

To: The General Faculty
From: The Academic Affairs Council
Date: May 3, 2016
Re: Summary of Proposed Honor Code Changes

The AAC recommends changes to the language of the Academic Honor Code following this year's review of the implementation of the Code.

The proposed changes provide additional clarity and streamline the procedures. Both of these goals are important: students who come before the Honor Council often have questions about how the Honor Code works, and the text of the Honor Code could help to address many of these questions in advance. Instructors who raise concerns about possible academic misconduct also benefit from clarity in the procedures, and the Honor Council will benefit from language that clarifies the possible approaches to violations of the Honor Code.

In addition, all parties benefit from streamlined procedures: an ongoing concern is that it can take a long time to address a case, and some of the procedures in the Honor Code invite multiple meetings and other delays in scheduling.

The proposed changes cover four areas: the list of violations of the Honor Code, additional flexibility in the roles of Secretary and for the Dean of Studies, Guidelines for Chair-Dean Reviews, and other (brief) clarifications to the language of the Code.

I. Updates to the List of Violations (pp. 1-2)

The definitions of different kinds of academic misconduct have been changed so as to address the most common misconceptions or areas of confusion encountered by the Honor Council.

The revised definition of plagiarism removes the reference to the metaphor of theft as well as the general reference to multiple definitions of plagiarism, both of which have confused students. The revised definition adds examples of the most common forms of plagiarism.

The revised definition of cheating no longer suggests that collaboration is discouraged, but rather focuses on the principle of transparency: the instructor should be aware of assistance a student receives when completing coursework.

Similarly, the definition of collusion has been changed to as to emphasize the principle of transparency.

Both of these changes address concerns that the Honor Code language is overly broad. For both definitions, the respective shift highlights the instructor's reasonable expectation that s/he can set the rules for completing assignments, and indicates that the student has a responsibility

to signal clearly how s/he completed the work. (An individual instructor still has the latitude to cancel this responsibility for a particular assignment in a particular course.)

Forgery on Academic Documents has been removed from the list of examples, since it is possible and preferable to address these issues under the Conduct Code. The Conduct Code covers lying to college officials, and is an appropriate venue for general concerns about dishonesty, as opposed to concerns about dishonesty about a particular item of assigned work.

II. Additional Flexibility in Honor Council Roles in Proceedings (p. 3, p. 6)

The proposed changes to allow additional substitutions for the Secretary (p. 6) and Dean of Studies (p. 3) add flexibility to allow for easier scheduling.

The Honor Code is more complex than the system for adjudicating allegations of academic misconduct before. A significant source of additional administrative overhead is the complexity of the roles that are required at different stages in the process of addressing a case.

While previous changes to the Honor Code have expanded the number of faculty members and student officers who are available for proceedings, the roles of Secretary for hearings (p. 6) and of the Dean of Studies for hearings and Chair-Dean Reviews (p. 3) remain significant sources of scheduling complexity. In many cases, this complexity is unnecessary: others could substitute for the Secretary or Dean of Studies without any loss to the Honor Council, the accused student, or the accuser (indeed, all of the parties would benefit from speedier scheduling).

III. Guidelines on Chair-Dean Review Sanctions (pp. 4-5)

The current Honor Code language does not include any guidance regarding Chair Dean Review sanctions. Most Honor Code violations -- 121 proceedings out of 180 over the first 10 terms of the implementation of the Honor Code -- go to a Chair-Dean Review: the student acknowledges responsibility for violating the Honor Code, and the Chair and Dean determine the appropriate sanction.

The proposed guidelines are compatible with the approach we have taken in most Chair-Dean Reviews -- in which students have received lighter sanctions than the "normal" sanction of failure in the course indicated in the language for Honor Council hearings. In our experience, in many cases of first violations, students fully acknowledge a misstep that is substantially characterized by a mixture of inexperience and a lapse in judgment. The guidelines will help students to understand the possible outcomes of a Chair-Dean Review while preserving the discretion of the Chair and Dean to address a range of more or less egregious first violations.

The proposed guidelines include four parts (p. 5):

First, the guidelines explain what happens when the Chair and Dean impose no sanction, and allow explicitly for the possibility that the Chair and Dean may decline to record an admitted instance of academic misconduct as a violation. In our experience over the first several years of the implementation of the Honor Code, it has been clear in some 15% to 20% of cases that no sanction is appropriate. The proposed language will help the Chair and Dean to address cases in which their intent is to take no "institutional action", trusting that a negligent lapse will not be repeated. "Institutional actions" are significant because students may be required to report them -- when applying to medical school, for example.

Second, the guidelines explain that grade sanctions may apply and override course withdrawals or pass/fail declarations, including cases in which a student's misconduct occurs in more than one course, or a past course. In addition, the guidelines address the concern from parents that they are only notified that there is an issue after a student is suspended -- when it is too late for them to discuss the issue with their student, and avoid a major disruption to their student's studies. (Under the current Honor Code language, parents are only notified for second violations.)

Third, the guidelines add academic probation with parental notification as a possible element of a sanction. In some cases, a grade penalty may not be appropriate (e.g., if a student has failed a course anyway, and has attempted dishonestly to get additional credit to raise the failing grade). This flexibility would allow the Chair and Dean to impose a sanction without having to suspend a student.

Fourth, the guidelines explicitly prohibit the Chair and Dean from imposing a sanction of suspension or expulsion, indicating that egregious first violations should be addressed in a hearing rather than a Chair-Dean Review.

IV. Additional Clarifications

The Honor Council has had difficulties in some cases when an instructor has outlined specific sanctions in a course syllabus. Additional text in the Honor Code will remind faculty members that Honor Code sanctions are determined by the Honor Council for each case. (pp. 2-3)

The reference to service on the Committee on Standing is obsolete, since the Committee on Standing has not addressed academic integrity issues for several years. (p. 3)

Students are notified that they are expected to respond to a charge letter within one week. (p. 4) (Sometimes students delay responding to a charge, and it becomes necessary to send repeated reminders.)

It is important that students and professors understand how case materials from proceedings will be filed and made available in case there is a subsequent violation. (pp. 5-6)

The current language addressing the possibility that a student does not show up for a hearing is clear in intent, but could be made more explicit. (p. 6)

It would be helpful to emphasize to students that they need to make arrangements for their advisors to appear, rather than expecting that the Honor Council will provide an advisor. (p. 6)

It should be noted that when there is no sanction in a Chair-Dean Review, there is nothing to appeal. (p. 7)

The section on records should indicate more clearly what sorts of records we keep. (p. 8)