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Honor Codes as Learning Tools at SUNY Institutions

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Honor Codes as Learning Tools at SUNY Institutions

There has been an outcry, of late, that integrity is being lost in many forums. Personally, politically, educationally, and professionally, there is a rising perception that honor and ethics are casualties of progress, that integrity is a quaint concept suited only to a nostalgic past. At the same time, there is a call for educators to produce graduates who are better citizens, with a more coherent sense of responsibility and integrity. Are these goals disparate, or are they, in fact, goals that contribute to the same outcome? If so, what are some of the vectors that can drive what at first glance appear to be divergent outcomes?

The Center for Academic Integrity posits that “Higher education and society benefit when colleges and universities have standards of integrity that provide the foundation for a vibrant academic life, promote scientific progress, and prepare students for responsible citizenship” (CAI, 1999, p.4). The Center’s working definition of academic integrity emphasizes “five fundamental values: honesty, trust, fairness, respect, and responsibility.” (CAI, 1999, p.4).

One of the traditional vehicles in academia for instilling a foundation of personal integrity is the use of an honor code. We examined the existence and role of codes of academic honor at 30 SUNY campuses to determine their frequency of use, the modus of use, and the anticipated proximal and global outcomes of their application.

We defined honor code as an explicated statement requiring a student’s active consent. This provides a differentiation from the standard statement of Academic Policy found in all SUNY student handbooks. We view the academic policies (on integrity, dishonesty, personal conduct, etc.) in such handbooks as passive policies, in that they do not require an informed statement of compliance by the student. Virtually all university policies contain language addressing the requirements of academic, and often personal, integrity. We were interested in examining the schools which surpass these inclusions.

We examined the 30 comprehensive and professional campuses for the presence and application of honor codes. After identifying the schools where codes of honor are in place, we then examined the method of their application. Are they applied institution-wide, by program, or by individual instructor? Are students required to sign a statement of compliance at the beginning of their academic career, at the beginning of each semester, at the beginning of each course, or for each assignment?

We reasoned that formal Honors Programs were likely repositories for the development and dissemination of honor codes; thus we began our inquiry by identifying those schools with Honors Programs in place. We examined websites for all campuses and subsequently contacted individuals on a subset of campuses for additional probing. Of the comprehensive campuses, we found that 21 have a formally developed Honors Program or Programs. Of these schools, 7 have explicit language regarding the use of a

formal honor code in place. In addition, the Schools of Medicine and the Maritime College have very clearly defined codes of honor. In particular, the Maritime College, as a quasi-service academy, integrates their code of honor into most aspects of the students' daily experience, and further, emphasizes the regulations set forth in *The Organization, Operation, and Regulations Manual for the Regiment of Cadets*. The Medical School at Stony Brook also makes very explicit the application of, the rationale for, and the consequences of breaking their Honor Code. In addition, the School of Environmental Science and Forestry has a carefully conceived and explicated Code of Academic Integrity which discusses both intent and consequence.

Another campus which utilizes an institution-wide Honor Code is Plattsburgh, which includes an Honor Code Pledge, an Honor Code Statement for syllabi, and an Honor Code Statement for assignments. The Honor code Pledge reads "I commit myself to academic integrity in and out of the classroom. I will be honest, responsible, and give support to others as they abide by this pledge" (SUNY Plattsburgh, 2010, p.1). New students must affirm this pledge when they logon to Banner for the first time. Faculty are expected to include an Honor Code statement on all syllabi, which reads, "It is expected that all students enrolled in this class support the letter and the spirit of the SUNY Plattsburgh Student Code of Conduct and the Honor Code Pledge" (SUNY Plattsburgh, 2010, p.1). Finally, faculty are asked to use, voluntarily, an Honor Code Statement for Assignments, such as "On my honor, I affirm that the work I am submitting is my own. (signed)" Or, "On my honor, I affirm that I have not given or received any unauthorized assistance on this assignment/examination. (signed)" (SUNY Plattsburgh, 2010, p.1). This appears to be the most fully-developed Honor Code application at any of the comprehensive campuses.

Potsdam utilizes an assignment based approach, informing students that all assignments either require, or imply acceptance of, the following pledge: "On my honor, I will not give nor receive any inappropriate assistance on any academic work in accordance with the SUNY Potsdam Academic Honor Code and the directions given to me by each course instructor" (SUNY Potsdam, n.d., p. 1).

Farmingdale takes a campus-wide approach, reporting that the Dean discusses their 23 page Code of Conduct at every orientation, with the discussion culminating in students signing the Code of Conduct. The Code of Conduct includes language which emphasizes faculty responsibility to prevent dishonesty and to protect honest students. Since it is felt that this Code of Conduct supersedes individual programs, the Honors track does not have a separate Code. However, the Nursing Program, as a medical provider, maintains a separate, additional Code.

Alfred University also has a Student Code of Honor and Principles of Community. Other campuses have honors codes embedded within programs, such as the statement of academic integrity in the School of Business at New Paltz, and the Honors Codes of the Binghamton Scholars Program and the Honors Program at Delhi.

Attached is a chart of the SUNY comprehensive campuses, noting the presence or absence of a campus or programmatic Code of Honor, the source of information regarding their code of honor, the contact person for information about their code or Honors Program, and the status of their membership in the Center for Academic Integrity (CAI).

Overall we determined that 33% of the SUNY schools reviewed via the web make use of some form of Honor Code. Having examined the whole range of campus documents, it is apparent that when honor codes are used, they address the following areas of concern: academic integrity (100%), community responsibility (70%), personal integrity (60%), professional integrity (50%), and clinical integrity (30%). Approximately half of the time the pledge or code involves a commitment to influence the behavior of others. Typically students are reminded of their commitment when an exam, paper, or project is submitted. In addition, a minority of campuses also remind students when engaging in important professional activities, as well as when quizzes and homework assignments are submitted.

While the above observations suggest that some SUNY institutions have found ways to effectively implement honor codes, they also highlight the fact that there is substantial room for growth in this domain. Zimbardo's (1970) classic demonstration of deindividuation suggests that individuals engage in more antisocial behavior when they experience diminished individuality and a diminished sense of personhood. Diener, Fraser, Beaman, and Kelem (1976) add that in situations, such as wearing a disguise, people feel less aware of their values. Therefore, in the academic context, especially in large classes in which one may feel reduced to a number, it may indeed be necessary to explicitly invoke a reflection on personal values and prior commitments to maintain values of honesty and integrity. This is precisely the role an Honor Code and its reaffirming pledge can serve.

Arguing in favor of relying upon Honor Codes to bolster academic integrity, Pavela (1997) feels it is a powerful way to combat pervasive cheating. Callahan (2010) utilizes the phrase "culture of integrity" to capture the way a code can shore up a moral foundation in the face of significant pressures to reap the benefits of dishonesty. McCabe and Pavela (2005) argue that "student involvement in developing community standards on academic dishonesty" is key to success. As part of the greening of campuses across the nation, many colleges and universities are signing onto a *Graduation Pledge of Social and Environmental Responsibility*. Why not a pledge to uphold honesty and integrity while engaging in campus life and beyond?

As a follow-up to this report, future work might survey individual faculty to reveal creative uses of course-based honor commitments. Future reports should identify model practices for others to adopt with the aim of making expectations of honor more compelling and models of integrity more explicit.

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Web Page Survey: SUNY Honor Codes

SUNY:	Type of Honors			
	Online Honor Code Info Access (URL)	Program and Contact Information	Sample Honor Code Content	CAI* Member ship
Albany	NA	Department-based Honors programs (contact dept)	NA	NA
Alfred University	Alfred University Web Page http://my.alfred.edu/index.cfm/fuseaction/student_policies.codeofhonor.cfm	University Honors program Gordon Atlas Director 607-871-2924 atlas@alfred.edu	Student Code of Honor & Principles of Community	NA
Alfred State	NA	College Honors program Terry Morgan morgantm@alfredstate.edu coordinator	NA	NA
Binghamton	Binghamton University Web Page http://www2.binghamton.edu/scholars/frequently-asked-questions.html	Binghamton University Scholars program Director Wm Ziegler , Ziegler@Binghamton.edu 607-777-3583	Binghamton University Scholars Program Honor Code	CAI member
Brockport	NA	University Honors Program Information (585) 395-5400	NA	NA
Buffalo State	NA	All College Honors Program Andrea Guiati 716-878-3093	NA	NA
Canton	NA	NA	NA	NA
Cobleskill	NA	Web page references to honors program but no contact information	NA	NA
Cortland	Cortland Web Page http://www2.cortland.edu/dotAsset/317314.pdf	(607) 753-4827 honors@cortland.edu	University Honor Code currently under develop-ment	NA
Delhi	NA	Universit Honors Program Kathryn DeZur 607-746-4462	NA	NA
Downstate Medical Center	College of Medicine WP http://sls.downstate.edu/student_affairs/docs/handbook/MedicineStdHandbook.pdf	NA	College of Medicine Student Honor Code	NA

Web Page Survey: SUNY Honor Codes

Empire	NA	Discussions underway regarding honors program & academic integrity	NA	NA
Environmental Science & Forestry (ESF)	EFS Web page & student catalogue/ handbook http://www.esf.edu/facgov/integrity.pdf	Lower division Honors Program & upper division Thesis Honors Program Don Leopold djleopold@esf.edu 315-470-6599	Code of Academic Integrity with features of Honor Code	NA
Farmingdale	Faculty web page Richard Vogel 631-420-2063 richard.vogel@farmingdale.edu	Honors Residence program has been in place and Honors College has been under development.	Faculty syllabus with honor code reference	NA
Fredonia	NA	University Honors Program David Kinkela Kinkela@fredonia.edu 673-3876	NA	NA
Geneseo	NA	Edgar Fellows Program (Honors Program) co-directors Olympia Nicodemi 585-245-5384 and Ronald herzman 585-245-5273	NA	CAI member
Maritime	Web page & student handbook	NA	Code of Conduct & Academic Integrity	NA
Morrisville	NA	NA	NA	NA
New Paltz	University web page & School of Business web page	Honors Program Director Jeff Miller 845-257-3934 millerj@newpaltz.edu	School of Business Academic Integrity	NA
Old Westbury	NA	Honors College nancy Sacks sacsn@oldwestbury.edu 516-876-3177	NA	NA
Oneonta	NA	Julie Freeman Honors program	NA	NA
Optometry	NA	NA	NA	NA

Web Page Survey: SUNY Honor Codes

Oswego	NA	Honors Program Norman Weiner 315-312-2190 weiner@oswego.edu	NA	CAI member
Plattsburgh	Plattsburgh Admin Policies Web Page	Diana LaPorte, AVP Admin 518- 564-2539; laportdm@plattsburgh.edu	Honor Code Pledge; Honor Code Statement for Syllabi; Honor Code Statement for Assignment	CAI member
Potsdam	Potsdam Student Conduct and Community Standards on the Web	Honors Program Thomas Baker Director 315-267-2900 or lawrenbs@potsdam.edu	A. Academic Integrity; B. Academic Honesty Pledge; C. Basic Standards of Academic Integrity D. Procedures, Due Process and Student Rights	NA
Purchase	NA	NA	NA	NA
Stony Brook	NA	The Honors College 631-632- 4378 Director Jeff Edwards fac & admin dir Oliver Street III	NA	CAI member
Stony Brook School of Medicine	School of Medicine Web Page	NA	The Honor code of the Stony Brook University School of Medicine	CAI member
SUNY IT	NA	NA	NA	NA
UB	NA	U Honors College Admin Director klh5@buffalo.edu Krista hanypsiak	NA	CAI member