

Report of the Academic Integrity Committee to the Faculty Updated Spring 2014

Over the past four years, the Academic Integrity Committee has studied closely the academic environment at Harvard while also examining a variety of honor code models at peer institutions. The committee was created in the face of evidence that both broad cultural trends and specific local conditions may be contributing to academically dishonest behavior among a growing number of students. This impression was reinforced last year, as more than half of the students enrolled in a single course, offered the previous spring, were accused of academic dishonesty. While these cases derived from a particular class, some of the issues that have been raised are common to many courses and to the community of faculty and students at large. The Academic Integrity Committee has looked at a broad range of options for addressing ways to refocus the community on promoting academic integrity, which is at the heart of the academic mission.

The Academic Integrity Committee has spent the past year gathering feedback from various members of the community. The committee has heard from both students and faculty about the responsibility that each group holds separately and together for upholding the values inherent to our common mission of teaching and learning. We have continued to refine and develop a set of recommendations for the Faculty, along with preliminary implementation details.

The committee unanimously recommends the adoption of an honor code. Below we have outlined the components of such an honor code, which we are now presenting to the Faculty. We have also identified some additional resources we would like to develop to support students and faculty in their efforts to maintain high standards in this arena, as well as some cultural interventions we recommend to ensure that each member of the community – faculty, graduate students, and undergraduates – shares a common set of expectations about academic integrity.

Honor Code Components

1. Statement of Values and Honor Code

The committee feels strongly that the honor code should reflect the culture of integrity that is essential in any academic environment. As President Faust stated at the FAS Faculty meeting on February 5, 2013, we need to “work together to affirm the values of diligence, high aspiration, mutual concern, and personal integrity that are the foundation of what we as an academic community exist to do and to be.” The committee has drafted a statement of values and an honor code that address the values we hold as a community of learners. The honor code and the culture that surrounds it should signal to students that Harvard values learning, intellectual inquiry, and intellectual exploration more than it values the external trappings of “success.”

2. Affirmation of Integrity

An essential component of an honor code is what we wish to call an “affirmation of integrity.” This statement provides students the opportunity to affirm their adherence to the code and their

membership in a scholarly community. The affirmation states clearly that the work they are submitting was completed with integrity, respect for the community, and in accordance with our stated values. Research by Dan Ariely and others shows that such declarations, or other moral prompts, remind students of their obligation to conduct themselves ethically during their work and that as a result, they are less likely to plagiarize or otherwise cheat on their assignments.¹ We envisage students writing the affirmation on graded assignments as well as final exams or projects, and students may also be asked to signal their commitment to the honor code upon matriculation. The precise details of when and how students will repeat this affirmation will be determined in the coming year. A draft of the affirmation has been written by student members of the Academic Integrity Committee with input from the faculty and administrators.

3. Honor Board

It is critical that students feel ownership of the honor code. At many peer institutions, the honor code has been written by students and the rules and regulations are enforced by an entirely student judicial board. Currently at Harvard, cases of academic dishonesty are adjudicated by the Administrative Board (“Ad Board”) composed of faculty and administrators. The review of the “Ad Board” in 2009 recommended the consideration of student participation in the adjudication of disciplinary cases.² The Academic Integrity Committee strongly supports this idea. We recommend the creation of a newly designed Honor Board that would be responsible for hearing all academic dishonesty cases while other disciplinary cases would continue to be reviewed by the existing Ad Board. Additional details about the relationship between the Honor Board and the existing Ad Board will be determined by the Dean of Harvard College.

4. Exams

Unproctored exams are a component of many traditional honor codes. However, schools that offer unproctored exams have reported rates of cheating similar if not higher than those with proctored exams. Middlebury College recently reviewed their honor code and in their final report, the faculty recommended eliminating unproctored exams because of the high rates of cheating.³ In addition, unproctored exams rely on students to report cheating that they witness. Research on peer reporting suggests that very small percentages of students feel comfortable reporting on the cheating of their peers.

The Academic Integrity Committee members discussed whether unproctored exams would be appropriate at Harvard and it was clear that the introduction of unproctored exams would be unlikely to enhance the culture of trust that we are trying to build. The committee also felt that peer reporting would not be any more successful at Harvard than it is elsewhere. The committee felt that the bigger obstacle to creating a culture of trust and the assumption of student honesty was the long list of rules and regulations outlined at the beginning of the exam. The rules which

¹ Ariely, Dan. *The (Honest) Truth about Dishonesty*. Harper Collins: New York, 2012.

² Report of the Committee to Review the Administrative Board of Harvard College, April 2009.

³ Middlebury Honor Code Committee Report, 2008-09

http://www.middlebury.edu/media/view/251522/original/Honor_Code_Review_Committee_Report_FINAL_2.pdf

include complex and often opaque guidelines set a negative tone for the exam which signals to students that faculty expect that they might cheat on the exam.

The committee is in the process of rewriting the instructions for administering final exams, emphasizing that the exam is the intellectual culmination of the course and that the rules and the presence of the teaching staff at the exam itself are intended to ensure a fair environment for all students in that setting and to maintain the integrity of the examination room so that students can focus on their work, not on the possible cheating of their peers. The committee also strongly recommends that faculty be present during the administration of their exam. Faculty presence at final examinations signals to students that the faculty instructors are invested in the value of the examination as a marker of what students have learned from them in the course. The committee also recommends that undergraduate course assistants not be allowed to supervise the administration of final exams by themselves.

5. Sanctions

Traditional honor codes include significant sanctions for violating the honor code. In the most extreme cases, students found to have violated the code are expelled; at other schools, it is indicated on the transcript that the student has plagiarized or cheated on the exam. The committee feels that Harvard already has significant sanctions, but that it would be beneficial to review the range of sanctions, to revisit the educational purposes of the sanctions, and to make the range and purpose of the sanctions more transparent to faculty and students alike. We recommend making the information about the range of sanctions and the aggregate numbers of the sanctions given available to faculty and students through an easily accessible website. This information was previously included in the Harvard College Handbook for Students, but was removed in the early 1990s.⁴

Cultural Interventions

While issues of academic integrity are central to the work that is done in the classroom, it is also essential to integrate discussions of integrity more broadly in the community. In the fall of 2012, we commissioned a review of the existing literature about academic integrity. The review confirmed many of the committee discussions about the sources of cheating and the ways of responding to it while focusing on particular areas of interventions that are likely to be most effective. The review also highlighted the fact that students arrive at elite universities such as Harvard with habits and beliefs about academic integrity that develop during their high school years. It is evident that early and frequent cultural interventions that educate students about what academic integrity is and why it is important are crucial to changing the environment at Harvard. There are a range of possible interventions under discussion, including using the admissions process to signal the importance of academic integrity and the expectations for applicants at the institution and sharing information through videos and websites before matriculation.

⁴ While the Administrative Board publishes this data on its [website](#), we are calling for a more accessible and detailed site, that is updated regularly.

The committee strongly recommends adding a session about academic integrity into Opening Days so that first-year students are exposed to the expectations in joining a shared community of learners. The format and timing of this session will be coordinated with the Freshman Dean's Office and with consideration for all of the competing topics that are important for the adjustment of our incoming students. However, it is also clear that students must be reminded of their responsibility to uphold the honor code and to participate with integrity in this community of learners every year, not just upon their arrival. There are many opportunities for this type of signaling, including the potential creation of a Sophomore Orientation in the Houses, a statement that students sign when they register each term, and peer discussions in the Houses and the concentrations. A subgroup of the Academic Integrity Committee is developing a set of proposals for the Dean of Harvard College to consider.

Resources for Faculty and Concentrations

While the Honor Code is aimed primarily at the conduct of Harvard College undergraduates, the role of faculty and other instructors in supporting academic integrity in classroom communities is central to our endeavor. Several years ago, the Faculty voted to require that course policies about collaboration appear on syllabi and/or course websites. In addition, a subgroup of the committee has been developing an assignment taxonomy, drafts of which have already been circulated to various groups of faculty who have provided invaluable feedback. This taxonomy provides examples of assignments and grading rubrics along with an explanation of what type of assignment might allow students to deepen their comprehension of course material and develop particular analytic skills. The working document also provides information to help faculty design assignments that are less likely to elicit dishonest behavior from students. A website may also be developed to share important data on courses with and without exams, so that faculty can make decisions with the best information available. The committee is also looking at other interventions that could be suggested to faculty to promote integrity in their courses.

Finally, the committee has been discussing how departments might address issues of integrity with their concentrators. In addition to teaching explicitly proper citation methods for the discipline, sophomore, junior, and senior tutorials might address common practices around collaboration and research. The committee intends to work closely with the Directors of Undergraduate Studies to make recommendations to the concentrations about how they might expand explicit discussions about academic integrity in their curriculum as students use more complex data and sources in their advanced work.

Summary

Overall, the Academic Integrity Committee is grateful for the conversations and engagement on this topic that have emerged over the past year. Fruitful discussions and disagreements have characterized all of the interactions surrounding these important questions of honesty, integrity, community, and scholarship. For the most part, our student-faculty community is strong and healthy. At the same time, there are pressures on our students to succeed in this environment that leads some of them to behave in ways that are counter to the accepted norms and values of

the community as a whole. We hope that the adoption of an honor code at Harvard College will bring these values front and center for all of us, making it easier for all to uphold them