



Virginia Commonwealth University

VCU HONOR SYSTEM

POLICY STATEMENT AND PURPOSE

Section I: Introduction

Virginia Commonwealth University recognizes that honesty, truth and integrity are values central to its mission as an institution of higher education. In a community devoted to learning, a foundation of honor must exist if that community is to thrive with respect and harmony. Therefore, members of the academic community are required to conduct themselves in accordance with the highest standards of academic honesty and integrity.

The Honor System Pledge is “On my honor, I have neither given nor received aid on this assignment, and I pledge that I am in compliance with the VCU Honor System.” Neither the presence nor the absence of a signed pledge statement, however, shall prevent a student from being charged with a possible violation or from being held to the standards of the Honor System.

Section II: Rights and Responsibilities of the VCU Community:

All members of the VCU community are presumed to have an understanding of the VCU Honor System and are required to:

- . • Agree to be bound by the Honor System policy and its procedures;
- . • Report suspicion or knowledge of possible violations of the Honor System;
- . • Support an environment that reflects a commitment to academic integrity;
- . • Answer truthfully when called upon to do so regarding Honor System cases, and;
- . • Maintain confidentiality regarding specific information in Honor System cases.

However, facts, principles, and problems raised by cases, the knowledge of which benefit the Honor System and Honor Education, may be discussed with appropriate faculty and administrative representatives.

VCU Students: All VCU students are presumed upon enrollment to have acquainted themselves with and have an understanding of the Honor System. Therefore, it is a student’s responsibility to ask course instructors to clarify expectations for each assignment in order to be in compliance with the Honor System.

VCU Instructors: To reinforce the terms and importance of the Honor System, all VCU instructors are expected to discuss the Honor System at the beginning of a course, to

include a section on the Honor System in course syllabi and to assess academic work on the specific assignment/exam as if there were no violations of the Honor System, until and unless otherwise determined by the Honor System.

Section III: Possible Violations

Academic dishonesty jeopardizes the quality of education and depreciates the genuine achievements of others. Academic dishonesty by a student will not be tolerated and will be treated in accordance with the procedures as outlined in the Honor System. If a student violates the Honor System, that student will suffer consequences. However, appropriate opportunities to remediate the situation and for the student to learn and to grow from the mistake will be considered.

The categories of academic dishonesty include, but are not limited to, any deliberate and dishonest act that results in, or could result in, a student receiving an unfair advantage in an academic matter:

- . • **Plagiarism:** Representing the words, ideas, facts, opinions, theories, illustrations, tables or any part of another's work as one's own on academic assignment without customary and proper acknowledgment of the source;
- . • **Cheating:** Receiving, giving and attempting to receive or give unauthorized assistance, such as materials, devices, information, notes or sources, on academic matters;
- . • **Lying:** Transferring, transmitting or communicating any false statements concerning academic matters;
- . • **Stealing:** Taking or making academic materials inaccessible, thereby temporarily or permanently depriving others of its use or possession, and;
- . • **Facilitation:** Helping or soliciting another person to commit an act of academic dishonesty.

Section IV: Sanctions

All proven cases of Honor System violations will be sanctioned appropriately under the relevant circumstances. Sanctions assigned by the Honor System are intended to address specific violations. In some cases, however, the assignment of a sanction may result in the lowering of the accused's cumulative grade point average, the accused's loss of a graduate assistantship or the accused's dismissal from further enrollment in a program. Although the Honor System can consider and assign other sanctions, the recommended sanction for a student's first violation is an 'F' for an assigned course grade. Although the Honor System can consider and assign other sanctions, the recommended sanction for a subsequent determination of an honors violation is Suspension for at least three semesters.

Any student found guilty of an Honor System violation shall be subject to one or more of the following sanctions:

Honor Probation Honor Probation is a written warning that indicates that a subsequent determination of an honors violation may result in a sanction of Suspension and/or Expulsion.

Other Relevant Sanction The Honor Council may assign other relevant sanctions, including, but not limited to, restitution, community service, special projects and special educational requirements. A student who fails to complete these sanctions, fails to provide documentation of completion of the sanctions, or who commits an honor violation while completing these sanctions, shall be required to appear before an Honor Council. At that time, the student shall be considered under the recommendation for a subsequent violation.

Assignment of Grade on a Test/Paper/Assignment A grade of "0" can be assigned for a test/paper/assignment. The grade shall be factored into the course grade.

Assignment of Course Grade A course grade of 'F' can be assigned for the course in which the accused committed the violation. Grades assigned by the Honor System may not be voided by withdrawal from a course, withdrawal from the University, by use of the Repeat Course Option or through the Grade Appeal Procedure. A transcript notation shall be placed for this sanction. This sanction is a University disciplinary action that may be reported to external agencies upon request.

Suspension Suspension is a separation from the University for a specified period of time, not to exceed two years. After the suspension has been served, a student may be permitted to resume classes. A transcript notation shall be placed for this sanction. This sanction is a University disciplinary action that may be reported to external agencies upon request.

Expulsion Expulsion is a separation from the University for an unspecified period of time. After five years, a student who has been expelled may petition the Honor Council for permission to make application for readmission to the University. An expelled student who is permitted to apply shall meet all other University admission requirements and will be judged competitively with other applicants. A transcript notation shall be placed for this sanction. This sanction is a University disciplinary action that may be reported to external agencies upon request.

Revocation When a violation invalidates a major piece of work required for a degree, then the sanction may include a recommendation to the University President for rejection of a thesis or dissertation or revocation of a degree or certificate. A transcript notation shall be placed for this sanction. This sanction is a University disciplinary action that will be reported to external agencies upon request.

Section V: Rights and Responsibilities Arising From Possible Violations:

Accused In all cases, the accused shall be accorded and informed of the following rights:

- To a status of good standing at the University and a presumption of

innocence until

otherwise determined by the Honor System based upon clear and convincing evidence to support a finding of guilt;

- . • To remain silent at any meeting or hearing;
- . • To refrain from admitting self guilt at any time;
- . • To a reasonable time frame, at least seven days after receiving notification of the possible violation excluding weekends and official University holidays, within which to prepare a response to the possible violation;

- . • To request that the case be referred to an Honor Council hearing after an initial investigation and determination;

- . • To appeal, upon request within the specified time frame, any decision until final determination by the President, and;

- . • To procure and to utilize an advisor (not an attorney).

Accused and the Accuser In all cases, the accused and the accuser shall be accorded and informed of the following rights and responsibilities: Rights

- . • To obtain a current copy of the Honor System;
- . • To obtain a list of Honor Council members;
- . • To a reasonable written notice of facts and information underlying the possible

violation, including but not limited to, a statement of the possible violation, the accuser's identity and the sanctions to which the accused may be subject if found guilty;

- . • To obtain, present, question and refute evidence utilized as part of an investigation or determination;

- . • To a meeting or hearing at which both the accuser and the accused may be represented and the accuracy of the possible violation determined;

- . • To an investigation of a possible violation, to be conducted promptly, insofar as possible, and in a manner that minimizes public disclosure of either's identity;

- . • To a reasonable written notice of an Honor Council hearing, if arranged, that would be held no sooner than five days, excluding weekends, holidays and official University holidays, and no later than 20 days, excluding weekends and official University holidays, from the date of receipt of written notification of the hearing;

- . • The right to a closed hearing, if requested, except for observers to be chosen by the

accuser, the accused, the Honor System Administrator, or the Executive Board;

- . • To request a reasonable delay, for cause, before or after an Honor Council hearing is scheduled;
- . • To appeal, upon request within the specified time frame, the pre-hearing determination and/or the sanction, and;
- . • To participate in a meeting, upon request, with the Academic Integrity Officer or the Chair of the Honor Council hearing to discuss the rationale behind the determination and/or sanction.

Responsibilities

- . • To read and to respond promptly to all communication regarding the Honor System;
- . • To make truthful statements during an investigation, meeting or hearing;
- . • To refrain from harassing, pressuring or intimidating the accuser, the accused and other relevant parties involved in the case, and;
- . • To report any harassment, pressure or intimidation arising from an Honor System case.

Section VI: Executive Board

The Executive Board shall be comprised of four graduate/professional students, four undergraduate students, six faculty members and the Honor System Administrator. Faculty and students will be drawn from the Honor Council membership. The Executive Board shall serve for one year and may be re-appointed. The Executive Board responsibilities shall include, but are not limited to, assisting with orienting Honor Council members to the Honor System, including issues of confidentiality and review of procedures, surveying each accuser and accused from the previous year to determine their level of satisfaction with the Honor System, and reviewing annually the Honor System procedures and recommending changes if needed.

Section VII: Honor System Administrator

The Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs shall designate an Honor System Administrator and an alternate Administrator. In the absence of the Administrator, the alternate will serve. The Administrator and alternate shall be responsible for, but not be limited to:

- . • Orienting Honor Council members to the Honor System;
- . • Assigning the Academic Integrity Officer to investigate possible violations;
- . • As needed, assigning an investigator other than the Academic Integrity

Office to investigate possible violations. This may be at the request of the accused or accuser if there appears a bias or conflict of interest or to ensure that an investigation and determination is completed within the timeframe specified by this document;

- . • Coordinating Executive Board meetings and Honor Council hearings;
 - . • Providing direction when there are questions regarding policy and procedures;
 - . • Reviewing findings and determinations regarding policy and procedures;
 - . • Maintaining case records;
 - . • Submitting annually to the University community a report on honor violations and sanctions, omitting any identifying information from the cases, and;
- . • Responding to requests for information, when permissible by law or by the relevant parties, from internal and external sources.

Section VIII: Academic Integrity Officer

Under the direction of the Honor System Administrator or alternate Administrator, an Academic Integrity Officer will have responsibility for:

- . • Investigating all Honor System allegations;
- . • Completing the investigation and issuing a determination within 30 calendar days of being assigned a case;
- . • Assigning sanctions or referring the case to the Honor System;
- . • Presenting the facts in regard to the investigation, determination and evidence at Honor System hearings, and;
- . • Preparing and keeping a deidentified record of pertinent facts on each case.

Section IX: Honor Council

Honor Council members shall be current VCU students and faculty who are elected, selected or appointed. Faculty appointments will take into account the diversity of the VCU faculty and input from the Faculty Senate. Student appointments will take into account the diversity of the student body and input from the Student Government Associations. In order to serve, students must be in good academic and disciplinary standing, not have a pending honors violation and not have been found guilty previously of an honors violation. All Honor Council members shall receive training prior to acting officially in any Honor System capacity.

Section X: Procedure

Filing of possible violation: If a member of the VCU community identifies a possible violation, an initial description of the possible violation must be filed in writing with the Honor System Administrator within 30 calendar days of discovery. Discovery occurs

only when the accuser possesses sufficient proof of a possible violation. At any point after a case has been filed, it may be withdrawn. A possible violation that is filed after the 30-day deadline will not be considered.

The accused, the accuser and the course instructor shall be notified in writing via VCU e-mail, the U.S. Postal Service and/or other appropriate means of communication that a notice of a possible violation has been filed and that an investigation will occur. The accused and the accuser shall each be assigned and/or shall select an Honor Council member who may serve as an advisor. Additionally, the accused and the accuser each have the right to select someone other than an Honor Council member, not an attorney, to be an advisor. The accused and the accuser will each be encouraged to meet with an advisor to review the Honor System and his/her rights and responsibilities. The Academic Integrity Officer shall also inform the accused and accuser of all rights and responsibilities. The accused shall be informed that the University will not issue a degree to any student accused of a possible violation of the Honor System until a case has been investigated and adjudicated completely, including appeals.

Investigation of possible violation: The Academic Integrity Officer will undertake an investigation and issue a determination. The investigation may include, but is not limited to, meeting with and taking statements from the accuser and the accused, seeking information from other students, faculty or staff, reviewing the accused's transcript, exams, papers and other relevant material, and conducting other actions as appropriate. All parties involved in the investigation shall maintain confidentiality regarding information and all documents shall be maintained in a secure file.

Determination of possible violation: Within 30 calendar days of being assigned a case the Academic Integrity Officer shall complete an investigation and issue a determination. The 30-day deadline can be extended by the Honor System Administrator in special circumstances when parties required for completion of the investigation are unavailable during that time period. The determination shall include a finding as to whether the student is innocent or guilty of an honor violation and, if found guilty, assign a sanction. The accused, the accuser and the course instructor shall be notified of the determination within five days, excluding weekends and University holidays.

A case will be referred to the Honor Council if the accused is on Honor Probation, there are multiple possible violations or if the Academic Integrity Officer determines that the possible violation could warrant a sanction of Suspension, Expulsion or Revocation. In these cases, an Honor Council hearing shall be convened to determine whether the student is innocent or guilty of an honor violation and, if found guilty, assign a sanction.

If it is determined that the accused has not violated the Honor System, and there is no appeal by the accused or the accuser, the case shall be finalized. All documents related to the case shall be returned to the original sources and/or destroyed. The accused, the accuser and the course instructor shall be notified in writing of the determination within five days, excluding weekends and University holidays.

If it is determined that the accused has violated the Honor System, and there is no appeal by the accused or the accuser, the case shall be finalized. The accused, the accuser and the course instructor shall be notified in writing of the determination within five days, excluding weekends and University holidays. Sanctions assigned by the Honor System shall go into effect when the case becomes final.

Appeals of Academic Integrity Officer determination: The accused and the accuser have the right to request that the determination of the Academic Integrity Officer be appealed to the Honor Council. The request must be filed with the Honor System Administrator within five days of receipt of the determination notification, excluding weekends and University holidays. Upon receipt of an appeal, an Honor Council hearing shall be convened.

Section XI: Hearings

An Honor Council hearing panel shall consist of five members: three students, two faculty and one non-voting Chair. An Executive Board student member shall serve as the non-voting Chair. The Administrator or alternate shall attend the hearing to assist the Chair. The required number of Honor Council members must be present in order to hold the hearing.

The three student members shall be of the same classification as the accused (i.e., undergraduate or graduate/professional). One of the student members shall be, if possible, from the accused's school. Honor Council members shall disqualify themselves from a hearing in which they have a conflict of interest with either the accuser or the accused. In these instances, an alternate member shall be assigned.

Honor Council hearings shall be flexible enough to provide for the consideration of all information. If the accused does not appear for a hearing either through refusal to attend, failure to locate following a good-faith attempt to do so, or by withdrawal from the University, the hearing shall proceed without the accused.

The following general format used for Honor Council hearings shall include, but is not limited to:

- . • Introduction of Honor Council members and participants in the case;
- . • Statement of the date, time, and location of the hearing;
- . • Brief summary of the possible violation;
- . • Reminder to the accused and the accuser of all afforded rights and responsibilities;
- . • Reminder to the accused that it is an honor violation to make knowingly false statements to the Honor Council;

- . • Reminder that the accused is considered not in violation of the Honor System unless there is clear and convincing evidence. Clear and convincing evidence requires that the evidence presented by the accuser must convince the Honor Council that it is substantially more likely than not that the accused has violated the Honor System;

- . • Reminder that the University community considers violations of the Honor System to be serious infractions;
- . • Reminder that the Honor System exists to protect honest students and alumni from those who gain, or seek to gain, an unfair advantage in an academic setting;
- . • Reminder that the hearing, but not the deliberations, is being recorded;
- . • Questions by the Honor Council, accused or accuser at any time;
- . • Presentation of evidence and witnesses by the accuser;
- . • Presentation of the investigation, the determination, and evidence by the Academic Integrity Officer;
- . • Presentation of evidence or witnesses by the accused or accused's advisor;
- . • Closing statement by the accuser, and;
- . • Closing statement by the accused or accused's advisor.

Section XII: Honor Council Deliberations

After the hearing, the Honor Council goes into closed-session deliberations. The Administrator or designee shall not be present for the deliberations. The purposes of the deliberations are to apply the standard of clear and convincing evidence to determine if the accused is guilty of violating the Honor System and, if there has been a violation, to assess a sanction. If there are multiple possible violations, the members shall determine if the accused is guilty on each possible violation. Members will state their opinions on each possible violation. Four of the five members must concur to determine that the accused is in violation of the Honor System. When there is a determination that a violation has been committed, there shall be a discussion of the sanction.

Members shall state their opinions and rationale regarding the sanction. Three of the five voting members must concur to determine the sanction. The Chair shall notify the Administrator or designee of the Honor Council's determination. The decision shall be to the accused, the accuser, the course instructor, and the dean of the accused's school within five days, excluding weekends and University holidays.

Section XIII: Appeal of Honor Council Finding

If the accused is determined by an Honor Council hearing to have violated the Honor System, the accused may request, within five days of receipt of notification, excluding weekends and University holidays, that the case be sent to the University Appeal Board. A University Appeal Board hearing shall be convened and all parties shall be notified. The Chair shall represent the Honor Council before the Appeal Board and the accused and accuser may be accompanied by an advisor, not a lawyer serving as legal counsel, who may participate in the appeal hearing.

In considering an appeal, the University Appeal Board shall consider only the following issues:

- . • Whether the Honor Council's process was conducted fairly and in accordance with prescribed procedures;
- . • Whether there is new evidence or relevant information not available at the time of the Honor Council hearing that, if consequential, may result in a remanding of the case to an Honor Council;
- . • Whether the original decision was supported by substantial evidence;
- . • Whether the Honor System was improperly interpreted or misapplied by the Honor Council, or;
- . • Whether the sanction imposed was proportionate to the gravity of the violation.

The University Appeal Board can recommend dismissal of some or all of the possible violation, assignment of the same or different sanction, remanding the case to the Honor Council, and/or affirm the Honor Council's decision. The University Appeal Board cannot recommend imposition of a higher sanction than was assigned by the Honor Council. The University Appeal Board's recommendation and the case material shall be submitted to the President, or designee, for review and action. The decision of the President is final. If the President upholds the finding of guilt and the sanction, the sanction shall take effect retroactive to the initial determination of being in violation of the Honor System.

Section XIV: Records

All Honor System records shall be maintained with sufficient safeguards to ensure confidentiality. An annual summary report of all cases, with all identifying information removed, shall be made available to the VCU Board of Visitors. The summary report may be made available upon request to internal or external sources at the University's discretion. With respect for confidentiality and regardless of the finding of guilt or innocence, the Academic Integrity Officer or the Honor System Administrator shall prepare and keep a record of pertinent facts on each case. Deidentified cases and composite data will serve the purpose of honor education for the University community.

All records of Honor System violations and sanctions assessed not involving Suspension or Expulsion shall be kept at least until completion of the academic program in which the student is enrolled at the time of the violation or three academic years following the violation, whichever is longer. A transcript notation that is assigned by the Honor System will remain on the student's transcript. No earlier than five years from the date the sanction was assessed, a student may request removal of transcript notations except those for Suspension, Expulsion or Revocation. All records of violations and sanctions involving Suspension, Expulsion or Revocation shall be maintained permanently by the Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs, or designee, with sufficient safeguards to ensure confidentiality.

Section XV: Amendments

The Executive Board shall review annually all procedures and may make recommended

changes to the Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs. The Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs may appoint a committee to conduct a complete review of the Honor System at any time, but at least every five years. The Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs shall forward all proposed revisions to the Honor System to the University community, including the Faculty Senate and the Monroe Park Campus and MCV Campus Student Government Associations, for review and comment. Final revisions shall be submitted to the University Council for action in accordance with its normal procedures. Revisions as approved by the University Council shall be forwarded to the Board of Visitors for final approval and will become effective as soon as practical following BOV approval.

Approved by University Council: October 19, 2006

Approved by Board of Visitors: November 16, 2006

Effective: Fall 2007

WHO SHOULD READ THIS POLICY:

- . • All Students
- . • All Faculty
- . • All Administrators

CONTACTS:

General and specific questions about this policy can be answered by the Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs.