

REPORT OF THE HONOR COMMITTEE ON THE POSSIBLE
EFFECTS OF COEDUCATION ON THE
UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA HONOR SYSTEM

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At a time when student dishonesty on the nation's campuses is estimated at upwards of 60%, at a time when cheating techniques are often more elaborate and scientific than the courses themselves, at a time when concepts of honor and integrity are being critically eroded in a society of widespread shoplifting, tax evasion, and falsified expense accounts - the University of Virginia can take special pride in being "out of touch" with the times.

Yet, the University can ill afford to wall itself off from contemporary trends. It neither desires nor is capable of gaining immunity from the scars, defeats, and pains which are inseparably parts of progress. Our duty, it would seem, must be to minimize these inevitable injuries, to preserve what is most noble in our past, and - most importantly - to forge ahead. It is in this spirit and frame of mind that the Honor Committee has examined and evaluated co-education and its effects upon the Honor System.

The main feelings of this report have been drawn from three principal sources:

1. a study entitled "Student Dishonesty and Its Control in College", which was conducted by William J. Bowers of Columbia University,
2. a questionnaire distributed by the Honor Committee to nearly thirty colleges and universities, and,
3. records of dishonorable dismissals from the University.

As each of the three sources is of a distinctly different character, it is most expedient to discuss each source independently of the other two.

Bowers, William J., "Student Dishonesty and Its Control in College", New York, Bureau of Applied Social Research, Columbia University, 1964

College cheating and the conditions under which it occurs were until December 1964 largely a mystery to social scientists. Why is it that one student will cheat and another will not? Why is it that cheating is prevalent on some campuses and scarcely a problem at all on others? What are the personality factors and the institutional structures which tend to impede or inhibit a student's propensity to cheat? It was to these very questions that William J. Bowers addressed his attention and that he directed the most advanced techniques of research survey and analysis. The end product, of course, was what is generally recognized as the most comprehensive and authoritative work now existing of its kind. And - most pertinent to this report on co-education at the University - Mr. Bowers' study provides the empirical data needed by the Honor Committee to substantiate conclusions which would otherwise have remained highly conjectural and speculative. Therefore, the Honor Committee has most confidently and unashamedly drawn extensively from Mr. Bowers' own findings.

At the outset the Honor Committee finds it necessary to dispel any notion or erroneous assumption that females are any less honorable than males. On the contrary, Mr. Bowers' sampling techniques reveal that only 43% of female students - as opposed to 54% of male students - have cheated at some time during their college years. On this basis, one might reasonably conclude that, rather than increasing the overall level of cheating in a predominantly male university, the inclusion of females would tend to reduce it. Paradoxically, this conclusion is not confirmed by systematic analysis.

On the contrary, Table 9.6 of the Bowers report shows that the cheating rate at co-ed schools is substantially higher than that at single sex schools.

Table 9.6

Per cent of schools with a High Level of Cheating by Sex Composition Among Schools Represented by Deans, Student Body Presidents, and Students

Sex Composition	% of Schools with High Level of Cheating		
	Deans	Student Body Pres.	Students
all female	25 (79)	18 (92)	19 (16)
all male	50 (64)	55 (57)	50 (16)
coeducational	75 (444)	74 (341)	61 (67)

The 11% difference in cheating between the sexes does not explain the difference between the co-ed schools and the single sex schools since the men's colleges have lower rates of cheating than do the co-ed schools. Thus, "the difference between the co-ed and single sex schools is," according to Mr. Bowers, "perhaps best explained by the different social climates at these schools, the greater emphasis on social life at the co-ed schools and greater emphasis on intellectual matters at the single sex schools!"

In fact, it has been statistically proved that students who are oriented to the social aspects of college life have a greater propensity to cheat than those who are oriented to intellectual pursuits. Table 6.2 adequately correlates academic dishonesty and value orientation.

Table 6.2
Per Cent Cheating by Orientation to College

Importance of social values	Importance of Intellectual Values		
	High	Medium	Low
High	51 (747)	57 (607)	65 (548)
Medium	41 (827)	48 (609)	57 (576)
Low	37 (593)	40 (393)	47 (390)

In short, emphasis on social values, is positively related to cheating, whereas emphasis on intellectual values is negatively related to cheating. This quite understandably reflects the tendency of the socially oriented student to neglect his academic responsibilities and, consequently, to find himself more frequently in academic difficulty; conversely, the generalization perhaps reflects the more conscientious commitment of the intellectually oriented student to his academic work and, moreover, his high regard for scholarly integrity.

In any event, coeducational schools - as opposed to single sex schools - substantially increase the likelihood of social interaction between the sexes and, thereby, encourage and stimulate the social orientation of students. It is not surprising, therefore, that coeducational schools should have higher levels of cheating than either male or female colleges.

Yet, to conclude at this point that any escalation of coeducation at the University of Virginia would unavoidably lead to a substantial and immediate increase in the cheating level is to discount totally the impact of peer disapproval and the existing Honor System. To do so is to conclude that sex composition and social orientation are determinative and absolute. The following discussion will show that, on the contrary, these factors are relative influences on student dishonesty.

Turning first to consideration of peer disapproval, the following table shows that the climate of peer disapproval has a definite effect upon the likelihood that a student will cheat.

Table 8.9
Per Cent Cheating by Climate of Peer Disapproval at Their College

School Climate of Peer Disapproval	% Cheating	Number of Students	Number of Colleges
Very strong	23	532	8
Fairly strong	36	1072	18
Moderate	50	2165	40
Fairly weak	59	752	15
Weak	69	901	18

Specifically, where the peer disapproval climate is strong, scarcely more than one-fifth of the students have engaged in cheating since entering college. Likewise, as the disapproval climate progressively deteriorates, the cheating percentage becomes increasingly more staggering. In fact, in its more eroded form, peer disapproval allows nearly 70% to be involved in student dishonesty. In any event, the level of peer disapproval must be considered significant.

Equally as significant as the disapproval which a student perceives among members of his own peer group is the climate of disapproval of the college as a whole. Even though the campus-wide disapproval level is simply the sum of the attitudes of the individual peer groups, it, nonetheless, tends to affect student cheating behavior independently. The impact of both individual and aggregate peer disapproval is shown in the following chart:

Table 8.10
 Per Cent Cheating by Perceived Peer Groups
 Disapproval and Climate of Disapproval of the College
 Climate of Peer Disapproval of the College

Perceived Peer Group Disapproval	Strong	Moderate	Weak	% Difference
Strong	25 (973)	35 (744)	43 (292)	-18
Moderate	39 (371)	52 (622)	56 (325)	-17
Weak	50 (228)	63 (761)	76 (986)	-26
% Difference	-25	-28	-33	

According to Mr. Bowers; "No matter what the school-wide climate of disapproval, students cheat less when they perceive disapproval from their close associates; conversely, no matter how strongly those in their immediate circles disapprove, their propensity to cheat is influenced by those with whom they have more casual social relationships, that is, the student body as a whole. A student's close associates seem to have a somewhat stronger impact on his behavior than do those more distant from him (this can be seen by comparing the percentage differences in the columns with those in the rows), but both sources of disapproval show a substantial independent effect." p. 56

That social orientation is only a contributing - and not a pivotal - influence on student dishonesty becomes readily obvious when one considers the next table of percentages. Here Mr. Bowers shows that "the level of disapproval students perceive among their peers has a much stronger effect on their cheating behavior than their orientation to college." p.152

Table 8.8
Per Cent Cheating by Orientation to College and
Perceived Peer Group Disapproval

Orientation to College	Perceived Peer Group Disapproval			% Difference
	Strong	Moderate	Weak	
Primarily Intellectual	26 (802)	41 (444)	59 (537)	-33
Both/Neither	30 (672)	50 (429)	69 (629)	-39
Primarily Social	40 (503)	57 (431)	74 (776)	-34
% Difference	-14	-16	-15	

As shown above, "intellectually and socially oriented alike cheat less the more they think their peers would disapprove. Although the socially oriented are more inclined to cheat than the intellectually oriented whatever the level of peer group disapproval, they are nonetheless just as responsive to changes in peer disapproval as the intellectually oriented. Thus cheating increases to about the same extent in each orientation group as peer disapproval weakens." p. 152

The above deductions, it would seem, undermine the popular thesis that co-education would bring about the casual relaxation of moral standards such that cheating would become increasingly widespread. In fact, it is peer disapproval - and not social orientation - which is regarded as the more influential determinant.

Turning now to the various methods of controlling student dishonesty, one finds that an honor system serves as the most effective constraint. This is shown in Table 10.4:

Table 10.4
Per Cent of Schools with a High Level of Cheating by Arrangement for Control
and Sex Composition Among Schools Represented by Deans and SBPs

Arrangements for Control	% of Schools with a High Level of Cheating					
	Deans			SBPs		
	Female	Male	Coed	Female	Male	Coed
Honor System	17 (42)	0 (19)	47 (55)	8 (48)	0 (16)	49 (59)
Judiciary Bodies	a (5)	a (10)	83 (130)	a (6)	69 (16)	83 (98)
Faculty-Centered Control	31 (32)	71 (35)	75 (239)	29 (38)	75 (24)	79 (185)

^aToo few cases to yield stable percentages.

Most significant is that in every instance, regardless of the sex composition of the college, the general cheating level at schools with honor systems is substantially lower than that at schools with other control techniques. Nonetheless, one must also recognize that, in terms of relative effectiveness, an honor system at a co-ed school is slightly less than half as effective as an honor system at an all male school.

The conclusions to be drawn from Bower's study of student dishonesty are numerous and complex. Essentially, the problem involved in his study and in that of the Honor Committee's evaluation of co-education is one of identifying and weighing the relative importance of the various causes of student dishonesty. This Mr. Bowers has lucidly done and laid out in his summary tally sheet, which is given below:

Table 11.1
Major Determinants of Academic Dishonesty in College

<u>Determinants of the Cheating Behavior of Students</u>	<u>Strength of Relationship</u>
Peer disapproval of cheating (Disapproval among close associates and student body as a whole)	Strong
Personal disapproval of cheating	Strong
Prior history of cheating in high school	Strong/Moderate
Value-orientation in college (criteria for selecting friends, choice of major, and involvement in campus social life)	Moderate
Adaptation to the role of student (study habits and academic performance)	Weak
<u>Determinates of the Level of Cheating of the College</u>	
Climate of peer disapproval of the college	Strong
Formal arrangements for controlling academic dishonesty (honor system vs. other arrangements)	Strong
Quality of school (proportion admitted, faculty-student ratio, and proportion living on campus)	Moderate
Sex composition of student body	Moderate
Size of enrollment	Moderate

The Honor Committee would here like to note several conclusions which bear directly upon the effectiveness of an honor system in a co-educational university, and which are essential components of this report. They are:

- (1) Peer disapproval of cheating and the method of controlling student dishonesty are primary determinants of the cheating level.
- (2) The sex composition of the college or university and the social orientation of the student are secondary and only relatively significant determinants of student dishonesty.
- (3) The most effective combatent of student dishonesty is an honor system administered exclusively by the students themselves.
- (4) Honor Systems are most effective in single-sex, and particularly in male, colleges.
- (5) Honor Systems are least effective in co-educational colleges and universities.

II.

To supplement the statistical and analytical evidence of the Bowers report, the Honor Committee distributed a questionnaire to the chairmen of honor committees at thirty colleges and universities. The principal intention of the Honor Committee in doing so was to solicit the candid personal opinions of those most closely connected with co-educational honor systems. Secondly, this questionnaire was designed to put these candid responses in the proper perspective. That is, questions were asked for evaluative purposes which would reveal the general effectiveness and procedural perfection of the particular honor system in question. In this way, the Honor Committee was able to weigh the relative significance of each opinion returned.

The general returns and attitudes of the questionnaire were mixed and inconclusive. To illustrate this point, the Honor Committee here presents two characteristically conflicting opinions.

In my opinion, co-education has helped to strengthen the Vanderbilt Honor System. In most cases, women take their obligations to our Code very seriously. They have served well as members of our Council. If the traditions of honor and an effective Honor System are strong, I doubt that co-education would weaken those traditions in any way.

Chairman, Vanderbilt Honor Council

My personal appraisal and recommendation to you must be that co-education would not in any way serve to strengthen the Honor System. It may in fact serve to lessen its effectiveness...based upon my knowledge of the Virginia tradition, I do not feel that the presence of female students on the Virginia campus would allow your Honor System to enjoy the position in which its effectiveness currently places it.

Rick Boucher, Chairman of Honor Council, Roanoke College

And equally paradoxical:

I believe it would have virtually no effect. The effectiveness of an honor system does not bog down because of a heterosexual student body. The fact that no men accuse females is interesting, however...

Chairman, Men's Honor Council, William and Mary College

The Honor Committee feels that the remaining returns can best be understood if examined individually. Therefore, these questionnaires are presented as supplementary evidence to this report.

III.

A final bit of statistical evidence considered was the dismissal record of the Honor Committees for the past number of years. It was found that from the summer of 1958 until the present time, 124 students have been dismissed for honor offenses. Of these students only two are known to be females (there have been two dismissals from the Nursing School) because records are not kept as to the sex of an offender. It is thus impossible to determine whether the individual dismissed from the Medical School, Law School, or any other schools, were male or female. A perusal of the files of each individual offender revealed no female offenders outside of the Nursing School, although there is a possibility that other individual files not available at the present time would reveal evidence to the contrary.

In sum, we feel that these data are irrelevant to our considerations. From experience we know that females will accuse other females but are somewhat reluctant to independently accuse males. To the knowledge of the present Honor Committee, there has been no occasion when a male has accused a female.

We have no evidence that the Honor System works less effectively in the Nursing School or among the small number of females already at the University than it does among the rest of our predominantly male student body.

FINAL CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Recognizing that the Honor Committee is concerned solely with what is best for the Honor System, we shall direct our conclusions only to that point. This is done with full understanding that other considerations must also be made in deciding on the advisability of co-education for the University at large, but these considerations will be proposed by other groups and thus are not mentioned here. It is worth noting, however, that the Honor Committee sincerely hopes (and believes) that the possible effects of co-education on the Honor System will be carefully weighed in the final decision of this Executive Committee about whether or not to recommend co-education.

CONCLUSION #1 Co-education will hurt the Honor System, and thus should not be recommended. This conclusion is based principally on the evidence discovered by Mr. Bowers, although the personal opinions of the Honor Committee concur with his findings. As Mr. Bowers said, "an honor system at a co-ed school is slightly less than half as effective as an honor system at an all male school." This would certainly then imply that it was not in the best interests of our Honor System to change from predominantly "all male" to "coeducational".

The above would be our sole and final conclusion were it not for a realistic awareness that the other considerations apart from those concerning the effect on the Honor System might lead to a recommendation of co-education for the University. With this in mind we will continue with a second conclusion.

CONCLUSION #2 If there is to be co-education at the University, then it should be effected by having a "coordinate college" for women established nearby rather than by completely integrating the females into the University community. We reach this conclusion again because of Mr. Bowers' discoveries. It seems that the more intermingling there is between the men and the women, the less "peer disapproval" there is about honor offenses. The effect of this change in attitudes can only be a weakening of the Honor System.

Our final point should probably be called a precaution rather than a conclusion. Perhaps the biggest danger an Honor System can face is overextension into areas where student opinion is not strongly involved and where "offenses" are not deemed basically dishonorable. If it is decided that because of other considerations co-education should be implemented at the University, then the Honor Committee strongly recommends that the utmost care be used in establishing rules and regulations for the new University community so that under no circumstances will the Honor System become involved in matters of administrative or "social" concern. Granted this is the case now at the University, but we greatly fear that the increased number of rules and mores which will naturally arise as a social atmosphere develops will lead to many dangerous situations for the Honor System.

Again, our principal and final conclusion is that it is not in the best interests of the Honor System to make the University of Virginia co-educational.