize (and for a teacher to assist a student in this realization) that he involves himself in the process of education for his own emancipation, and that others' opinion of his own intelligence matters less than his own more accurate understanding of where he stands. An undue emphasis on recognizing intelligence using high grades and punishing malpractices using lowest possible grades is akin to potty-training a baby. It is like reinforcement learning that does not necessarily involve any conscious cogitation and decision on the part of the student. A habit not adopted via active reasoning can be as easily done away with as it was acquired.

2. I come from a family that gave me immense independence in career choices and was never concerned with grades excessively. As a result, I believe that mostly teachers are responsible for an undue emphasis on grades. Grades are reflective of a student's preparation in a field of study and are incidental given student's best efforts in the chosen field/subject. The undue emphasis on grades makes students forget their primary goals in education and hanker after indicators (which incidentally are highly valued by most faculty).

3. I personally believe that passion is far more important and indispensable than sharpness/intelligence, and that a person truly passionate about his work cannot cheat himself and others into believing something that is not true.

4. I personally consider plagiarism and all other kinds of malpractices a great act of selflessness on the part of the student who choses to place numbers and others' opinion of himself before his own good in the long run. I find myself incapable of such acts of selflessness.

5. I believe that habits of academic misconduct are often a result of the kind of stagnant mentality that a student is surrounded with. It is important to wean a person away by involving him in activities that make him realize his mistakes. Summarily awarding a misconducting student an FR is NOT such an activity. Instead, the person should be involved in community service. If the professor is imaginative, he may even involve himself in the correction process. For example, the erring student could conduct tutorials and help all students who face difficulties with the subject. This can be far more fruitful in making him realize the importance of knowledge that a summary punishment.

6. I personally believe that I take two kinds of courses. The first type of courses is by people who change the way I think about a subject and conduct myself. Amongst my IIT Bombay courses, those by Prof. Bhaskar and Prof. Sunita fall in this category. In the second type are courses that do not really matter in the long run and which I may probably forget after the semester. For the first type of courses, I greatly value the people who teach them and my relationship with them as a disciple. I cannot imagine of cheating them in any way. For the second type of courses, I do not care much what the professor thinks of me and the incentive for cheating is not present. Hence, for both types of courses, I cannot resort to cheating.

Irrespective of my views on this subject, I understand that academic dishonesty (in any form) will result in a FR grade.