HONOR COMMITTEE MEETING
NOVEMBER 10, 2013

I. ROLL CALL

Absent: Will Dantzler, Colin Leslie, Austin Sim, Michelle Butler, Joanna Will, Robert Carlisle, Jessica Alvarez, Michael Billet

II. COMMUNITY CONCERNS

None

III. OFFICER REPORTS

A. Michelle Butler—Vice Chair for Community Relations, CLAS

B. Brittany Wengel—Vice Chair for Education, CLAS

   Coffee event in the Comm School on Wednesday from 1:30-2:30
   Med School tabling
   Umbrella share program begins this week

C. Andi Chernau—Vice Chair for Investigations, SED

   1 investigation
   Ipanel scheduled for next week

D. Conor O’Boyle—Vice Chair for Trials, CLAS

   Trial today – a student in the college was found not guilty of cheating by a random student panel.
   4 upcoming trials

E. Evan Behrle—Chair, CLAS

IV. OLD BUSINESS

A. FFH Plagiarism Proposal
• Training for committee (Ipanel) members regarding “accidental” citation is a good idea
• Josh: addition of non-students is unnecessary
• Noah: system is complex enough, no need to add non-students
• Natalie: definition of honor plagiarism should be broader (as compared to grammatical plagiarism)
• Madison: could be a good idea to send out a policy statement regarding our stance towards grammatical plagiarism
• Evan: group of committee members should get together to define grammatical plagiarism and write a rough draft of Honor’s policy statement (Josh, Marie, maybe Michelle)

B. The “Constitutional Convention”

Timing

• Marie: timing later rather than sooner is better since we should involve upcoming committee
• Josh: against holding the convention after the new committee is elected. Holding it in January would be a good starting point for next year’s committee, nothing would have to be “finished” this year.
• Conor: students attending the convention should be able to vote on their initiatives, so an earlier convention is better. This will be a project that lasts a long time: it shouldn’t be rushed, but a January convention would allow for ample planning and for the current committee to begin addressing problems proposed by this year’s students.
• Brittany: earlier is better - our current committee should help build momentum for the initiative and can then pass the torch to the next committee
• Andi: dragging the convention on too long could cause its initiatives to lose momentum
• Laurie: extended dialogue not necessarily a bad thing. The upcoming committee should be trusted to build on the ideas proposed at the convention. Hosting the convention in January would be rushing things.
• Evan: we don’t have to decide now between January and March, but we do have to decide between December and after.
• Vote: majority in favor of holding the convention after winter break.
• Evan feels like he asks whether or not there are any questions, comments or concerns at least 30 times a meeting.

V. Community Concerns

None

VI. Closed Session
PROPOSAL AND STRUCTURAL POLICY CHANGE

Reports of plagiarism with regard to “citation practices”

The Informed Retraction (IR) process creates a template for further review of other areas within the honor process that might similarly benefit for alleged honor offenses. One gray area that is a strong candidate for this application is an honor violation that involves acts of inadvertent plagiarism or “grammatical plagiarism.”

The main objective of this proposal is to set forth a process model for excusing “grammatical plagiarism” as an opportunity to learn and strengthen student writing knowledge and skills, in other word, a teachable moment.

If the report is that of plagiarism, due to faulty citation practices, then the investigation is reviewed by a plagiarism review board (PRB), much like the I-panel. We suggest that this panel will consist of 5 persons: Vice Chair of Trials and Vice Chair of Investigations, an expert on citation, the Dean of Students and a faculty member. The panel will decide whether the offense is grammatical or honor plagiarism. A grammatical plagiarism case would be dropped and the student would receive remediation in writing practices. The honor plagiarism case would remain, only when the investigation includes evidence of student gaining an unfair advantage. The student would have the option to submit an IR or continue thru the trial process.

The implementation of this option for reported students will strengthen the respect the student body has in the honor system, where teachable moments become a part of the Community of Trust allowing students to learn from unintended scholastic mistakes. More importantly, it will be promoting a system that will be fair for all. The committee, as well as faculty, have demonstrated in the past the progressive difficulty of knowing how to do research papers without introducing inadvertent errors using web based citations or in describing someone else’s ideas or work with proper paraphrasing.

The following definitions were written by Emeritus Associate Professor of History, VCU Dr. Alan Briceland, in his paper titled, Plagiarism: A Misunderstood Concept, that he presented to the Honor Committee on November, 8 2009.

“Grammatical plagiarism is when the work was improperly done, but not because there was an attempt to deceive.

Honor plagiarism involves a deliberate attempt by a student to gain an unfair advantage over some portion of their peers.”

For example the comparison between the Plagiarism Supplement (2009) and 3 student case studies shows that the students did not take unfair advantage over their fellow students. Families for Honor have pointed out the citation errors in the
Plagiarism Supplement and they have been presented to the Honor Committee. A presentation was given to the Committee on September 27, 2009 concerning problems with the understanding unintentional mistakes in citation. It is evident the committee and those that approved the Supplement on November 24, 2009, did so with knowledge of citation and did not cite properly. Should that be considered an honor offense?

Additional examples are in the 3 case studies attached. Each student was accused of an honor offense. One student was exonerated and two were found guilty. This comparison exemplifies the opportunity for teachable moments and to retain students who should remain in the Community of Trust.