

REPORT ON THE STATUS OF SERIOUSNESS
IN THE HONOR SYSTEM

I. BACKGROUND

Seriousness was introduced to the honor system in 1981 in the form of reprehensibility. Its purpose was to remove trivial offenses from the honor system and to encourage student participation.

II. PROBLEMS WITH SERIOUSNESS AT PRESENT

A. INCONSISTENCY

Investigators decide seriousness without precedent or guidance therefore seriousness is necessarily inconsistent because of students' different personalities and values.

B. The student body has no idea of what is expected of them as far as seriousness is concerned. Students don't find out what is serious enough to warrant permanent dismissal from the university until after the fact.

C. INTERNAL CONTRADICTION

With the criterion of seriousness the honor system permits certain acts of lying, cheating and stealing.

D. TWO STUDENTS REPRESENT THE ENTIRE STUDENT BODY

The opinion of two investigators is inconsistent and not always representative. This is representative over a long period of time because opinions balance out, but for individual cases students are being evaluated on a non-student body opinion because no two investigators are going to fall on the mean.

E. QUANTITATIVE MEASUREMENT

In the past emphasis has been placed on a quantitative assessment of seriousness and not qualitative. Investigators concentrate on how much the particular question or exam is worth in the class instead of to what capacity the act violates the community of trust.

F. FACULTY DISSENSION

Faculty display a lack of confidence in the system to adjudicate what in their minds are serious offenders.

G. ACCEPTANCE OF LYING

Student body opinion is reluctant to find lying serious enough to warrant permanent expulsion.

III. SOLUTIONS

- A. A guideline endorsed by the Honor Committee describing what acts are serious enough to warrant permanent dismissal.
1. ADVANTAGES
 - a. This guideline would clarify to the student body what is expected of them.
 - b. It would uphold the original intention of seriousness-- to remove trivial offenses from the scope of the system
 - c. It would take pressure off of investigators
 - d. It would remove inconsistencies from the system
 2. DISADVANTAGES
 - a. This guideline would further separate the honor system from the student body. It might appear that the Honor Committee is exercising too much power.
 - b. It would be inflexible and unable to address changing student body opinion
 - c. Utilization of guideline by investigators: Either allows the committee too much power in deciding seriousness, if used, or, enhances inconsistencies present if not used.
- B. Establish a separate body to determine seriousness on a case by case basis, removing this duty from investigators.
1. ADVANTAGES
 - a. A panel would create consistency over the year
 - b. It would be more representative of student opinion on each case
 - c. It would be able to consider quality of act instead of quantity
 2. DISADVANTAGES
 - a. Inconsistency would exist from year to year
 - b. Students would not know what is expected of them
 - c. Another step in the system would slow down the already lengthy process
 3. OTHER DETAILS THAT MUST BE ADDRESSED
 - a. Who would sit on the panel
 1. Honor Committee Members
 - a. On a rotating basis
 - b. On a standing basis
 2. Mixed panel of committee members and random students
 - a. Standing or rotating
 - b. Drawn from a pool or randomly (different each time)
 3. All randomly chosen students
 - a. Drawn from a pool or randomly (different each time)
 - b. When would the body hear the case
 1. Before confrontation
 2. Before accusation (change standard of proof for seriousness before confrontation)
 3. After accusation
 - c. How specific should the hearing be
 1. All details of the case revealed
 2. Similar to a certification hearing where only generalities are used

C. Abolish seriousness from the honor system

1. ADVANTAGES

- a. Provides consistency
- b. Students know what is expected of them
- c. Eliminates contradiction in idea of honor
- d. Represents entire student body opinion by nature of a referendum
- e. Eliminates emphasis on quantitative aspects of the act
- f. Faculty unrest over students not being reprimanded for nonserious acts would dissipate
- g. Lying no longer would be tolerated

2. DISADVANTAGES

- a. System would be overburdened with trivial cases
- b. Students would be reluctant to use the system