

The Tar Heel

The Honor Code; taken seriously at UNC-CH

By Peggie Porter
Kaleidoscope Editor

Most students probably do not remember agreeing to uphold the Honor Code and Campus Code on their applications to the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. There was just another dotted line to be signed. But the honor system is an integral part of the academic process, and one that should be noted.

According to the UNC-CH Instrument of Student Judicial Governance, students are on their honor not to lie, cheat or steal "when these actions involve academic processes or University, student or academic personnel acting in an official capacity." The Campus Code stipulates that students must "conduct (themselves) so as not to impair significantly the welfare or the educational opportunities of others in the University community." Most schools have similar rules. The variation is found in how these rules are enforced.

Suppose a professor thinks he sees a student cheating on a midterm exam. He reports the student to the Dean of Student Affairs or to the Student Attorney General. Students in the Attorney General's office then

investigate the case to decide if there is enough evidence to warrant charges against the student. If there is enough evidence, the student may plead guilty or not guilty to these charges at a hearing of the Student Court. He may be found guilty or not guilty by them and sanctioned appropriately.

But if the same situation were to occur at North Carolina State University, the process would be entirely different. If, say, a horticulture professor caught a student passing off someone else's soil samples as his own, the professor would say to the student, "Look here, Jethro, those aren't your soil samples. What do you got to say for yourself?"

"You caught me with my hands dirty, Dr. Clodhopper," Jethro might say.

"Well, we'll just keep this between us, Jethro," Dr. Clodhopper would whisper, clapping a hand on Jethro's shoulder. "I'll give you a zero on this assignment and we'll say no more about it." Jethro would be placed on Academic Misconduct Probation for the remainder of his career at State, meaning that if he is caught cheating again, he will be suspended from school for a semester.

All kidding aside, our colleagues to the east place too much responsibility on the professor. He must act as witness, prosecutor and judge. The only time another party is brought in to the situation occurs when the professor thinks stiffer punishment is

warranted or when the student does not admit guilt. There is a very real possibility that an innocent student will be intimidated into saying he is guilty.

The importance of having students involved with the judicial process cannot be overrated, according to those administrators and students involved. "Students should be court members so that professors won't use the system as a vehicle for personal vendettas or to cover their own asses," said Martin Gonzalez, graduate attorney general. Although he could not give examples due to the confidential nature of all cases, Gonzalez did say, "I've seen it happen."

Anne Bowden, Associate Dean for Student Affairs, agreed that students play an important role in the honor system. "You have a right to be judged by your peers," she said, and in a university setting, "your peers are each other. Because they are peers, they may be more capable of understanding what's plausible and what's not."

"The system tries to treat students as more than adolescents. The faculty and staff are not parents. Students have to learn what it means to be an adult without looking to other people to play parent."

Undergraduate Attorney General Mary Evans said she would like to see more emphasis placed on the

honor system itself and less on the judicial system. "When people think about the honor system they think about the Attorney General, the court . . . things that only come into play when there's been a breakdown in the system. I would like to see people having pride that they've done something with integrity."

To Evans, integrity means "having the self-confidence to stand up for yourself," and that means turning in other students for violating the Honor Code.

We are all strongly conditioned not to rat on each other, but "at this level of school, that's holding you back," said Evans. In college, students work much harder at their studies and there is an element of competition for grades. "When you work hard on a research paper and someone else buys one, or you stay up for three nights studying for an exam and somebody gets a copy ahead of time and blows the curve for a class of 200, that's not fair."

Many students are reluctant to turn other students in because it cannot be done anonymously; a defendant has the right to face his accuser. "It really hurts me," Evans said, "when someone calls me in tears

and says 'I saw the girl in front of me cheat,' but that person doesn't want to get involved."

UNC-CH's judicial system falls somewhere in between those at State and UVA. At UVA, anyone convicted of any honor offense, including lying (for example, telling your professor that you got snowed in in Tryon and couldn't get back for the test in order to get an illegal extension is an honor offense); is summarily expelled from the university. Other universities have proctor or monitor systems, in which tests are patrolled by student or staff monitors who watch for cheating. Evans says these systems fail because they are based on distrust rather than trust.

Here at UNC-CH, sanctions vary from censure, a formal letter of reprimand, to expulsion. The usual sanction in cases of academic dishonesty, including cheating, plagiarism and unauthorized collaboration, is suspension for a minimum of one semester and an "F" in the course. The "F" applies regardless of the assignment on which the student cheats; even if it is a homework assignment worth 5% of the total grade, the student receives an "F" if convicted of cheating.

Tops

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The night before each orientation day students and parents are given the opportunity to check into Hinton James dorm for the night and an optional evening orientation program featuring representatives from the housing department who provide a slide show and discussion sessions on dorm life.

"There would be something wrong with you if you didn't feel just a little bit scared about coming to Carolina," said orientation assistant Margaret Barrett. "We are working with the University to make these freshmen's first contact with Carolina a positive one."

"I feel much more comfortable about leaving home knowing how nice the people here at Carolina are," said Daphne High from Charlotte after attending the July 15 TOPS program.

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