MACON UNDEGRADUATE HONOR SYSTEM POLICY AND PROCEDURE

This Honor System shall function only in those schools at the Macon Campus which offer undergraduate degrees. Academic integrity at Mercer is maintained through the Honor System. The Honor System at Mercer demands of each student the responsibility for his or her own honest comportment and assumes the corollary responsibility that each one will report any violations of the Honor Code about which he or she has information.

During the spring of 1954, the College of Liberal Arts students recognized a need for an Honor System on campus. Following extensive deliberation, a petition was presented to the student body by the president of the student body, Joseph Hendricks, CLA 1955. After a general election, the student body adopted the form of a pledge to be signed by each student on every examination.

The first Honor Council consisted of eight members, the president, vice president, and secretary of the student body and the president of each class, and had the responsibility of enforcing the Honor Code. Then, in 1956, the council was changed to consist of nine persons who were not necessarily class or student government officers.

Since 1956, there have been other significant changes. An amendment was passed which requires the reporting of cheating or other academic dishonesty as well as the pledge that one has not given or received aid. This code is now central to the Honor System. Every student consents to the following 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."

In addition, each student is personally responsible for knowing the rights and obligations as set forth in the Honor System printed in The Lair. The student is also expected to cooperate completely and to participate fully in the Honor System. Students who refuse to accept the Honor Code will be denied admission.

Definition of Mercer Honor System

The Honor System, based on the Honor Code, is established, interpreted, and administered by the student body. The aim of the Honor System is to promote complete freedom within the academic community—a freedom that is based on a trust between students and faculty. The Honor Council, in its role as the judiciary body for the System, supports that freedom and guards that trust.

At Mercer University, each student enrolling in a class offered by an undergraduate school or college on the Macon Campus subscribes to the System, whether during the regular academic year, the summer semester, or evening classes. The faculty subscribes to and supports fully the Honor System. The Honor System places responsibility for honesty where it belongs: the individual student or faculty member. The individual is responsible for reporting any academic dishonesty he or she may see as well as being responsible for his or her own honesty. By placing the responsibility on the individual, each student and faculty member becomes the guardian of the Honor System.

The Honor Council

Elected officials of the Honor Council include the Chief Justice who presides in a non-voting capacity at hearings, Associate Chief Justice who performs the duties of the Chief Justice should he/she be unable to attend, and the Clerk who performs administrative duties of the council. Each justice is appointed for leadership ability, character, interest in the undergraduate colleges, honesty in all areas, and scholarship. At present, the Honor Council is composed of a minimum of five justices. The faculty advisors and the Chief Justice serve in a non-voting capacity. Subject to approval by the university provost, the Honor Council sets forth its own procedure.

What Constitutes a Violation of the Honor Code

A violation of the Honor Code involves cheating, plagiarism, academic negligence, or other acts which compromise academic integrity. It is the responsibility of the student to ascertain what would constitute a violation of the Honor Code in any given situation. One has an additional responsibility to understand fully an instructor’s position in special situations, which may emerge in his or her course. Ignorance or disapproval of an instructor’s expressed class policy is not an excuse for an Honor Code violation.

Cheating is defined as the possession, communication, or use of information, materials, notes, study aids or any electronic devices not permitted by the instructor in an academic exercise, or unauthorized communication with another person during such an exercise. The following are some examples 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;
3. Giving or receiving facts or ideas either verbally or in writing during a test situation;
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;
6. Using unassigned translations in a reading course in a foreign language;
7. The presence of cellphones, smart watches, or other wearable technologies not explicitly allowed by the instructor that can send, receive, or view information relevant to the academic exercise.

It is to be emphasized that these examples are not the only possible ones. They are listed to give the student a general idea of what constitutes an Honor Code violation.

**Plagiarism** is defined as the use of ideas, facts, phrases, or additional materials 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, regardless of misinformation, carelessness, sloppiness, or typographical errors.

**Self-Plagiarism** is work of an individual completed in a prior course, unless explicitly exempted by the instructor. Work from a prior course is considered published work and must therefore be cited as such.

**Academic negligence** is unacceptable conduct of a student during a testing situation, including tests, outside assignments, papers, homework, and lab reports. It may include the student's failure to understand the instructor's specific instructions. Plagiarism that results from negligence is not academic negligence – it is plagiarism and will be dealt with as such.

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

**Laboratory and Referencing Procedures**

To avoid academic dishonesty in laboratory work and in the writing of papers, the following laboratory and referencing procedures should be used:

**Laboratory Procedures**

1. Chemistry and Physics experiments, Psychology and other reports, and Biology lab plates are to be the work of the individual student, not the combined efforts of a group of students unless the instructor stipulates otherwise.
2. There must be (where applicable, e.g., Psychology) exact and accurate annotation and credit given for material taken and used.
3. The instructor has the right to delineate what constitutes academic dishonesty in the laboratory, as in the classroom. Responsibility rests solely on the student to determine from the instructor what is required and allowed in any questionable situation.

**Referencing Procedures**

1. If an instructor specifies a class policy on referencing, it must be followed.
2. If no class policy is specified, it is the student’s responsibility to learn of any departmental manuals. If a department accepts such manuals, their policies on referencing should be followed. For example: *The Council of Biological Editors Style Manual* for the Biology Department or *The Handbook of Authors of Papers in The Journal of the American Chemical Society* for the Chemistry Department.
3. If there is no specified policy or departmental manual, the policy must be as is specified in the most current *MLA Handbook*.

**Procedure for Reporting Honor Code Violations**

Each student is responsible for reporting any and all violations of the Honor Code. The student accepts this responsibility when he or she enters the University and is expected of him or her as a vital participant in the 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 System.

The set procedure for reporting a violation is:
1. If a student sees, knows, or hears an act of dishonesty, he or she is responsible for reporting the suspected violation to the instructor concerned or to a member of the Honor System. The primary obligation of the student is to see that the alleged violation reaches the Honor System as soon as possible.

2. If one knows of or sees an act of academic dishonesty, a student may go to the student suspected of the violation and ask him or her to report the violation personally, stating that if this is not done within a certain period of time, it will be reported.

3. A student should remember in any and all cases that one's primary duty and obligation is to report the act either directly to the Honor Council or to the instructor. Even in cases where there is only suspicion, the details of the suspicion should be divulged to the instructor.

The Honor System rests primarily with the students of the University. It carries with it the personal responsibility of individual honesty and the personal obligation of individual involvement to see that no violation goes unreported. The system cannot and will not work unless each and every student accepts responsibility and exercises this responsibility.

Rights and Responsibilities

The following are the Rights and Responsibilities for charged students and student witnesses. These Rights and Responsibilities are binding to all Mercer students that come before the Honor Council as charged students and student witnesses.

Rights and Responsibilities of the Charged Student

1. The student alleged to have made a violation of the Honor Code shall have the following due process rights in the event that one shall face a hearing before the Honor Council:
   a. The right to be notified of the date, time, and place of their hearing at least seventy-two hours prior to the hearing itself. This right may be waived by joint consent of the charged student and the Council.
   b. The right to be presumed not responsible of Honor Code violations until proven responsible by clear and convincing evidence. Clear and convincing evidence means that the Honor Council must feel that it is substantially more likely than not that an Honor Code violation occurred.
   c. The right to due process and equal protection under the Student Government Association Constitution and subsequent legislation.
   d. The right to be informed of all charges against them and to review all evidence at least seventy-two hours before a hearing.
   e. The right to face all student situational witnesses and to question those witnesses through written questions as well as re-examine all evidence in the hearing.
   f. The right to call character witnesses on their own behalf. Character witnesses are limited to Mercer University students, faculty and staff unless prior approval is granted by the Chief Justice or Associate Chief Justice.
   g. The right to counsel provided that said counsel is a current undergraduate student at Mercer University. Counsel may be present at the testimony of the witnesses and the charged student; however, counsel will not be permitted to answer questions in place of the student.
   h. The right to request the removal, with cause, of any member of the Honor Council from the hearing. The Honor Council shall retain the right to deny this request.
   i. The right to appeal the decisions of the Honor Council. This right must be exercised within four business days after the hearing takes place.
   j. The student has the right of full free speech and therefore may choose to remain silent when questions are posed and have no inference of responsibility made from their silence.

2. The charged student shall have the following responsibilities in the event that one shall face a hearing before the Honor Council:
   a. A general duty to cooperate fully with the Council in all matters pertaining to the investigation and hearing.
   b. A duty to be present at the hearing at its scheduled time. If the student fails to appear or to notify the Council, the hearing shall proceed in their absence.
   c. It is expected that all relevant questions will be answered frankly, fully, and honestly, remembering that false information or willful omission of evidence could carry additional charges.
   d. The student acknowledges that the entire hearing may be recorded and that the recording may be reviewed if the final decision of the Council is appealed.
e. A duty to contact character witnesses and/or the charged student’s chosen student counsel and refer them to the investigating justice.

f. The charged student does not have the right to discuss the investigation with anyone other than their student counsel, the Investigating Justice, or the Chief Justice. All contact with members of the Honor Council must take place only between the student counsel and the Chief Justice or their appointed representative.

g. Harassment of witnesses, justices, instructors, or other charged students is strictly forbidden and will be considered a violation of the values of the community of respect and lead to an investigation by the university judicial system.

Rights and Responsibilities of Witnesses

1. The student who is serving as a witness for an Honor Council investigation and hearing shall have the following rights:
   a. The right to be notified of the date, time, and place of their hearing at least seventy-two hours prior to the hearing itself.
   b. The student has the right of full free speech and therefore may choose to remain silent when questions are posed and have no inference of responsibility made from their silence.
   c. The right that neither the witness’ person nor property will be insulted, molested, threatened, or damaged because of their participation in an investigation and hearing.

2. The student who is serving as a witness for an Honor Council investigation and hearing shall have the following responsibilities:
   a. A general duty to cooperate fully with the Council in all matters pertaining to the investigation and hearing.
   b. A duty to be present at the hearing at its scheduled time. If the student fails to appear the student could be charged with contempt.
   c. The student acknowledges that the entire hearing may be recorded and that the recording may be reviewed if the final decision of the Council is appealed.
   d. It is expected that all relevant questions will be answered frankly, fully, and honestly, remembering that false information or willful omission of evidence could carry additional charges.
   e. The student witness does not have the right to discuss the investigation with anyone other than the Investigating Justice or the Chief Justice. All contact with members of the Honor Council must take place only between the student witness and the Chief Justice or their appointed representative.
   f. Harassment of other witnesses, justices, instructors, or charged students is strictly forbidden and will be considered a violation of the values of the Community of Respect and leads to an investigation by the University Judicial System.

Sanctions for Honor Code Violations

If the student is found responsible for violation of the Honor Code, the possible sanctions are:

1. Immediate Expulsion;
2. Suspension;
3. An Honor Council “F” in a course;
4. Educational Sanction
5. Zero on the assignment;
6. Letter of Censure;

Sanctions for academic negligence include a letter of censure and other sanctions not exceeding a letter of censure. Sanctions for providing false information include immediate expulsion, suspension, censures, or other discretionary sanctions. Educational sanctions may also be selected by the Honor Council to accompany or take the place of the sanctions listed above. Educational sanctions are designed for underclassmen or transfer students that show a gross misunderstanding of plagiarism.

Honor Council Records

The following policy shall apply to records of Honor Code violations:

1. No records will be kept for students who were accused of one or more academic transgressions, but found “not responsible” by the Honor Council;
2. Records will be kept indefinitely for students who were found responsible for any violation of the Honor Code, regardless of the severity of the violation;
3. Upon being asked to provide information about applicants to a graduate school, professional school, or place of employment, the College Dean, at his or her discretion, will determine to what extent Honor Code violations shall be released.
Appeals Process
The student may appeal in writing to the Dean or the Dean’s appointed representative of the College/School in which he/she is enrolled within four school days after written notification of the results of the Honor Council hearing. He/she may appeal on the following grounds:

1. New information (available after the hearing) of a nature that the verdict or sanction may have been different;
2. Significant procedural error occurred which substantially affected the outcome of the hearing; *
3. The sanction imposed was inconsistent with the weight of the information.

*Procedural flaws alone are not grounds for an appeal. Significant procedural errors that may have affected the verdict or sanction will be considered.

Under normal circumstances the Dean will convene an advisory committee to assess the merit of the appeal. This committee may be composed of justices from the Honor Council and one or more members of the faculty.

The Dean shall have the authority to act de novo to determine the issues of both responsibility and sanction(s). The accused may appeal the Dean’s decision to the President of the University or to the President’s appointed representative.

An Alternative — Administrative Hearing
When the Student Honor Council is not sitting (e.g., during the summer), the student alleged to have made a violation of the Honor Code may select an alternative due process hearing to expedite his/her case involving an alleged Honor System violation. This hearing will be presided over by the Dean or the Dean’s appointed representative of the College/School in which the student is enrolled. The Administrative Hearing Board is composed of one academic administrative officer appointed by the Dean or the Dean’s appointed representative. The Dean or the Dean’s appointed representative may; in addition, appoint available Honor System justices and a faculty member from the appropriate school to this hearing, guided by the exigency of the situation. Honor System rules and procedures relating to (1) the evidence to sustain a verdict of guilty and (2) the fairness of the sanction(s) shall apply to this hearing.

The student shall have the right to the test of “clear and convincing evidence” as to the evidence against them. The student also has the right to a sanction that fits the violation and that, where appropriate, includes mitigating circumstances. Precedents set by the Honor Council will be considered in all decisions made in an administrative hearing. The student shall have the right to all appellate processes detailed in the Honor System.

The student may select the Honor Council as his/her forum to decide responsibility and sanctions, when the Council sits during the regular academic year (Fall & Spring). If the Student Honor Council does not resolve the issue of the student’s alleged Honor System violation by the end of the Spring Semester plus ten days, the student, having the right to a speedy hearing, may select the Alternative-Administrative hearing as his/her proper due process hearing. However, the student must be warned that the right to the Honor Council, with its long tradition of benefits on behalf those charged with an Honor Code Violation, will be waived if the accused selects the Alternative-Administrative hearing.

In the event that multiple students are accused of a violation on the same assignment and all students accused agree that an administrative hearing is necessary, one such hearing will occur. No administrative hearing for an individual student will be granted in cases involving multiple students.