

Testing the Value of Honor

Committee Eager to Start Campus Honor Discussion

As the school year began, the Carolina community turned our collective attention to some of the University's most cherished values – academic freedom, open minds and collaborative inquiry about our own and others deeply held beliefs.

During the next few months we will be afforded another rare and important opportunity to examine what makes UNC special – the principles of academic integrity, honor and collective responsibility that have shaped our campus environment for many years.

Last fall, Chancellor James Moeser challenged all of us to think in depth about the Code of Student Conduct (including the Honor Code and Conduct Code) and student judicial system. He appointed a task force, chaired by School of Law Professor Marilyn Yarbrough, and charged it with examining the system's basic premises, substantive and procedural provisions, and administration.

This summer, the task force submitted its report, reflecting its study of UNC's and other universities' honor systems, observations drawn from interviews and forums last spring and recommendations for possible steps action to

improve our system, as it now exists. The full report can be found at <http://judicialreport.unc.edu>.

The chancellor then referred the report to the Committee on Student Conduct for its consideration, asking COSC by December to recommend an action plan based on consultation with key campus constituencies such as Student

Congress, Faculty Council and the campus community at large. Efforts are already under way to raise the community's awareness of key issues, beginning with the successful activities incorporated into the recent Honor and Integrity Week.

Three significant questions underlie the findings and recommendations of the task force and COSC's ongoing work.

1. How can we best assure that "problem cases" involving students charged with violations of the Code of Student Conduct are handled fairly, efficiently and respectfully?

The task force recommended possible changes in such matters as the standard of proof, alternative sanctions, informal procedures and appeals. It also highlighted the importance of recruitment and training of students involved in the honor system through the Office of the

Student Attorney General and the Honor Court. Some of these recommendations appear to warrant further intensive study (for example, possible changes in the burden of proof, introduction of alternative sanctions or dispositions, development of informal mediation procedures), others have already been introduced (expedited hearing arrangements, speed of disposition and broader recruitment of honor court judges and attorney general's personnel). We hope to share a detailed action plan on these and related issues in about another month, and to engage in intensive consultation with Student Congress and Faculty Council at that time.

2. How can we more successfully prevent "problem cases" from arising?

It is not enough to handle "problem cases" in the best possible fashion. Instead, we hope to develop "best practices" and other forward-looking strategies for heading them off before they occur. For example, research has shown that cheating tends to arise in certain disciplines or settings (often in business or the sciences, in large classes, in settings where students are unfamiliar with the meaning of plagiarism, when faculty expectations are not clearly articulated and when students fear that they will not achieve their objectives because their academic

standing is relatively low).

COSC hopes to work with the Center for Teaching and Learning and academic departments to assist faculty members in developing standard approaches to clarifying expectations and administering graded assignments before problems occur. It will also be important to identify emerging issues across the campus and deal with them systematically (for example, harassment through e-mail, disruptive conduct during classes, hazing or drinking). We also hope to make the honor system more transparent and meaningful to all members of the community, perhaps through creation of a recurring ethics column describing common difficulties and asking readers to think through possible outcomes ("you be the judge").

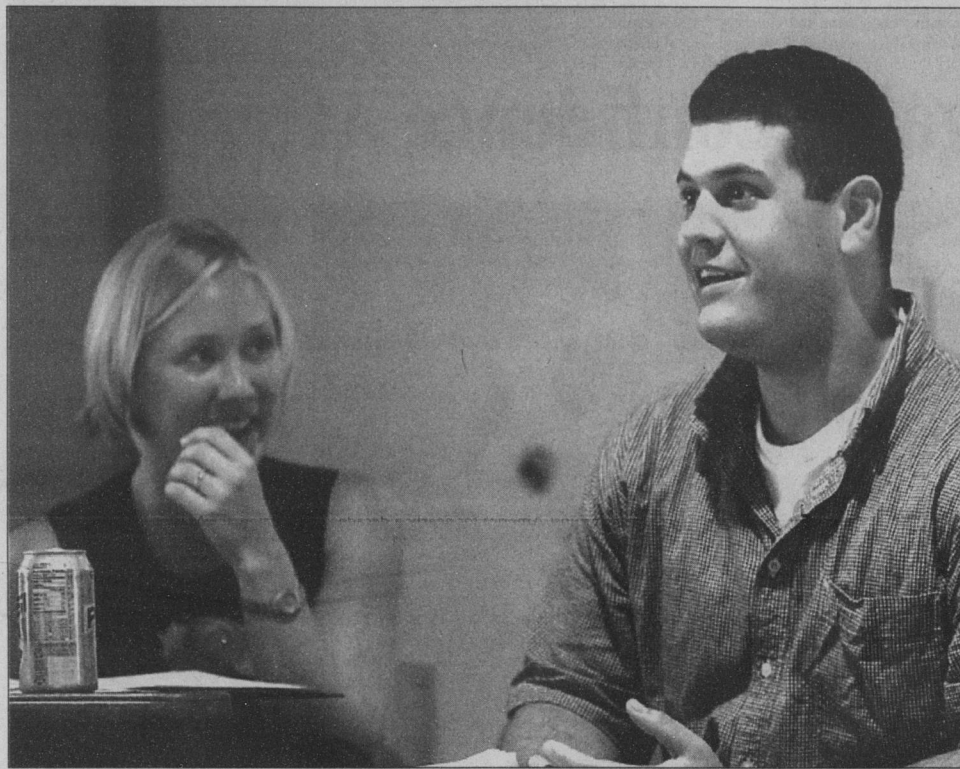
3. How can we renew and expand the faculty-student partnership that animates our honor system and the process of teaching and learning in order not only to meet minimum standards but to assure that we set and achieve a higher standard of honor and integrity that sets Carolina apart?

UNC's honor system places students at the center of the process in important and beneficial ways. At the same time, according faculty a more significant and intellectually engaging

role could significantly enhance the system and overall campus life. For example, COSC is considering the possible creation of a "faculty advisory panel" composed of highly respected faculty who could provide specialized expertise and advice to the student attorney general or Honor Court. It is also examining ways in which the values of honor and integrity could be incorporated more meaningfully into the intellectual culture of the campus, perhaps by development of a spring reading program that would engage faculty members and students across all years and programs in discussion of a book that raises fundamental questions of personal and intellectual values at its core.

COSC invites all members of the campus community to assist us by reacting to the ideas just outlined or suggesting others of your own (these can be e-mailed to lstarr@email.unc.edu). We will provide additional updates and open forums over the next few months. Please join us in this effort by making a commitment to honor and integrity a central part of your personal agenda this fall.

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DTH/KATE BLACKMAN

Student Body President Jen Daum (left) and Student Body Vice President Aaron Hiller participate in a mock Honor Court trial Wednesday as part of Honor and Integrity Week, illustrating how the judicial process works.

Current Honor Court Flawed

You told your Spanish teacher that you skipped class because you were sick, but your roommate knows you just didn't feel like going. What if your roommate tells the teacher?

If you ate at Lenoir Dining Hall during Honor and Integrity Week, this question might look familiar to you.

An orange pamphlet sponsored by the General Alumni Association included this dilemma and others (although from the point of view of the roommate of the offender) in one effort to draw students' attention to the school's honor system and give them more reasons to fear their roommates.

Right now there are a lot of issues to care about in light of recently proposed changes to the honor system by a special task force.

The most common offense tried in Honor Court is academic cheating – looking at someone else's exam, copying and pasting pieces of essays off the Internet or cooperating a little too much with your classmates on a group project, for example.

Right now, a typical sanction for cheating is an F in the course and a one-semester suspension. The task force recommended establishing a sanction consisting of a grade of "XF" in the class to denote academic dishonesty with the option of clearing the "X" by taking a special class on honor. This would apply to all cases of academic cheating, making it more obvious on the student's transcript.

The idea of teaching responsible behavior to guilty students sounds nice, but it is ultimately not worth funneling resources into a token class.

In his quest for truth in "Meditations on First Philosophy," Rene Descartes first rejects all claims that are not indubitable; he later modifies his stance to accept all things that are clear and distinct to him because he can assume that God will not

deceive him.

UNC has not adopted an official school God, but the task force is recommending that the standard of proof for convicting someone in honor court be changed from "beyond a reasonable doubt" to "clear and convincing." Most evidence is convincing; that's how it gets the case to trial in the first place. An Honor Court conviction has serious

effects on a student's college career and absolutely devastates a permanent record; accused students must be given the benefit of the doubt.

The University of Virginia advertises that because of its Honor Code, students can take exams unproctored. Here at UNC we tend not to take our Honor Code that seriously, but that pledge you sign every time you take a quiz does do something for you: It guarantees your right to a fair trial, which includes a defense counsel.

The Honor Court is structured so that students are assigned one from a pool of staff that works for the attorney general – the same pool from which the investigator is chosen.

This is arguably a huge flaw in the system, which is why a few years ago a group of concerned students formed the Independent Defense Counsel (<http://www.unc.edu/idc>) to provide accused students with an alternative.

Now, IDC is a prominent organization including many experienced members, and all members are trained specifically to fight for accused students in honor court. They're eager to defend guilty and innocent students; they just like to help people.

The challenge this presents to the investigation only makes the whole process even fairer by ensuring that the defendant's case is argued just as aggressively as the investigation's.

Unfortunately, students are automati-

cally assigned counsel from the attorney general staff and not advised on their other options, and IDC has limited advertising capabilities. When the Committee on Student Conduct makes its final recommendations, it should include a suggestion to give accused students easier access to outside counsel.

The task force worries that faculty have been avoiding using the Honor Court, preferring to handle situations themselves.

They do not address the motivation for this trend, however, which is that many professors feel squeamish taking a case to the courts because the system is too harsh on students. If anything, the changes recommended would make it easier for the Honor Court to come down on students. It is important that faculty use the system in place because it guarantees students fair trials.

So the Honor Court is missing out on a number of cheating cases because certain faculty members don't agree with its brand of justice.

Meanwhile, students are tried and convicted for possession of marijuana if their roommates have it in the room. Is that a victory? In order for the University community to take it more seriously, the honor system should consider weakening its sanctions.

The Honor Code is useful today and will continue to be as long as we confront issues of "honor" more uh, honestly.

This means not encouraging people to tell their roommates for skipping class, not overzealously convicting people of pot possession on technicalities and not pretending that taking a class on the meaning of honor isn't a joke. If we make the philosophy of the honor system about real integrity, we will save it from irrelevancy.

Glenna Goldis is a member of the IDC and a sophomore majoring in philosophy. Reach her at glenna@email.unc.edu.

Student Voices Needed in Review of Honor System

The UNC honor system is coming off of a week that was spent promoting the ideals of honor and integrity on this campus.

We held a kickoff event in the Pit in which Dean Smith participated. We held a mock hearing in order to show the campus community what we do on a daily basis; we sponsored a keynote speaker, Dr. Jeffrey Wigand. We also had informal Pit-sits and informal sessions about the honor system and how students could get involved.

The week was a success in that the unity of student government was expressed, as demonstrated by Student Body President Jen Daum and others as they came out to support our efforts. Finally, we feel that the week was an overall success in that we started a dialogue about the notions of honor and integrity and taught the community about the University's tradition of student judicial governance.

Philosophically, Honor and Integrity Week raised some compelling issues. How do we reach out to the University community? How do we educate and inform the community in a manner that is interesting but still serious? Are the ideals we are promoting outdated in a modern university setting? Insofar as the first two questions are concerned, we feel that we did a good job. The final question, however, remains unanswered.

What is the role of honor at a modern university? Is the notion of personal integrity something we think of only after we find ourselves in a less-than-ideal situation in which we have to answer for our actions?

Some will say the University's role is different now than it used to be. Education for the sake of enlightenment is tossed by the wayside in favor of nabbing a degree in order to get a better job, end of story.

Clearly, getting a job matters. But it is often the means, not simply the ends, that build our character and make us better members of a community.

To cap off Honor and Integrity Week, we all need to carefully consider our personal notions of honor and why we are at UNC. We are more than just the sum of our parts. We are a University community with a certain shared vision and a desire to be the best, not just academi-

cally or athletically, but ethically.

It is with this vision in mind that Chancellor James Moeser began the task force review of the honor system last year. Since the inception of the honor system in 1875, comprehensive reviews of the student-run system have occurred every 30 years or so. This review follows that tradition, as the last major judicial revisions took place in 1974, culminating in the creation of our current Instrument of Student Judicial Governance.

A review of this nature is both necessary and healthy for our honor system, and we are looking forward to improving the honor system for the overall betterment of the University community.

Along these lines, it is crucial to remember that while certain issues, such as the current standard of proof under which we operate, are topics of discussion, they are by no means the only issues of note that we are promoting.

Improving efficiency and effectively reaching out to the campus community are also realms we are improving upon, and the list goes on and on.

The point is, this review and the changes to follow must be debated and embraced by all members of the UNC community – students, faculty and administrators alike. It is not simply for the good of the honor system that these changes might occur, it is for the overall good of our community of which we all are a vital part.

In conclusion, our encouragement to you is twofold. First, think upon your own personal convictions and the means by which you hope to achieve your personal goals at UNC. Think not only about what the roles and responsibilities the University has toward you, but about what roles and responsibilities you have toward the University.

Secondly, we ask you to get involved in this formative process within the honor system. Only a debate in which there are multiple voices and ideas may the best ones ultimately rise to the top.

Reach Student Attorney General Amanda Spillman at spillman@email.unc.edu, Jonathan Slain, Spillman's chief of staff, is a senior political science major. E-mail him at slain@email.unc.edu.

AMANDA SPILLMAN
AND JONATHAN SLAIN
GUEST COLUMNISTS

Honor Code's Future Rests on Proving Relevancy to Students

Honor is an old-fashioned idea, one that seems more suitable for discussions about duels to the death in the 19th century than academic life in the 21st.

The environment at UNC only emphasizes that apparent discrepancy – witness the push campuswide to use laptops and multimedia presentations in everything from classroom lectures to group projects.

In the desire for progress, some key aspects of campus life inevitably get pushed aside and run the danger of becoming irrelevant, which is the danger facing the Honor Code and Honor Court.

Granted, faculty members still expect students to sign a pledge affirming that they followed the Honor Code before turning in a paper for class or taking an exam.

But for most students, this marks the beginning and the end of their interaction with the code during the course of their campus career. A mere signature done largely for the sake of routine hardly shows that students understand, or even are interested in, the Honor Code.

Chancellor James Moeser recognized the decreasing role of the Honor Code in campus life when he spoke about the importance of rejuvenating the code in his State of the University Address. "Let us resolve to return the concept of honor to the center of the stage," he said. "It is clear that we have some major work to do."

Last year, Moeser formed a special committee to examine the Honor Code and honor system as a possible solution. That committee's proposed changes largely



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focus on administrative and technical changes, such as weakening the standard of proof from "beyond a reasonable doubt" to "clear and convincing" and creating a faculty adviser position for the student attorney general.

But the committee's best bet for preserving the importance of the Honor Code rests on their proposal to create a student advocate for honor position, with the responsibility of sponsoring public programs to boost student awareness of the Honor Code's function.

Administrators and student officials already have taken limited steps. Students returning to campus this fall found signs posted in classrooms admonishing them to follow the tenets of the code. A nice effort but ultimately a waste of money since the signs carry even less meaning than signing the pledge.

Honor and Integrity Week, a series of campus events sponsored last week by the judiciary branch to demystify the role of honor on campus, is a much better start but needs to become an annual event.

The code and honor system as a whole have something of a mysterious aura that many students fail to understand and appreciate.

Only by showing the average students how the code impacts their day-to-day lives on campus can officials re-install a culture of honor at UNC.

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