



Refer to the [Bylaws](#) for complete details.

### 1. What happens if I'm accused of an Honor Code violation?

The Honor Council process includes an investigation and a hearing.

Once the violation has been reported to the Honor Council, the Chief Justice assigns the case to a justice to serve as an impartial investigator whose purpose is to collect any information related to the alleged violation. The investigating justice emails the accused student the Notice of Alleged Violation that explains the charge of the Honor Code violation. The investigating justice then meets with the accused student to review the violation, possible sanctions, the student's rights and responsibilities, types of hearings (formal or informal), hearing procedures, and the list of justices who may be recused from the hearing. The investigating justice also collects any evidence for the case. The accused student makes a statement about the alleged incident.

The investigating justice also collects evidence and testimonies from the relevant faculty member and witnesses. The investigating justice will assemble the evidence and testimonies into an investigative report that is submitted to the Associate Chief Justice prior to the hearing.

At the hearing, the accused student will appear before the Honor Council and provide a statement about the alleged incident. The accused student is present during the entire hearing, excluding Council deliberations, and may ask questions to the faculty member and witnesses. The investigating justice serves as a witness at the hearing. The accused student may invite a person of support to the hearing for the purposes of consultation and/or emotional support. The accused student will receive the final decision within ten (10) business days from the hearing.

### 2. What is the difference between a formal and informal hearing?

A **formal hearing** is conducted when a student pleads "responsible" or "not responsible" to violating the Honor Code. The Council convenes to adjudicate the case and determine the sanction(s). Witnesses attend the hearing, and the faculty member attends the hearing or, if absent, submits a statement. A full panel with a minimum of five (5) voting justices must be present at the formal hearing to decide the verdict and recommend the sanction(s).

An **informal hearing** may be conducted if the accused student pleads "responsible" to violating the Honor Code and has not previously been found responsible for an Honor Code violation. Since the

accused student admits to being responsible for the violation, the Council only convenes to decide and recommend the sanction(s). The accused student does not receive a lesser sanction just because an informal hearing is conducted; the sanction is based on

The accused student waives the right to a formal hearing. A three-person panel of voting justices must be present at the hearing. An informal hearing cannot be conducted if there are multiple accused students in the case. The accused student must formally request the informal hearing, and the Chief Justice must grant approval for an informal hearing.

The Council reserves the right to pre-select the type of hearing at any point in the process.

**3. If I plead responsible for the violation and have an informal hearing, am I guaranteed a lesser sanction?**

No. The sanction is not based on how you plead or the type of hearing (formal or informal). The Honor Council may consider a range of sanctions for an Honor Code violation, and the Council may elect to consider extenuating circumstances when recommending a sanction. The typical sanction for a first offense for a violation of cheating or plagiarism is a zero on the assignment. Typical sanctions for repeated offenses include failure of course or a recommendation for suspension or expulsion.

**4. Are hearings held in the summer?**

Yes. The Council conducts formal and informal hearings in the summer from the first business day following commencement to the last business day in May. Formal hearings held in summer have fewer justices. Hearings held in the summer are conducted virtually.

The investigating justice must inform the accused student of the option of a summer hearing, a formal or informal hearing is determined, and the student must elect to schedule the hearing by the last business day in May or delay the hearing until the following fall semester. There is no penalty to the accused student for delaying the hearing until the following fall semester.

Alleged violations that occur in the summer will be adjudicated in the following fall semester.

**5. How do I report a violation?**

Violations are reported in the MyMercer student portal under the Academics section.

**6. What are the possible consequences for a violation of the Honor Code?**

If found responsible for violating the Honor Code, the student will be subject to one or more of the following sanctions:

- **Educational sanction:** a sanction due to a gross misunderstanding of citations and formatting that led to plagiarism. If a student receives an educational sanction, it is the student's responsibility to complete the academic training as assigned; otherwise, the student receives a failure of course.
- **Censure:** a reprimand due to the student's grossly inappropriate behavior. The sanction of censure does not affect the student's course grade or academic standing at the University.
- **Zero on the assignment**
- **Failure of course:** a course grade of F which will appear on the student's transcript.
- **Suspension:** the termination of the student's attendance at the University for an indefinite or specified period of time. The suspended student may not be on University property without prior approval from the Office of the Provost. Stipulations may be applied to the student for ending the suspension.
- **Expulsion:** the immediate and permanent separation of the student from the University.
- A **combination** of the above sanctions.

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#### **7. If accused, should I talk to my instructor or accuser about the case?**

No. Faculty members are advised to refer all communication about a pending case to the Honor Council. It is best for an accused student not to communicate with the faculty about the allegation once it is being investigated so as not to interfere with the investigative process. Of course, the accused student will continue to communicate with the faculty member during class and about the course and/or research.

#### **8. Can I bring someone with me to the hearing?**

Yes. You may bring a person of support provided that the person of support is a current undergraduate student or employee at Mercer University or another person (with advance approval from the Chief Justice) for the purposes of consultation and/or emotional support. The person of support will not serve as a witness or be charged in the case. The person of support cannot speak on behalf of the accused student nor ask questions of any faculty, witness, or Council member. Consultation must take place in a manner that does not disrupt the proceedings. The accused student

must notify the investigating justice at least five (5) business days prior to the hearing if the student will be bringing a person of support to the hearing. When multiple students are charged from the same incident (or a related incident), accused students are not allowed to have the same person of support at any point during the proceedings.

### **9. How do I prepare for the hearing?**

- You will be asked to provide an opening statement that is a description of the incident (What happened?). You may write/type a statement and read it aloud at the hearing.
- After you review the evidence prior to the hearing, write questions that you want to ask the faculty, investigating justice (as a witness), and other witnesses during the hearing. You cannot ask questions to other accused students, if there are multiple accused students in the case.
- You may invite a person of support to attend the hearing with you. See FAQ question #7.
- Dress professionally: Ironed buttoned-down or collared shirts, blouses, dress slacks, khaki pants, and dresses and skirts that hit at the knee, slightly above the knee, or below the knee. Shoes can be loafers, dress shoes, heels, dress sandals, and flats.  
Avoid: Jeans, T-shirts, tank tops, sleeveless shirts, exercise clothing, loungewear, leggings, shorts, mini-skirts (or very short dresses), flip-flops, and sneakers
- Arrive 15 minutes before your scheduled hearing.
- Contact your investigating justice if you have any questions prior to the hearing.

### **10. What is a character witness statement?**

The character witness statement is a formal letter to the Council written by a Mercer student or employee who knows the accused student and can attest to the student's positive character traits and moral conduct. The accused student is allowed to submit no more than two character witness statements as evidence to the Council. Character witness statements will not be read aloud at the hearing, and the character witness does not attend the hearing.

#### Writing a Good Character Witness Statement

- Introduce yourself and state the purpose of the letter. Identify the name of the accused student.
- Explain your history and relationship with the accused student. List specific examples of the accused student's positive character traits and good deeds and/or service to others.
- Explain how the sanction may affect the accused student. Explain how the accused student has learned a lesson from the experience. Include your email address and phone number in case the Council has questions.

### **11. Appearing before the Honor Council is stressful for me. What can I do to alleviate my anxiety?**

The mental health and well-being of our students at Mercer University is a top priority. Here are some suggestions to help alleviate your stress about appearing before the Honor Council:

- Make sure you understand the policies and procedures of the Honor Council that are posted in the [Bylaws](#), so you know what to expect at the hearing
- Contact your investigating justice or the Chief Justice at [honorcouncil@mercer.edu](mailto:honorcouncil@mercer.edu) with any questions you have throughout the process.
- Remember that you may bring a person of support with you to the hearing. The person of support is a current Mercer undergraduate student or employee or another person (with advance approval from the Chief Justice) to provide consultation and/or emotional support.
- Contact the staff at the [Counseling and Psychological Services \(CAPS\)](#) office on campus.
- Take a look at the [CDC](#) website that provides multiple resources on taking care of your emotional health.

#### **12. If I am found responsible, what appears on my transcript?**

If the sanction is failure of course, then the failing grade will appear on the transcript. There is not an indication of an Honor Code violation on the transcript.

#### **13. If I am found responsible, will the violation be reported to graduate/professional schools or future employers?**

If the student has given permission to the graduate/professional school to obtain information from Mercer University and the other school contacts the Honor Council, the Council provides the date, verdict, and sanction from the case. The Council also indicates if the student is involved in any current investigations that have not yet been brought to a hearing.

#### **14. What if I complete or withdraw from the course before the hearing?**

If an accused student completes or withdraws from the course in question prior to the Honor Council's investigative report or hearing, a letter will be sent to the accused student stating that the student is suspected of an Honor Code violation, an investigation has been or will be conducted, and a hearing may be held. Prior to the hearing, an Incomplete will be reflected on the student's record for the course in question, and registration and transcript holds will be placed on the student's University record while the case is pending.

#### **15. Can I appeal the decision?**

Yes. The accused student may appeal the Honor Council's decision to the Dean of the accused student's school/college within three (3) business days from the Notice of Decision. Requests for extensions must be submitted to the Dean prior to the expiration of the three-day period. The appeal request form is available in MyMercer. An appeal is only admissible on the following grounds:

- Significant procedural errors occurred that substantially affected the outcome of the hearing and/or violated the student's rights.
- New information or evidence that was not presented at the original hearing becomes available and could reasonably be expected to affect the original decision.
- The imposed sanction was disproportionate to the violation.

Failure on the student's part to demonstrate that there is reason to believe that one of the above grounds applies will result in an automatic denial of the appeal.

If unsatisfied with the Dean's decision in the appeal, the accused student may appeal the Dean's decision to the Provost in writing within three (3) business days of the Dean's decision. The decision of the Provost is final.

#### **16. Who can report me to the Honor Council?**

Students, faculty, and staff can report a student to the Honor Council. All students consent to following the Honor Code upon entering Mercer University:

*I pledge to hold myself to the highest standards of academic integrity while at Mercer University. I further pledge that I will hold my peers to these standards by reporting any violations I observe and that I will foster a spirit of honesty in the University's academic environment.*

#### **17. Who forms the Honor Council?**

The Honor Council consists of a minimum of ten (10) voting student members and at least one faculty advisor from each of Mercer's traditional undergraduate programs on the Macon campus including the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, School of Business, School of Engineering, College of Education, School of Music, and College of Health Professions. The Honor Council serves under the authority of the Provost of Mercer University.

#### **18. How do I join the Macon Traditional Undergraduate Honor Council?**

At the beginning of the spring semester, applications for undergraduate students to join the Honor Council will be made available by the Executive Board of the Honor Council. Rising sophomores, rising juniors, and rising seniors who meet the requirements may apply. In addition to the application, two

letters of recommendation from faculty members, advisors, or work supervisors at Mercer University are required.

Members must maintain a minimum cumulative grade point average of 2.5 and not be found responsible of an Honor Code or Student Code of Conduct violation while attending the University.

The Executive Board will review applications and select new members. Student justices are appointed during the spring semester at the successful completion of Honor Council training.

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