

The Honorable Thing to Do:

A Survey and Analysis of Honor Codes and Councils in DC Independent Schools

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In this study I shall present an overview of honor codes and honor council systems in order to understand the benefits and potential complications involved with instituting such policies in an independent school. The data for the study comes from studying the academic integrity policies of 29 independent schools in the Greater Washington D.C. area. I analyze trends in policies and practices, link those ideas to research, provide a template for creating or revamping such systems in an independent school, and evaluating the efficacy of such practices.

Introduction

One major question is why should a school have an honor code at all? The first, clearest answer is that an honor code will help cut down on incidents of cheating at a school. In a recent article, leading researchers on academic honesty claim that the presence of an honor code at an institution is effective at “reducing cheating in academic settings” (McCabe, Butterfield, and Treviño (2003)).¹ An honor code contributes to a culture of academic integrity, which fights against what researchers call “a culture of cheating” (McCabe and Trevino (1993)). The link between an honor code and the culture of a school will remain an important connection throughout this study.

No one, however, expects an honor code to be a *deus ex machina*. Through much research related to honor codes on large and small school campuses, the authors of the above study posit that an honor code is one of several factors which affects whether or not a culture of cheating develops at a school. Those other factors are numerous, and include such examples as student perception of peer behavior, student perception of

¹ The authors goes on to cite seven separate research studies to support this claim, dating back as early as 1935; the authors themselves have been involved in no fewer than 5 studies on this topic, including one published after this article appeared.

faculty understanding of academic integrity, and student perception of severity of punishment if caught for violating principles of academic integrity. Among the several influences, the one common thread is student perceptions towards something. Student perception of peers' behavior is the single most important contributing factor to the existence of a culture of cheating (ibid.). In other words, the way to combat against a culture of cheating is to affect student perceptions. What this research tells us is that the administration cannot, by itself, reverse a culture of cheating; instead, student perception is a much larger factor in the culture of any school as students approach the issue of whether or not to cheat on an assignment. For that reason, not only an honor code but an honor council is an important and necessary element in combating against a culture of cheating, because a student-led committee which fights against cheating represents a vital link between the individual student and the values of the community (Gable et. al., 2005).

The direct data for this study came from contacting a population of 77 independent schools in the D.C. metro area (MD, D.C. VA). Every institution contacted had at least a middle school (grades 7-8) program, and most also had an high school (grades 9-12) arm as well. Of the 77 institutions invited to participate in this study, 29 responded; one declined to participate, three had no honor code or honor council in place, and one more initially responded but did not follow up with any materials. The remaining 24 institutions were studied by examining school policies and conducting interviews in-person, over the telephone, and via email. 75% of these institutions have honor codes, and 54.2% of them have some type of honor council. The evidence gathered from these institutions reflects the dominant view in the research: honor codes help to reduce incidents of cheating at schools by fostering a student culture against

academic dishonesty. But what the data show is that institutions with honor councils (also called honor committees and honor boards) have much loftier goals than simply cutting back on academic dishonesty. In these schools, student-led groups responsible for forming, enforcing, and promoting academic integrity create values which represent the community culture of the school and prepare students for more advanced citizenship roles in society after they graduate.

Honor Codes – The Purpose

Of the many aims of an honor code, the following is a list of the most commonly identified, as well as stated purposes of such a system within the independent schools studied. Respect was the most common principle, named in 72.2% of the school honor codes policies. Respect sometimes was specified as respect for others, respect for self, or respect for the school.

The next two most common purposes were responsibility (44.4%) and integrity (38.9%). With responsibility, schools were mainly interested in how the honor codes helped to teach students how to take responsibility for their own actions. This purpose applied not only to students who violated the honor code in an academic context, but also to how student-led honor councils fostered the idea that the entire community, not just adults, uphold the shared, community values in the honor code. Integrity was identified as a short-term (while in school) and a long-term (for life) product of an honor code, as it taught people to act in accordance with a set of expectations for acceptable behavior.

The final three purposes commonly identified by these schools were compassion/caring (33.3%), honesty (33.3%) and trust (33.3%). These purposes are

character traits which, according to the school policies, evidenced themselves in student behavior while at school as well as all through life.

Although not as common through many of the schools studied, the following is a list of other purposes, both short- and long-term, which schools indicated were desired ends of their honor codes and honor councils: dignity, perseverance, honor, maturity, self-confidence, freedom, courage, and leadership.

Honor Codes – The Policies

There were two precepts mentioned in 14 (77.8%) of the honor codes studied: no cheating and no lying. No cheating remains a foundation of most academic honor codes. Cheating can take many forms in schools, such as copying work from another student on an assessment, copying homework done by someone else, or obtaining advance information about the material on an assessment. According to recent survey data, over 80% of students admit to cheating on a test or exam within the past 12 months, and over 50% of students do not believe that cheating is a big deal.² Several of the honor codes broke cheating into subcategories, usually giving plagiarism its own definition. Several schools indicated that new technologies, particularly the internet, make material so easily available to students that plagiarism, or “misrepresenting someone else’s work or ideas as your own” (anonymous, personal interview, 6 July 2006), needed more specific attention. The influence of easy access students have to papers and other study materials is echoed in research literature. One researcher points out that the preponderance of information available to students has put academic

² Statistics such as these can be found all over current publications. These figures come from the 29th *Who’s Who Among American High School Students Poll* and the Joseph & Edna Josephson Institute of Ethics, but other studies have been published in scholarly and trade magazine, as well as newspapers.

institutions on the defensive: they must employ “plagiarism detection software” to try to maintain an atmosphere of academic integrity (Warn, 2006). This author continues to advocate for a two-prong approach to academic integrity: both educating students about responsible scholastic habits (using tools such as an honor code) and using deterrents (such as software) to monitor for violations of that practice.

In fact, cheating is so prevalent in schools that many people no longer view it as an exception to student practice. Articles investigating the psychology and methodology of cheating have become more replete (e.g., Murdock, 2006). Data from the schools in this study support the belief that the motivation behind why a student cheats is an important element in working through issues of academic dishonesty. In an interview, one administrator responsible for overseeing the honor code system remarked that, “we look at a ninth grader’s work much differently than we do a senior...[the student] may be guilty...[but] also may be in that little, fuzzy zone of just “sloppy scholarship” (anonymous, personal interview, 8 August 2006). McCabe writes that students “say they need to cheat because of the intense competition to get into [college]” (cited in Willen (2004)). What these ideas illustrate is that the existence of cheating is no longer (if it ever was) a question; it has become so common that schools now consider the motivations for cheating when confronting it.

The other precept common to most honor codes is no lying. One school administrator reported that, “in the past, we have suspended [a student] for lying to a teacher, saying ‘I emailed the paper’ when they hadn’t emailed the paper” (anonymous, personal interview, 6 July 2006). Another said that a violation of the school’s honor code included, “lying to a teacher, maybe not even telling the whole truth” (anonymous,

personal interview, 8 August 2006). The same school officer continued to indicate the importance of truth in that school community:

[this school] is pretty unique in that we will branch out: if you break a rule pertaining to alcohol or drugs, you'd also go before the honor board. We don't have a discipline board because at the moment our philosophy is that you've broken your word as a member of the [school] community, and that you've done something you shouldn't have. Whereas some schools would say that's a discipline area, we make that an honor offense also, so you would go before the honor board.

Research indicates that both teachers and students have identified “relying on trust” as one of the most likely ways to help to reduce cheating (McCabe, Butterfield, and Treviño, (2003)). Indeed, “honoring truth and truthfulness” is one of the core purposes for an academic institution, according to students and adults (Moore (2002)). The honor code supports that educational goal.

Outside of these two, core tenets, two others were commonly included in honor codes: not stealing, indicated in seven (38.8%), and not tolerating other students who violated the honor code, mentioned in three (16.7%). In independent schools today, theft of property is a serious issue. According to a survey conducted by the Josephson Institute, which surveyed over 20,000 middle and high school students, “40% of males and 30% of females say they stole something from a store in the past 12 months.” In interviews for this study, one school administrator said, “we do have some stealing; we're a community of 300 [students] and adults, so...that happens” (anonymous, personal interview, 8 August 2006). An official from a different school confirmed that stealing occurs regularly on that campus as well. 2001 statistical data from NCES indicate that 17.8% of teachers in independent schools list conditions such as theft as

significant issues which they use to consider whether or not to remain at a school.³ Like cheating (discussed above), stealing has become such a common practice in independent and public schools that researchers now investigate the psychology of why students steal (Homeier, 2005), as well as how schools can employ back-end tactics to deal with theft, such as the use of surveillance cameras (Lebowitz, 1997).

The final tenet found in several honor codes was the provision that students are expected not to tolerate fellow students whom they witness violating the honor code. This tenet brings with it, perhaps, the most complex set of cultural issues out of any examined thus far. Some schools have this tenet as an explicit part of their honor code; some schools deliberately never will include it; some have it as an expectation for students, but do not have it written down. Should a student have to report a peer whom they witness? Is that too much of a burden to put on a teenager? The differences in these systems highlight something about the culture of that particular school and how rules and culture intersect. For example, in a school where reporting others is an explicit part of the honor code, it is an honor offense not to do so. In that school, if, in the process of investigating an episode, a student's name came up as having known about it, that student would have to be brought up on charges of violating the honor code at a separate hearing. Schools with this precept in their code tend to cite the notion of community values being upheld by all members of the community as a guiding rationale. On the other hand, schools which deliberately exclude such a precept tend to believe that students should not deal with heavy issues such as a behavior which might warrant expulsion, and that students should learn to take responsibility for their own actions. One school administrator interviewed works in a system which currently does

³ The same factor is listed as significant in 22.3% of teachers who choose to leave a school.

have students on an honor council overseeing such issues, and the system is under review for (amongst other issues) whether that oversight should persist (anonymous, personal interview, 8 August 2006). Finally, there are the schools which exist in between the two extremes. In one such school studied, the overseeing administrator reported that the process was that if a student were to suspect a violation, s/he must go and recruit two other students, approach the potential offender and ask him/her to come forward to the honor board. If that student refused, then all three students were to report the issue together, but no consequence would befall them if they did not (anonymous, telephone interview, 17 July 2006). According to this official, the school was encouraging honesty and support, but not forcing students to “turn each other in.”

While honor codes take many different forms, the tenets listed above are the four most common (no cheating, no lying, no stealing, not tolerating others who do). For the sake of being comprehensive, the following is a list of other tenets found in at least one honor code studied: specific mention of accidental v. deliberate cheating, respect, accountability, physical or verbal aggression, kindness, adhering to other school rules, and evidencing friendship. While the ideas represented in this list are sometimes subsumed within the four tenets above, the choice of different school to separate them out or even express a value which does not fall in the four main tenets demonstrates a commitment to a different set of values which suits the school community. Five of the schools' policies (27.8%) were phrased in the positive, listing which expectations for behavior were expected rather than which behaviors were not permitted. Like including the particular precepts themselves, listing behaviors affirmatively also indicates the values of the school community.

Honor Councils

Whether called an honor council, an honor committee, or an honor board, many of the schools who have an honor code also have a student-led group charged with enforcing it. Eleven (45.8%) of the schools that responded have some sort of student-led honor council in place.⁴ In contrast, three (12.5%) have adult groups which are solely responsible for the enforcement of the honor code. Much of the research literature on moral education, however, highlights active “reflection” as an essential component of growing up moral thought in students (Lerch, Bilics, and Colley (2006); Moore (2002); Duckworth and Seligman (2006)), and student participation in the deliberations involved in investigating and enforcing an honor code fulfill any requirement for reflection discussed in the research. For that reason, I shall focus on describing the composition and procedures of these student-led honor councils.

All of the administrators interviewed who had student-led honor councils in place indicated the importance of students leading the charge of upholding community, cultural values. One administrator said, “it’s very important for our student body to know that they are responsible, through the people they elect, for upholding the values of this community” (anonymous, personal interview, 29 August 2006). In the view of this administrator, the student-led honor council lets the entire student body know that they are responsible for upholding the values upon which the community has agreed. A student-led committee actively upholds the values of a community, and can serve as a vital link between the individual student and the values of the community (Gable et. al., 2005). In this school, the honor code is over 20 years old, so its precepts were not

⁴ Of the remaining schools, others may also have systems in place, but they did not respond more fully to the original inquiry or to follow-up inquiries.

discussed or debated by the students currently attending the school, but the students were, nevertheless, “responsible for upholding the values of the community” because those values became their values. Research into the sociology of students teaches us that student behavior is the product of at least two, competing forces: peer culture and school expectations (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986). Where there used to be a (mythical?) single path of correct behavior (Peshkin, 1986) defined largely by adults, students now have choices, and the values which the administration encourages do not always get selected. In other words, a top-down model of administrators, parents, and faculty acclaiming their values against cheating will not overwhelm the tide of the student sub-culture if the students do not share in those values; fighting against cheating must come from within the student sub-culture and be nurtured by the adults in the community. A student-led honor council is one way to build such culture.

Beyond upholding values of the community, honor councils are an immeasurable learning experience for the students who serve on them. The same administrator continued to say:

“we trust them to do that [uphold the values of the community]. And [it is important] that we trust that kids can figure out right from wrong. And having watched them deliberate, I know they can do that. I’ve seen them be absolutely thoughtful and fair. It’s so hard for the kids who are on the committee. They have a first-hand knowledge of how hard it is to make these decisions, to navigate the waters of consequences. I think for the whole community to know that there are kids involved in if people get suspended or even expelled, I think it shows how important we take our honor code, and how important a learning process it is” (anonymous, personal interview, 29 August 2006).

The remainder of this citation shows how serving on a student-led honor committee teaches students reflection (“how hard it is” to make decisions, as well as how to impose proper consequences”), and that participation is “a learning process.” This facet of an honor council was echoed by other administrators whom were interviewed.

The make-up of honor councils varied greatly, from the fewest number of students, being five (three seniors and two juniors) to the most, being eight (two from each of the high school grades). In some schools only juniors and seniors served, where in other schools there were representatives from each grade 9-12. These students went by many titles such as clerks, representatives, and prefects. Two (15.4%) of honor councils were comprised only of students, although most were a combination of students and adults. Even on four (30.8%) of these councils with adults, only students were afforded voting rights, although on most both students and adults had votes. On one, no voting took place – only discussions until all members, both students and adults, reached a consensus. On another, discussion ensued and if even two of those voting believed no infraction had occurred, the case was dismissed. The adults typically serving on these committees, in voting and non-voting capacities, were the Academic Dean, a faculty advisor to the council, a principal or division head (but not the chief officer of the school), and either one or two faculty members who were elected or placed there on a rotating basis (annually or bi-annually). Each of the student-led honor councils had student leadership, a head prefect or council chair, who ran honor hearing proceedings and took the recommendation of the honor council to the chief academic officer in the school (along with the Academic Dean). In no system did the honor council’s recommendation get put into practice directly; it was always a recommendation to the Head of School/principal who, in turn, decided on the course of

action. In interviews, administrators affirmed that almost always the recommendation of the honor council is the action that the chief administrator adopted.

Procedures for Incidents

Despite variations in the make-up of honor councils and the processes by which they operate, a general schematic for the process evidenced itself. I have created a schematic (Appendix 1), and divided the process into stages to show overlap and distinction in practices more easily. The three stages identified are Event, Investigation, and Hearing.

The first stage is the Event stage, where the alleged infraction takes place. In this phase, a teacher, observer, or even a fellow student becomes aware of some behavior which is suspect (in terms of the honor code). It could be something as obvious as a cheat sheet in a test, as subjective as a plagiarized assignment, or as subtle as overhearing two students discussing the contents of an assessment before one of them has taken it. The person who suspects the infraction either notifies the student (suspect) of his suspicion and informs him that his suspicion will be reported to the Academic Dean, or goes directly to the Academic Dean himself. In some schools, this phase involves a student (or group of students) discussing their suspicion with the suspected student, and that suspect reporting himself to the Academic Dean.

The second stage, Investigation, serves to fact-find about the alleged event and set up the hearing itself. The Academic Dean meets with the suspect and informs him that he is suspected of violating the honor code. He explains to the student the procedure from this point forward, and gives the student time (usually one night) to introduce the circumstances to his family. The Academic Dean informs the appropriate

administrator of the alleged infraction, then calls the family the following day to inform them (if the suspect has not) and explains how the procedure works.

At that point, the investigation into the events surrounding the alleged infraction occurs. This investigation is carried out by the Academic Dean, the presiding officer of the honor council, or both. They interview the suspect himself, classmates, the teacher, and any other person who they deem might supply valuable information.

When all possible information has been gathered (usually within a few days of the initial reporting), the Academic Dean schedules the honor council to meet. The hearing time and location are communicated to the suspect and the members of the honor council. Typically, the hearing is located away from the main business of the school, to avoid onlookers and curious students/teachers.

Finally, the Hearing phase arrives. The only people allowed in attendance at the hearing are the suspect, the members of the honor council, and (typically) one person, chosen by the suspect, to come as support. This person is usually an adult member of the school community (teacher, advisor, counselor) chosen by the student, and does not speak at all, but is present merely for emotional support for the suspect. As a rule, no parents are permitted in the honor council's hearing. Witnesses who will testify are also in attendance.

The presiding student officer of the honor council runs the hearing. First, the suspected student tells his story, presenting all facts. Then, the person making the allegation (the teacher or student who originally witnessed the alleged infraction) tells his story. Any additional, relevant evidence gathered during the investigation is presented either through other witness testimony or through a report by the presiding officer/Academic Dean.

After the evidence is presented, the presiding officer allows the council members to question any of the witnesses, including the suspect, to clarify points of interest. After all council members have asked and had questions answered, the suspect may ask any final questions of the council members. Notes are taken of the evidence presented, usually by the Academic Dean, in case facts need to be clarified during deliberation later.

At that point, all people who are not members of the honor council leave the room so that the council can deliberate in private. The process of deliberation was described by the studied institutions vaguely because the process was different case-by-case. In some, there were preliminary and interval votes, in others no voting occurred until all members agreed they were ready to vote. In some, chairs were arranged in a circle so council members can speak to one another; in others, the room arrangement varied or was not mentioned as important. During this deliberation, someone takes notes (usually the Academic Dean) and also clarifies facts based on the notes of the earlier testimony. Finally, an agreement is reached by the council. The process of agreement varies between academic institutions, ranging from consensus to simple-majority voting to one school where, if two voting members find no infraction, the case is dismissed. Once the decision is determined, the council members further deliberate and determine what they believe to be an appropriate consequence (ranging from academic probation to expulsion).

At that point, the decisions of the council are communicated to the Head of School (or chief administrative officer) by the council's presiding officer and the Academic Dean. The Head of School then makes a final decision on the consequence. The Academic Dean informs the suspect and his family of the decision and consequence.

Exceptions

Several of the councils had opportunities for the faculty advisor/Academics Dean to end the investigation procedure at interim points before the student came before the honor council. If a student were to admit his infraction in full during the Investigation phase, the honor council would not meet and consequences would be decided by the Head of School and/or Academic Dean solely.

In addition, issues of sexual harassment or privacy were oftentimes handled by adult groups or administrators, not brought before the honor council. The dignity and privacy of the students was the primary reason used to support these exceptions. Also, in most schools alleged violations of rules by adults were not brought before the student-led honor council, although in two they were.

Facets of the Honor Code/Honor Council Systems

In researching honor councils for so many schools, a wide variety of procedures came up. While it is not possible to list them all here, some themes which emerged throughout can impact heavily on how an honor council works. For example, in many schools there was an honor pledge, usually hand-written, at the end of each assignment, which served as a reminder that the honor code applied to all work. As a variation, some schools had students sign their honor pledge only at the beginning of the year, while one school gave all new students (lateral entries and matriculating students) an open test on the honor code which had to be passed before that student could use any technology or take any assessments. In a small group of schools, the honor code applied to all members of the school community, adults and students, and adults could be

brought before to the honor council, just like students. In some schools, the honor code and the jurisdiction of the honor council extended beyond the school campus and operating hours to any activity in a student's life. In the past seven years, many schools have begun to publish the affairs of the honor council, usually anonymously (in terms of student identity), on a bulletin board periodically or in the school's newspaper, although one school holds periodic whole-school assemblies and names the students who have been found guilty of honor code infractions along with the consequences.

Some school administrations vet prospective honor council candidates by a series of criteria (e.g., past record, academic achievement, personal interviews), while others allow the nomination to stand regardless of any record. In one school, honor council members are appointed by the administration directly (with no student vote).

Possible concerns

The obvious question is if an honor code and honor council produces fewer incidents of cheating, persons with more integrity and responsibility, and a stronger community, why does every school not have them? What are the possible down-sides to such systems?

One possible concern is public perception. When one student was informed that he was under suspicion of cheating, he remembered that he had "heard about the grueling investigations, the closed trials" (Hoover (2002)) of the honor council. Because the workings of an honor council require anonymity, ideas about what goes on in their proceedings are subject to rumor and exaggeration. Because records of their proceedings are never published and rarely archived (in my research I found no school that records such information formally, and only a few that put hand-written notes in a

student's file for the duration of his tenure at the school and then destroyed them), any student involved with an honor council hearing can say whatever he wishes about what happened in the session, and no member of the honor council can present any affirmative testimony to the contrary. Because a student-led council helps to foster responsibility and ownership over the values of the school, an honor code and honor council can be seen as examples of an active democracy, one where all community members have a say in the shape of their community. On the other hand, however, clandestine meetings with private records can aggravate democratic citizens who suspect corruption or fear a lack of integrity. In one interview, a school official noted that the duty to give the school community a sense of what happens in such meetings (in general), as well as the findings of the council had been subjects of blasting school editorials in the past years, and a topic for consideration by the administration in this coming academic year.

Another concern is that the decisions rest in the hands of students who lack experience to make sound judgments. Student who serve on an honor council typically undergo an orientation to being on the council, but some people fear that they may lack worldly experience to meet out justice; others, that they may possess certain biases towards friends in such cases where the need to make difficult decisions. Research continually reminds us that peer opinion and circumstance form a major part of how students decide how to act, not just abstract values such as an honor code (Niels (2003)). The best response I came across to this concern came in the citation (above) from an interview with an administrator:

...we trust them to do that [uphold the values of the community]. And [it is important] that we trust that kids can figure out right from wrong. And having

watched them deliberate, I know they can do that. I've seen them be absolutely thoughtful and fair. It's so hard for the kids who are on the committee. They have a first-hand knowledge of how hard it is to make these decisions, to navigate the waters of consequences. I think for the whole community to know that there are kids involved in if people get suspended or even expelled, I think it shows how important we take our honor code, and how important a learning process it is (anonymous, personal interview, 29 August 2006).

Some wonder that even though the proceedings and accusations are anonymous, how possible true anonymity is in an independent school community, typically small. The responses to these questions in interviews were all over the spectrum, from one official saying that most people do not even know of most of the incidents because "anonymity works so well" to one saying "we do the best we can, but students will notice someone missing." The most common response was to create good policies for the honor council and demand complete restraint from those serving on it, and allow whatever else happens to happen.

One of the most surprising elements encountered during the research process was that families have little influence on the process, and cannot attend the hearing itself, even if the student and family member request it. While no one interviewed gave a specific reason why not, it was generally felt that the procedure allowed for a fair process designed to achieve justice and self-advocacy, and that families could not add any value to those goals.

Because diversity is an issue within school communities, and in some cases, more so in independent schools, the most common system of open nominations and elections by the general student body, does not guarantee equal representation on an honor

council. While some schools pre-qualify candidates for honor council candidacy based on prior academic records and behavior, no school I have come across considers gender or race as a pre-qualifying status for serving on an honor council. When the question was posed of whether schools had thought of redesigning the process to ensure an accurate representation on the council, this reply from one interview was typical: “We’ve thought about it, but we really don’t know how to do that. Because where do you stop?” (anonymous, personal interview, 6 July 2006).

The final issue raised in the research was what happens when a member of the honor council is accused of violating the honor code? This instance calls on the previous concerns of bias because one wonders if the members of the honor council could enforce the code without passion or prejudice to the case. One school indicated that when that had happened once, the case did not go to the honor council, but to a separate administrative hearing. That hearing process already existed for issues of harassment or if there were an honor code violation during final exams (rather than pulling students from exams), so the adults oversaw the case. In another school, the honor council heard the case over its member. In a third school, the student gathered all students accused of cheating, they admitted their infraction, and created a penalty which satisfied the administration. In that case, the student continued to serve on the honor council.

Implementation

This paper has been a survey of different approaches to honor codes and honor councils. Many independent schools have such systems because of the belief that they not only help to address issues of academic dishonesty, but also help to build the

character of students within the school.⁵ What follows is my assessment of how schools might go about implementing or re-structuring such systems at their institutions, based on research and common practices from the institutions studied (see Appendix 2).

First, community members must recognize the need for these systems. Such needs include problems with academic dishonesty (cheating, plagiarism), behavior (lying, stealing), or the desire to build the character of the students (integrity, responsibility, compassion, etc.). These needs should ideally tie into the mission/vision statement for the school.

Second, after the needs are established, an honor code and honor council (of some variety) should be vetted as a means of meeting these needs. Because a successful honor code and council require support from administration, faculty, students, and families, both of these discussions (the needs themselves and the honor code/council as ways of meeting them) should be conducted as open fora where all members of the community have an opportunity to share ideas and concerns. There can be no successful honor code or honor council if the members of the community do not see the value of such endeavors. Also, because a student-led honor council is a form of student leadership, any student governance group (student government, student council, etc.) should be a central part of such discussions.

Third, an honor code should represent the ideals for the community, not simply be a list of outlawed behaviors or punitive actions. Some schools have gone about achieving this by creating a student bill of rights, listing the rights and responsibilities for the student body. Hypothetically, adults in the community could then add to this

⁵ It should be noted that most researchers who support honor codes also write about the need for education and vigilance on the part of the school in confronting issues of academic dishonesty.

list, ending up with a catalog of ideals by which each member in the community should live. From there, everyone can brainstorm behaviors within the school day (and without, if the culture supports it) which evidence those ideals; similarly, they could identify behaviors which contradict those ideals. While the group must be open to ideas from anyone, working from a general group of rules/traits listed in other schools' honor codes and handbooks may be a way to open into discussion on what works for a particular school.

Fourth, it is necessary to systematize the findings. Write down an honor code, based on the discussions of rights and responsibilities which have surfaced. Also, create a procedure which outlines how alleged infractions to the honor code will be handled by the honor council. In this phase, schools will have to determine key factors, such as whether or not it is a student-led council, how does membership come about, and are there issues which do not go to this body (harassment) or at certain times (summer, final exam period, etc.). Schools would also benefit from creating a flow chart (or organization map) of this process, identifying who will be responsible for each step in the process, when and where communications to key people will occur, and who is ultimately responsible for moving to the next step in the process. Schools can compare their code and procedures against those of peer schools to determine where their model is different, and understand why that is so. Once the honor code and honor council procedures are written down, they should be publicized and vetted by the community. Perhaps a vote might be used to ratify them. However it is done, group consensus/support should be clear before implementing any policy.

Fifth, schools should create an orientation program before any student or adult can serve on an honor council. For this step, work from materials available from other

schools or even invite an Academic Dean from a peer school in to help to create the orientation. As an honor council would be new to everyone in the school community, it is vital that the few responsible for carrying out its procedures understand them as clearly as possible. During orientation, there should be several role-played scenarios, taking the procedures from cradle-to-grave, to identify issues where the process could become slippery, confusing, or open to contention on the grounds of fairness.

Finally, pilot the program, running it when occasion serves as faithfully to the procedures as possible. Constantly seek evaluation and adjust the procedures as needed to achieve the desired ends (cf. shared needs, step one). Seek evaluation early on in writing, orally, or howsoever it is possible to get it, from anyone involved with the policy, and do not be afraid to adjust it according to the feedback. This evaluation and adjustment should become ongoing (either periodically or regularly). In interviews, topics such as publicizing honor council findings, election procedures, and the role of the administration have been mentioned as concerns raised by students (and adults) throughout the years that schools have had these policies in place. Rather than having such concerns raised in negative or accusatory ways, an ongoing policy of evaluation allows for ideas to surface and be evaluated as they come up.

N. B. The single most important factor which determines the success of an honor code/honor council system at a particular school seems to be how well the policies fit in with the culture of the school. These systems can support or even transform the culture of a school as they call upon the core belief of the members of the community; but they can also rend apart a community as they ask certain members to stand up for abstract values and draw down (severe) consequences on students. Understanding how an honor code and honor council meshes with the values of the school will help to shape

the specific policies in the school, provide grounding to support the existence of such a system, and help to define the cultural identity of the community into the future.

Conclusion

Many independent schools have honor codes and honor councils; they are, at minimum, arms of policies designed to combat against student cheating. These policies serve as part of a two-pronged approach to combating against academic dishonesty: preventative efforts and responses. The honor code is preventative; it outlines expectations for how students should behave. The honor council is responsive; it enforces the honor code and recommends punishment to those guilty of infractions. But in addition to the issue of academic dishonesty, independent schools also seek to foster character development in their students, and honor codes and honor councils fulfill these ends as well.

Respect is named by 61.9% of schools as the purpose for having honor codes and honor councils. The other stated purposes, including responsibility, integrity, and honesty, speak less to preventing academic dishonesty and more to helping to create good people from whom honest behaviors emerge. To that end, the four most common precepts listed in school honor codes are no cheating (76.2%), no lying (76.2%), no stealing (38.1%), and not tolerating others who violate the honor code (19%). The combination of the stated, non-academic purposes and the academic provisions leads the honor codes to combat against what researchers term a “culture of cheating,” addressing not only the academically dishonest behaviors, but the normative beliefs which support them.

Part of the way schools integrate the values of the honor code into their school communities is by encouraging student interaction with the code, usually through a student-led honor council. Most honor councils are comprised of a body made up of elected students along with a few adults. Time and again, administrators who oversee these honor councils commented on how the process of researching, questioning, and deliberating over the cases helped students to understand the importance of the precepts in the honor code and how they apply to everyone in the school community. Student participation in these groups, usually as leaders, supports a core idea named in numerous research studies as essential for ethical development on ethics: reflection. The process of investigating a claim of academic dishonesty, hearing the evidence, deliberating over the facts, determining guilt or innocence, and even recommending the school's response, is active, reflective, participatory involvement by the students in forming and upholding the values of their school community. In that way, the values become shared values.

There were occasions where adults intervened or bypassed this process, usually involving harassment or confession of guilt early on by the student. An honor council remains, like everything else in a school, an apparatus for learning. The values of the community may require that adults intervene and bypass this learning opportunity in the name of privacy and/or legal confidentiality, and that is a pedagogical choice for each school community to make.

Possible problems arising from the honor councils included public perception, concern in the ability of students to judge their peers, anonymity, the roles of families, fair representations on honor boards, and conflicts of interest amongst students. These issues are not to be dismissed in the name of the greater good honor codes and honor

councils bring to a school, for the form the roots of a counter-culture which could undermine all of the normative benefits such policies exist to foster. Schools must think about how they present the procedures of the honor council to balance out the needs for privacy and the right/need the community has of knowing the fairness of a clandestine sub-group with enormous influence; adult supervision (not oversight) and high quality training need to be in place to work against fears of student inadequacy; how students get onto these councils and what behavior is expected of them, being responsible for overseeing the behaviors of others, is a valid concern and should be clear and consistently monitored; finally, the influence of families and people in the community must never be allowed to interfere with the process of defending fairness and upholding the values of the honor code. Any one of these issues (and they tend to come in groups) can undermine the practical and normative values of having an honor code and honor council, so they need to be deliberated, debated, and addressed by the school community.

What remains outside of the scope of this study are two key questions: how does the experience going through an honor council hearing affect the student being accused, and what is the student experience of living with an honor code? Schools are (quite correctly) protective of outsiders coming in and speaking with their students in these ways, but understanding the student response to these policies (and there will always be more than one cultural response among the students) will help researchers understand their efficacy, and school officials better to integrate the values behind such policies into their school culture.

Overall there is little doubt, from researchers or from school officials, that an honor code and an honor council benefit the school. They help to prevent academic

dishonesty and help to galvanize community values. They bring students into the active deliberation over values and allow them to reflect on their meaning and importance.

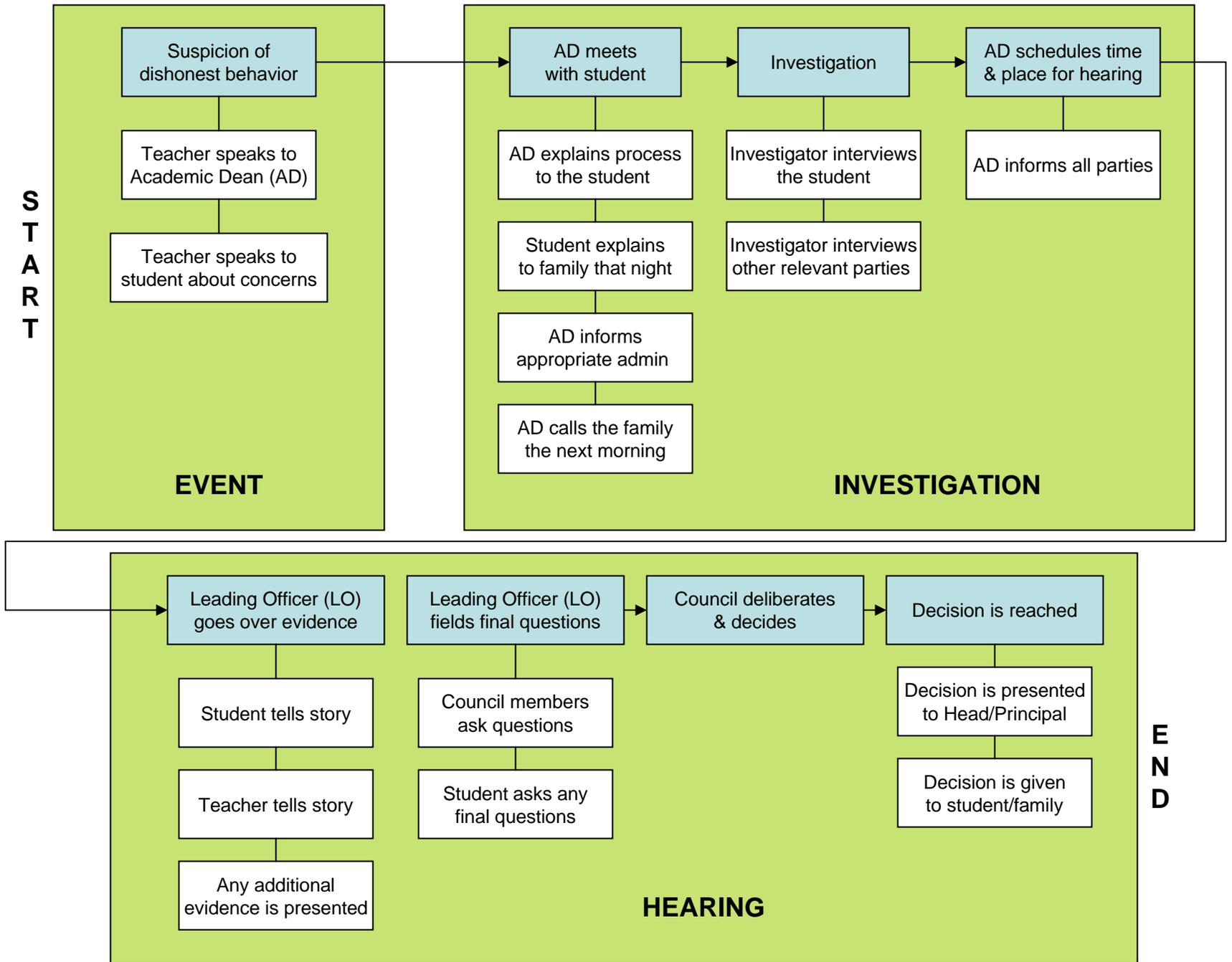
The many incarnations of these codes, councils, and procedures support that the idea is valuable, but only if its practical manifestation within a school community is adapted to fit a specific community's norms and promote community values.

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Appendix 1 – Honor Council Hearing Procedure



Appendix 2 – Implementation of an Honor Code and Honor Council

