The Honor System

Click on a link to be taken to the entry below.

- Introduction
- Philosophy
- The Single Sanction
- The Honor Committee
- Juries
- Honor Support Officers
- The Community Relations Committee

Introduction

The Honor System has been a defining characteristic of life at the University for 160 years. Under the Honor System, University students have pledged to act honorably, i.e., not to lie, cheat, or steal. This ideal of Honor is not imposed upon students; rather, by choosing to enroll at the University of Virginia, students are committing themselves to a community with a common ideal. Specifically, each student at the University signs a pledge to abide by the Honor System as part of his or her application for admission. Students also commit themselves to governing the system—the Honor Committee (together with its support officers and jurors) is comprised entirely of your fellow students. The result of these commitments is to produce, at the University of Virginia, a "Community of Trust."

One benefit of the Honor System is a presumption of honor, i.e., each University student is presumed to act honorably unless his or her actions prove otherwise. This presumption accompanies a student in all of his or her dealings with fellow students, faculty members, administrators, and members of the local community. This positive conception of honor is the heart of the Honor System.

Individual responsibility is essential to maintaining our Community of Trust. The Honor System depends entirely upon the willingness of each student to live up to the standards set by the community of his or her fellow students. Any violation of the Honor Code by a University student constitutes a breach of the Community of Trust. Therefore, it is the responsibility of each student to report conduct that may demonstrate a disregard for these basic principles of honor.

Philosophy

The central purpose of the Honor System is to sustain and protect a Community of Trust in which students commit themselves to the pursuit of truth in order to enjoy the freedom to develop their intellectual and personal potential. Dishonest conduct—whether lying, cheating or stealing—is incompatible with these pursuits, which can thrive only in an atmosphere of trust. The Honor System does not exist merely to punish students who commit Honor offenses; rather, its purpose is to promote and maintain an atmosphere of trust.

The Single Sanction

http://records.ureg.virginia.edu/content.php?catoid=7&page=08c_honor_system.html
If a student willfully commits a non-trivial act of lying, cheating or stealing—an Honor offense by willfully committing a serious act of lying, cheating or stealing, that student breaches the trust of the entire community. Students convicted of an honor offense are permanently dismissed from the University. With respect to University graduates convicted of an honor offense, the Honor Committee may make a recommendation of degree revocation to the General Faculty. These measures help to promote an atmosphere of trust and freedom from suspicion in our community.

The Honor Committee

The Honor Committee is responsible for the overall administration of the Honor System. The Committee is comprised of two representatives from each of the eleven schools of the University with the exception of the College of Arts and Sciences, which has three representatives. The Committee elects a Chair, Vice-Chair for Investigations, Vice-Chair for Trials, Vice-Chair for Services, and a Vice-Chair for Education from among its members. Honor Committee members are elected each Spring by the student body.

Operation

Anyone can report an Honor violation by calling an Honor Advisor or Committee member. Once a case is reported, the Committee assigns two trained Honor Counsel to investigate. After the investigation is completed, the evidence is presented to a panel of three Committee members, who decide whether or not there is enough evidence to formally accuse the student of the alleged Honor offense. If the student is formally accused, he or she may elect to either (1) leave the University, without requesting a trial (in which case he or she will be deemed to have admitted guilt, whether or not such an admission is expressly made), or (2) request an Honor trial. If a student requests a trial, he or she will have the opportunity to present evidence and witnesses in his or her defense to a panel of student jurors.

If a student fails to cooperate with the Honor process sufficient to establish ongoing communication about his case, the Committee may cause a “registration block” (barring further registration) and/or a “transcript hold” (resulting in the denial of transcript requests) to be imposed until such communication has been established (or restored). If a student is the subject of an Honor accusation immediately prior to graduation, his or her degree will not be conferred, and he or her will not diploma will be withheld, pending the resolution of such accusation.

Any student found (or deemed) guilty of an Honor offense will be permanently dismissed from the University and will not be entitled to receive or hold a degree from the University of Virginia. The notation “enrollment discontinued” will be placed on the student’s transcript. In the case of a student found (or deemed) guilty of an Honor offense following graduation, the General Faculty will undertake proceedings to revoke his or her degree.

The rules of the Honor System apply to any person who was a University student at the time an alleged Honor offense was committed. Students who leave or have left the University for any reason (including transfer, withdrawal, leave of absence, graduation or other failure to return to the University for any reason), at any time, whether before a case is reported and/or results in an official accusation or thereafter, are subject to the Honor System, so long as a case is reported within two years from the date of the alleged offense.

The current rules and procedures of the Honor Committee, as embodied in its By-laws (as they may be amended or updated from time to time), are available directly from the Honor Committee. While the By-laws describe the organization and procedures of the Honor System, they are not meant to be exhaustive or to extend to every imaginable circumstance, and they do not constitute a contract between the University and University students, past or present. Questions regarding the By-laws or any aspect of Honor Committee practice or procedure should be addressed directly to the

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Honor Committee. The Honor Committee can be contacted by phone at (434) 924-7602, or through its website at www.student.virginia.edu/honor.

**Juries**

In 1990, the student body reaffirmed a 1980 referendum to allow randomly selected students to serve as jurors in honor trials. It is the right of the accused to be judged by a panel of peers; therefore, students are called upon to serve as jurors to help judge the guilt or innocence of an accused student. To ensure that the trial process remains as equitable and expedient as possible, students are obligated to respond to the jury notification letters forwarded by the Honor Committee. Once secured as a juror, students are expected to appear on the designated trial date. Failure to meet these obligations will be considered a breach of the University Standards of Conduct and may result in an appropriate sanction as determined by the Judiciary Committee. By devoting one day to sitting as a juror on an Honor panel, students help to guarantee that the Honor System remains a vital and responsive aspect of University life.

Honor trials will generally last one full day. The Trial Chair, (an Honor Committee member) provides knowledge of Honor Committee practice and procedure and experience in conducting Honor trials.

**Honor Support Officers**

The Honor Committee appoints student support officers each year who are responsible for various aspects of the Honor System. Honor Advisors, Counsel, and Educators advise students involved in honor cases; conduct investigations and assist with trials; and disseminate the philosophies and guidelines of the Honor System, respectively. The Honor Committee selects support officers each Fall through an interview and examination process.

**The Community Relations Committee**

The Community Relations Committee, formerly known as the Bad Check Committee, promotes trust between students and merchants in the Charlottesville community. One aspect of this trust is the privilege, in many cases, of writing checks to local merchants by simply showing your University of Virginia I.D. Some merchants may also be willing to extend credit to University students (an "Honor Debt"). The Community Relations Committee provides a means for merchants to elect to contact the Committee, rather than the police, when a student bounces a check or fails to repay an Honor Debt. In this way, the Community Relations Committee may act as an intermediary between the student and the merchant, thus promoting the continuation of a relationship of trust.

Students, however, should be aware that bouncing checks and failing to repay Honor Debts can be costly. The Community Relations Committee, through the Office of the Dean of Students, has the power to suspend students who fail to make restitution for their bad checks and/or their Honor Debts in a timely manner. Students who have willfully written a bad check or failed to satisfy an Honor Debt may be referred to the Honor Committee for investigation and possible Honor charges.

**Reporting an Honor Offense**

If you suspect that an Honor offense may have been committed, you should contact an Honor Advisor immediately, at (434) 924-7602.