

Honor System of the School of Medicine

As medical students and physicians, we demand honorable and ethical behavior from ourselves and peers. To protect our sense of responsibility to each other and to our patients we must, as students, learn to develop and maintain fair, ethical standards. Without this strong internal system, we risk watching this task fall under the jurisdiction of others less qualified to make these decisions. Thus, we promote a strong Honor System. Our Honor Court provides the opportunity for medical students to participate in and value this self-governing responsibility.

I. Foundation

The School of Medicine of the Medical College of Georgia has operated a student-sponsored; faculty supported Honor System since 1953 when the System was adopted by the student body and faculty. The Honor System is comprised of an *Honor Code* and an *Honor Court*.

The responsibility for the System's implementation rests primarily with members of the student body, individually and collectively. Members of the faculty, staff and exam administrators are also responsible for supporting the code and following the procedures for reporting infractions to the Honor Court as entailed below (V.1 and 2). Matriculation in the School of Medicine shall be considered an agreement to abide by the Honor System.

II. Honor Code

The Honor Code requires honorable and ethical behavior in all educational situations and medical responsibilities irrespective of the degree of supervision, guidance, or monitoring provided by the faculty or staff, of all students in the School of Medicine.

The Honor Code specifically forbids:

1. Lying
2. Cheating, or attempted cheating
3. Stealing, or attempted stealing
4. Plagiarism
5. Failure to report the knowledge of an Honor Code violation
6. Failure to protect the confidential nature of the patient-physician relationship

Definitions

1. *Lying* is defined as knowingly furnishing false information.
2. *Cheating* is defined as the giving or receiving of unauthorized assistance that might give one student unfair advantage over another.
3. *Attempted Cheating* is defined as a willful act designed to accomplish cheating but falling short of the goal.
4. *Stealing* is defined as the unauthorized taking or appropriating of property.
5. *Attempted Stealing* is defined as a willful act designed to accomplish stealing but falling short of that goal.
6. *Plagiarism* is defined as the act of verbatim repetition, borrowing, or paraphrasing the work of another without crediting the source of material.

III. Honor Court

1. Jurisdiction: The Jurisdiction of the Honor Court shall be limited to violations of the Honor Code by students in the School of Medicine. This shall include all clinical, research, and classroom affairs.
2. Composition:

- a. *Members*: The court shall consist of five members from each class, with Freshman members joining during their fall semester (November). In addition, two faculty members shall serve as voting members of court. These faculty members shall be appointed by the Faculty Senate from the nominations submitted by the student members of the Honor Court. New nominations shall be submitted annually following the election of the new officers of the court at a meeting of the student members of the court.
 - b. *President*: The president shall direct the proceedings of the Honor Court and file a record of such proceedings with the office of the Dean, as subsequently directed herein, until a new court assumes its duties. The outgoing president shall preside at the initial meeting of the new court, which shall elect its president as the first order of business. The president-elect shall assume his office at the conclusion of that meeting.
 - c. *Vice President*: The vice-president shall advise the president and shall assist him in matters requiring the attention of the Court as described herein. The vice-president shall assume the office of President should the president become unable to discharge his appointed duties.
 - d. *Secretary*: The secretary shall record and distribute the minutes of Honor Court meetings and shall maintain a current list of members and their contact information. In addition, the secretary shall keep a record of all further proceedings of the court and provide it for the president's review.
3. Election of Members:
- a. Members of the Honor Court shall be elected from the Freshman class in the fall semester of each year.
 - b. The President of the Honor Court shall communicate with the President of the Freshman Class at the beginning of the fall semester, in order to select a date for a class meeting for the purpose of nominating and electing the members of the Honor Court.
 - c. The President of the Freshman Class shall notify the members of his class of the proposed date of the election not later than one week prior to that date.
 - d. The nomination and election of members of the Honor Court shall be conducted by the officers of the Freshman Class. However, the President of the Honor Court shall attend the election meeting in order to answer questions.
4. Term of Service: Each member of the Honor Court shall serve during good behavior, so long as he continues to be a student in the School of Medicine.
5. Replacement of Members: Seniors who graduate early shall not be replaced, but should other members be lost from the court for any reason, they shall be replaced by election from the appropriate class.
6. Meetings of the Honor Court:
- a. The Honor Court shall meet at the *call of the President* but in no event shall meetings be conducted less frequently than *one time* each academic semester exclusive of the summer semester.
 - b. A quorum for the purpose of regular business shall consist of not less than 1/2 of the voting members.
 - c. Each new court shall assume office and conduct its initial meeting not later than the second Thursday in December.

IV Examinations

Proctoring of examinations is undesirable, but this in no way limits the authority of persons who administer examinations to take such actions as they deem necessary to maintain decorum in examination room(s). Students shall be allowed adequate classroom space during an exam to minimize distraction and discomfort while working. It is suggested that exam administrators limit the taking of examinations to the main classroom(s) and the student module areas.

1. The following statement shall be typed (or written) at the end of each written examination or at the end of the answer sheet if it is separate from the examination,

"I pledge, to the best of my knowledge, I *observed or know*
of no violation of the Honor Code having taken place.
"Signature of the student."

2. An unsigned pledge shall be construed as intent to report a violation of the Honor Code. No examination paper with the pledge unsigned shall be returned, nor the grade recorded, until the student acknowledges his failure to sign the pledge. It should be noted that false signing of the pledge constitutes a violation of the Honor Code.
3. One of the Honor Court members will be available to check for unsigned exams and compiling a list of these names if needed.
4. The Honor Court member shall be responsible for confidentially inquiring of each name on the list regarding intent to file a report of a violation.
5. The person observing a violation of the Honor Code should report the violation to a member of the Honor Court within two weeks of its occurrence, with longer time granted according to the stipulations in Section V.
6. In the event of a National Board Exam, FLEX, or end of rotation exam, the person who witnessed an Honor Code violation is solely responsible for the notification of the Honor Court.
7. The Honor Court member responsible for a particular exam should inform the proctors of the exam, if there are proctors, as to who they are and that they will check the exams for signatures after the exam, if needed. He/she should also inform the proctor on proper procedure for identification and reporting of potential violations.

V. Reporting Violations of the Honor Code

1. If a student notices an Honor Code violation during an examination, he/she should notify the proctor, if one is present, of the suspected individual(s). If there is not a proctor present, notify the Professor, Attending, or secretary of that department, if they can be accessed outside of the exam room, in the same manner as mentioned above. All steps should be taken in a subtle manner as to not alarm anyone. After the exam, the accuser should talk to no one but the Honor Court President and the Case Investigator about the incident. Honor Court members can answer general questions about the notification procedure, but specific information about the case may only be discussed with the President or Vice-President.
2. Violations or possible violations of the Honor Code shall be reported in writing. The signed letter of accusation should name the alleged violator(s); and state in as much detail as possible the place, date, time, circumstances and other pertinent facts of the alleged offense. The letter should be received within 2 weeks of the purported violation. In the case in which the letter is not received within 2 weeks, the President and Vice-President shall meet to determine if the reported violation is serious enough to demand attention by the court and suspend the normal 2 weeks limit to accept letters of reported violations.
3. The letter shall be sealed in an envelope and given to any Honor Court member who shall within 48 hours of receipt of the letter, deliver the letter to the President.
4. Any student who believes that faculty are failing to carry out their responsibilities under the Honor System shall file a complaint using the format listed in (1.) above. In such cases, the president shall forward a copy of the written statement to the President of the Faculty Senate of the School of Medicine and the President of the Honor Court shall address this issue in his yearly report to the Faculty Senate.

VI. Pretrial Procedures

1. The Honor Court members shall be divided by the president into two groups (A,B), balanced among the members of the Court, including the Honor Court Faculty members and excluding the president and vice-president.
2. The President of the Honor Court will preside over all cases, but will not have a vote. The vice-president will assist the president but will not have a vote.
3. One of the two groups, (A, B) of Honor Court members will be chosen by the president to hear a trial.
4. Upon receipt of a letter of accusation, the president shall meet with the vice-president in order to decide whether the alleged offense, if sustained would constitute a violation of the Honor Code. If a unanimous decision cannot be made by the officers, the president shall call a special meeting of the court to decide this question by a simple majority vote of the quorum. At no time during such a called meeting are the names of the accused or accuser to be divulged. Only the nature of the alleged offense relative to the jurisdiction of the court is to be discussed.
5. Should it be determined that the alleged offense would constitute a violation of the Honor Code if substantiated, the officers shall:

- a. Select a *time, date, and place for the trial*, which shall be within two weeks of the original receipt of the letter of accusation by the president, except in the situation in which delaying the trial is necessary to insure all information pertinent to the case can be gathered.
 - b. Notify the accused by letter in advance of the hearing of:
 - 1) the alleged offense
 - 2) witnesses, accusers
 - 3) time, date, and place of trial
 - 4) his right to select one person, not on Honor Court, to serve as an advisor if he so desires. (This advisor may aid the accused in the preparation of a defense, may be present with the accused at the time of the hearing, but will not be allowed to speak before the Court.)
 - 5) the accused has an option of a prehearing plea of guilty. (In such a case, the accused should deliver to the President a signed plea of guilty. The president shall notify the case investigator (VI.c) of the plea. All parties shall then await the hearing for further disposition by the Court.)
 - c. Appoint a person, not on the Honor Court, to serve as case investigator. This investigator does not participate on the hearing panel and is never allowed to vote during the actual hearing; he/she presents an objective account of the investigation to the members of the Court. Prior to the trial, the investigator asks the accused to give an account of the events surrounding the alleged violation and explain that the accused may refuse to make a statement. The investigator then interviews other persons who might have been a part of or a witness to the alleged violation and collects all available evidence.
 - d. Notify by letter, the remaining Honor Court members of the date, time, and place of the hearing only. (No further information is to be made known to the court members who may hear the case.)
6. The President shall be available to answer any questions which the accused, or accuser may have about the workings of the honor system.
 7. The President should exercise his access to the MCG Legal Advisor whenever necessary to help maintain proper procedure and interpretation.
 8. The President shall make arrangements for separate waiting areas for the accused and the accuser(s) during the trial.

VII. Trial Procedures

1. Hearings shall be closed and all hearing proceedings shall be confidential. Deliberations of the court on findings or sentence shall be closed to all persons except members of the court. The hearing shall be closed to all persons except:
 - a. members of the Honor Court
 - b. the accused with advisor, if asked by the accused
 - c. witnesses and accusers, while testifying
 - d. other persons may be admitted by agreement of the accused person and the Honor Court
 - e. President.
2. All hearing proceedings, except deliberations of the court on findings and sentence, shall be recorded on tape. This tape recording shall serve as the official record of the hearing and shall be filed with the office of the Dean, along with a brief written summary of evidence, findings, and sentence. Should the accused desire to appeal a verdict or sentence, a copy of the tape recording of the hearing will be made available to him. In the event of a finding of "not guilty", the following statement shall be filed with the office of the Dean:

"The Honor Court of the School of Medicine met at (time) on (date) to hear evidence in the case of (person) who was accused of violating the Honor Code. After considering all available evidence, the Court found the accused not guilty."

This statement shall be signed by the president and vice president of the Honor Court.

3. The accused should be present during all proceedings except deliberations of the Court findings and sentence. However, any part or all of the hearing may be conducted in the absence of the accused if:
 - a. the accused voluntarily fails to appear for or absents himself from the hearing.

- b. the accused willfully obstructs the progress of the hearing to such a degree that the Court decides it is necessary to bar him from the hearing.
4. The accused shall be permitted to examine all evidence in the case. No evidence or testimony may be considered by the court unless such evidence or testimony has been presented in the presence of the accused or in accordance with sub paragraph 3a or 3b above.
 5. Hearing proceedings shall be conducted by the President of the Honor Court under the guidelines listed below:
 - a. The court shall be called to order by the President. The Vice-President shall call the roll. A quorum of 2/3 of the appointed court groups (either A or B) shall be required before the hearing can proceed.
 - b. The president shall read the original letter of accusation to the court.
 - c. The president shall ask the accused how he pleads. In the case of a "guilty" plea, the court shall proceed with 5f, g and h below
 - d. The case investigator shall be asked to present all witnesses and information gathered pertaining to the case. Following this presentation, questions will be allowed from the President, Court members, and accused. All questions relating to procedure shall be decided by the president.
 - e. The accused shall then be asked to present any evidence and/or witnesses pertinent to the defense. Questioning shall follow a format similar to (d.) above.
 - f. All persons except the Honor Court members shall be asked to leave the hearing room.
 - g. The Court shall then deliberate only the facts presented.
 - 1) The court shall first deliberate whether the accused is "guilty" or "not guilty" and shall take a vote on the same.
 - 2) If a verdict of "guilty" is made, the Court shall deliberate on the penalty, followed by a vote on the same.
 - 3) A 2/3 majority of present members shall be required for a guilty verdict and for the subsequent penalty.
 - h. The accused or any witness may be recalled by the Court before the verdict is reached. At that point, the hearing must be reconvened.
 - i. Following its vote, the Court shall recall the accused for the purpose of notifying him of the verdict. If a "guilty" verdict has been reached, the accused shall be told the Court's recommendation for penalty and shall be advised the Court's decision may be appealed within five working days of the trial. The actual date of the appeal will be set at the discretion of the Dean of the Medical School. The accused shall be advised that regardless of the final verdict, all Honor Court proceedings are to be kept in the strictest of confidence.

VIII. Penalties

1. The Court shall submit recommendations for penalties to the Dean of the School of Medicine who shall become responsible for implementation of that penalty. The Dean has the discretion to alter this penalty after a review of the court proceedings with the President of the Honor Court.
2. All persons found guilty by the Honor Court of an Honor Code violation shall have a written statement of the conviction entered in the permanent record of that student. This written statement may only be removed if the first appeals board, or Dean, overturns the conviction.
3. In addition, one or more of the following recommendations may be made:
 - a. A failing grade in the clerkship or course in which the offense occurred. This shall involve the assigning of an Honor Court "F" which shall not be negated with make-up of the involved work.
 - b. Comprehensive re-examination, written and/or oral, over any or all of the work in the involved course which had been covered prior to the time of conviction. This shall require negation of previously assigned grades and require reassignment of grades based on the re-examination.
 - c. Immediate suspension for the remainder of the school year.
 - d. Immediate expulsion from the School of Medicine.
4. The Court may make any other recommendation, which it feels would be appropriate penalty.

5. If the Court decides a grade change is warranted, this penalty shall be implemented through the office of the registrar and overseen by the Dean. There will be no notification made to the course director about the trial or the penalty in order to protect the guilty student from further punishment.

IX. Announcement of Findings

1. Only in the case of a "guilty" verdict will any announcement be made.
2. The announcement shall be made by the President of the Honor Court in the form of a verbal statement before the involved class or clerkship members and/or in the form of a written statement posted at the Post Office and on the glass windows opposite the Hamilton Wing classrooms.
3. The announcement shall include only the nature of the offense (not time, place, class, etc.) and the sentence rendered so as not to identify the individual (not time, place, class, etc.)
4. Under NO circumstances shall the names of the accused and/or accuser be announced.
5. The announcement shall be made within one week of the conclusion of the trial or upon exhaustion of all desired appeals.

X. Appeals

1. The first appeal may be made to the Dean of the School of Medicine. The Dean may either: (a) appoint three faculty members to review the trial proceedings or (b) uphold or overturn the Honor Court decision. The next two appeals comply with the Board of Regent's Policies.
2. The second appeal may be within five working days of the prior decision.
3. The third appeal may be made to the Board of Regents.
4. Each of the appeals must be within five working days of the prior decision.
5. Each Appeals Committee will function to determine whether or not to uphold or overturn the decision of the Honor Court. They will be concerned with the proceedings of the previous trial to determine if proper procedure was followed. They will be concerned with the evidence in the previous trial and whether or not it was substantial enough to support the verdict. They will also determine whether the student was treated fairly. If the Honor Court decision is overturned due to inappropriate procedure, then the case will be turned over to the Honor Court group who did not hear the original trial. If an Appeals Committee determines that the accused is guilty but the penalty delivered by the Honor Court is too harsh, then the same Court members will reconvene to establish a new penalty.
6. New evidence may be presented at the Appeal if provided more than 48 hours before the date of the appeal.

XI. Orientation

1. Student Orientation
 - a. Prior to Orientation, all incoming freshmen will be sent an agreement to be signed and turned in at Orientation stating that they have read the Honor Code, understand its meaning and implications and agree to abide by this Code.
 - b. Orientation of the incoming Freshman class shall be the responsibility of the Honor Court as a whole, with the Sophomore members acting as coordinators.
 - c. A thorough orientation shall be given during the first week following matriculation. Short daily sessions are suggested covering: The foundation of the system; the Honor Code; the Honor Court and how it functions; reporting of violations.
 - d. Periodic re-emphasis of the Honor Code will be the responsibility of the Court members of the respective classes. Sophomore members shall be responsible for the Freshman class until such time as Freshman members are elected.
2. Faculty Orientation
 - a. Orientation of the Faculty shall be the responsibility of the President of the Honor Court and the Court's faculty members.

- b. The Honor System shall be explained at the first faculty meeting, and copies of the Honor System shall be made available.
- c. It shall be emphasized that the Code is applicable in all phases of the student's medical education.
- d. The President of the Honor Court may make a yearly report to the Faculty Senate and the student body regarding the disposition of cases with the same constraints as listed under Section IX excepting IX.5.

Revision of the Honor System

Revisions shall require a simple majority of the voting members of the Honor Court, approval of the Dean of the School of Medicine, and ratification by a simple majority of the voting student body of the School of Medicine.

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