

Vanderbilt University Divinity School Honor Constitution

The Vanderbilt Honor System was instituted in 1875 with the first final examinations administered by the University. Dean Madison Sarratt summarized the system as follows, “Let every individual who contemplates entering Vanderbilt University ask himself/herself/theirself first this important question: ‘Am I strong enough to give my word of honor and then live up to it in spite of every temptation that may arise?’”

The purpose of the Honor Code is to preserve and promote academic integrity. Ideally, a student’s personal integrity is presumed to be sufficient assurance that in academic matters one does one’s own work without unauthorized help from any other source. The Undergraduate Honor Council and the graduate and professional school Honor Councils are organizations that seek to preserve the integrity of the Honor Code at Vanderbilt University. Each council aims to secure justice for any student under suspicion of dishonesty, to vindicate his/her/their name if innocent and, if guilty, to protect the honor and standing of the remaining students.

The Honor System is only one of the elements provided to Vanderbilt students to aid in the development of creative thinking, intellectual maturity, personal accountability, and respect for honesty, integrity, and truth. The goal of the Honor System is to have all students leave Vanderbilt not only as graduates, but also as citizens of integrity.

Statement of the Honor Code

Vanderbilt University students pursue all academic endeavors with integrity. They conduct themselves honorably, professionally, and respectfully in all realms of their studies in order to promote and secure an atmosphere of dignity and trust. The keystone of the honor system is self-regulation, which requires cooperation and support from each member of the University community.

Honor Code Pledge

I pledge to pursue all academic endeavors with honor and integrity. I understand the principles of the Honor System, and I promise to uphold these standards by adhering to the Honor Code in order to preserve the integrity of Vanderbilt University and its individual members.

General Information

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;
- assignments that permit students to discuss the assignment or to collaborate, including during group study sessions;
- all limitations placed on take-home examinations, including use of class or outside materials or discussion with classmates;
- use of examinations or other materials from previous sections of the class; and
- use of Internet or other electronic resources, including proper attribution.

In the event that a student does not obtain a clear explanation of the application of the Honor Code from an instructor 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.

Cheating, plagiarizing, or otherwise falsifying results of study is prohibited. The System applies not only to examinations, but also to all work handed in (including drafts), such as papers, reports, solutions to problems, tapes, films, and computer programs, unless excepted by the instructor. The System also applies to any act that is fraudulent or intended to mislead the instructor, including falsifying records of attendance for class, for events for which attendance is required or for which class credit is given, or for internships or other work service. Work in all courses—including those that involve, in whole or in part, online learning—is subject to the provisions of the System.

Honor Code Violations

Violations of the Honor Code are cause for disciplinary actions imposed by the appropriate honor council.

Possible violations include but are not limited to the following:

- **Giving and/or receiving unauthorized aid** on an assignment, report, paper, exercise, problem, test or examination, tape, film, or computer program submitted by a student to meet course requirements. Such aid includes the use of unauthorized aids which may include crib sheets, answer keys, discarded computer programs, the aid of another person on a take-home exam, etc.; copying from another student's work; unauthorized use of books, notes, or other outside materials during "closed book"

exams; soliciting, giving, and/or receiving unauthorized aid orally or in writing; or any other similar action that is 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 or ideas of another without properly indicating that source. A full discussion of plagiarism and proper citation is provided in the University Student Handbook (https://www.vanderbilt.edu/student_handbook/the-honor-system/).
- **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, a staff member, 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.
- **Any falsification of class records** or other materials submitted to demonstrate compliance with course requirements or to obtain class credit, including falsifying records of class attendance, attendance at required events or events for which credit is given, or attendance or hours spent at internships or other work service.
- **Submission of work prepared for another course** without specific prior authorization of the instructors in both courses.
- **Use of texts, papers, computer programs, or other class work prepared by commercial or noncommercial agents** and submitted as a student's own work.
- **Falsification of results** of study and research.
- **Altering a previously graded examination or test** for a regrade.

Note: Examinations and the questions therein, as well as lectures, teaching notes, scholarly writings, course handouts, assignments, and other course materials are the property of the individual faculty member. Copying or distributing any such materials without the permission of the copyright owner may constitute an infringement violation and may result in a referral to the office of Student Accountability, Community Standards, and Academic Integrity for corrective action.

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, the student must:

1. Issue a personal warning to the suspected student, and report that warning to the Associate Dean for Academic Affairs, or
2. Report the incident to the Honor Council for action by the chairperson, or
3. Inform the instructor in the course of the suspicions and identify, if possible, the person(s) suspected.

Responsibility of the Individual Faculty Member

Faculty members have an important role in the Honor System at Vanderbilt. Although the Honor Councils undertake each year to educate students in the meaning of the Honor System, it falls to the faculty to make the Honor System an integral part of the academic life of the University. If a faculty member has reason to believe that the Honor Code has been breached, the faculty member is obligated to take action in one of the following ways:

1. Issue a personal warning to the student(s) suspected of academic dishonesty. All personal warnings must be reported to the Associate Dean for Academic Affairs, or
2. Report the incident to the Honor Council for action by the chairperson.

Article I: Jurisdiction

Section I: All students taking a course or courses, including those involving, in whole or in part, online learning, in the Divinity School, including M.Div., M.T.S., Th.M., D.Min. 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 ten 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/theirself in a manner befitting the office may be removed by the chairperson or the Associate Dean for Academic Affairs.

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 Associate Dean or the Associate Dean's 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: Student Adviser

Section I: Every accused student will be assigned a Honor Council student adviser from the body of the Divinity Honor Council. A list of all possible student advisers will be made available by the Honor Council Chairperson, and the accused student may select a student adviser from it during the investigation and the hearing. The accused may also select an adviser from the University community: faculty, staff, or student. However, persons related to the accused or who have formal legal training are not eligible to serve as advisers.

Section II: An adviser accompanies the accused student to investigative meetings and the hearing and explains the procedures of the Honor Council regarding investigations, hearings, and the penalties that may be assigned. In addition, an adviser may confer with the accused during the investigation and a hearing but may not speak directly with Honor Council members on the panel during the hearing.

Section III: An accused may separately obtain professional legal representation, advice, and counsel. However, an attorney may not participate in or be present during an Honor Council interview or hearing. The Honor Council is a student tribunal untrained in the law. An attorney representing an accused may work directly with the Office of the General Counsel.

Article V: Investigation

Section I: When an alleged violation of the Honor Code is reported, a member of the Office of Student Accountability, Community Standards, and Academic Integrity will be assigned to investigate the incident. The assigned investigator will interview the accuser and collect any available information or documentation related to the alleged violation.

Section II: The accused will be notified via e-mail that a report has been filed, and will be asked to schedule a meeting with the assigned investigator in the office of Student Accountability. The accused is required to respond to the investigator's inquiries within a reasonable period of time.

Section III: The investigator will assemble the evidence and testimony in a concise, logical report. The investigator will provide the investigative report to the Chairperson of the Honor Council who supplies the report to the Hearing Board Members. At least twenty-four hours before the hearing, the accused student will be presented with a copy of the investigator's report so that he/she/they may comment at the hearing on any corrections or clarifications the accused student feels are necessary or appropriate.

Article VI: Hearings

Section I: Hearings are called by the chairperson of the Divinity School Honor Council.

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 an allegation that the Honor Code has been violated.

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 the hearing board member is 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.

Section V: An audio recording shall be made of the proceedings but deliberations of the hearing board itself are not recorded and remain strictly confidential. A recording of the proceedings shall be available to the Appellate Review Board upon their request. The audio recording shall be deposited with the Associate Dean for Academic Affairs for safekeeping.

Section VI: Determination of guilt shall be by unanimous vote of a hearing board of the Divinity School Honor Council using a preponderance-of-the-evidence standard.

Section VII: 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 the student's accuser. A copy of this Constitution shall accompany the charges securely sent to the student.

Section VIII: The accused shall be entitled to an adviser, a Vanderbilt faculty member, staff member, or student who has not had formal legal training and is not related to the student, if the student desires one. The adviser may not address the board.

Section IX: The accused and the accuser shall be present at the time of the hearing. Each shall present his/her/their case, using, if he/she/they 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 X: If the accused refuses to appear before the Honor Council, the accused shall be tried in absentia. Accusers may allow their statement to investigators serve as their participation in the process.

Section XI: 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 using a preponderance-of-the-evidence standard 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 VII: 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.

If the accused is found guilty, the Honor Council determines a fitting penalty based upon

- (a) the flagrancy of the violation,
- (b) premeditation involved in the offense, and
- (c) the truthfulness of the accused throughout the investigation and the hearing

These three factors are ranked on a scale of low, medium low, medium, medium high, or high.

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

Section III: The presumptive penalty for a first offense is failure in the course. In certain circumstances, after reviewing the flagrancy of the violation, the degree of premeditation, and the truthfulness of the accused throughout the hearing and investigation, the Honor Council may, at its discretion, reduce the penalty on a first offense to include an Honor Council reprimand, with a recommendation for failure on the assignment, or increase the penalty to suspension for one or more semesters, or expulsion. The minimum penalty for a second offense is failure in the course and suspension for not less than a semester, and depending upon the severity of the violation, the penalty may be suspension for multiple semesters or expulsion. The penalty for a third offense is expulsion.

Article VIII: Post-Hearing

Section I: At the conclusion of the hearing, the chair will gather all the material evidence, reports, notes, and other records of hearing and place them in a sealed file in the Associate Dean's office.

Section II: A brief written summary of the charge, the verdict, and the penalty, if any, shall be reported to the accused, accuser, and the Associate Dean or the Associate Dean's authorized representative by the chairperson of the hearing board.

Section III: When an individual is found guilty of an Honor Code violation, a sealed envelope containing a letter detailing the infraction and the penalty will be written by the chair of the Honor Council and deposited for safekeeping in the Associate Dean's office.

Section IV: The Associate Dean or the Associate Dean's appointed representative will be responsible for retrieving said letters for subsequent cases but shall not open them.

Section V: The Associate Dean maintains records of Honor Council proceedings in accordance with the office's document retention policy. Records of convictions and penalties will not be released outside the University absent a written release from the convicted student or unless otherwise required by law in accordance with the Family Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). However, students should be aware that they may be required to sign such a waiver when applying to graduate or professional schools or in the course of any employment or governmental background check.

Article IX: Appeals

All appeals should be filled with the Appellate Review Board in accordance with its procedures, which are outlined in the University Student Handbook.

Article X: 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 majority vote of the faculty meeting in regular session.

Revised April 2018; Amended to include the Th.M. degree November 2019; Amended to include the D.Min. degree and correct an embedded link January 2021.