

CONSTITUTION
OF THE
VANDERBILT DIVINITY SCHOOL
HONOR COUNCIL

The Honor System*

The Vanderbilt Honor System was instituted in 1875 with the first final examinations administered by the University. A student's personal integrity then, as now, was presumed to be sufficient assurance that in academic matters one did one's own work without unauthorized help from any other source.

The Honor System presumes that all work submitted as part of academic requirements is the product of the student submitting it unless credit is given with proper footnoting and bibliographic techniques or as prescribed by the course instructor.

Cheating, plagiarizing, or otherwise falsifying results of study is prohibited. The System applies not only to examinations, but to all work handed in, such as papers, reports, solutions to problems, tapes, films, and computer programs, unless excepted by the instructor.

Students are responsible for obtaining from their professors an explanation of the freedom they may exercise in collaboration with other students or in use of outside sources, including the student's own work prepared and submitted for another course. In the event that a student does not obtain a clear definition of the application of the Honor Code from a professor in any class, the student must assume that the Honor Council will follow the strictest interpretation of the Honor Code with respect to that class.

When a student makes use of concepts or words from an outside source, whether in the form of a direct quotation or of paraphrase, credit must be given to the original source for each idea by footnote or other technique acceptable to the instructor. Failure to make such an acknowledgement constitutes plagiarism. A comprehensive explanation of plagiarism is given below under the heading "The Honor Code Applied to Preparation of Papers."

Faculty members do not routinely monitor tests and examinations to apprehend violators. Instructors who remain in examination rooms are there primarily to give assistance.

Honor Code

Violations of the Honor Code are cause for disciplinary actions imposed by the Honor Council. The following are included as violations:

§ Cheating on an exercise, test, problem, or examination submitted by a student to meet course requirements. Cheating includes the use of unauthorized aids (such as crib sheets, discarded computer programs, the aid of another instructor on a take-home exam, etc.);

copying from another student's work; soliciting, giving, and/or receiving unauthorized aid orally or in writing; or similar action contrary to the principles of academic honesty.

§ Plagiarism on an assigned paper, theme, report, or other material submitted to meet course requirements. Plagiarism is defined as incorporating into one's own work the work of another without properly indicating that source. A full description of plagiarism is given below.

§ Failure to report a known or suspected violation of the Code in the manner prescribed.

§ Any action designed to deceive a member of the faculty or a fellow student regarding principles contained in the Honor Code, such as securing an answer to a problem for one course from a faculty member in another course when such assistance has not been authorized.

§ Use of texts or papers prepared by commercial or noncommercial agents and submitted as a student's own work.

§ Submission of work prepared for another course without specific prior authorization of the instructors in both courses.

§ Falsification of results of study and research.

The Honor Code Applied to Preparation of Papers

§ Papers are to express the original thoughts of the student. If a topic for a paper has been discussed fully among students prior to an assignment, then the students should consult the instructor about writing on that particular topic.

§ Failure to indicate the source of ideas, expressions, phrases, or sentences constitutes plagiarism.

§ A student may not submit papers substantially the same in content for credit in more than one course, without specific and prior permission of all instructors concerned.

Students often have trouble distinguishing between privileged information and common knowledge. An idea may be considered common knowledge if it is encountered at least three times in separate sources during one's research into a particular subject. (Reprints on one source do not constitute separate sources.)

Students should realize that an act of plagiarism may include some degree of premeditation or may be the result of carelessness or ignorance of acceptable forms for citation; the act is plagiarism in any case and is a violation of the Honor Code. Students, therefore, must be conscious of their responsibilities as scholars under the Honor System, to learn to discern what is included in plagiarism as well as in other breaches of the Honor

Code, and must know and practice the specifications for citations in scholarly work. The following examples illustrate the kinds of problems that can arise.

A student turned in a paper with the following paragraph:

The characters in Othello are both allegorical and realistic at once. Characters like Iago and Desdemona are recognizable both as persons and at the same time devils, demigods and forces in nature. It is Shakespeare's achievement as an artist that he is capable of creating visions of life as people live it at the same time that he is able to understand life in terms of social and cosmic symbols. In this paper I will discuss the allegorical elements in the play, the skeleton of ideas and actions with which the characters give meaning to the play.

The instructor gave the paper to the Honor Council, citing this paragraph as evidence of plagiarism. The instructor presented the following paragraph from Alvin Kernan's "Introduction to The Tragedy of Othello" by William Shakespeare, edited by Alvin Kernan. Copyright c 1963 by Alvin Kernan.

Here is the essence of Shakespeare's art, an ability to create immediate, full and total life as men actually live and experience it; and yet at the same time to arrange this reality so that it gives substance to and derives shape from a formal vision of all life that comprehends and reaches back from man and nature through society and history to cosmic powers that operate through all time and space. His plays are both allegorical and realistic at once; his characters both recognizable men and at the same time devils, demigods and forces in nature. I have discussed only the more allegorical elements in Othello, the skeleton of ideas and formal patterns within which the characters must necessarily be understood. But it is equally true that the exact qualities of the abstract moral value and ideas, their full reality, exist only in the characters.

The instructor delineated four examples of plagiarism:

(1) A change in wording:

STUDENT: The characters in Othello are both allegorical and realistic at once. Characters like-Iago and Desdemona are recognizable both as persons and at the same time, demigods, devils and forces in nature.

KERNAN: His plays are both allegorical and realistic at once; his characters both recognizable as men and at the same time devils, demigods and forces in nature.

The instructor explained that this is plagiarism because the ideas presented in both cases are the same, with the student adding only a few of his own words to alter Kernan's original phrasing.

(2) Use of a catchy word or phrase:

STUDENT: In this paper I will discuss the allegorical elements of the play, the skeleton of ideas and actions with which the characters give meaning to the play.

KERNAN: I have discussed only the more allegorical elements in the play, the skeleton of ideas and formal patterns within which the characters must necessarily be understood.

The instructor stated that this sentence constitutes plagiarism because the student used the catchy phrase "the skeleton of ideas." Again, the student retains Kernan's phrase and his ideas, changing only some of the wording.

(3) Undocumented paraphrasing:

STUDENT: It is Shakespeare's achievement as an artist that he is capable of creating visions of life as people live it at the same time that he is able to understand life in terms of social and cosmic symbols.

KERNAN: Here is the essence of Shakespeare's art, an ability to create immediate, full and total life as men actually live and experience it; and yet at the same time to arrange this reality so that it gives substance to and derives shape from a formal vision of all life that comprehends and reaches back from man and nature through society and history to cosmic powers that operate through all time and space.

This, the instructor said, was paraphrasing, and unless acknowledged, it is also an act of plagiarism. Students must clearly indicate each use of paraphrasing with a footnote or a reference technique suitable to the instructor.

(4) Word-for-word copying:

STUDENT: . . . are both allegorical and realistic at once . . . recognizable . . . devils, demigods and forces in nature . . . the allegorical elements in the play, the skeleton of ideas . . .

KERNAN: . . . are both allegorical and realistic at once . . . recognizable . . . devils, demigods and forces in nature . . . the allegorical elements . . . the skeleton of ideas

The instructor noted that had the student put Kernan's words in quotation marks and properly footnoted them, there would have been no offense.

Plagiarism extends to preparation materials as well. For example, should the student forget to note on research cards the source of material and then fail to footnote the source when the paper or report is prepared, the student is still committing a plagiaristic act. Not knowing how or when to footnote is not considered a sufficient excuse.

Students are expected to follow the general rules of footnoting for each discipline. One footnote is not sufficient if additional material from the same source is included in a work.

Footnotes should express the extent of ideas or expressions of others that are used. All direct quotes must be in quotation marks or in block quote format. Simply providing a footnote without using quotation marks or block quote format is a violation. For further information about footnoting, refer to A Manual for Writers by Kate L. Turabian or the MLA Style Sheet.

A general rule is: when in doubt, always footnote.

Responsibility of the Individual Student

Without the support and cooperation of the entire student body, the Honor System will not work. Students must insist on the absolute integrity of themselves and their fellow students. It is the obligation of every student who suspects an honor violation to take action in one of the following ways, determining the choice of action by the flagrancy and/or certainty of the violation.

If a student has reason to suspect that a breach of the Honor Code has been committed, he or she must:

1. Issue a personal warning to the suspect, or
2. Report the incident to the Honor Council for action by the president:
 - a. An official warning will be issued by the Council to the suspect.
 - b. A hearing will be held by the Council, or
3. Inform the instructor in the course of the suspicions and identify, if possible, the person(s) suspected.

Article I: Jurisdiction

Section I: All students taking a course or courses in the Divinity School, including M.Div., M.T.S., and special students, shall be under the jurisdiction of the Divinity School Honor Council. Students whose major registration is in another school of the University shall be under its jurisdiction with respect to suspected violations of the Honor Code at the Divinity School.

Article II: Membership

Section I: The Divinity School Honor Council shall consist of seven students enrolled in the Divinity School; and five faculty members. Members shall be appointed within one month of the opening of school in the fall and shall serve until their successors are chosen.

Section II: A hearing board of the Divinity School Honor Council shall consist of the chairperson, a clerk, and five voting members selected by the chairperson from the

membership of the Council. The voting membership shall consist of three students and two faculty members. The chairperson shall preside over the hearing. Both the chairperson and the clerk shall be without vote. A quorum shall consist of the total voting membership.

Section III: Any member of the Divinity School Honor Council who fails to conduct himself/herself in a manner befitting his/her office may be removed.

Article III: Chairperson

Section I: Immediately after the members of the Divinity School Honor Council have been appointed, they shall meet and select one of their number to be designated chairperson.

Section II: The duties of the chairperson shall be as follows:

1. to set the time for and to preside at hearings and other meetings of the Divinity School Honor Council;
2. in the event that the chairperson cannot be present for a hearing, to appoint another member of the Council to serve as chairperson for that hearing;
3. to appoint the five-member hearing board from the membership of the Honor Council for a hearing;
4. to appoint an additional person from the Council as a clerk for each hearing board who shall record the entire proceedings of the hearing;
5. to report for each hearing board the findings of all hearings to the Dean or his/her authorized representative;
6. to see to it that all students and faculty members of the Divinity School are informed of functions of the Honor Council System and their responsibilities under it.

Article IV: Hearings

Section I: Hearings must be called by the chairperson of the Divinity School Honor Council at the written request of any student or faculty member.

Section II: Hearings shall take place at the earliest convenience of all parties concerned, but usually not more than thirty days after the chairperson of the Honor Council receives a formal request for a hearing.

Section III: All members of the Honor Council sitting to hear a charge will certify to the chairperson prior to the opening of the hearing that he/she is a disinterested party without conflict of interest. A member may be disqualified upon motion by another member of the

board or by the accused. Such a motion must be sustained by a simple majority vote of the voting membership of the hearing board.

Section IV: All hearings shall be closed, and their proceedings held in confidence, unless the accused requests an open meeting.

Section V: A tape recording shall be made of the proceedings. It shall be available to the Appellate Review Board upon their request. It shall be available to others upon written permission of the person charged with the offense. The tape shall be deposited with the Dean for safekeeping.

Section VI: A brief summary of the charge, the verdict and the punishment, if any, shall be reported to the Dean or his authorized representative by the chairperson of the hearing board. This information may not be released to non-university persons except upon written permission of the accused.

Section VII: Determination of guilt shall be by unanimous vote of a hearing board of the Divinity School Honor Council.

Article V: Procedure of Hearings

Section I: It shall be the duty of the chairperson of the Divinity School Honor Council to notify the accused in writing of the nature of the charges, including the substance of the evidence and the consequences of a finding of guilt, placed against him/her and the name of his/her accuser. A copy of this Constitution shall accompany the charges mailed to the student.

Section II: The accused shall be entitled to an adviser (one without legal training) if he/she desires one. The adviser may not address the board.

Section III: The accused and the accuser shall be present at the time of the hearing. Each shall present his/her case, using, if he/she so desires, witnesses, who may be questioned by the members of the Honor Council. The accused and the accuser shall be present during all of the testimony; witnesses shall be present only during the time of their own testimony.

Section IV: If the accused refuses to appear before the Honor Council, he/she shall be tried in absentia. If the accuser refuses to appear at the hearing, the charges shall be dropped.

Section V: After all testimony has been taken from both the accuser and the accused, the witnesses, the hearing board shall deliberate in private until a verdict has been reached. A unanimous vote shall be necessary for a finding of guilty. The accused and the accuser shall be informed in writing of the decision within twenty-four hours by the chairperson of the hearing board.

Article VI: Penalties

Section I: Where guilt has been established, penalties shall be decided upon a vote of four fifths of the members of the hearing board.

Section II: Penalties may range from reprimand to permanent expulsion from the Divinity School.

Article VII: Appeals

Section I: Appeals by the accused of the decision of a hearing board shall be directed to the Dean of the Divinity School for forwarding to the Appellate Review Board.

Section II: Appeals shall be presented in written form, explaining the basis of the appeal, to the Dean of the Divinity School or his/her authorized representative within seven days of the time the decision is handed down by the hearing board.

Section III: The Appellate Review Board of Vanderbilt University shall be the final appellate body for cases arising in the Divinity School Honor Council.

Article VIII: Amendments

Section I: This Constitution may be amended at any meeting of the Student Government by a two thirds majority vote of the members present, and by a two thirds vote of the faculty meeting in regular session.

*From the Vanderbilt University Student Handbook 1993/94. Pp. 21-25.

[Revised 9/93]

Section II: When an individual is found responsible for an Honor Code violation, a sealed envelope containing a letter detailing the infraction and the punishment will be written by the chair of the Honor Council and deposited for keeping in the Dean=s office.

Section III: Should an Honor Code violation hearing find an accused individual guilty of an infraction, the hearing board will then be granted access to any sealed letter(s) concerning the individual in question in order to determine an appropriate penalty.

Section IV: The Dean or her/his appointed representative will be responsible for retrieving said letters, but shall not open them.

[Approved by Student Senate 5 February 2001]

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