2000-01 Honor Code Review Committee Members

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Introduction

The Honor Code Review Committee, composed of faculty, a dean, and students, met on a regular basis from October 2000 through April 2001 to assess the current Honor Code at Middlebury College. This review of the Honor Code occurs triennially as set forth in the Honor System Bylaws in the 2000-01 Middlebury College Handbook (page 98). This Introduction provides a summary of the Committee's recommendations and response.

Early in its review process, the Committee decided to focus on ways to strengthen procedures for hearing academic cases. Currently, two boards, the Student Judicial Council and the Judicial Review Board, hear cases of academic dishonesty. Some members of the Middlebury College community perceive a disparity both in the way cases are heard and how the two boards impose sanctions. A recommendation to combine these two boards and a proposal describing a structure for the combined system are included in this report.

In an open meeting of the Honor Code Review Committee with Middlebury College students, those students present affirmed that the honor code is an important part of their Middlebury College experience. Several students, however, suggested that the honor code has become "institutionalized" and less important in the daily lives of students and faculty. In this report the Committee proposes to institute a formal ceremony at which all students learn about the importance of the honor code before they sign it. In order to emphasize that importance, and to provide consistent training to all students, the Honor Code Review Committee proposes to improve the way first-year students, especially those entering in February, are introduced to the Honor Code and trained to sign it. Additionally, faculty are encouraged to be consistent in requiring students to sign the honor pledge on all tests and papers.
Since the last review of the honor code, Internet plagiarism has become more prevalent. Online "cheat sites" make it easy for students to purchase or copy, papers and submit them as their own work. The Honor Code Review Committee believes that all faculty members should be aware of online detection services, and has recommended ways that the College can train faculty members on the use of those services.

At a meeting with the President of the Student Government Association, the Committee was told that some students sense both a misunderstanding across academic disciplines about what constitutes plagiarism, and that spurious plagiarism cases are sometimes brought to the Judicial Review Board. In a subsequent review of past plagiarism cases from several disciplines, the Committee did not find evidence of misunderstanding or of spurious cases; however, the perception among students still exists. The Committee recommends the College address the issue by clarifying its use of the term "plagiarism."

Recommendation
Combine Student Judicial Council and Judicial Review Board

The Honor Code Review Committee recommends that the jurisdictions of the Student Judicial Council and the Judicial Review Board be combined into a single Academic Judicial Board that would hear all cases of alleged academic dishonesty. A Judicial Appeals Board would hear appeals of decisions from the Community Judicial Board and the Academic Judicial Board. The new College judicial system would have the following structure:

Community Judicial Board

Jurisdiction: Non-academic conduct infractions

Composition: A member (a dean) of the Dean of Student's Office
One staff member
Two faculty members
Four students
Leadership: One dean and an elected student serve as co-chairs

Academic Judicial Board

Jurisdiction: Academic dishonesty

Composition: Member of the academic administration
Two faculty members
Three students

Leadership: Co-chaired by member of academic administration and an elected student

Judicial Appeals Board

Jurisdiction: Appeals of decisions of the Community Judicial Board and the Academic Judicial Board

Composition: An administrator (Secretary of the College),
Two faculty members
Two students not serving on the board that had original jurisdiction

Leadership: Co-chaired by either the Secretary of the College or faculty member and an elected student

This change is intended to address the following problems with the present system:

(1) The proposed changes would eliminate the disparity in the way academic dishonesty cases are heard and sanctions are imposed under the current system. The current system treats cheating on exams and plagiarism in very different ways. At present, the Student Judicial Council hears only those cases in which cheating on exams is alleged, while the Judicial Review Board hears cases of alleged plagiarism. (The Judicial Review Board also hears appeals of decisions of the Student Judicial Council and the Community Judicial Board.) There is strong consensus among former chairs and members of both the Board and the Council that these infractions are merely different forms of academic dishonesty and should be judged by the same judicial body. Some community members have claimed that a special degree of technical competence is required to judge plagiarism cases, and therefore a group containing faculty members in the majority, such as the current Judicial Review Board, should have exclusive jurisdiction in such cases. But this claim is disputed by those with actual experience on the Judicial Review Board who counter that few cases, if any, have turned on an intricate, professional understanding of the nature of plagiarism.

(2) The current system has been the source of considerable confusion for faculty who may be considering bringing charges of academic honesty. The proposed changes would make the jurisdictional lines very clear: a single body, the Academic Judicial Board, hears all cases of academic dishonesty, including cheating on exams and plagiarism. All charges of academic dishonesty would be brought to the same office, which would prepare charge letters and coordinate and schedule hearings.

(3) The issues of composition and leadership of the new Judicial Boards are likely to cause considerable discussion. The Committee reconsidered the original reasons for having an all-student board such as the Student Judicial Council (the faculty representative serves as a participating, but nonvoting member) hear all cases of alleged honor code violation. While the Committee was sympathetic to the ideas that lay behind the creation of this all-student body in 1971, by 1981 the faculty had already voted to limit the Council's jurisdiction, moving plagiarism cases to a new Judicial Review Board. This new Board was chaired by a member of the academic administration and gave
faculty a voting majority on cases of plagiarism. Now, since in a typical year more plagiarism cases are heard than cheating cases, the fact is that cases of academic dishonesty are more likely to be heard by a faculty-dominated board than by a student-dominated board. (See Appendix 1 for number of infractions heard by each board during the past three years).

In the proposed system, a single body (the Academic Judicial Board) consisting of an equal number of student and faculty representatives would hear all cases of academic dishonesty. Equal representation reflects more fairly the contributions made by both students and faculty to the honor code system: students pledge themselves to academic honesty and faculty demonstrate their faith in that pledge by not proctoring exams. When academic dishonesty is alleged, whether cheating, plagiarism, or other academic misconduct, students and faculty should be involved equally in determining the facts of the allegation and in recommending a sanction, if necessary.

It is instructive to recall that equal representation was the fundamental principle underlying the introduction of a Community Judicial Board last year. Prior to its creation, disciplinary cases were heard in most instances by the Deans, with a much smaller number of students electing to have their cases heard by the Student Judicial Council. Under that system, students found guilty of a conduct violation in a Deans' hearing often saw infractions as "problems with the Deans" rather than a failure to abide by the policies and regulations adopted by the College community. The introduction of a Community Judicial Board has changed this situation dramatically. A student charged with a conduct violation must now face representatives of the entire College community, including faculty, students, and staff. We believe that the Community Judicial Board serves as a model for the composition of a judicial body that reflects more fairly the community that it serves.

Recommendation

Introduction and Commitment to the Honor Code: Formalizing the Honor Code and the Faculty Role in the Honor Code System

Currently, first-year students are required to sign a copy of the honor code prior to matriculation. The honor code form is sent home to entering students along with many other forms and information sheets that must be read, signed, and returned. As a result, students may not fully recognize the distinct importance of the honor code. Later, during orientation, first-year students hear about the honor code at a large meeting where many other issues are also addressed. The Honor Code Review Committee proposes that the manner in which first-year students are introduced to the honor code be changed to emphasize its importance.

Because the honor code is central to our community, we recommend that it be introduced to first-year students at a separate activity. Rather than have entering students sign the honor code before matriculation, a formal ceremony should be conducted during orientation in which all students sign their pledge. The ceremony could involve a speech given by a senior member of the Student Judicial Council followed by a signing ceremony. To further stress the honor code as well as to educate students on the difficult topic of plagiarism, the Committee recommends that issues of academic honesty be addressed in all first-year seminars, preferably in a standardized format developed for the seminar program. All faculty who participate in the first-year seminar program would be thoroughly trained to teach this information to first-year students. The Committee suggests that such a format involve videos, Internet activities, vignettes, or other interactive activities.
Because the honor code is the responsibility of both faculty and students, the system works most effectively when both groups are fully committed to it. After an initial signing ceremony and discussions in the first-year seminars, all faculty must continue to convey the importance of the honor code. Faculty who are lenient or who show little interest in having students properly sign the honor code weaken the system as a whole. An important component of the honor code system at Middlebury College is that exams are not proctored. The system depends on the students' signing the honor pledge before turning in assigned work. It is every faculty member's responsibility not to grade work until the honor pledge is signed. Faculty should also be careful not to place students in positions where they are tempted to cheat. The Honor Code Review Committee believes that if faculty members enforce the principles of the honor code consistently, the established system can thrive.

**Recommendation**

**Combating Internet Plagiarism**

The Honor Code Review Committee discussed the increasing problem of digital or Internet plagiarism. Online "cheat sites," featuring papers available on nearly any topic, are abundant and easily accessed by students. Students all over the world can access sites like *Schoolsucks.com* and *The Evil House of Cheat*. A group of educators concerned with the growing number of Internet plagiarizers created a service, *Turnitin.com*, advertised as the most comprehensive detection service available today. Other web-based tools to combat Internet plagiarism exist, but faculty are not always familiar with them or have not learned to use them. The Honor Code Review Committee believes that faculty should be familiar with and able to use detection services, and recommends that faculty be trained to detect Internet plagiarism. The Honor Code Review Committee learned that there are several detection services available and that the site licenses for these services are quite expensive, as opposed to a per-use fee. The Committee recommends that the College pay the per-use fee for the use of a detection service for faculty members who have cause to believe that a paper has been plagiarized when all other traditional methods to discover the source have not been successful. While the Committee does not endorse any particular product, it does recommend, in addition, that the College undertake the task of creating a video, a CD-ROM product, or a written document, which would properly define Middlebury College's use of the term plagiarism.

**Appendix 1**

**Summary of Judicial Review Board and Student Judicial Council Infractions in the Past Three Years**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Student Judicial Council</th>
<th>Judicial Review Board</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>6</td>
<td>11</td>
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<tr>
<td>1999-00</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000-01</td>
<td>3 (currently)</td>
<td>5 (currently)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 2
Professor Jordan's Recommendations Concerning the Honor Code

Administrators

Remind students "Student responsibility is the quid pro quo for the absence of proctors."* Clarify student responsibility with respect to the honor code at Middlebury, and their responsibility to one another. Discuss with SGA, and clarify handbook language concerning, realistic responses that students ought to make if they see or know of student cheating. Poll faculty on their experiences with judicial processes. Consider simplifying judicial processes.

- One committee modeled after Community Judicial Council, to hear all academic dishonesty cases (student chair).

Faculty

Train faculty on how to talk about academic integrity. Train faculty on how to encourage intrinsic motivation in students about course topic.

- Consider eliminating honor code if student leadership does not promote it more extensively and successfully over the next three years.

Students

Encourage wide discussion of the honor code among peers. Encourage student leaders to speak out. Increase understanding and promotion of the honor code. Publish cases and penalties in The Campus.

- Consider a vote of (no) confidence in the Honor Code.

As a Campus Community

Conduct panel discussions of the role of academic integrity in a liberal arts college, relative to the goals of education in this setting. Clearly identify and highlight on a yearly basis Middlebury College's understanding of the central purposes of a liberal arts education, and the relation of the honor code to those purposes.

- Clarify for students in handouts the relation of independent to collaborative work.


Bibliography


Multimedia Integrity Teaching Tool (the MITT), Ball State University, 2000.