Honor Committee Meeting January 26, 2014

Roll Call

Absences were: Brett Rappaport (SARC), Michael Billet (MED), Austin Sim (MED), Andi Chernau (SED), Marie Fleming (SCPS), Laurie Axford (SCPS)

Community Concerns

Mrs. Henderson from Families for Honor spoke to express support for the previously proposed working groups model for meeting structure. Mrs. Henderson also addressed the Committee regarding Families for Honor’s previous proposal concerning grammatical plagiarism.

Officer Reports

Michelle Butler (VCCR) – there are three upcoming Honor co-sponsorships with other organizations, including SEED and Democracy for America.

The next CRDAC meeting is on January 27th from 8:00-9:00 in the Lower East Oval Room of the Rotunda.

Michelle will be working with Katie Kitchens, the Special Assistant to the Honor Committee, to compile and edit Committee handbooks for the upcoming term, and will send out a request to all current Committee members for feedback on transition and how to improve this year.

Brittany Wengel (VCE) – Honor educators spoke with approximately 30 international students to discuss the principles of Honor and academic integrity.

Honor educators will continue to hold regular library office hours throughout the spring semester.

There was an education event at the Batten School last week, which was well-attended.

Conor O’Boyle (VCT) – there is currently one outstanding trial request and one outstanding appeal request.

Old Business

Josh Myers and Michelle Butler introduced Families for Honor’s proposal regarding grammatical plagiarism. Josh Myers read aloud a Committee statement related to this proposal. In this statement, the Committee declared its unwillingness to declare all grammatical plagiarism per se “insignificant” because that determination is deliberately left to the Committee I-Panel and the student jury at trial. The Committee reaffirmed its commitment to fundamental fairness for all students and to encouragement of I-Panel and jury panel members to consider issues of grammatical plagiarism within the framework of significance. The statement also called for the consultation of a designated, on-call Faculty Advisor to address questions of grammatical plagiarism when necessary.

Evan Behrle called for members of the Committee to express their thoughts on the position.

Natalie Whitaker agreed that the statement accurately summarized the views expressed by Committee members during previous meetings.

Michelle Butler suggested a clause calling for additional training for I-Panel and jury panel members regarding issues of grammatical plagiarism.
Josh Myers said that the statement was an expression of the Honor Committee’s acknowledgement of a standing commitment to be vigilant of any issues of grammatical plagiarism, but that instituting a bylaw was not necessary.

Jessica Alvarez spoke to agree with Josh stating that instituting a bylaw would be unnecessary.

Natalie Whitaker asked about the nature of questions that would be brought before the on-call faculty advisor introduced in the Committee’s statement.

Josh Myers stated that he felt that the faculty advisor should generally address any ambiguities where the I-Panel or jury panel members were unsure of whether an instance of grammatical plagiarism had occurred.

Joanna Will stated her opinion that the institutional requirement for a faculty advisor who might serve as a witness at trial or during an investigation should require the introduction of a new bylaw.

Evan Behrle stated that he would speak with Rachel Setear, the Committee’s legal advisor, to determine whether the presence of a faculty advisor would require an official change to the Committee’s bylaws.

Michelle Butler stated that the institution of a faculty advisor would be inherently difficult as there is no consensus on the definition of grammatical plagiarism, nor on plagiarism standards generally.

Colin Leslie asked whether the advice sought from a faculty advisor would, then, require that person to be privy to the evidence in the case, and whether that was OK under current confidentiality rules.

Evan Behrle agreed to also bring this question to the Committee’s legal advisor.

Mrs. Henderson from Families from Honor pointed out that she consistently heard uncertainty from the members of the Committee on the issue. She proposed that the best way to address this problem would be to codify the training of support officers and Committee members from year to year regarding issues of grammatical plagiarism.

Josh Myers addressed Mrs. Henderson’s concern regarding the uncertainty surrounding the issue, saying that some of the uncertainty of the issues is impossible to resolve and that the Honor Committee does not take a student’s intent into consideration when evaluating reported Honor Violation as per its constitution and bylaws.

Evan Behrle pointed out that the question of grammatical plagiarism would always have to be inherently subjective and could not be precisely defined. He suggested that establishment of institutional memory regarding the issue of grammatical plagiarism could be a means of reducing the uncertainty surrounding the issue.

Mrs. Henderson spoke again regarding the Honor Committee’s plagiarism supplement, which she contended was itself improperly cited.

Evan Behrle proposed that the plagiarism supplement could be improved not only in terms of its citations but also in terms of its general effectiveness. He also asked the Committee Members if they would be okay with approving the statement regarding the issue of grammatical plagiarism, given that it would include a clause calling for additional training. Ultimately, the Committee decided that the working group would need to amend the current statement to include information about training, and bring the amended statement to the next meeting of the full Committee on Feb. 9, 2014.
Evan Behrle introduced several topics to be discussed within working groups in the following Committee meeting and during subsequent working group meetings. These topics are:

The Honor Congress and/or focus groups
Re-writing the Committee’s appeal bylaws
Faculty engagement
The issue of disproportionately in reporting of minority students

Josh Myers stated that he would like to see the Congress and focus groups be worked on within the same working group.

Colin Leslie gave the opinion that the titles of the working groups should be expanded, given that the working groups would likely outlast the current Committee.

Evan asked that all members of the Committee respond to an email to rank their preferences for participating in these working groups.

Committee will meet at 3:00 p.m. on Sunday February 2nd in order to avoid conflicting with the Super Bowl.

Community Concerns

Mrs. Henderson asked whether the five groups would be broken into five rooms and whether community members would have the ability to participate within the working groups. She also inquired whether the Honor Congress will be occurring.

Evan Behrle responded stating that the working groups would all be in the Trial Room, broken up, and would allow for community participation in any of the groups. He explained that the date of the Congress was still TBD, and that the working group assigned to this task would develop more of a plan in the coming weeks.

Closed Session