

## Emphasizing Honor Codes/Concepts as Developmental

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The concept of “Honor” is not one which resonates with today’s student. Over the past generation or two it has fallen into disuse and out of popular identity. For reasons developed later, the concept lacks the compelling force which it held for previous generations of students. In this paper we present the case that, in order to be relevant to today’s students, “Honor” must be viewed as a characteristic to be developed rather than a characteristic to be “protected from loss” during college. And, we will argue, rather than shedding the *concept* of honor due to the baggage of the term and its depiction in common culture, colleges and universities should embrace the concept of developing the next generation of citizens with integrity as part of the educational mission of transformation.

We will begin by discussing the broad landscape of today’s students, and will continue with a classification of Honor Codes and the entities responsible for their implementation. We will then argue for a movement away from the perception that “honor” can be lost and suggest that Honor Codes/Concepts should emphasize the positive aspect of students’ growth and development rather than the punitive enforcement. And, we will conclude by making the case that, as educators, we can make this concept integral to our work and central to our mission.

While categorization of students into segments is always difficult, we find that two general categories are helpful in discussing the issues of academic integrity and basic honesty. A brief discussion of traditional-aged students and adult learners is helpful in seeing how each group has a jaded view of honor, albeit from different perspectives. Both are influenced by the values debate in society and the very real societal acceptance of misrepresentation.

Many traditional-aged students arrive at college from a culture of questionable behavior. They have always known that politicians cannot be trusted, big business is dishonest and information is free for the taking. They come from a society which is always pressuring them for results, be it their family or a school system striving to stay ahead of the calls for outcomes assessment. They have also experienced a school environment which tolerates cheating because technology has advanced beyond means of enforcement and teachers often encounter problems from parents and administrators when they attempt to hold a student accountable. The combined effect is to dissuade many from trying. Perhaps even more troubling is that many recent high school graduates have a very limited perspective of absolute right and wrong, ascribing instead to a sense of situational ethics based on the students' best interest rather than promoting the greater good.

These environmental influences are overlaid on the characteristics ascribed to the "Millennial" student, born between 1980 and 2000. Howe and Strauss (2000), who did the pioneering work in understanding this generation, identified several characteristics that may serve to reinforce some of the challenges. This generation is perhaps the most

“protected, scheduled, structured, and shadowed generation.” Their parents have mediated their social interactions, reducing their practice in conflict resolution. They crave autonomy, but they have had little opportunity to make decisions on their own. And, their close “friendship” relationships with parents may muddle their authority.

And while they are technologically-savvy and always “in touch,” the true interpersonal situations are often a challenge. They report few heroes and role-models. And they tend to demonstrate respect, not awe, for authority. This respect quickly turns off when they see hypocrisy. And, as we have said, the culture has provided many opportunities for hypocrisy to be inferred.

The adult learner arrives in the college environment often for the second time. They may have been “shut out” from the opportunity earlier in their life. Or, they may have not used their first opportunity well. They are very motivated to do well as they have seen the opportunities that a college education has opened for others. However, they also bring their experiences from the workplace into the classroom. These experiences may include witnessing transgressions against ethical standards of a professional, some of which may have gone unpunished. They also often know firsthand the limits of their current education, the limits of corporate loyalty, and the importance of looking out for oneself.

Both the traditional student and the adult learner are part of a society that places situational value on honesty and intellectual property. We use the term situational value

because most would not condone stealing of physical property, but find taking intellectual property as in another category. The Rule of Law can be described by taking a Milton Friedman approach to extreme – if the government wishes you to obey the law it will place an enforcement mechanism in place. A metaphor for the position is the general disregard that speed limits are held unless one sees a patrol car. Society has us performing multiple risk assessments more influenced by the probability of getting caught than doing the right thing.

Many of the societal figures of “Moral Authority” have been shaken by the frequent and public transgressions of political, church and business leaders. The many “cover-ups” discovered, only go to reinforce that in additional dishonest behavior going on, the web of disseat will involve many others as its impact is hidden. Combined this has placed students in an environment that reduces trust, promotes cynicism and places any concept of honor as foreign in popular experience.

Again while any classification of honor codes/concepts will be imprecise, we view them as restrictive, guiding or advisory. *Restrictive honor codes* are ones which emphasize a lack of tolerance for dishonest behavior and generally call for the separation of the person found in default from the college. *Guiding honor codes* are based upon a series of actions and choices which provide advice to students and other participants regarding how issues are to be viewed and the appropriate actions taken. *Advisory codes* call for students to act in accordance with honest and ethical standards but provide little active engagement or enforcement.

These classifications should be viewed along a continuum that would range from no institutional statements concerning honesty through statements dealing with common values such as honesty and integrity through the three formalized codes.

It is important to superimpose the formal or implied existence of an honor code on the organizational entity or entities responsible for administering it. Over the past decades, honor codes have moved into a setting that requires the engagement of the College Administration and a great deal of legal review. A tension has always existed in systems that placed responsibility for honor codes on students or excluded them from meaningful participation. Today it is very difficult for a faculty member to place themselves in the position of being evaluated by students or administrators in dealing with matters of academic integrity.

We argue that most of the systems in being place too much emphasis on “Honor” being lost. Presumption in most systems presumes that the great majority are honorable and honest and that the Code is in place to punish violators. This approach is faulty because it is based upon the (false) presumption that the rules are understood and built on a foundation well established prior to arriving at college. It also tends to discount the situational perspective taken by students as to the impact of their behavior. Finally it tends to view that clearly defined boundaries of behavior exist.

We suggest that emphasis be shifted to the making codes developmental. From a presumption that everyone knows what is right, the code engages the campus community into a discussion and common sense of understanding. Such an approach recognizes the fact that in a society where the “chance of getting” caught is often the only de-motivator, it helps students; faculty and staff develop an alternate approach.

We must recognize that our “traditional” 18-25 year old students are different qualitatively from older students. Research from neuroscience suggests that the adolescent brain continues to mature until about age 25 (e.g., Beckman, 2004). This is certainly relevant to high level thinking processes such as moral reasoning. We also have evidence that college-aged students are more likely to “tell a lie” (specifically telling “self-serving” lies) than the general population (DePaulo, Kashy, Wyer & Epstein, 1996). Classic and more recent developmental theories alike (e.g., Erikson, 1963) teach us that during the traditional college years, students are searching for their identity and place in the world. They are immersed in a peer culture, and individuals look to peers who have far more power to reward or punish them than do adults.

Appeals to group identity are quite compelling, and can be strengthened through the use of technology that keeps young people ultra-connected. Recent research also finds empirical evidence for the extent to which peer interactions contribute to their happiness (Csikszentmihalyi & Hunter, 2003).

Rather than lamenting the negative impact of the peer culture, adults can leverage peer culture to make more ethical behavior the norm. Necessary but certainly not sufficient for this effort is ensuring that young people actually *know* what behavior is appropriate. Many institutions require students to have some assessable approach to information literacy, especially in light of the enormous amount of information available immediately at their fingertips through the internet. We would suggest that these efforts be expanded to go further in exposing students to additional matters of academic and personal integrity.

A group which will need to be included in discussions will be the faculty. Efforts must include an education of the faculty regarding the need to develop academic integrity beyond stopping cheating. Here perhaps a page can be borrowed from the movie industry which seeks to use moral suasion, by clearly identifying the people who are hurt by illegal copying of movies, not the stars but the various behind the scenes people who can be hurt by the practice.

Curriculum can be enhanced by discussion of the “shades of grey” found in academic and personal integrity questions. Here the emphasis should be the fostering a clear “contract” between the individual faculty member and his/her students. Clarifying what is expected and what is not can vary among different faculty members. While this can be more clearly understood between academic disciplines, it also can exist within a discipline. And community-based learning, including service-learning, internships, and field placements, provide a wealth of contexts within which students can be afforded

opportunities to experience challenges, process and discuss them in class and through guided reflection and research, and emerge with a more nuanced understanding of ethically-challenging situations.

Bowman (2004) and others have acknowledged that the advent of the internet has increased the level of plagiarism. First, the sheer amount of information available at the student's fingertips is enormous, and the temptation to do "lazy research" is significant. But, perhaps more important, inadvertent academic dishonesty comes from taking information from electronic encyclopedias using free search engines, and considering this information to be "common knowledge" rather than acknowledging the source and synthesizing the information as has been done for decades.

If we truly want to increase both "critical thinking" and "information literacy" among our students, we need to encourage them to question the standards to better understand them. For example, one current debate is the extent to which the open-editing on-line encyclopedia "Wikipedia" can be used in any way in academic context. Scholars of good faith disagree about its value and role (and accordingly have different classroom policies). As faculty members we fall short in educating students when we simply include a statement "Wikipedia is not a source permitted for the term paper" on the syllabus. We need to provide reasons why, and then engage students in a dialogue around the issue in which they are free to ask questions and give opinions.

Punishment should be viewed as the last resort, applied only after attempts at remediation fail. The goal needs to be the understanding that the choice to be associated with the academic endeavor of this college/university calls for acceptance and buy-in of academic honesty. Faculty should attempt to find ways to strengthen students' participation in this effort through developmental assignments, rather than applying tools to catch and punish cheaters. This does not imply the absence of significant consequences, but that these consequences should reside in the environment where the offense occurs and efforts at education should precede efforts at punishment of violations. Faculty and academic administration need to deal with academic issues and student development professionals need to handle those associated with unacceptable behavior outside the academic setting.

The success of this process rests on these efforts being communicated widely at all levels of the institution, and the relevance to the mission and educational goals of the institution emphasized whenever and wherever possible. The education of the campus community needs to be a priority and enforcement when necessary must be done fairly and consistently.

In an increasingly competitive higher education environment, educators and institutions look for points of distinction and ways to demonstrate that they add value above and beyond their basic educational mission to equip students with knowledge, skills and abilities in their discipline. We suggest that the "honor concept"—however it is named—can and should be used to help transform students of all ages into responsible citizens who approach life's challenges with integrity. This is not only a strategy to demonstrate

the value of the institution, but at the heart of our institutional missions and our shared responsibility as educators to develop the next generation.

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