

The Honor Code

The following information is from a memo sent to all Arts and Sciences Faculty by Dean Raymond Nelson on November 10, 1995. Although it is addressed to faculty, it applies to teaching assistants as well.

During the past years a number of questions have arisen concerning the relationship of faculty to the Honor System and the options open to faculty in dealing with instances of cheating by students. The published guidelines about these matters (see [Graduate Record](#)) are sufficiently general and ambiguous to have led individuals to radically different kinds of action. What follows is my understanding of the rights and responsibilities of faculty who are confronted with academic dishonesty.

Let me remind you that by accepting appointment to the faculty of the University of Virginia you agree to cooperate with the Honor System. The Honor Committee, which is elected by the students to administer the Honor System, is invested by the Board of Visitors with the authority to impose a sanction in cases of dishonorable behavior. It holds that authority exclusively. It has no authority in matters of academic standards or judgment. If you as a member of the faculty observe an academic assignment in which cheating has occurred you have both the right and the duty to grade it appropriately--to give it, for instance, a grade of zero on the academic grounds that it is improperly prepared. You do not, however, have the prerogative of punishing the student for dishonorable behavior by imposing a sanction that goes beyond the assignment--that is, you may not fail the student in the course (unless the grade of zero would be heavily weighted enough to cause that result), refuse to allow the student to complete the course, refuse to allow the student to register for other courses in your department, etc. If you do impose a sanction you not only violate the integrity of the Honor System and the policies of the University, you expose the University to recrimination and litigation. You may also expose yourself personally to litigation.

When you encounter cheating you should assign the exercise on which cheating has occurred an appropriate grade--that is, I assume, a failing grade--and then turn the matter over to the Honor Committee. Assign the failing grade upon the initial grading of the exercise if you are aware of the cheating at that time, or immediately at whatever subsequent time you become aware of it. In any case, do not put yourself in the position of reporting to the registrar a deceptively high grade with the intention of lowering it if the outcome of an Honor case disappoints you. Grades can be changed only for reasons of error in transcription or computation.

If you grade the exercise appropriately and give your evidence of cheating to the Honor Committee you will have met both your academic and institutional responsibilities. If you and enough of your colleagues attempt to circumvent the Honor System you may, in time, succeed in defeating it altogether. It is not my intention to defend the Honor System here, but I will say that, despite all of its faults, the common life of this place would be immeasurably the poorer without it. If you have questions about the faculty's obligation to the Honor System or about what an appropriate response to any particular circumstance might be, please

seek advice from your departmental chair or someone in this office before you commit yourself to a course of action.

Again, for a general summary of the Honor System, refer to the chapter in the [Graduate Record](#), and [The Honor System at the University of Virginia](#) homepage.