

# **Rules Governing the Graduate Honor Council of Vanderbilt University**

*Adopted by Graduate Student Council, October 21, 2004  
and endorsed by the Graduate Faculty Council, November 9, 2004*

## **Preamble**

The Honor Code at Vanderbilt represents a compact of mutual trust between each student and the members of the faculty. Every student is honor bound not to present as his/her own, the work of another. Faculty members, in turn, do not question the integrity of the students. The purpose of the Graduate Honor Council is to preserve and perpetuate this feeling of mutual trust. It is therefore an organization of graduate students for their own protection. It seeks to protect the honor of all graduate students by vindicating those falsely suspected of dishonesty and penalizing those guilty of dishonest acts, according to the procedures set forth in this document.

## **Honor System**

The Honor System presumes that all work submitted as part of academic requirements is the product of the student submitting it unless credit is given with proper reference or citation or as prescribed by the course instructor. Students are responsible for obtaining from their professors an explanation of the freedom they may exercise in collaboration with other students or in use of outside sources, including the student's own work prepared and submitted for another course, during group study session and in take-home examinations. Violations include the following: (1) falsifying or cheating on any material submitted to meet course requirements; (2) plagiarizing on any assigned material; (3) failing to report a known violation of the Code; (4) taking actions to deceive a member of the faculty, staff or fellow student regarding principles contained in the Honor Code; (5) submitting work prepared for another course without specific prior authorization of the instructors in both courses; (6) using text or papers prepared by commercial or noncommercial agents and submitting as one's own work; (7) falsifying results of study and research. Violations of the Honor Code are cause for disciplinary actions imposed by the appropriate honor council. (For further discussion of the Honor System, please read the Student Handbook regarding the Graduate Honor System or go to the World Wide Web ([www.vanderbilt.edu/student\\_handbook](http://www.vanderbilt.edu/student_handbook))).

## **Article I: Jurisdiction**

Section 1: All students taking courses with or doing research under the supervision of faculty in programs of the Graduate School and represented on the Graduate Student Council shall be under the jurisdiction of the Graduate Honor Council, unless the Graduate Honor Council expressly grants jurisdiction to another honor court.

Section II: The Graduate Honor Council shall take cognizance of the following violations as outlined in the Student Handbook, by any student designated in Article I, Section I: cheating on any course requirement; plagiarism, whether intended or not;

failure to report an Honor Code violation; deceptive actions that violate the Code; submission of work prepared for another course without the consent of both instructors involved; submission of papers prepared by a source other than the student; falsification of research results; and/or committing any similar actions contrary to the principle of academic honesty.

## **Article II: Structure, Officers and Membership of the Graduate Honor Council**

Section I: The Graduate Honor Council shall consist of Officers, Core Members, and At-large Members. The selection, duties and roles of each of these parties are described herein.

Section II: Officers of the Graduate Honor Council shall include a President and Vice-President. These officers shall be elected by majority vote of the Graduate Student Council from the voting membership of the Graduate Student Council and will serve until September 1<sup>st</sup> of the year following their election.

Section III: In addition to a President and a Vice-President, the Graduate Honor Council shall have a minimum of three Core Members. These Core Members shall be selected in the following manner: the President of the Graduate Honor Council shall appoint a minimum of three Core Members who will be ratified by the voting membership of the Graduate Student Council. In making these appointments, consideration shall be given to balanced representation across academic disciplines. Core Members shall serve until September 1<sup>st</sup> of the year following their appointment.

Section IV: At-large Members shall be appointed by the President of the Graduate Honor Council as needed on an ad hoc basis from the student body of the Vanderbilt University Graduate School. The duties of At-large Members shall be to serve as investigators and/or as members of hearing panels.

Section V: Should a vacancy occur in the Officers or Core Members of the Graduate Honor Council, it shall be filled by the procedure outlined in Article II of these rules.

Section VI: Any member of the Graduate Honor Council who fails to conduct himself or herself in a manner befitting his/her office or duties may be removed at any meeting of the Graduate Student Council by a two-thirds majority vote of the members present.

Section VII: Members of the Graduate Faculty will be selected from each department by the Director of Graduate Studies in that department to comprise the Board of Faculty Advisers to the Honor Council. A member of the Board of Faculty Advisers sits on all Small and Large panel hearings. In most cases, the Faculty Adviser is an observer but may request permission from the President of the Honor Council to ask a question or if requested by the Honor Council, participate in the Council's interviews of witnesses and consideration of the evidence. After the hearing, the Faculty Adviser will

prepare a short synopsis of the proceedings for the Graduate School, who, at the year's end, will submit a report of the Council's activities to the Faculty Senate.

### **Article III: Duties of Honor Council Officers and Members**

Section I: The duties of the President shall be as follows:

- 1) to appoint Core Members, subject to approval of the Graduate Student Council, and appoint At-Large Members, as necessary for investigations and hearings
- 2) to set the time for and to preside at all hearings and other meetings of the Graduate Honor Council;
- 3) to appoint a secretary, who shall record the entire proceedings of all hearings on tape;
- 4) to appoint a hearing body to review the evidence and to determine a verdict;
- 5) to report all convictions to the Graduate School and to provide an overview to the Graduate Student Council;
- 6) to serve on the Executive Board of the Graduate Student Council;
- 7) to ensure that all students and faculty members under the jurisdiction of the Graduate Honor Council are informed of its function and their responsibilities under the Honor Code.

Section II: The duties of the Vice-President shall be as follows:

- 1) to notify an accused student of the charges against him/her;
- 2) to appoint investigators for each case;
- 3) to receive a written report from the investigators explaining their findings and submit that report to the President.

Section III: The duties of Core Members and At-Large Members shall be as follows:

- 1) to participate in investigations as assigned by the Vice-President
- 2) to serve on hearing panels as assigned by the President.

Section IV: If the President of the Graduate Honor Council is unable to serve for any reason, including a potential conflict of interest, the Vice-President shall serve as acting President and shall appoint an acting Vice-President. If the Vice-President is unable to serve, then the President shall appoint an acting Vice-President

#### **Article IV: Investigations:**

Section I: Contacting the Graduate Honor Council should be the first step taken by anyone who perceives a violation of the Honor Code. When the President is notified of an allegation, he/she shall inform the Vice-President, who will assign three investigators, one of whom may be the Vice-President himself/herself, to review and investigate the allegation. The investigators shall:

- 1) Meet with the accuser(s) and any material witnesses, and collect all pertinent materials and information;
- 2) Interview the accused and present him/her with the evidence accompanying the allegations;
- 3) Compile a written report of the findings of the investigation to be submitted to the Vice-President.

Section II: The investigators must maintain impartiality and confidentiality in all proceedings. No person shall investigate a case in which they are directly or indirectly involved through personal acquaintance, bias, or conflict of interest or are otherwise unsuitable.

Section III: If there is no representative from the department from which an investigation arises, a non-voting consultant from that department may be appointed by the President of the Graduate Honor Council. In the event that more than one department is involved, non-voting representatives from each department involved in the investigation may be appointed by the President to advise the Graduate Honor Council.

Section IV: Upon completion of the investigation, the Vice President shall send the findings to the President.

#### **Article V: Hearings**

Section I. Upon receiving the report of an investigation, the President will decide if a hearing should be before a Small Panel or Large Panel. A Small Panel shall consist of the President plus two persons selected for the hearing, while a Large Panel shall consist of the President plus eight persons. The truthfulness of the accused, the severity of the violation and the degree of premeditation will help to determine the format of the hearing. The accused may also request that the case be heard in front of a Small Panel; however, after hearing the relevant facts, the Small Panel may decide that the hearing should be before a Large Panel.

Section II: Hearings will be called by the President of the Graduate Honor Council, who will also serve as chair of the hearing.

Section III: All hearings shall be closed, and their proceedings held in confidence, unless a defendant requests an open hearing

Section IV: The accused and the accuser shall be present at the time of the hearing. Each shall present his/her case, using, if he/she desires, witnesses, who may be questioned by any party in the hearing or by the members of the Honor Council. Witnesses shall be present only during the time of their testimony. The accused may bring a faculty adviser of his/her own choosing or the President of the Graduate Honor Council will appoint one.

Section V: Determination of guilt or innocence shall be by two-thirds vote of the appointed hearing committee.

Section VI: If the accused admits guilt, a Small Panel will meet and determine whether they should decide upon a penalty, or bring it before a Large Panel for a decision.

Section VII: No person shall participate in a hearing on a case in which they are directly or indirectly involved through personal acquaintance, bias, or conflict of interest or are otherwise unsuitable. Any member of the Graduate Honor Council who is from the same department as the accused shall not vote on this particular case due to a potential conflict of interest. The two investigators will also be excused from the hearings in whose investigation they were involved.

Section VIII: If a member is unable to attend, or if a member is involved in the investigation, or if a member declares himself/herself ineligible or incompetent to take part in the investigation because of a conflict of interest, or if two members of the Honor Council object to a member's participation in a hearing on other grounds, then the President of the Graduate Honor Council shall appoint a temporary member to the Honor Council.

Section IX: If the Honor Council learns that any participant in the hearing has been harassed in any way, it shall notify the Graduate School at once, so that appropriate action may be taken.

Section X: If the accused refuses to appear before the Honor Council, he or she shall be tried *in absentia*. If the accuser refuses to appear at the hearing, the charges shall be dropped.

Section XI: After all testimony has been taken from both the accuser and the accused, the hearing room shall be cleared, and the Honor Council shall deliberate in private until a verdict has been reached. At that time, the accused shall be called into the

hearing room and informed of the decision by the President of the Honor Council. The outcome of the hearing, whether it is a vindication or a conviction (regardless of any penalty involved), will be reported in writing by the President within a week after the hearing to the accused, the accuser, and to the Graduate School.

## **Article VI: Penalties**

Section I: Where guilt has been established, penalties shall be decided upon by a unanimous vote of the Small Panel, or seven of the nine members of the Large Panel.

Section II: The Council shall choose from among the following penalties:

- 1) Reprimand
- 2) Failure of work in which the violation occurred
- 3) Failure of the course in which the violation occurred
- 4) Suspension from the Graduate School for a period of not less than the remainder of the semester and not more than two semesters
- 5) Expulsion from the Graduate School

Section III. Penalties of suspension and expulsion shall only be determined by a Large Panel. The Graduate Honor Council, in the case of a reprimand, will carry out the penalty. When it involves failure of the work or course, the faculty responsible for the course will carry out the penalty, and the Graduate School, when it involves suspension or expulsion from the Graduate School.

## **Article VII: Appeals**

Section I: Appeals of decisions of the Graduate Honor Council shall be directed to the Appellate Review Board.

Section II: Appeals shall be presented in written form, explaining the basis of the appeal, to the Chair of the Appellate Review Board within seven days of the time the decision is handed down by the Graduate Honor Council.

## **Article VIII: Amendments**

Section I: Amendments to the Rule of the Graduate Honor Council may be proposed by any member of the Graduate Honor Council and shall be submitted to the Officers and Core Members of the Honor Council, the Graduate Student Council and the Graduate Faculty Council for approval.

## APPENDIX

### Faculty Information

The Vanderbilt Honor System was instituted in 1875 with the first final examination administered by the University. A student's personal integrity then, as now, was presumed to be sufficient assurance that in academic matters one did one's own work without unauthorized help from any other source. The Honor System presumes that all work submitted as part of academic requirements is the product of the student submitting it unless credit is given with proper reference or citation or as prescribed by the course instructor. The Honor System is not a panacea for all acts of academic dishonesty, nor does it automatically ensure the honorable behavior of all students in academic matters. It is the spirit – an ideal – that permeates the entire educational process at Vanderbilt University.

The Honor System is administered by the Honor Councils. The Undergraduate Honor Council has jurisdiction over all undergraduates, while the Graduate School and each of the professional schools have their own Honor Councils to administer the Honor System for their respective students. This document deals with the Graduate Honor Council.

Faculty members have an important role in the Honor System at Vanderbilt. Although the Honor Councils undertake each year to educate students in the meaning of the Honor System, it falls to the faculty to make the Honor System an integral part of the academic life of the University. Faculty members can accomplish this in the following manner:

At the start of the semester's work in a course, a statement demonstrating the faculty member's support of the Honor System is most beneficial. In this statement, the faculty member should explain what constitutes a violation of the Honor Code in the course, including the limits on collaboration with other students and the use of outside sources. If such matters are stated explicitly, misunderstanding about assignments may be reduced.

A faculty member should neither punish nor excuse Honor Code violations. If a faculty member has reason to believe that the Honor Code has been breached, he or she is obligated to take action in one of the following ways:

- 1) Issue a personal warning to the student(s) suspected of academic dishonesty that, unless the action which led to the suspicion ceases, the incident will be reported to the Graduate Honor Council,

OR

- 2) Report the incident to the Graduate Honor Council.

The flagrancy of the violation determines which course of action the faculty member is expected to follow. The option of warning the student personally is open to the faculty member only in the event of a minor suspicion or if evidence is not available. If suspicion is strong or if evidence is available, the faculty member is obligated to report the incident to the Graduate Honor Council. It should be understood, however, that the faculty member need not have evidence in hand before notifying the Council – just suspicion well founded. The Council will investigate all cases.

To report a violation, the faculty member should notify the Graduate Honor Council through its present President, or other appropriate persons designated in the school. An investigating committee selected from the Council will then call on the faculty member to discuss the case and receive whatever evidence is available. The investigators will then interview the accused and make arrangements for a hearing.

The faculty member need not consult or discuss the matter with the accused either before or after the Council has been notified. Vanderbilt students recognize the Honor Council as the judicial branch of the Honor System. It handles all matters pertaining to a case, including, if the instructor wishes, the notification of the accused student.