

PERSPECTIVES

On the Professions

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"The Honor System"

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When our faculty get together to talk about integrating ethics into the curriculum, they often end by talking about adopting "the honor system." Such talk has made me uncomfortable. The reason I generally gave for discomfort is that we are trying to integrate professional ethics into the curriculum; the honor system is irrelevant to that, indeed, a diversion.

That was the reason I gave, but I had another, one I am revealing for the first time here: *I did not understand the honor system's appeal.* The faculty who talked about the honor system had all experienced it as undergraduates (at schools as different as West Point, Williams, and the School of Engineering at the University of Michigan). I could tell it meant more to them than they said, but I could not tell what.

Since many of my colleagues seemed to feel as I did, I decided to do an issue of *Perspectives* on the subject: What is the honor system? What can be said for and against it? What relevance has it to professional ethics? While hoping to help IIT decide, I thought most readers would find an issue on the honor system interesting for another reason: **the**

honor system has something important to teach about professional ethics.

I began preparing this issue with a literature search. I was surprised by how little literature there was. I was also surprised by what I found. The honor system is not a system; it consists of at least four elements that combine in many ways. It is at least possible that no two IIT faculty had experienced quite the same system. More surprising, *I* had experienced an honor system.

One day in the late 1950's, the principal of my high school announced that an "honor court" of seven students would be set up to hear complaints of student violation of non-academic rules. A student found in the halls during class without a hall pass would no longer be sent to the principal's office; instead, he or she would be summoned to the honor court. Since my high school already had student monitors ("hall guards"), it would henceforth have two elements of an honors system. Students, not teachers, would have primary responsibility for reporting violations of rules over which the court had jurisdiction; and students, not teachers, would have primary responsibility for disciplining violators.

Missing at my high school were, however, two other elements: a

promise of honesty (for example, "I will not lie, cheat, or steal"); and a self-enforcement rule ("or tolerate those who do"). Ordinary students were *not* "on their honor" either to obey the rules themselves or to help get others to. While my colleagues seemed to think of the honor system as concerned exclusively with academic honesty, the literature seemed to allow the substance of an "honor code" to be academic (as at Princeton), nonacademic (as at my high school), or both (as at West Point).

Having discovered myself a veteran of an honor system, I began to wonder why I had not noticed. I thought history would be of help. It was.

History of Honor System

West Point may have had the first "honor system." Early in the 1820's, Superintendent Thayer began to take cadets at their word when they denied doing wrong or knowing of it. Putting them on their honor to answer truthfully saved scarce time he would otherwise have had to use to investigate minor charges. Anyone later discovered to have lied would be expelled.

Cadets seem to have done their best with this system. For example, drinking alcohol was against the rules. When cadets met at a local bar, each turned from the table before downing his

drink so that his fellows could, if questioned, honestly report that they had seen no other cadet drinking.

About this time, both Amherst and the University of Virginia experimented unsuccessfully with a student court hearing minor charges. But not until 1842 did the University of Virginia adopt (what is now counted) the original honor system. Each student had to sign a pledge on each examination stating that he had received no assistance.

A half century later, Virginia's system (or something like it) had only spread to seventeen Southern schools. Then, suddenly, it spread quickly northward. By 1915, at least seventy-six colleges had adopted an honor system.

The honor system grew up at about the same time as the major professions. Yet there is an important difference between them. The honor system has generally found a home at small, homogeneous institutions like Beloit, Haverford, Wesleyan, Princeton, or Hobart, not at large or urban institutions like Harvard, NYU, Yale, Chicago, or Wisconsin. Honor is an atavistic virtue, the virtue of knights, duelists, Southern gentry, and cowboys. Professions are creatures of the modern world; their home, the big cities.

My high school belonged to the modern world. Large, with more than three thousand students, it served a big-city suburb only a polluted lake away from Canada. So, when I heard our principal announce the "honor court," I misunderstood, of course. I thought the "honor" derived from serving on the court, not from upholding a system of honor.

"Honor" (in that sense) was not in my vocabulary. I doubt it was in the principal's either. He explained the court as a contribution to "democratic education."

What's in this Issue?

I have come a long way since then. I now look upon the honor system with more understanding and more respect. I have therefore put the opposition first. Ellen Ellis' piece is now more than twenty-five years old. I have reprinted it for two reasons. First, it remains the best general attack on the honor system I know of. (I especially like Ellis' suggestion that any discussion of the honor system begin by *dropping* the word "honor.") Second, little Ellis says sounds out of date, though the students she had in mind could be the (older) faculty who today recall the honor system so fondly. The age of the Ellis piece gives it an ironic twist.

Ellis was already an emeritus professor (of political science) when her piece appeared. Yet her argument does not depend upon the moral degeneracy of the generation she denounced. Students will always need proctors to watch over them when they take exams because, she argues, students are like the rest of us—morally too weak for what the honor system demands. A college needs proctors for the same reason a city needs police.

Ellis might, then, be surprised to read Rachana Kamtekar's description of her years under Stanford's honor system (even though it confirms many of Ellis' worries). Stanford had a self-enforcement requirement. Students who knew of the wrongdoing of others were supposed to report it. Kamtekar,

then a student, twice chose not to do that. Her explanation helps us understand both the moral complexity of such decisions and what makes so many veterans of the honor system want to re-create it.

Joseph Beatty's piece is, in effect, a meditation on the predicament into which Stanford put Kamtekar (and Thayer put his cadets). Beatty argues for doing away with the self-enforcement requirement (what he calls "the informer rule"). His reason is that it works *against* the goal of moral education supposedly justifying the honor system. Loyalty and friendship are moral virtues; they are also virtues necessary for the primary relations through which we become moral. The self-enforcement requirement, if treated as preempting these other moral considerations, threatens the very social bonds necessary for moral education. Only a fanatic treats one moral consideration, even honor, as overriding every other.

These first three pieces combine argument and anecdote. The last reports empirical research. Donald McCabe's extensive study of honor systems has led him to at least two important conclusions. The first is that honor systems can reduce academic dishonesty substantially. Ellis is too gloomy about the moral improvement human beings are capable of. McCabe's other conclusion is, however, that the honor system as such does not seem to be the key to such improvement. Some schools with an honor system showed no improvement; some without an honor system did. The key to improvement seems to be explicit and continuing discussion of academic honesty, an environment making academic

honesty seem important to everyone.

While I no longer think an honor system is irrelevant to teaching professional ethics, I still oppose its adoption. The good an honor system can achieve can be achieved without it, simply by explicit and continuing discussion with students of moral, scholarly, and professional standards. What is bad about the honor system-its reliance on "honor" rather than honesty, decency, and other workhorses of every-day morality-is avoided. Students can learn to cooperate in creating a morally exemplary environment without a vocabulary foreign to them (and us).

Of course, the switch from talk of honor to talk of morality, academic honesty, and professional ethics will not do away with Beatty's worry. (Most professional codes require that wrong doing be reported.) But the switch may at least make it easier for students-and faculty-to think clearly about the responsibility of each for the conduct of everyone else. Honor is a preemptory virtue; morality, academic honesty, and professional ethics leave more room for discussion, revision, and even principled compromise.

That is the conclusion I drew after doing this issue. You may draw another.

"The Honor System Re-examined"
Ellen Deborah Ellis, Mount Holyoke College

The introduction of the so-called honor system into the educational institutions of the United States must bear a large share of responsibility for the intellectual and moral turbulence and disregard for law that mark our student bodies today. Confusion on the part of the leaders of society is sure, in its turn, to produce confusion on the part of those led. To cite a manifestation of this fact, one need only point to the questions inevitably arising in a young mind imbued in nursery and early school years with the virtues of "schoolboy honor" when confronted in later years with the requirements of the honor system as described below.

The foundations for an ordered society must be well and consistently laid if disorder and weakness are not to break forth in the superstructure. A careful and objective examination of the honor system in its variations and of its implications does not reveal the requisite strength, but shows it to be a dangerously weak foundation for orderly and ordered living in this less than perfect world. And, it may be added, if the world were perfect, no system-honor or otherwise-would be necessary. The honor system is a myth that needs to be dispelled.

What is it for?

The honor system, as discussed in this paper, is a method pursued in educational institutions which in its pure form, it is hoped, will make it possible to detect student misdemeanors and determine their authorship without the intervention of proctors or monitors. Self-reporting is the method most acceptable, although in some variations of the system students aware of the

misdemeanors of fellow-students are, in the last resort, in honor bound to report them to the authorities.

Let it be noted here that the chief stress in an honor system is upon the detection of a breach of regulations and the discovery of the identity of the violator of rules, rather than upon the necessity of substantive obedience to the rules themselves and the need for providing punishment for rule violation.

It is not coincidental that in this age of disregard for law, if not of open violence, educational institutions on both school and college levels should increasingly turn to the so-called honor system for the solution of the problems of law and order among the students. To administrators and faculties, this system appears to offer a blessed relief from an increasingly frustrating task while it admirably suits the anti-law attitude of many students.

Seed of its Own Destruction

An honor system appears on the surface to be a very simple thing. Yet honor systems as they commonly exist in our schools and colleges are marked by so many inner contradictions and incongruities as almost, if not quite, to disqualify them as the systems of law and order that they purport to be.

The term "honor" itself is difficult to define. It suggests honesty, self-respect, a sense of integrity, and individual and social responsibility-all of them highly subjective qualities appertaining to an individual's personality as such, and not to be put on or off according to external circumstances and conditions.

One of the most glaring incongruities of an honor system is that its successful working depends in the main upon the functioning of those whose honor has proved conspicuous by its absence. This clearly involves a contradiction in terms which has proved difficult for students to explain. If, furthermore, self-reporting or reporting by a fellow student fails to occur, in the absence of proctors or monitors, the enforcement of rules is rendered impossible, and the existing system of discipline is weakened accordingly. In the light, too, of the traditional and still strong emphasis upon school-boy honor, reporting by a fellow student is but a slender reed.

Still further confusion appears when the attempt is made to correct the deficiencies of student honor by appointing proctors or monitors whose duty it is to check up on the violation of rules and on the operation of the honor system in general. In this situation, students have been quick to forget the true nature of honor, its essentially subjective and personal character. Finding an objective system of detection of misdemeanors brought under the same umbrella with a sentimental system of student reporting, they not unnaturally assume that honor has somehow automatically become a dead letter. They assume that they are not only not in honor bound to report misdemeanors, but that they are not even in honor bound to observe the rules supposedly in force.

Honor Versus Government

Thus is the system of discipline further undermined. The responsibility for maintaining an ordered society tends to be shifted to the shoulders of the officials of

whatever system exists, and the honor system has destroyed itself. Although conceived as a means of securing social law and order, it contains within itself the seeds of lawlessness. The possible effect of this development upon the concept of student integrity is only too obvious and requires no elaboration here.

The charges against the honor system can be summarized in the comprehensive indictment that it does not adequately prepare students for life in the world outside. Society in that world is, unfortunately, not composed exclusively of those whose actions are at all times controlled by their sense of personal honor, nor is the assumption made, as the phrase "honor system" suggests, that honor does in fact exercise such universal control.

Man has, at all times and in all ages, found it necessary to devise an objective procedure for the detection of malfeasance and its punishment. To this procedure the term "government" has been applied. The term "honor system" suggests only the effective functioning of individual personal honor; the term "government" looks as clearly toward those whose honor fails or is deficient and for whom other motivation for the observance of law must be provided in the interest of all members of the community.

For "honor" in this context should be substituted the much less glamorous but more realistic "sense of social responsibility" and "good citizenship," the use of which automatically obviates many of the confusions and incongruities considered here. Surely these indispensable bulwarks of civic and political stability would be more firmly

implanted in the citizenry if the disciplinary systems prevailing in educational institutions reflected more clearly and generally accepted principles of government.

For the maintenance of law and order in school or college, two factors must be present. There must be a feeling, and a recognition, of social responsibility on the part of the individual student-not couched in the phraseology of "honor" and the "honor system," with their odor of sanctity, but in terms of good citizenship and all that that implies in individual and social values. There must also be an objective means of detecting breaches of the law and of dealing with such breaches.

Appeal to Students

Appeal must be made to the reason as well as to the sound sentiment of students. They must be reminded that in the political community outside the schools and colleges their integrity does not disappear with the presence of the policeman on his beat. As in all social problems, the solution of this one must be found in education. The students must learn how to apply the fundamental principles of government to a viable student organization for the maintenance of law and order. In this work departments of political science bear, I believe, a heavy responsibility.

"Case for Discussion: A Case of Honor"

You are one of five students on your college's honor court. You have just heard a case against Chris, a sophomore, accused of cheating on his (objective) midterm exam in Computer Science 120 (business computing). The evidence against him consisted of a) his test, b) the test of the student next to him, and c) the testimony of the instructor who taught the course. No one witnessed the cheating, but the instructor, a graduate student, testified that the answers on the two answer sheets were "uncannily- similar" (as indeed they were), that Chris' answer sheet had no jotting on it while the other student's had lots, and that therefore Chris, rather than the other student, must have copied. Chris testified that the exam was entirely his own work. Under your college's honor system, anyone convicted of cheating, however minor, must be expelled. You are supposed to convict if you find the evidence of guilt "clear and convincing." Should you convict? Why or why not?

(This case is based on one that occurred at the University of Virginia in 1993, as reported in the Chronicle of Higher Education October 19, 1994.)

"Memories of Honor"
Rachana Kamtekar, Illinois
Institute of Technology

When I agreed to write about my college experiences with the honor system, I recalled an occasion when a student asked me to report two students for collaborating on a take-home examination. The student who

approached me had herself witnessed the two cheating but was unwilling to report them because she was in the same course. She did not want to be thought to be competing with them. According to the honor code at Stanford (which I remember signing several times, mostly before taking tests), one is required to report instances of cheating as well as to refrain from cheating oneself

At the time, I was the Resident Assistant in my house. The student who approached me did so supposing me some kind of authority who would deal responsibly with the violation in question. I thought about this supposition for a while and then told her that, although I had enough indirect evidence that the two students were violating the honor code to believe her, she was the one who should report the incident to her professor since she, not I, had actually witnessed it. She did not report the incident. I thought about confronting the two students myself, but did not. As far as I know, the two students got away with violating the honor code.

Recently, while discussing this incident with some friends, I remembered another case, one closer to home. In college, a good friend of mine regularly collaborated with her peers on homework assignments or take-home examinations; she often obtained help from friends, who were graduate students or professionals, on her programming or logic assignments, on papers, and on problems on take-home examinations. I don't think she ever looked at another student's work during an in-class examination, but I never tried to

find out. What I saw in her outside-the-classroom work was enough to trouble me. But I never reported what I saw. It never even occurred to me to do so. While it did occur to me to bring up the matter with her, I was afraid doing so would strain our friendship. I realize now that I just shut out as much information as I could.

In neither of these cases did the fact that I had signed the honor code and thereby promised to report cases of cheating move me to action or reflection. Instead, I thought about the incidents just as if I had never made such a promise: Was it fair to others for the students I knew to be enjoying this sort of advantage? Would getting away with these relatively minor cases of cheating encourage greater immorality later on in life? Did I want to associate with people who would do such a thing? But even these reflections, on my own moral terms, rather than Stanford's, did not move me to action.

I think that, had I concluded that cheating on tests was only the beginning of a morally grave downward spiral, I would at least have confronted my friend. But as it was, I assumed that my friend, a generous and kind person, would never do anything to cause serious harm to anyone. I did not consider serious the disadvantage in academic results suffered by her peers who were not getting extra help—perhaps because the disadvantage was diffuse, because I did not know them, or because grades did not seem to me so consequential.

Honor and Morality

My response to my friend's seeking help was not based on a purely moral concern about honesty. In college, I wanted to

preserve the sense that my work was my own. It took me a long time to accept other students' offers to proofread and comment on my papers before I turned them in. Initially, I even hesitated to take help from Teaching Assistants. Even after I was convinced that obtaining this kind of help was standard practice and didn't give me an unfair advantage over others, I still felt that it compromised my pride, my sense that my accomplishments were my own. My queasiness involved both my sense of what was moral ("is it really morally *right* for me to get this kind of help?") and my sense of honor ("is it really *my own* work that is being favorably evaluated?").

In effect, then, the honor code at Stanford, and the fact that I signed it, did not affect my behavior at all. I know that signing it sometimes occasioned a dim feeling of pride, at the knowledge that I was being trusted and was part of a generally trustworthy community. But this feeling could not have survived serious scrutiny: people in my community stole bikes, cut pages out of library books, and cheated Xerox machines or the telephone company when they could. It was a sense of honor that kept me from doing these things-and from cheating. But my sense of honor had to do with my sense of myself as a moral person, and as above "petty cheating." It had nothing to do with keeping my word to Stanford. That was immaterial, since cheating was wrong whether or not I had signed a statement promising to refrain from it.

The same concern for my own sense of honor made me balk at the idea of reporting others to those in authority, in accordance with the honor code. I much

preferred the idea of confronting them with what I thought they were doing wrong: tale-telling ran against my own sense of honor. When I think about how an ethic of honor is supposed to work, it seems to me that it depends crucially on one's peer group. Honor has to do with one's status among peers. Their opinion of one and one's consequent opinion of oneself has authority. A rule, made up and set over students by an impersonal university body is not the same thing. If this is right, the appropriate way to deal with violations of the honor code would be within the peer group: it would be to impose social opprobrium on or confront the violators in question, not to report the violation to some authority. In fact, I neither ostracized nor confronted nor reported in college, but comforted myself with the thought that people who cheat are only putting themselves in awkward positions down the line, that they were claiming to be able to do things they would later be called upon to do, and then be unable to do.

When I have discussed these issues with people who attended an undergraduate institution with an honor code, many of them have said that the honor code depends on an ethic of honor which is now dead. I agree to the extent that I do not think that most people regard giving their word as commanding their highest allegiance. I think people are quite willing to break their word, for moral as well as self-interested reasons, particularly when it has been given to an institution rather than to an individual. But this does not mean that honor is dead. In my view, one's sense of honor is bound up in complicated ways with one's sense of what it is to be a moral person. We are proud to

live up to this sense, ashamed to fall short of it, and our indifference to certain rules or codes (like mine to the Stanford honor code) can come with the attitude that they are "beneath" one's moral ideal. No individual institution like the honor code can simply stipulate the content of this sense of what is involved in being a moral person. In sum, I think that I found the Stanford University honor code irrelevant because it ignored the fact that people have a sense of what is honorable and moral, superseding a university's prescriptions.

"Honor and the Informer Rule"

Joseph Beatty, Randolph-Macon College

A few years ago our faculty faced a disturbing fact: many of our students seemed not to be taking our honor code seriously. The problem was not that cheating was rampant but that students rarely reported cheating they witnessed. Like many traditional honor codes, ours then included an "Informer Rule": any student witnessing or knowing of an offense must report it if the violator does not. Failure to report was an offense as serious as the original offense. The usual penalty for any honors offense was expulsion or suspension for a set period.

What's right here?

What troubled our faculty most about student failure to report others was that they understood it as failure to abide by rules safeguarding the search for truth to which students had voluntarily pledged themselves. Feeling

betrayed and angry, many believed the failure to inform was moral cowardice in the face of likely peer disapproval. Other faculty traced it to a generational egoism, cynicism, and callowness, a disposition to irresponsibility.

Many students agreed with these faculty. But some did not. Among those who did not, I found something that made me prick up my ears. Students, they said, did not experience the pledge as voluntary; they were already on campus when they realized the full implications of the pledge. The penalty for honor violations, even minor ones, was, they said, so harsh that not informing seemed morally better. The morally appropriate response often seemed to be, they said, to confront offenders when they witnessed cheating, express disapproval, ask for explanations, and so on—rather than to inform on them and open them to suspension or expulsion. Yet, in doing what they believed to be "the right thing," these students often felt morally compromised, for they also believed that they had violated a rule they were pledged to uphold.

What startled me about these comments was that student unwillingness to inform was understood as a moral response which placed them in conflict with the moral demands of the code. The students were committed to the high ideals of the code—the search for truth and its safeguards, community good, self-government, justice. The problem was that this commitment came into conflict with their concern for their fellow students, those who, if "turned in," would suffer extreme sanctions. The paradox of their position was

evident: for them, a code whose intention was to protect and nurture values, ideals, and virtues of high importance, a code designed to be an instrument of moral education in an educational community, was of less moral weight than protecting a dishonest student from the full consequences of his or her dishonesty.

Teaching What?

What seemed clear in my conversation with these students was that, in the name of high ideals, our honor code obligated them to make fellow students—including friends with whom they had close ties—vulnerable to severe penalty. Doing as they were obliged to do, they experienced a wrenching of their natural sympathies; and when they failed to inform, they experienced the self-loathing that usually accompanies moral hypocrisy.

I also listened to advocates of the honor code. They claimed that the informer rule was an instrument of moral education, that it helped foster an atmosphere of trust, a sense of community. As I listened, I formulated three questions: **First**, did the fact that the code occasioned such divided allegiance signal an incoherence in the honor system? **Second**, were the students morally wrong to disobey the informer rule? **Third**, would students have a stronger obligation to inform in a system which punished infractions less severely? I will briefly sketch my answers to these questions.

With respect to the first question, it seems to me that there are incoherencies in the system itself. The practice of informing as a function of one's allegiance to the honor code is supposed to

cultivate honorable and responsible dispositions; it is a kind of moral education. But, since friendship and solidarity are the sorts of relations in which one reliably acquires the moral and social sympathies so important to moral dispositions, it seems self-defeating to require students to inform against friends and fellows in the name of moral education. Since the informer rule undermines both the constitutive values and concerns of the person and the very sympathies and identifications by means of which the person becomes himself, it is an assault on the person or at least on personal integrity. Whatever one is, whatever one morally prizes, the code overrides it in moral significance. An enterprise which tries to promote a sense of trust and community by mutual surveillance thus courts the charge of incoherence.

Because I answered my first question in this way, my answer to the second must be that students are not wrong to resist the informer rule. Their intuition, that the systems claim to preempt all other moral considerations is too abstract and absolute, too lacking in attention to persons and moral particularities, is **morally** admirable. The obligations of friendship are, I think, at least as morally compelling as any obligation to inform founded on mere allegiance to general principles of justice, truth-telling, or promise-keeping. If these competing moral obligations are in fact morally equal, then forcing individuals to choose between them naturally occasions self-alienation, de-legitimizes morality and moral sensibility, and invites moral hypocrisy.

I therefore answer my third

question: In a system in which sanctions were less severe (and in which sanctions helped to educate and cultivate moral sensibility) students probably would be more willing to inform. But, even then, informer rule systems would be neither coherent nor person-respecting enough to overcome the robust considerations offered here **against** informing as a **requirement**.

How (it might be objected) could respect for persons or their integrity justify students shielding from punishment those who have used instructors and students as unwilling instruments for their dishonest purposes? To be sure, cheating is wrong and we are right to resent it as we resent other injustices. But it does not usually involve great harm or injury to persons. In situations-academic or not-in which offenses against honor threaten considerable or great harm to persons or to systems, we often believe (rightly) that informing is a strong moral obligation and we (rightly) resent the unwillingness to inform.

But a practice of routinely informing on associates and friends, in its wrenching and devaluing of natural sympathies and identifications, is destructive of personhood. In such systems, all of one's relations to other community members are mediated by one's quasi-official role: watchdog or guardian of the code. Whatever concern one has for a friend's or associate's good, whatever precise understanding one has of the other's problem, whatever compassion one feels for the other, one's duty under the code must prevail. This allegiance to an abstract and absolute principle oversimplifies moral life and, in so doing, assaults and

reduces persons. So, I believe, it is ordinarily far more morally objectionable for an educational institution to require individuals to inform than for it to fail to punish dishonest students. Of course, such institutions should cultivate in various ways, commitment to truthful inquiry. And, to will that end is to will some means-but, of course, the precise means chosen must be consistent with the end.

A Final Provocation

I realize that I can't hope to do justice here to the complex issues I have been discussing; I can at best provoke. So, in the spirit of provocation, let me close with a point that seems obvious to me: If educational institutions abolished the practice of grading, academic honor codes (with or without an informer rule) would likely disappear. Grading and certification, rather than higher moral values, are in practice more important to honor codes, perhaps even a necessary condition of their existence. Institutions trying to restore the integrity (and innocence) of inquiry should therefore consider ways to cut or loosen the tie between grading and learning.

"At the Center"

IIT to Host Intercollegiate Ethics Bowl

The Ethics Center will host an intercollegiate Ethics Bowl on Saturday, April 8. A team representing IIT, to be selected through an internal ethics bowl competition on Saturday, March 25, will test its ability to analyze

ethical issues, under conditions that call for clear and quick thinking, in a contest with teams from DePaul, Loyola, and Western Michigan Universities.

Ethics Bowl, which the Center is co-sponsoring with the Office of the Dean of Student Affairs of IIT, is a team game inspired by t TV's College Bowl, but with rules adapting the College Bowl format to the subject of ethics. Ethics Bowl is intended to combine the excitement and fun of a competitive game with an educationally valuable experience. The Ethics Center has sponsored intramural ethics bowls at IIT for the last two years. In 1993 the competition drew four teams. Last year the field expanded to eight. The immensely positive feedback received from the students who participated encouraged the Ethics Center to plan an intercollegiate Ethics Bowl this year.

In Ethics Bowl a moderator asks teams of four persons questions that pose ethical problems on topics ranging widely over areas such as the classroom, personal relationships, professional ethics, and social and political issues. A team gets one minute to confer on its answer to a question, after which the Moderator states the "Moderator's answer." At that point, a team may either rest or challenge the Moderator's answer. The judges will be distinguished guests from outside IIT.

Anyone interested in receiving more information about the Ethics Bowl should contact professor Robert Ladenson, Faculty Associate of the Center at address on front.

"Honor Codes and Student

Cheating"

Donald McCabe, Rutgers University

When I signed the honor code pledge at Princeton University for the first time, I must admit that I was skeptical. To someone who had observed several instances of blatant cheating in high school, Princeton seemed more than a little naive. Simply asking students to sign a pledge that went something like "On my honor as a gentleman, I give my word that I have neither given nor received aid during this examination," did not strike me as an effective deterrent. After all: I was sure at least some of my classmates had cheated in high school; the courses at Princeton were difficult; and our tests and examinations were unproctored, a new experience for most of us. Yet I never saw anyone cheat on a test during my four years at Princeton and I remember hearing talk of only two or three possible violations. Although I'm sure that more cheating than this went on, I remain convinced today that the honor code experience was one of the most valuable lessons my classmates and I received at Princeton.

Thus, when I decided to leave the corporate world after twenty years and become an academic, I was more than a little disappointed to hear the war stories of my MBA students when the topic turned to questions of student values and integrity. According to many of them, cheating was now a common occurrence. Because of my own experience as an undergraduate, I wondered whether cheating was as widespread as it seemed to them and whether honor codes still

worked as I remembered. To find out I surveyed over six thousand students in the 1990-1991 academic year at thirty-one highly selective, small to medium sized, private colleges and universities across the United States.

Fourteen of the schools in this sample had academic honor codes. Although various definitions of honor codes have been proposed, I prefer the definition proposed by Brian Melendez in a study done at Harvard in 1985. Melendez suggested the defining characteristics of an honor code are one or more of the following: unproctored examinations, some kind of pledge requirement, a peer judiciary, and reportage-an obligation placed on students not to tolerate violations of the honor code by other students. All of the schools classified as code schools in my research met at least two of these criteria, and most met three or four.

The fundamental conclusion of my research is clear: **there is significantly less cheating at schools with honor codes.** Not only do fewer students at honor code institutions engage in any form of academic cheating (57% versus 78% of students at non-code schools), the power of honor codes is particularly clear when we look at students who repeatedly cheat on tests (or examinations). While 20% of the students at the non-code schools in my sample reported engaging in more than three instances of explicit test cheating, only 5% of the students at honor code schools did so.

A Most Important Question

More surprising, and perhaps more important, was the finding

that the honor code itself did not appear to be the primary factor in explaining these differences in cheating. Rather, my data suggest that the most significant contextual influence on an individual student's decision whether or not to cheat is his or her perception of what other students on campus are doing. Not only does the observed behavior of peers seem to influence academic dishonesty, it also seems to provide a kind of normative support for it.

Indeed, an institution's ability to develop a shared understanding and acceptance of its policies on academic integrity appears to be a major influence on the level of cheating whether or not a school has an honor code. One of the lowest rates of self-reported academic dishonesty in my research was at a non-honor code institution. Though without an honor code, the institution is strongly committed to the concept of academic honesty, makes it a major topic of discussion for incoming students, and goes to great lengths to ensure its policy is understood and accepted as an obligation of every member of the campus community. The most important question to ask concerning academic dishonesty may be how an institution can create an environment where academic dishonesty is socially unacceptable, where institutional expectations are clearly understood and where students perceive that their peers are adhering to these expectations.

Comments from students at schools that appear to have achieved such a shared sense of responsibility for academic integrity seem to support this view. "I like the respect I get at

[the institution] and wouldn't do anything to jeopardize that." "Peer pressure-you would feel very embarrassed if other students saw it." "... as for cheating on a test, it's socially unacceptable."

Comments from students at schools with high levels of self-reported cheating more often focus on rationalizations for cheating. "[Academic dishonesty] is rampant at ..., so much so that the attitude seems to be everybody does it-I'll be at a disadvantage if I don't." "If others do it, you're being left behind by not participating." "When most of the class is cheating on a difficult exam and they will ruin the curve, it influences you to cheat so your grade won't be affected." (For a more detailed report of these results, see D.L. McCabe & A.K. Trevino, "Academic Dishonesty: Honor Codes and Other Contextual Influences," *Journal of Higher Education*, 64 (1993), 520-538.)

Declining Morals?

Although it is tempting to suggest that such negative attitudes simply reflect the declining social mores that we hear so much about, the data available provide mixed evidence. A comparison of my data with those collected by William Bowers in the 1960's suggests that any increase in student cheating has been fairly modest at the small-to-medium-sized, selective institutions in my original sample. The only dramatic change is a marked increase in the number of students who report working together on graded assignments even when the instructor has asked for individual work. At least on this issue, today's students feel free to define their own rules, believing that as long as learning takes

place, it does not matter how. At larger, less selective schools, however, we see a different picture. The preliminary results of a study of 1,800 students at nine medium-to-large state schools, which I am now completing, suggests there has been a more significant increase in cheating at such schools.

As someone who teaches in a graduate school of management, one of my most disappointing conclusions was the finding that students who plan to enter business self-report more cheating than any other intended occupation. I think two factors are at play here. First, students headed for the corporate world often seem to apply a bottom-line mentality to their academic work; it doesn't matter how you achieve the result as long as you get the job done. Second, there seems to be a relation between cheating and the nature of testing. Many students explained that it's easier to cheat on objective tests (those with only one right answer) than on the essay tests typically used in liberal arts courses. This may help us understand the higher rates of cheating among those preparing for careers not only in business, but also in engineering and medicine, where science courses dominate the undergraduate curriculum.

An interesting question is whether honor codes, or other institutional strategies to address academic dishonesty, influence an individual's ethical behavior later in life. Although there is anecdotal evidence that suggests they may, there is not much empirical research on this question. I am now looking at this question. Some colleagues and I recently surveyed a group of

alumni from two highly selective liberal arts colleges in the northeast who work in business. One of these schools has had an honor code since the late 1800s; the other has never had one. Although we did not find a significant difference in the ethical behavior of these two groups, our initial results do suggest that those with honor-code backgrounds were significantly influenced by a strongly implemented corporate code of ethics in their work place while the presence of a corporate code did not have a significant influence on those without a collegiate honor-code experience. This result suggests that there may be interaction between a collegiate honor-code experience and a strongly implemented corporate code of ethics. Why? One possible explanation is that an honor-code experience makes individuals more open to the guidance provided by a strong corporate ethics code.

Honor and Education

Although more research is clearly needed to confirm this relation, I remain convinced that the basic elements of an honor code can be an important part of the undergraduate educational experience. Not only do they help reduce cheating, they may also teach students a more valuable lesson.

"To Our Readers"

Call for Cases. We would like to involve our readers in presenting a case or two in each issue. (See page 5 for an example). The next issue will be on Academic Boycotts. If you would like to

contribute, please contact Michael Davis, Editor, at our address on the front page. Acknowledgments will be made.

Ethics Bowl. CSEP would like to receive from our readers ethical problems which may be used in the annual Ethics Bowl as questions to the teams (see page 8). Contact Robert Ladenson, Faculty Associate at our address on the front page.

Note: This is the first issue in our new (and still experimental) format. Please comment.

"Announcements"

WORKSHOP: "Developing Numerical Problems to Accompany Cases in Engineering Ethics and Professionalism," August 14-18, 1995, will help engineering faculty to develop numerical problems to accompany existing cases as well as new ones as a way to introduce engineering ethics into required technical courses. Participants will be provided room and board and a \$50 a day stipend, but travel expenses will be the responsibility of the participant's home institution. Two Texas A & M professors, Mike Rabins (Mechanical Engineering) and Ed Harris (Philosophy), will conduct the workshop. Contact: Marilyn Grossman, email: drgrossm@teexnet.tamu.edu or ph. 800-447-9470.

CONFERENCES: "Ethics and Social Responsibility in Marketing", the 1995 American

Marketing Association Faculty Consortium, will be held June 23-26 at the Hofstra University. Deadline for submission of papers is February 15. Contact: Joel R. Evans or Barry Berman, Business Research Institute, Weller Hall, Frank G. Zarb School of Business, Hofstra University, Hempstead, NY 11550-1090 (ph. 516-463-5705 or fax. 516-463-4834).

"Politics, Ethics, and the Professions," the Third International Jerusalem Conference on Ethics in Public Service, will be held June 25-30, 1995 in Jerusalem. Contact: Dr. Simcha B. Werner, Chairman Scientific Committee, c/o International Ltd., P.O. Box 29313, 61292 Tel Aviv, Israel (ph. 972-3-510-2538 or fax. 972-3-660-604).

The Third International Conference on Social Values, "Values and Conflict in Training of Professionals," will be held at St. Catherine's College, Oxford University, July 19-23, 1995, under the sponsorship of the Center for the Study of Social Values in Education and Business Partnership. Contact Dr. Samuel Natale, Hagan School of Business, Iona College, 715 North Avenue, New Rochelle, NY 10801-1890 (ph. 914-633-2262 or fax. 914-633-2012).

"The Fourth Annual Seminar in Narrative Bioethics" will be held July 29-August 5, 1995 at Hiram, Ohio. Contact: Center for Literature, Medicine, and Health Care Professions, Mahan House, Hiram College, Hiram OH 44234 (ph. 216-569-5380 or fax. 216-569-5449).."

"The First World Congress on Business, Economics, and Ethics" will be held July 25-28, 1996 in Tokyo. Topics suitable for submissions include "ethics and international business," "country or region-related reports," "specific challenges for business ethics in developing countries," "practical and theoretical relevance of cultural traditions," "practical and theoretical relevance of religious traditions," and "comparative conceptions of business ethics--theoretical perspectives." Deadline for submissions: December 15, 1995. Contact: Professor Yokimasu Nagayasu, Reitaku University, 2-1-1 Hikarigaoka, Kashiwa Shi, Chiba-Ken, 277 Japan (ph. 81-471-733-256 or fax. 81-471-733-263); or Professor George Enderle, University of Notre Dame, College of Business Administration, Notre Dame, IN 46556, USA (ph. 219631-5595 or fax. 219-631-5255).

"Ethics, Medicine, and Health Care: An Appraisal of the Thought of H. Tristram Engelhardt", will be held September 29-30, 1995 at Youngstown State University. Deadline for submissions: April 3, 1995. Contact: Brendan Minogue, Ph.D., Director, Ethics Center, Youngstown State University, Youngstown, OH 44555-1465 (fax. 216-742-2304).

PUBLICATIONS: John A. Robertson, *Children of Choice: Freedom and the New Reproductive Technologies* (Princeton University Press, 1994), analyzes some of the moral, legal, and financial issues raised by reproductive technologies such as RU486, Norplant, in vitro

fertilization, donors and surrogates, genetic screening, and transplants from the perspective of procreative liberty. Contact: Mary Smith (ph. 609258-5165 or fax. 609-258-1335).

The Center for the Study of Ethics in the Professions (CSEP) was established in 1976 for the purpose of promoting education and the scholarship relating to ethical and policy issues of the professions. *Perspectives on the Professions* is one of the means the Center has of achieving that purpose

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