

# GRADUATE HONOR SYSTEM

This document describes policies and procedures for dealing with infractions of the *Honor Code* by students matriculated in Graduate Programs under the jurisdiction of the Graduate Council of Mercer University.

## DEFINITION OF THE GRADUATE HONOR SYSTEM

The Graduate *Honor System* is a code established, interpreted, and administered by the Graduate Council of Mercer University. It is based on the Undergraduate *Honor System* and draws on the traditions of integrity and academic freedom which are embodied by that system. Like that system, the aim of the Graduate *Honor System* is to promote complete freedom within the academic community - a freedom which is based on a trust between students and faculty.

At Mercer University, the *Honor System* is subscribed to by everyone enrolling in any class, whether during the regular academic year, the summer term, or evening classes. The faculty subscribes to and supports fully the *Honor System*. The *Honor System* places responsibility for honesty where it belongs and ultimately must rest, on the individual. The individual is responsible for reporting any academic dishonesty he or she may observe as well as being responsible for his or her own honesty. By placing the responsibility on the individual, each student becomes the guardian of the *Honor System*. As a pledge to uphold this responsibility, each student assumes the Honor Pledge stating, "I pledge myself to neither give nor receive aid during tests or for any individual assignments or papers, nor to use any information other than that allowed by the instructor. I further pledge that I will not allow to go unreported to the proper persons any violation of the *Honor System* and that I will give true and complete information before the Honor Committee."

## GRADUATE HONOR PANEL

Policies and procedures regarding graduate student infractions of the *Honor Code* are established by the Graduate Council of Mercer University. To this purpose, the Graduate Council shall establish and maintain a panel of members of the Graduate Faculty who are available to adjudicate cases of infractions reported to the Council. The members of this Panel may be called upon to serve as an Honors Committee to judge violations of the *Honor Code* and to recommend penalties for those found guilty of infractions.

Each college or school which offers graduate programs falling under the jurisdiction of the Graduate Council shall select three members of its Graduate Faculty to serve on the Honor Panel. The Honor Panel members shall serve for staggered terms so as to provide for continuity of experience.

## DEFINITIONS OF VIOLATIONS

**Violations** A violation of the *Honor Code* involves: (1) cheating, (2) plagiarism, (3) academic negligence, or (4) other acts of dishonesty in the area of academics and research. Perjury or willful omission of evidence during a COMMITTEE hearing is also a violation.

**Cheating** is the taking of credit for work which has been done by another person. The following are some of the more common instances of cheating:

- (1) Using notes, textbooks, or reference materials on a test, daily quiz, or examination unless the use of such materials is specifically permitted by the professor;
- (2) copying ideas or facts from another's papers during a test situation in or out of class;
- (3) giving or receiving facts or ideas by any means whatsoever during a test situation in or out of class;
- (4) obtaining test questions which a teacher does **not** release for further reference;
- (5) obtaining or giving specific information which will be on a test before the test is administered;

**Plagiarism** is defined as the use of ideas, facts, phrases, or additional material such as maps and charts from any source without giving proper credit for such material. Any material in a paper or report which is not acknowledged is understood to be the original work of the author.

**Academic negligence** is also a violation of the *Honor Code*. It is unacceptable conduct of a student during a testing situation. (This includes in-class tests, take-home tests, outside assignments, papers, homework, lab reports, etc.) It may include the student's failure to understand the instructor's specific instructions.

**Perjury** is the falsification of testimony or other evidence presented to the Council. Willfully omitting evidence may also result in a conviction.

## **PROCEDURE FOR REPORTING HONOR CODE VIOLATIONS**

Each student is responsible for reporting any and all infractions of the *Honor Code*. This responsibility is accepted when he or she enrolls in Mercer University and is expected of him or her as a vital participant in the Mercer University *Honor System*. The SYSTEM is so dependent upon this student responsibility that the shirking of this responsibility is considered a serious violation of the *Honor Code*. Faculty as well as students are responsible for reporting any and all infractions of the *Honor Code* which may come to their attention.

The procedure for reporting a violation is:

- (a) If a student or member of the faculty knows or hears of an act of dishonesty, he or she is responsible for reporting the incident to the Dean of the academic unit. The Dean will determine whether the incident should be managed within the academic unit or forwarded to the Graduate Council. If the decision is to forward to the Council, then such notification shall be immediately made to the Chairperson of the Graduate Council.
- (b) The Graduate Council will select two members of the Honors Panel for an Honor Committee and request that the Dean name the remainder of the Committee by: (1) selecting two members of the Graduate Honor Panel, and (2) naming one additional member of the Graduate Faculty. The Dean will appoint one member of this group as chairperson.
- (c) The chairperson of the Honors Committee will notify the accused student(s) and will serve as an investigator to determine the facts of the case. The Honors Committee will conduct the case according to the procedures described in the following section.

## **GRADUATE HONOR COMMITTEE PROCEDURE**

### **I. RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

#### **A. OF THE ACCUSED**

1. The accused shall have following rights in the event that he or she shall face a hearing.
  - a. A right that the charges against him or her be served on him or her by some member of the GRADUATE HONOR COMMITTEE at least 24 hours prior to the hearing. This right may be waived by joint consent of the accused and COMMITTEE.
  - b. A right to summon witnesses and to testify on his or her own behalf.
  - c. A right to be present when the witnesses testify and to question them at the designated time.
  - d. A right to examine written work or other exhibits where the evidence consists in part or whole of same.
  - e. A right to an acquittal unless the COMMITTEE believes that the charge or charges against him or her have been proved beyond any reasonable doubt.

- f. A right to request the Dean of the School or College to review a finding of guilt and the propriety of the penalty. This right must be exercised within four school days after the hearing.
        - g. The accused shall have the full right of free speech as regards his or her trial.
2. The Accused shall have the following responsibilities in the event that he or she shall face a hearing:
  - a. A general duty to cooperate fully with the COMMITTEE in all matters pertaining to case procedure.
  - b. A duty to be present at the hearing. If the accused fails to appear or to notify the COMMITTEE, the hearing shall proceed in his or her absence.
  - c. A duty to answer all relevant questions frankly, fully, and honestly, remembering that intentional omission is as serious an offense as willful distortion of the truth.

#### B. OF WITNESSES

1. A witness shall have the following rights in the event the accused shall face a hearing:
  - a. The right to be presented with a summons at least 24 hours prior to the hearing.
  - b. The right that neither his or her person nor property shall be insulted, molested, threatened, or damaged because of his or her part in the hearing.
2. A witness shall have the following responsibilities in the event that the accused shall face a hearing:
  - a. A general duty to cooperate fully with the COMMITTEE in all matters pertaining to case procedure.
  - b. The duty to be present at the hearing.
  - c. The duty to answer all relevant questions frankly, fully, and honestly, remembering that intentional omission is as serious an offense as willful distortion of the truth.

## II. CONDUCT OF THE HEARING

#### A. PARTICIPATION IN THE HEARING

1. Every hearing shall be conducted by a GRADUATE HONOR COMMITTEE appointed by the Graduate Council and the Dean of the School or College; the Committee chairperson appointed by the Dean shall preside.
2. The clerk of the COMMITTEE shall take minutes of the proceedings. Recording devices may be used if they are under the control of the COMMITTEE. The accused may listen to the recordings after the hearing in the presence of at least two members of the COMMITTEE. In those cases which result in a conviction, a complete record of the hearing proceedings shall be retained by the COMMITTEE until the graduation of the accused. In cases which result in an acquittal, only the number of the case, the name of the student, and the statement of acquittal shall be retained by the COMMITTEE.
3. A member of the COMMITTEE shall disqualify him or herself in a case in which he or she is called as a witness.
4. The proceedings of the case shall be held in utmost confidence before, during, and after the hearing.

#### B. CALL COMMITTEE TO ORDER

1. The clerk will record the committee members present.
2. The Chairperson of the COMMITTEE will give a review of the facts involved in the case.

- C. CALL THE ACCUSED BEFORE THE COMMITTEE
  - 1. Prayer by a member of the COMMITTEE.
  - 2. Swear accused in as he or she stands, raises right hand, and rests left hand on the Bible.
  - 3. Remind the accused that perjury and willful omission of evidence are a violation of the *Honor Code*.
  - 4. Ask the accused whether he or she has been afforded all the rights as stipulated by the *Honor System*.
  - 5. Ask the accused how he or she pleads.
  
- D. CALL WITNESS(S) BEFORE THE COMMITTEE
  - 1. Swear witness in as he or she stands, raises right hand, and rests left hand on the Bible.
  - 2. Remind witness that perjury and willful omission of evidence are a violation of the *Honor Code*.
  
- E. QUESTIONING OF WITNESSES AND ACCUSED
 

Questioning will be carried out by the committee chairperson to be followed by questions by other committee members.
  
- F. QUESTIONING OF WITNESSES BY THE ACCUSED
 

The accused will now have an opportunity to question the witnesses if he or she so desires.
  
- G. RESUME BY THE ACCUSED
 

The accused will now have an opportunity to give an uninterrupted resume of his or her defense.
  
- H. RECESS FOR DELIBERATIONS
 

Following the resume by the accused, the Committee will recess the Hearing and retire to confer and discuss the case. They will reach a verdict of guilt or acquittal and, in the event of a verdict of guilt, determine the appropriate penalty.
  
- I. PROCEDURE OF BEING RECALLED
 

Any witness or the accused may be recalled by the COMMITTEE. If special circumstances warrant, witnesses may also be recalled by the Committee at the request of the accused prior to the presentation of the verdict. The hearing will be reconvened for this purpose.
  
- J. REPORT OF THE ACCUSED
  - 1. IF GUILTY
    - a. Give the verdict to the accused.
    - b. Give penalty to the accused.
    - c. Advise accused that the decision may be appealed to the Dean of the respective School or College within four school days.
    - d. Advise accused that all GRADUATE HONOR COMMITTEE procedures are kept in strictest confidence.
  - 2. IF ACQUITTED
    - a. Give verdict.
    - b. Advise accused that all GRADUATE HONOR COMMITTEE procedures are kept in strictest confidence.

### III. POST HEARING PROCEDURES

- A. If the finding be one of guilt, the decision will be recorded in the GRADUATE HONOR COMMITTEE file and the accused will be notified of the decision and informed of the right to appeal. Files pertaining to the hearing will be maintained by the Office of the Dean of the academic unit.
  
- B. If the finding be one of acquittal, the accused shall be notified of that finding and cautioned that the hearing may be reopened for good cause by the COMMITTEE within a period of four school days.

## **PENALTIES FOR INFRACTION**

### **I. IF THE ACCUSED IS FOUND GUILTY OF CHEATING OR PLAGIARISM, THE COMMITTEE SHALL DETERMINE THE PENALTY BY MAJORITY VOTE.**

#### **A. TYPES OF PENALTIES:**

1. Class I penalty: expulsion from the graduate program **or** suspension for a specified period.
2. Class II penalty: failure in the course in which the violation occurs.
3. Class III penalty: failure on the work in which the violation occurs.
4. DISCRETIONARY penalty:
  - a. A censure or penalty other than the above indicating to the student that the conviction is the result of improper conduct and/or dishonesty on his or her part. A notation of the offense shall be recorded in the GRADUATE HONOR COMMITTEE file of the student in the form of a letter which will be removed upon departure of the student from the university.
5. Upon the unanimous agreement of the GRADUATE HONOR COMMITTEE, a penalty may be suspended with the stipulation that no letter be placed in the GRADUATE HONOR COMMITTEE file but that the decision shall be considered a conviction.

### **II. IF THE ACCUSED IS FOUND GUILTY OF ACADEMIC NEGLIGENCE, THE COMMITTEE SHALL DETERMINE THE PENALTY BY MAJORITY VOTE.**

#### **A. PENALTY:**

1. A censure indicating to the student that the conviction is a result of academic negligence or bad judgement on his or her part. A record of the conviction will be kept in the GRADUATE HONOR COMMITTEE file and be removed when the student leaves the University. The COMMITTEE will have the discretion to extend the penalty to not more than an failure on the work. Examples of extended penalties include rewrites on papers and retaking exams.

### **III. IF THE ACCUSED IS FOUND GUILTY OF PERJURY OR WILLFUL OMISSION OF EVIDENCE IN TESTIMONY DURING AN GRADUATE HONOR COMMITTEE HEARING, THE COMMITTEE SHALL DETERMINE THE PENALTY BY MAJORITY VOTE.**

#### **A. TYPES OF PENALTIES:**

1. Class I penalty: immediate expulsion from the graduate program or suspension for a specified period.
2. Class II penalty: censure or written rebuke. A record of the conviction shall be kept in the GRADUATE HONOR COMMITTEE file and will be removed upon the departure of the student from the university.

## **APPEAL PROCEDURES**

1. In the event of a conviction, the accused may request the Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs to review a finding of guilt and/or the propriety of the penalty. The request must be made in writing within four school days and should enumerate the grounds on which the appeal is based.
2. The Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs will review the request for an appeal to determine whether there are sufficient grounds to warrant reconsideration.

3. If the Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs determines that reconsideration of the conviction or penalty is appropriate, he or she should consider questioning or hearing:
  - a. the accused
  - b. any witness that the accused or the Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs wishes to question
  - c. the faculty member in whose class the violation is alleged to have occurred
  - d. any written evidence used in the Committee hearing
  - e. any records, notes or recordings kept by the Committee.
  
4. If after reconsideration the Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs believes that there are adequate grounds for changing the decision of the Committee, he or she may:
  - a. reverse the conviction or lower the penalty or
  - b. if additional evidence was presented after the original Honor Committee decision, refer the matter back to the Committee for its further deliberation.
  
5. If the Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs determines that reconsideration of the conviction or penalty is not appropriate, the accused may appeal the finding of guilt and/or the propriety of the penalty to the President. The decision of the President shall be final.