

Faculty Survey on the UVa Honor System 2006

Honor Committee Response

Prepared by: The University of Virginia Honor Committee

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A project initiated by the 2005-2006 Honor Committee
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Executive Summary

This report serves as a companion to the 2006 faculty survey published by the Center for Survey Research in a partnership with the University of Virginia Honor Committee. The survey itself contains strictly statistical results from the survey; this report identifies significant findings and interpretations of the data and includes intended responses from the Honor Committee.

Strong positive responses stand out with regard to faculty support for the Honor System, low rates of observed cheating, and a sense that the student is fairly treated during Honor proceedings. Among faculty and teaching assistants, 66.1% either “strongly support” the system or “support with reservations.” The Honor Committee interprets this as approval of the concepts embodied in the Honor System, even if there is a need to improve procedural elements. Additionally, 76.7% of faculty responded that they think that cheating is “very uncommon” or “uncommon” in their own classrooms; only 17.5% stated that they had observed cheating in the past two years. Such responses suggest that the Honor System contributes to low cheating rates. Finally, faculty who have worked through the Honor System were asked if they felt that the student involved was treated fairly; 81.5% responded in the affirmative. As the Committee sees fair treatment of students as a central goal of the system, this confirmation by experienced faculty members is valuable.

Areas calling for improvement include faculty knowledge of the system, Honor’s presence in the classroom, faculty reporting rates, and faculty experiences with the Honor System. 79.3% of faculty feel that they are either “very familiar” or “somewhat familiar” with the system, but only about one-third of all faculty responded correctly to basic questions about the system. This suggests that the Honor orientation for new faculty is not sufficient and that reminders about Honor System fundamentals should be ongoing. Hopefully, increased awareness among faculty will encourage them to increase its presence in the classroom. Among prominent findings, only about half of all faculty give space for an Honor policy on class syllabi. The Committee will emphasize the helpfulness of a clear policy in its communication with faculty. As another source of concern, only 16.4% of observed cases of cheating were noted to have been reported to the Honor Committee. Honor’s newly revised investigations procedures address many of the related concerns with this regard. Additionally, one in six faculty members cites that his or her experience with the Honor System has negatively impacted his or her impression of it. The Committee hopes that the revised investigative procedures and distribution of information will reduce this sentiment.

While the Honor System is student-run, faculty involvement and support is crucial to its operation. The Honor Committee will remain conscious of the faculty survey’s findings in shaping its programs in coming years.

Introduction

In the spring of 2005, the 2005-2006 University of Virginia Honor Committee, with the encouragement of the Faculty Senate, began to develop a faculty survey that would collect information on the knowledge, experience, and perceptions of the faculty. Though the UVa Honor System is entirely student run, faculty have long been recognized as an integral part of its functionality. Faculty educate students about their expectation of honorable behavior in their classrooms, report cases, and provide evidence during student-run investigations. They also serve as vociferous advocates and critics of the Honor System.

Purpose of the Survey

The purpose of the survey was threefold: to gather a general sense of the faculty's knowledge, experience, and perceptions of the Honor System; evaluate the correlation between the faculty's knowledge, experience, and perceptions; and create a forum to provide feedback from the faculty to the Honor Committee. The Committee will use the results of the survey to enhance communication with faculty and address their concerns.

How to Read This Report

The intention of this report is to provide the Honor Committee's reaction to the Faculty Survey as well as to begin to outline steps to be taken in response to the information provided by the survey. The faculty survey was intentionally left void of any analysis so that both Honor and others could make their own assessments of the information. In this document, data directly from the survey are provided under the SURVEY heading and the Honor Committee's response is given under HONOR RESPONSE. Tables and figures from the formal survey results may be referenced, but are not replicated in this document; the reader should review this document and the survey results side-by-side. Further, this content does not exhaustively detail every question asked in the survey, but rather focuses on what the Honor Committee considers to be the most notable outcomes of the survey.

Faculty Knowledge of the Honor System

Survey

In the survey, faculty members were asked to respond to questions aimed at evaluating their knowledge of the Honor System, both self-perceived and as measured by a number of basic fact-based questions. Table 2.1 highlights TA and faculty members' familiarity with the Honor System. The survey results show that the majority of faculty consider themselves "somewhat familiar" with the Honor System (59.5%), while 19.8% feel they are "very familiar," 18.6% "slightly familiar," and 2.0% "not at all familiar."

Table 2.4 demonstrates the "score" faculty and TAs received on a two-question basic knowledge quiz regarding (1) the violations that constitute an Honor offense, and (2) the possible penalties resulting from a guilty verdict. Looking at both faculty and TAs, the most common score is one correct answer (out of a possible two), with 41.4% of

respondents receiving this score, followed by two (33.8%) and zero correct answers (24.8%). The overall average score is 1.09 “points.” When these basic knowledge scores are indexed by school (Table 2.5), the schools with the top three averages are the Darden School of Business Administration (1.72), the McIntire School of Commerce (1.55), and the School of Law (1.37). The schools with the three lowest average scores are Continuing and Professional Studies (.59), the Curry School of Education (.91), and the School of Medicine (.93).

Faculty and TAs were then asked a series of five more detailed knowledge questions. Table 2.6 demonstrates that 23.9% answered three questions correctly, 23.5% answered two questions correctly, 15.9% answered four questions correctly, 11.3% answered zero questions correctly, and 5.7% answered all five questions correctly. When the detailed knowledge scores are indexed by schools, the results are similar to those of the indexed scores for the basic knowledge questions. In this case, McIntire, Darden, and the School of Architecture received the highest average scores, while the School of Continuing and Professional Studies, School of Medicine, and Curry School again have the three lowest scores.

Honor Committee Response

The information provided by the survey demonstrates a significant lack of understanding of the Honor System among faculty. There also exists clear evidence that the level of familiarity with the Honor System is not consistent across all respondents. These results therefore indicate a need for Honor Committee directives aimed at improving faculty understanding of the Honor System. In response to this faculty survey, the Committee has begun looking into ways to revamp those faculty outreach programs already in place and ways to reach faculty in new and perhaps more effective ways.

Suggestions for improving communication have been fielded from the members of Faculty Advisory Committee as well as from members of the Honor Committee and the support officer pools. Some ideas include ensuring consistent training programs for incoming faculty and sending periodic updates from the Committee to the faculty for the purpose of repeating important information and highlighting significant changes. Furthermore, faculty members have suggested that an interactive informational presentation and tutorial “quiz” might be an effective and well received directive. Some projects already underway include setting up a liaison from the Honor Committee to each faculty department in order to have a point person to whom questions can be directed. This could also be coupled with establishing a faculty liaison from each department to the Honor System. Finally, the Honor Educator pool is currently working to send out a magnet that each faculty member will have as a reference when issues concerning Honor arise. The card will include basic Honor System information as well as what to do/who to contact if an Honor offense is suspected.

This is certainly not an exhaustive list of ways in which the Honor Committee hopes to reach out to faculty. Improving faculty understanding of the Honor System is a goal the Committee will work to attain.

Support for the Honor System

Survey

Chapter III of the survey addresses faculty and TA support of the Honor System. When asked how they would describe their own level of support for the Honor System (Table 3.1), 30.0% responded that they “strongly support it,” 36.1% responded that they “support it, but with some reservations,” 12.6% considered themselves “neutral,” 9.9% said that they “somewhat oppose” the system, and 7.2% said that they “completely oppose the system as it now exists.” Of those in the final category, 2.5% think that it should be abolished, 4.5% think that it should be changed, and the final 0.2% are not sure what should be done with it. The strongest support comes from the School of Nursing, Darden, and the Curry School of Education. These schools show the greatest rates of “strongly support” and “support with reservations” as responses. The schools with the lowest support are the College of Arts and Sciences, Law, and Architecture. These results can be seen in Table 3.2. Of those who support with reservations or who are opposed, the greatest source of concern is the single sanction; 35.9% and 25.7% of respondents in each category, respectively, when asked about their reservations or concerns cited this (Tables 3.3 and 3.4).

Following faculty and TA responses about their own support for the Honor System, the survey asked about perceived support among faculty and TAs. According to Table 3.6, 24.8% of faculty and TAs feel that faculty generally show “very strong” support, 42.7% think that faculty show “moderate support,” 15.8% think that “most are neutral,” 9.9% think that “many do not support it,” and 6.8% think that “most do not support it.” TA assessment of their peers show even less of a perception of support; most notably, only 19% believe that TAs on the whole show “very strong” support for the Honor System.

Honor Committee Response

The portion of the faculty and TAs who support the Honor System strongly or with reservations is encouraging. Significantly, the self-assessment shows a higher percentage of those indicating strong support than the perception assessment of others. While this difference is not monumental, it is large enough to suggest that faculty, on the whole, are more optimistic about the Honor System than they may lead themselves and others to believe. In general, the strong majority of faculty members supporting the Honor System ensures that, as long as issues of concern are addressed by the Committee, faculty will continue to take interest in the system. As an example of Committee work to respond to faculty (and student) concerns, an ad-hoc committee was established two years ago to discuss the single sanction and potential alternatives to it. Similar initiatives are certainly possible.

Role of the Honor System in the classroom

Survey

The survey’s discussion of faculty observation of cheating in their classrooms provides insight into why the Honor system often goes unmentioned in classrooms and on course

syllabi. According to the survey, “two thirds [of faculty and TAs] ‘always’ or ‘regularly’ ask students to sign the Honor pledge on work and tests, and nearly two-thirds regularly (or always) state clear expectations about honorable conduct on the assignments they give” (19). About half “always” or “regularly” give space on their syllabi for their particular policies regarding the Honor code.

Using four separate questions, the survey creates a “Classroom Acknowledgment Index” that assigns a score to faculty from 1-4 on their presentation of information about the Honor Code in class. The mean score for this index is 1.89, meaning that on average faculty and TAs do two of the following: Discuss the Honor code on the Course Syllabus; Discuss the Honor Code with their classes; State clear expectations about honorable conduct on assignments, verbally or in writing; and Asked students to sign the Honor pledge on work and tests.

In the discussion of cheating in their own classrooms, 66.3% of faculty members and TAs who responded to the question “How commonplace do you think cheating is in the University in general?” believe that cheating is “uncommon” or “somewhat common.” By comparison, in response to the question, “How commonplace do you think student cheating is in your own classes?” 47.2% of faculty answered that cheating is “uncommon” or “somewhat common.”

In response to the question, “How many times in the past two years have you clearly observed a student intentionally cheating or been *quite certain* that a student cheated on work for your course (by Faculty and TAs)?” 82.5% of faculty members and TAs responded that they had seen no instances of cheating, while 32.6% suspected students of cheating in their own classes.

Honor Committee Response

Considering that 99.6% of faculty members and TAs recognize cheating as an Honor offense, it is encouraging to note that the majority of them address the Honor code in some way in their classrooms. In light of the mean score of 1.89 on the classroom acknowledgement index, it seems necessary to now address the question of how to improve and potentially standardize the presentation of the Honor code in the classroom. While Faculty members and TAs may mention the Honor code in their syllabi, it remains unclear whether they provide in depth description of their policies or if they simply state that students should conduct their academic work in accordance with the Honor System.

The goal of the Committee should obviously be to improve the Classroom Acknowledgment Index. The best way to do this seems to be improvement of faculty access to standardized information about the Honor System so that professors can adjust individual suggested Honor Policy statements to fit with their own classroom requirements. Because faculty members prefer to get information about Honor and its policies online, this clearly seems to be the best way to provide such suggested Honor Policies.

Perceived and Observed Cheating at UVa

Survey

Faculty were asked about cheating at the University in Chapter V. As stated in Table 5.1, within their own classrooms, 38.8% think that cheating is “very uncommon,” 37.9% believe that it is “uncommon,” 9.3% think that it is “somewhat common,” and 1.3% believe that it is “very common.” 31.6% state that they have “EVER *clearly observed* a student cheating or *been quite certain* that a student cheated;” 68.4% cite that this is not the case (Table 5.5). When confined to the past two years, 17.5% were certain that they had observed cheating, while 82.5% could not say so.

Faculty were asked to estimate how commonplace cheating is at the University in general. As seen in Table 5.3, 8.0% believe that it is “very uncommon,” 36.4% believe that it is “uncommon,” 29.9% think that it is “somewhat common,” and 4.3% think that it is “very common.”

Honor Committee Response

The low rates of observed cheating, suggest that the Honor System has an impact on student behavior in the classroom. By limiting responses to the past two years, a sense of consistent cheating rates can be achieved; experiences of tenured faculty members who have spent several years at the University, and may not reflect current student practices, are tempered by this adjustment.

As is evident with individual assessment of support in comparison with perceptions of other faculty members’ experiences, the faculty as a whole is far more optimistic about cheating rates in their own classrooms than at the University in general. The Honor Committee offers that this might be a result of a few incidents being conceived as representative of general student behavior. According to the survey, however, faculty members do not trace such incidents to their own classrooms. Thus, the Committee contends that the Honor System indeed influences classroom behavior.

Faculty Reporting Rates

Survey

In Chapter V, Table 5.5 reveals that 31.6% of faculty and TA’s responded “yes” to the question “Since you became a faculty member or a teaching assistant at the University, have you EVER *clearly observed* a student cheating or *been quite certain* that a student cheated on work for your course?” When the answer is broken down by school and primarily undergraduate institutions (A & S Schools, McIntire, Architecture, SEAS, and Nursing) are selected, the percentage increases to 40.5%.

Table 5.7 shows that of 17.5% of total respondents have observed or been quite certain that a student cheated in the two year period from January, 2004 to January, 2006. This represents over half (55%) of respondents who said that they have EVER witnessed or been quite certain that a student had cheated in a course. Again, when selecting for

primarily undergraduate institutions as above, the percentage of respondents who said they have observed instances of cheating increases to 23.9%.

Table 6.1 lists the actions taken by faculty and TAs when certain that cheating has been observed. Only 17.2% said that they “discussed the matter with and Honor Committee advisor or representative” and 16.4% said that they “reported the case to the Honor Committee.” Respondents were allowed to choose more than one response.

When faculty and TAs merely suspected cheating, Table 6.5 shows that 1.4 % of respondents “discussed the matter with and Honor Committee advisor or representative” and 1.0% “reported the case to the Honor Committee.”

Table 6.9 shows the reasons that respondents gave for not reporting the case to the Honor Committee. These were respondents who either observed or suspected a cheating incident in the past two years. 64.8% stated that there was “not enough evidence to report.” 30.9% said that “the single sanction was too strong a punishment for the level of infraction.” 22.9% replied, “lack of confidence that a guilty student would be punished.” 22.2% said that, “the process is too time consuming.” 21.2% said that, “single sanction: I did not want to be responsible for having a student dismissed from the University.” All other answers were given by under 15% of respondents.

Honor Committee Response

Taken together, these data reveal a number of troubling points. First, cheating remains prevalent at the University of Virginia despite Honor’s attempts to educate and dissuade students from cheating. The education strategy is mainly to highlight both the benefits that the Honor System provides as well as the consequences of a violation. If the number of faculty and TAs who are certain that cheating occurred is doubled to take into account those that did not respond to the survey, however, there were at least 707 instances of cheating observed from January, 2004 to January, 2006. These numbers show that there is still much to be done on the education front to encourage students not to cheat.

It is also concerning that almost three out of four faculty members who were certain that cheating occurred did not bring the case to the Honor Committee. While the study showed 707 instances of cheating in a two-year period, over approximately the same time period (March, 2004- March, 2006), the Honor Committee received only 134 reports. This number includes reports made by both faculty and students, and also includes instances of lying and stealing.

The Honor Committee has a system and trained numerous support staff to ensure that students receive a fair investigation. The records of students who are not accused by the Honor Committee are destroyed and their involvement in the investigation process is kept entirely confidential. In December, 2006, this process was streamlined, in part to reduce the time required of a reporter, and to make the process less adversarial and confrontational for both the student and reporter. Honor takes such strides to have a fair investigations process so that students and faculty will feel confident that when they

bring cases to the Honor Committee, the process will be fair. The Committee would like all cases, even those where there is a low index of suspicion, to be investigated. The Honor System needs better participation from faculty. In order to achieve this, the Committee needs to improve faculty communication. At the same time, The Committee hopes that the administration will continue to support and encourage faculty to follow the request of the entire student body and bring cases the to Committee.

When asked about their reasoning for not bring the case to Honor, the top 5 responses were 1) not enough evidence, 2) concern over the single sanction being too harsh a punishment, 3) Lack of confidence that a student would be punished, 4) the process is too time consuming, 5) and a desire not to be the reason why a student is dismissed from the University. This is useful information as it allows the Committee to specifically target these issues in outreach.

Faculty Experiences with Honor

Survey

Table 3.8 reveals how TA and faculty impressions of the Honor System have been affected by their experience with it. 66.8% replied that their experience with the Honor System has not affected their impression. 15% responded that their experience has positively affected their impression. This represented 45.2 % of those that said they were affected. 18.2% stated that their experience has negatively affected their view of the Honor System. This represented 54.7% of those that said their impression had been affected.

The 54 respondents who had reported a case in the past two years were asked a number of questions about their experience in the process. 16.7% found the time commitment too consuming and prohibitive. Only 3% said that they felt the accused student was treated unfairly. 11.1% felt that they were treated not fairly at all during the honor process. 62.9% were satisfied with the overall Honor process while 37.1% were dissatisfied. 32.6% were dissatisfied with the outcome, with 88.2% of those respondents citing that their dissatisfaction arose from Honor being “too lenient.”

Honor Committee Response

This is concerning news: More than one of six people who have interacted with Honor walk away with a negative impression. Chapter VII gives feedback from those who have been directly involved in an Honor case. This provides some information as to why experiences lead to a negative impression. The time commitment is too arduous, some feel that they were not treated fairly, and some were disappointed with the outcome. The revisions that the Committee has recently made to the investigations process, intending to reduce the time commitment that an Honor investigation and to give the reporter the opportunity to respond in writing to the student’s interview, should respond directly to some of these concerns.

The initial question was asked to all respondents, however, and the Committee has no basis of understanding what kind of experience everyone (particularly non-reporters) has

had with Honor. Regardless, Honor needs to work on improving the perception that people have when they walk away from an encounter. This can be as simple as including more personal interaction with the system or a more “user friendly” way of doing things for faculty.

Fair Treatment

Survey

Chapter IIV addresses faculty experience with the Honor System. Table 7.3 notes that 81.5% of faculty members working through the Honor System feel that the student was fairly treated throughout the process.

Honor Committee Response

This key finding reflects the basic soundness of Honor processes. Fair treatment of accused students is fundamental and a central goal of the system, and this result illustrates significant success on that metric. The most recent changes to the investigation procedures ensure that investigated students have ample time to review any evidence collected in their cases and reduce the adversarial nature of the Investigative panel by shifting all evidence collection and review to paper.

Interaction with the Honor Committee

Most faculty members and TAs do not know their Honor Committee Representatives. Only one out of seven know their representative. Faculty members did slightly better than TAs with 16% of faculty members knowing their representative, while only 10% of TAs did so.

There is significant variation in the knowledge of Honor Representatives by school. The variation is closely correlated with the number of Honor Committee Representatives per faculty member in those particular schools.

School	Faculty/Rep	% Knowledge
Medicine	435	4.6%
Arts & Sciences ^a	119	8.8%
Engineering	85	20.2%
Education	50	15.0%
Law	35	13.8%
Commerce	30	77.4%
Darden	27	65.5%
Nursing	24	55.6%
Architecture	18	18.8%

^a Includes both College and Graduate Schools of Arts and Sciences

The schools at the University vary greatly in the size of their student bodies and their faculty. However, all schools at the University have two Honor Committee Representatives, with the exception of the College of Arts and Sciences, which has three representatives. The survey shows a strong correlation between the ratio of faculty members to Honor Committee Representatives and the faculty's knowledge of these individuals. In the smaller schools, there is often the opportunity for more individual contact between Honor Committee members and individual faculty members.

In the larger schools, such as the College of Arts and Sciences, it is more difficult for Honor Committee Representatives to connect with faculty members on an individual basis. Consequently, the Honor Committee has looked at alternative ways to reaching out to faculty members in such larger schools. Two methods have been particularly promising. The Honor Committee has established a Department Liaison program, in which Honor Support Officers, not Committee members, have the opportunity to reach out to faculty on an individual basis. Though this is not the same level of interaction as may be present in other schools, it allows a degree of familiarity with the Honor System. The second program that the Honor Committee has tried to implement is to foster interaction between department chairs and Honor Committee members. Though every faculty member may not be familiar with their Honor Committee Representative, it is the Committee's goal that, at a minimum, the Chair for the department have an established relationship with their Honor Committee representative. Faculty members often turn to department chairs and deans to receive more information on the Honor System, and establishing relationships with these individuals will allow a deeper connection throughout the faculty.

Conclusion

The Honor Committee is encouraged by the response rate to this survey of more than 50% by faculty members and TAs. Now, the task becomes thinking of concrete and viable ways to address the concerns expressed in the survey. The Committee has already begun implementing Investigations reforms and creating opportunities to connect directly to faculty members and TAs. The reforms passed in December have already demonstrated a reduction in the time commitment demanded of faculty in the case process and have eliminated a confrontational meeting between faculty and students at the Investigation Panel. These benefits respond directly to the faculty and TA concern that the case process is burdensome and negatively impacts reporting witnesses.

In addition, the Honor Committee has begun distributing informational materials about what faculty should do in the case of suspecting an Honor offense and will work to revise its website to provide faculty with more information about Honor in the medium that they say they prefer.

The Honor Committee is pleased to learn that faculty members and TAs support Honor in general, and that they believe that students involved in the investigation process are treated fairly. The Committee recognizes its responsibility to reach out directly to the faculty and will continue to investigate new avenues of accomplishing this task.