

The Student Life Committee Report

on

The Honor System

submitted

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report focuses on the Honor System at Vanderbilt University. It was written by the Student Life Committee of the Faculty Senate after three semesters of study and discussion. The Student Life Committee was originally charged by the Faculty Senate to conduct this investigation for two reasons. The first reason was the realization that the Undergraduate Honor Council was not making an annual report to the Faculty Senate as their constitution required, and the second reason was at the request of the Provost. In both cases, because the Honor System requires participation of both the students and the faculty to function effectively, we offer this report and its recommendations in the spirit of improving the current system.

This report does not include any calls to dismantle or abandon existing systems. We believe that a peer-led Undergraduate Honor Council is both important and effective, for example, and we were also persuaded that there is no compelling reason to unify the currently unique Honor Councils for the Graduate School and the professional schools.

However, our study has resulted in the identification of clear challenges and opportunities for all of these groups, particularly with regard to the need to improve faculty awareness and involvement with the Honor System. To that end, we give 28 recommendations clustered around three primary themes:

1. **Information**: These recommendations share the goal of raising awareness of the Honor System, promoting it among both students and faculty, and increasing access among students and faculty to important materials. (Recommendations 1, 2, 5, 6, 7, 23)
2. **Engagement**: These recommendations are primarily faculty-directed and seek to address faculty concerns, incentivize faculty to use the Honor System, increase trust in the Honor System, and make the process of doing so less burdensome. (Recommendations 3, 8, 9, 10, 11, 25, 26, 28)
3. **Process Improvements**: These recommendations were designed to explain and increase the value of academic integrity among all Vanderbilt students (beyond raising awareness about how various systems work) and to improve the functioning of the Honor Code and Honor Councils. (Recommendations 4, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 24, 27)

All of the recommendations have one assumption in common: Vanderbilt University can and should promote a positive culture of honor. Although some of the discussion in this report refers to reporting alleged violations and punishing proven offenses, our committee strongly supports the idea that maintaining respect for both personal and academic integrity should be a central part of the educational experience of Vanderbilt students at all levels.

LIST OF RECOMMENDATIONS

(R1) The Associate Provost for Undergraduate Education should oversee the development of a centralized website dedicated to the Honor Code. The website should contain a succinct, non-self-referential statement of the Honor Code. It should also contain information for faculty including: what to do when encountering a possible violation of the Honor Code; advice on communicating with students who have possibly committed an Honor Code violation; faculty resources for advice; what to do to prepare a charge; what to expect out of the Honor Council process; the expected life cycle of an Honor System charge; advice from the General Counsel's office; resources for handling dissatisfaction with the Honor Council process or outcome. While the focus of this website is intended to be on the undergraduate system, links to the graduate and professional schools' websites for their respective Honor Codes and Councils should be maintained on this site as well.

(R2) The Associate Provost for Undergraduate Education should convene a Task Force to explore ways that education on the Honor Code and academic integrity could be included at multiple points in the undergraduate student experience. The committee should include representatives from the Faculty Senate Student Life Committee, Athletics, the Center for Teaching, the Undergraduate Honor Council, and other stakeholders as identified by the Associate Provost. This Task Force's charges would include (a) clarifying the role of faculty in educating students about the Honor Code, (b) developing guidelines for best practices in teaching (e.g., identifying guidelines for academic integrity within collaborative/group work), (c) identifying opportunities for members of the Undergraduate Honor Council to be more effective in educating their peers, and (d) identifying extracurricular programs and/or opportunities for intervention at multiple points during the undergraduate career. On this last point, for example, we note that the current Visions module on the Honor Code is optional, and we urge it to be required. Likewise, the Task Force should refer to and extend analysis of the VIRG report of April 2011 in order to identify opportunities at the most appropriate times for programmatic intervention (e.g., third semester of enrollment) *before* an Honor Code violation occurs.

(R3) The Provost should convene a Task Force composed of faculty members from all colleges and schools to consider modifications to the prescribed roles faculty play in upholding the Honor Code. These modifications would increase faculty discretion about when to report a student to the Honor Council. Any such changes would necessitate changes to the Faculty Manual as well. This Task Force would be charged with creating guidelines about how and why faculty may be expected to use their own judgment regarding "teachable moments" (i.e., opportunities to handle small infractions outside of the Honor Council). These modifications may include the development of a means of tracking interventions so that faculty would know

when apparently isolated incidents are actually patterns of behavior.¹ In addition to faculty members, this committee could include representatives from University General Counsel, the Office of the Dean of Students, Associate Dean Daniel Swinton, and other relevant parties as identified by the Provost.

(R4) On matters of academic integrity, the Director of the Office of Student Conduct and Academic Integrity should report to the Associate Provost for Undergraduate Education, who convenes a committee of the Associate Deans of the Undergraduate schools.² Modifying the reporting structure so that the Undergraduate Honor Council is better aligned with academic affairs seems more consistent with its mission and may give it greater visibility and credibility to the faculty. To foster this visibility and credibility, the committee recommends that the Associate Provost for Undergraduate Education make an annual appearance before the faculties of each of the undergraduate schools to discuss academic integrity and the Honor System. One component of informing the faculty about the Honor Council may be through the Associate Deans for Undergraduate Affairs in each of the Undergraduate Colleges.

(R5) The Vice Provost for Enrollment and Dean of Admissions should require all matriculating students (first-year and transfer) to indicate that they have read about the Honor System, understand that they will be participating in it, and agree to abide by it as students at Vanderbilt.

(R6) The Associate Deans should strongly encourage faculty who advise undergraduates, including CASPAR advisors (College of Arts and Science Pre-major Academic Advising Resources), to discuss the Honor Code with each advisee.

(R7) The Undergraduate Honor Council should submit annual reports to the Deans and the Provost, with copy to the chair of the Student Life Committee of the Faculty Senate.

(R8) Given the nature and import of the responsibilities of UHC faculty advisors, we recommend that the Provost consider additional compensation for them, either in the form of salary supplement or research funds. Faculty should be compensated according to the number of cases they oversee. While the committee does not make recommendations about the amount of compensation or number of cases, the committee feels that cash compensation is

¹ We envision a centralized database with a web interface that faculty could use, or they could call the Office of Student Conduct and Academic Integrity to report an incident. Repeat violators would be flagged and brought to the attention of the proper person. The faculty member might then be told that this behavior was not an isolated incident and an honor council incident report must be filed. We note that the University has a variety of tools, from redcap to the MIS department, which may be appropriate for developing this database and interface.

² As a point of clarification we are purposefully making a distinction between matters of Academic Integrity and Student Conduct. We were not charged with studying Student Conduct, and did not do so.

appropriate, and that the model used in the School of Medicine to incentivize medical faculty to interview medical student applicants is a good model to adopt for Honor Council service. Under this model, faculty advisors who sat in on a set minimum number of cases per semester would receive a cash incentive.

(R9) The Director of the Office of Student Conduct and Integrity should provide a report to the faculty member who brought the Honor Code violation to the UHC.

(R10) The Associate Provost for Undergraduate Education should convene a committee to study expanding the faculty advisor's role to include casting a vote in the penalty phase of large panel cases. The Student Life committee recommends this change, but recognizes that the faculty are not the only stakeholders in the process of changing the Undergraduate Honor Council process.

(R11) The role of faculty advisors should be expanded to include acting as resources for faculty who need guidance in navigating UHC procedures. We believe that the Associate Provost for Undergraduate Education is the administrator properly tasked with carrying out this recommendation.

(R12) Professional schools (Divinity, Law, Medicine, Nursing, Owen, and Peabody) should maintain their own Honor Systems. The committee found the arguments made for preserving a professional ethic and standard of conduct persuasive and was sympathetic to the argument that local authority might be the best arbiter of Honor System violations. Moreover, the committee felt that a recurring theme running through its investigation of the Honor System was an issue of faculty involvement; the committee believed that leaving the professional schools with their own Honor Codes and Councils places a responsibility on the faculty of those schools to ensure that the Honor Codes and Councils are working properly.

(R13) In each of the professional schools (Divinity, Law, Medicine, Nursing, Owen, and Peabody), the Dean or Associate Dean charged with oversight of the Honor System should submit the school's Honor Code to the university's General Counsel for review of procedural and legal issues.

(R14) Representatives from each professional school (Divinity, Law, Medicine, Nursing, Owen, and Peabody) appointed by the Dean or Associate Deans should meet annually for the purposes of (a) increasing the similarity of the various Honor Code processes; (b) sharing challenges and successes; (c) compiling and reporting data to the university. The Provost's office should be responsible for scheduling this meeting.

(R15) An annual report summarizing the work of each professional school's Honor Council should be submitted to the respective Dean, to the Provost, and to the Student Life

Committee of the Faculty Senate. Having Honor Codes and Councils specific to each professional school does not release them from overall accountability and commonality to standards of academic integrity of the University community. The committee believes that the preceding two recommendations will help ensure this.

(R16) The Provost should provide a paralegal to assist with objective fact-finding. This person could be used by the professional schools as needed or desired.

(R17) The Graduate School Honor Council structure and support should be re-evaluated. The Dean of the Graduate School should convene a committee with representatives from all colleges that report to the Graduate School to discuss an increase in administrative support and oversight conducted by a staff member from the Graduate School. Representatives should include graduate students as well as faculty. The committee believes that the Graduate Honor Council should be preserved, as it should not be the only school at Vanderbilt that uses a different set of processes. The committee notes the University's preference for local, departmental control of graduate education, but points to the analog within the undergraduate colleges: undergraduate degree requirements are set by departments and yet we maintain a strong, functioning Undergraduate Honor Council.

(R18) The Graduate School staff member charged with oversight of the Honor Council should consult the Center for Teaching about creating programming for educating graduate students about the Honor Code at Vanderbilt. We see this programming as having two purposes: one goal would be to teach the graduate students about how to maintain and promote academic honor when teaching undergraduates and the second one would be to underscore the centrality of academic integrity in their own work as scholars and researchers.

(R19) The Dean of the Graduate School should submit the Graduate School's Honor Code to the university's General Counsel for review of processes and legal issues.

(R20) The paralegal available to the professional schools in R16 should also investigate graduate school cases.

(R21) The Dean of the Graduate School should guarantee that Graduate Honor Council records are housed in a secure place on campus, with access controlled by a full-time University employee.

(R22) We recommend that the committee for the Graduate School mentioned in R17 be charged with amending the Graduate Honor Council Constitution to require the President of the Graduate Honor Council to give an annual report to the Deans of Schools with graduate students, the Provost, and the Student Life Committee of the Faculty Senate. These reports

should include the number of students reported who ultimately withdraw, resulting in the case being dropped.

(R23) The Dean of the Graduate School should provide all incoming graduate students a tutorial on the Honor System at Vanderbilt.

(R24) The Appellate Review Board (ARB) should follow the rules, procedures, and policies that flow from the originating school's Honor Code (i.e., undergraduate, graduate, or professional schools).

(R25) Given the nature and import of these responsibilities, we recommend that the Provost consider additional compensation for Chair of the ARB, either in the form of a salary supplement or research funds. (NB: The committee believes that this has been implemented since we begin our deliberations, but we leave this recommendation in the report to underscore our support for the continuation of this practice.)

(R26) The associate deans of each school should assist the Provost in identifying senior faculty who are interested in serving on the ARB and could serve over the summer.³

(R27) The committee recommends that stakeholders explore the possibility of making expedited options available to students if the ARB chair grants an appeal. These options might be similar to the administrative hearing option that is offered to students in Student Conduct cases. This recommendation might be included in the charges to the Task Forces requested in recommendations (2) or (3) if appropriate.

(R28) The Faculty Senate should continue active involvement in the following ways. The Student Life Committee of the Faculty Senate should be charged with assessing the status of these recommendations in two years' time. A recurring annual charge to the committee should be to assess the annual reports requested by the recommendations in this report and then report on the status of the Honor System to the Faculty Senate. The Executive Committee of the Faculty Senate should identify ways in which the Senate can engage faculty in the ongoing discussions about the Honor System.

³ One model is that of the University Standing Committees.

I. INTRODUCTION

The Honor System serves as the foundation of the Vanderbilt community's ethical code and as a keystone of academic integrity at Vanderbilt. The Honor System was instituted in 1875 with the first final examinations administered by the University and thus has served since classes first began at Vanderbilt. Dean Madison Sarratt summarized the system as follows, "Let every individual who contemplates entering Vanderbilt University ask himself[/herself] first this important question: Am I strong enough to give my word of honor and then live up to it in spite of every temptation that may arise?"

This report contains an assessment of the Honor System and its enforcement and promotional arm, the Honor Council. It was written by the Student Life Committee of the Faculty Senate. The infrastructure and efficacy of the Honor System have been reviewed intermittently since its inception. The current document contains some concerns that were reported in 1944, for example, suggesting that periodic reassessment is a valuable component of the university's long-term commitment to the Honor System.⁴ Today, with ubiquitous access to the Internet, increased emphasis in some disciplines on collaboration in projects and laboratories, and academic pressures on students and faculty perhaps higher than ever, is the Honor System a relic from an earlier time? As faculty, some of us have had poor experiences with the Honor System and the Honor Council. Some of us know colleagues who have had bad experiences. Does the Honor System really work at Vanderbilt, or is cheating uncontrolled and unsanctioned? A surprising number of our colleagues ignore the Honor System or are ignorant of its content. Are we as faculty too busy to take part in this tradition of Vanderbilt, or are we no longer committed to such a system? Do we harbor grave doubts about its efficacy, and if so, upon what are those doubts based?

Of course, we speak as if there were a single Honor System and Honor Council, and at one time there was, but such is no longer the case. There is a single Honor System and Honor Council for the undergraduate student population, but the Graduate School and each of the professional schools (Divinity, Law, Medicine, Nursing, Owen, and Peabody) have their own Honor Systems and Honor Councils, which are similar, yet differ in important and significant ways.⁵ This report tries to encompass all of them. Where we believe we have solutions, we give

⁴ *A Study of the Honor System at Vanderbilt University with Recommendations for Its Improvement*, 1944. This document also contains a lengthy history of the Honor System up to that time.

⁵ Compare, for example, the undergraduate system or statements at http://www.vanderbilt.edu/student_handbook/the-honor-system, the graduate system at <http://studentorgs.vanderbilt.edu/gsc/honor-council/http://studentorgs.vanderbilt.edu/gsc/honor-council/>, the School of Medicine version at <https://www.mc.vanderbilt.edu/medschool/pdf/HonorCode09.pdf>, the Owen School

them. In many instances, we identify areas that are beyond the scope of the committee and indicate how further steps should be taken. This report should therefore be seen as beginning a dialogue in the Provost's "Five-Year Campus Conversation on Integrity."

This report contains near-term recommendations that the committee believes are key to the health of the Honor System at Vanderbilt as well as the promotion of an improved culture of academic integrity. These recommendations are labeled "Principal Recommendations." The report also contains recommendations that the committee classified as longer-term, that should be implemented for the maintenance and improvement of the Honor System, but that were not of an immediate remedial nature.

A. CONTEXT OF THE HONOR SYSTEM

The stated purpose of the Honor System at Vanderbilt has always been to foster and maintain personal integrity within each student in order to maintain the high level of integrity for which Vanderbilt University has been known and respected since its founding. Undergraduate students may be asked to sign the Honor Pledge on tests and examinations that states "I pledge my honor that I have neither given nor received aid on this examination." The first Honor Council was founded in 1900, and the first constitution and bylaws were written in 1905. Since then, the Honor Council has had a three-fold purpose: to secure justice for any student under suspicion of dishonesty, to vindicate the student if innocent, and to protect the honor and standing of the remaining students if guilty.

At the undergraduate and graduate levels, a feature of Vanderbilt's Honor System is that the Honor Council is peer-based and composed entirely of students. In the professional schools, this practice varies as the schools seek to serve as a training ground for a professional ethic and professional code of conduct. For students, the peer-based feature demonstrates a philosophy that their friends and fellow students at Vanderbilt are the people most concerned with the preservation of their integrity and that of the University. For faculty, it demonstrates a trust that young adults are capable of assuming the responsibility to judge their peers in serious matters of academic integrity with potentially far-reaching consequences.

To be effective, the Honor System requires participation of both the students and the faculty. The responsibilities of undergraduate students are articulated well in the Constitution of the Undergraduate Honor Council: "For the successful operation of the Honor System, the

cooperation of the whole student body is essential. It is the duty of each member of the student body to show his or her appreciation of the trust placed in him or her under this system, not alone by his or her own conduct, but by his or her insistence on the absolute honesty of others in his or her class. It should be a point of honor among the various classes to hold their members to the standard of the University, and all students should be ready to report to the Honor Council anyone who may violate this trust, immediately and without discrimination.”⁶

The responsibilities of the faculty to a working Honor System are not as well articulated. A section on the Undergraduate Honor Council page⁷ gives four recommendations for faculty: (i) Give a statement making it clear what constitutes an Honor System violation; (ii) remind students of the Honor Code throughout the semester; (iii) provide an atmosphere conducive to the effective operation of the Honor System; (iv) and require students to sign the Honor Pledge on every assignment. These are all reasonable suggestions for faculty, but they do not cover the spectrum of situations that faculty encounter in their classrooms. The Honor System permits faculty to either issue a warning to a student or report the incident to the Honor Council, with no space for alternative choices. There are faculty members who feel these choices are too stark and heavy-handed and resent the Honor System because of it. Likewise, there are faculty members who, with consent of the accused students, administer summary judgments. Most observers of the Honor Council believe that if the faculty reported *all* violations to the Honor Council, the system would break under its own weight.

Added to these concerns for faculty is the perception of potential legal issues. As Vice Chancellor David Williams (University General Counsel) pointed out, faculty members who submit cases to the Honor Council should prepare strong evidentiary cases. An “F” in a course may prevent a student from going to graduate, medical, or law school. Many families in such cases will legally challenge the Honor Council’s findings, Williams reported, and he expressed concern that Vanderbilt’s defenses were often weaker than they ought to be. Likewise, John Callison (Sr. Deputy General Counsel) pointed out that faculty members administering summary judgment (that is, going outside the system established at Vanderbilt) also creates potential liabilities for the University in the case of legal challenges.

⁶ <http://studentorgs.vanderbilt.edu/HonorCouncil/constitution.pdf> (adopted 5/23/1945; last amended 2/10/2010).

⁷ <http://studentorgs.vanderbilt.edu/HonorCouncil/facguide.php>

B. SCOPE OF REPORT

The Student Life Committee was originally charged by the Faculty Senate to investigate the Honor System and Honor Council for two reasons. The first reason was the realization that the Undergraduate Honor Council was not making an annual report to the Faculty Senate as its constitution required.⁸ The second reason was at the request of the Provost. The Provost had four particular issues of concern: (1) that there was a wide disparity in the understanding of honor and integrity in the incoming freshmen class that Vanderbilt doesn't address adequately; (2) that there was a lack of faculty participation in the Honor System, whether in hearing cases at the low level or at the high level appellate process; (3) that students from historically underrepresented populations might be disproportionately reported to the Undergraduate Honor Council; and (4) that there was an attitude among some students that information available for free doesn't need to be cited or used with the rigor that academia demands. The Committee expanded the scope of the initial charges after doing due diligence on the above charges and discovering that there were fundamental questions about whether the graduate and professional Honor Councils and Systems were functioning properly and also after hearing concerns about the general performance of the appellate process.

C. MEMBERSHIP OF STUDENT LIFE COMMITTEE

The process of creating this report spanned two academic terms of the Senate, and thus membership of the committee varied. For 2010-2011, the Chair was Mavis Schorn (Nursing); for 2011-2012, co-chairs of the committee are Vanessa Beasley (Communication Studies) and Joy Calico (Musicology & Ethnomusicology). Bobby Bodenheimer (Electrical Engineering and Computer Science) served as the executive committee liaison for both terms. Other committee members are: Michael Aurbach (Art), Jo-Anne Bachorowski (Psychology), Mark Bandas (Dean of Students, *ex officio*), Donald Brady (Medicine), David Carlton (History), Robert Miller (Medicine), Richard Peek (Medicine), Thomas Schwartz (History), William Turner (Human and Organizational Development), and Tony Weil (Molecular Physiology and Biophysics).

⁸ Article 8.4 of the Undergraduate Honor Council Constitution states "Section 4. The chair of the board, along with the president of the Honor Council, shall mail an annual report to the Faculty Senate on the status of the Honor System."

D. PROCESS

The committee has deliberated for one and a half years, beginning in Fall, 2010. This deliberation included monthly meetings. In September, 2010, we conducted a survey of the Faculty Senate on attitudes about, knowledge of, and experience with the Honor System and Honor Council. In October, 2010, a full meeting of the Faculty Senate was held to discuss issues related to the Honor System and Honor Council. Speaking at that meeting were Mark Bandas (Dean of Students), Daniel Swinton (Director of the Office of Student Conduct & Academic Integrity), Charles Brau (Head of the Appellate Review Board and Professor of Physics), and John Callison (Senior Deputy General Counsel). Also attending were Roy Elam (Faculty advisor to the Honor Council of the Medical School and Associate Professor of Medicine), Richard Hoover (Associate Dean for Academic Affairs of the Graduate School and faculty advisor to Graduate School Honor Council), and Arthur Overholser (Sr. Associate Dean of the School of Engineering).

Members of the committee discussed the attitudes about the Honor System and Honor Council with their colleagues in their Schools and Departments informally and more formally at faculty and curriculum committee meetings. Members of the committee gathered information from members of the Vanderbilt community who are stakeholders in the Honor System and Honor Council. In addition to the people mentioned above, these stakeholders included: Steven Menendez (Undergraduate Honor Council President), Allison Pingree (Center for Teaching), Derek Bruff (Center for Teaching), David Williams (University General Counsel), Michael Hime (faculty advisor to the Honor Council), William Adair (faculty advisor to the Honor Council), Lenn Goodman (faculty advisor to the Honor Council), Andy van Schaack (Human and Organizational Development), Carolyn Dever (Dean of Arts & Science), Chris Guthrie (Dean of the Law School), Jim Bradford (Dean of the Owen School of Management), Jim Hudnut-Beumler (Dean of the Divinity School), Bonnie Miller (Senior Associate Dean, Medicine), Scott Rodgers (Associate Dean, Medicine), Don Welch (Associate Dean, Law), Sharon Shields (Associate Dean, Peabody), Cynthia Cyrus (Associate Provost), Paddy Pearman (School of Nursing Honor Council Advisor), Donna Pavlick (School of Law Honor Council administrator), Kelly Christie (Owen School Honor Council administrator), Jim Segedy (Graduate Student, Chair of Graduate Honor Council), Meredith Albin (Medical Student, Chair of the School of Medicine Honor Council), Frank Wcislo (Dean of the Commons), Douglas Christiansen (Vice Provost for Enrollment and Dean of Admissions), Sandra Stahl (Associate Dean of Students), Richard McCarty (Provost), and Nicholas Zeppos (Chancellor).

The committee also relied on quantitative data in its deliberations. Daniel Swinton from the Office of Student Conduct and Academic Integrity provided much of this, including case dispositions and appellate data for cases from 2004 through 2010. In addition, case histories of

all Undergraduate Honor Council cases from Fall, 2005, through Spring, 2010, were given to the Vanderbilt Institutional Research Group (VIRG) for analysis, and a report was provided for internal use by the committee. The Student Life Committee asked VIRG for the following information regarding students who appeared before the UHC:

1. What the outcome was (innocent, reprimand, failure in course, suspension, etc.).
2. Demographic information regarding the student, such as school/college, and whether the student was a varsity athlete.
3. When in the student's academic career the violation(s) occurred.
4. The student's GPA in the semester prior to the alleged Honor Code violation, in the semester of the alleged violation, and subsequent to the alleged violation.
5. The number of courses being taken during the semester of the alleged violation.
6. An assessment of the academic ability of the student, such as SAT/ACT scores, number of AP credits that the student had, first semester GPA, number of transfer credit hours given to the student, etc.

For technical reasons regarding how student records are kept, the transfer credit hours question and the GPA during the semester of the alleged violation could not easily be answered.

The committee examined the historical record concerning the Honor System as well. We are aware of several detailed examinations of the Honor System, Honor Councils, and related matters. Chancellor Oliver C. Carmichael appointed a faculty-student committee in 1942 to study the Honor System. This committee, chaired by Donald Davidson, issued its report in 1944, entitled *A Study of the Honor System at Vanderbilt University With Recommendations for Its Improvement*.⁹ A faculty committee, chaired by William H. Roberts, reviewed the Honor System in 1958-59 at the request of Chancellor Harvie Branscomb.¹⁰ A committee examined the establishment and application of the Honor System to the Graduate School in 1970, and the proposal to apply the Honor System to the Graduate School was adopted by the graduate faculty in that year (while the professional schools already had Honor Systems and Honor Councils).¹¹ A procedural review of the Honor Council was conducted by six students in 1971.¹² Another faculty committee chaired by Robert Birkby reviewed the Honor System in 1987 at the

⁹ This document is held by libraries in the Vanderbilt system as well as Special Collections.

¹⁰ Several copies of this document exist in the archives. One such is Roberts, William H. Memorandum to College of Arts and Science. 10 October 1959. Record Group 300 Chancellor's Office, Box 177, File 18.

¹¹ Report of the Committee Concerned with an Honor System in the Graduate School. 26 May 1970. Record Group 700 Student Affairs, Box 1257, File 2.

¹² The Vanderbilt Honor System Study Committee Recommendations and Proposals. 14 February 1971. Record Group 700 Student Affairs, Box 1340, File 9.

request of Chancellor Joe B. Wyatt.¹³ A faculty committee chaired by Donald Hall reviewed disciplinary procedures at Vanderbilt, including the Appellate Review Board, in 1995 at the request of Provost Thomas G. Burish.¹⁴

Although the recommendations contained in the present report were arrived at independently of the prior reviews, there is often a confluence of themes and recommendations that makes our current recommendations more salient. However, it is important to note that our report addresses one issue that was not discussed in any of the previous studies of the Honor System: collaboration that may cross the line into giving and receiving unauthorized aid. We acknowledge that problems and insecurities around the Honor System are long-standing. Even though the Honor System is as old as Vanderbilt itself, the Honor System requires regular maintenance and review at an institutional level if its performance is to be assured.

A draft set of recommendations was debated and discussed at a faculty senate meeting consisting only of elected senators in January, 2012. A revised draft was then circulated more generally to faculty and administrative stakeholders during an open comment period later that month. This final report and its recommendations are the outcomes of those processes.

E. NOMENCLATURE

We employ the following distinct terms in our report. By *Honor Code*, we mean the specific personal code of conduct that provides a minimum standard of behavior to insure academic integrity and that Vanderbilt students are expected to conform to at all times. Honor Code includes academic integrity and personal conduct, according to the Student Handbook. The committee could not find an explicit statement of the Honor Code in any University publication or website. By *Honor Council*, we mean the organized body that investigates, adjudicates, and promotes the Honor Code. At Vanderbilt, Honor Councils are usually, but not always, composed of students. There are seven Honor Councils, the largest of which is the Undergraduate Honor Council. By *Honor System*, we mean the general structure that governs and guides academic integrity and freedom, including both the Honor Code and the Honor Councils housed within specific schools and colleges.

¹³ Report of the Ad Hoc Committee on the Honor System. 25 May 1987. Private Collection.

¹⁴ Hall, Donald J. Memorandum to Provost Thomas G. Burish. 3 May 1995. Faculty Senate Records.

II. UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS

The Student Life Committee believes that the Honor Code and the Undergraduate Honor Council (UHC) are vital to undergraduate life at Vanderbilt, and that the Undergraduate Honor Council should remain a student-led and student-directed undertaking. This tradition has a long and rich history at Vanderbilt, and we see no reason to abandon it. Nevertheless, our research indicates concern among faculty about the emergence of a campus culture that does not value or understand the Honor Code. Better support for the Honor Code by the entire university community is required if it is to remain an integral part of the undergraduate academic experience. There is also concern about the structure and procedures of the Honor Council (but not about the actions or ethics of the student members or faculty advisors on the Honor Council).

A. THE HONOR CODE

1. UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS AND THE HONOR CODE

Undergraduates generally agree that plagiarism and cheating on tests constitute Honor Code violations and should be punished.¹⁵ Beyond that, however, there is very little agreement about what constitutes an Honor Code violation or what role the Honor Code should play in their academic experience. In fact, it is difficult to ascertain exactly what the Honor Code *is*. There is a section in the Student Handbook entitled “Honor Code,” but it merely provides a list of possible infractions and a warning that they will be punished.¹⁶ The committee could locate only one explicit statement in official University materials. The Honor Code Pledge is printed on the card distributed to undergraduate students after they participate in the Honor Code signing ceremony: “I pledge to pursue all academic endeavors with honor and integrity. I understand the principles of the Honor System, and I promise to uphold these standards by adhering to the Honor Code in order to preserve the integrity of Vanderbilt University and its individual members.”¹⁷ The text of the Honor Code should figure more prominently in university literature.

¹⁵ Report from Associate Provost for Undergraduate Education Cynthia Cyrus, 24 October 2011.

¹⁶ The “Honor Code” section in the 2011-12 Student Handbook provides a list of possible infractions with the warning that “violations of the Honor Code are cause for disciplinary actions imposed by the appropriate honor council,” but there is no statement of an Honor Code. The Undergraduate Honor Council website links to this page, as well. http://www.vanderbilt.edu/student_handbook/the-honor-system#honorcode

¹⁷ The only other statement of this text found in University literature or on the website was in a letter the Undergraduate Honor Council sent to incoming first-year students in June 2011.

The university website reinforces the impression that the Honor Code is not integral to campus life. There is no link to the Honor Code under the “Students” tab or under the “Faculty and Staff” tab. A search for “Honor Code” brings up links for Owen, the School of Medicine, Undergraduate Admissions, and others, but there is no single, dedicated site for the Honor Code. A search for “Honor Council” brings up the UHC site, which in turn links to the Student Handbook section on “Honor Code” cited above; a general Google search for “Vanderbilt Honor System” produces similar results. Furthermore, the language on the Vanderbilt website largely focuses on punitive measures and processes. The committee members were struck by a lack of language about living with honor and integrity as a member of our scholarly community. The committee believes that the University needs to foster positive discourse about academic integrity.

Associate Provost for Undergraduate Education Cynthia Cyrus is conducting a series of interviews with 40 randomly-chosen juniors from across the four undergraduate schools regarding the academic Honor System. In a report generated after interviews with approximately half of those students, she wrote that “the students I’ve talked to so far have very little personal knowledge of the Honor Council beyond the initial Honor Code signing.” Students reported having “a generally positive impression of the Honor System here on campus, but they didn’t think it made much difference past the freshman year, partly because it [the Honor Council] is not a visible presence.” The VIRG data show that the most likely time for an Honor Code violation to occur is during a student’s third semester of college, suggesting a potential need for greater follow-through beyond the first year.

Many students mentioned “strategic cheating” and “ends-driven cheating” as responses to being overextended. According to students Cyrus interviewed, those who cheat may be perceived by their peers as looking for a way to get ahead and bump up their GPA’s. Students interviewed by Cyrus also “have a strong sense that there are two kinds of cheating:” hard cheating and soft cheating. There was uniform agreement that hard cheating (meaning copying answers on a test or plagiarism - “actions that everyone knows is wrong”) should be punished severely: “failure in the course, suspension, or expulsion.” They believed that this is relatively rare, however. Soft cheating, on the other hand, “includes actions such as crowd-sourcing homework, consulting test banks, collaborating on work outside of class even when it has been expressly forbidden by the instructor, or copying answers from the back of the book.” Students reported that soft cheating is a “valuable means of studying – a way of learning the material through consultation.”

The Hustler is another source of information about undergraduate culture regarding cheating and the Honor Code. There were several such stories published in 2009. On 4 December 2009, it published the results of its survey on Adderall use on campus and reported that 25% of student respondents considered taking Adderall without a prescription to be cheating, while 50% did not; 18.3% were unsure. 20% reported having taken the drug without a prescription in order to study. One student said that it did not constitute cheating because “it’s done beforehand, and most people consider cheating to be things that are actually done during tests.” The editorial headline that accompanied the study was unequivocal, however: “Taking Adderall illegally is a violation of the Honor Code, even if only 25% of Vanderbilt students agree.”

On 17 April 2009, *The Hustler* published a front-page piece entitled “Cheating truths.” The editors spoke with seven students about cheating, and found that “students exhibit a vast range of opinions and concerns as far as what constitutes cheating, and whether or not cheating is a problem on campus.” With regard to the Honor Code, one said “I follow my own moral standards. I would never do something or not do something because of the Honor Code. I would just do it because it seemed right or wrong to me.” One of her peers disagreed, saying that “he believed the Honor Code was a part of everyday life on campus.” A related story published on 20 April 2009 reported on Professor Brian Heuser’s research into “the self-reported academic integrity habits of Vanderbilt students.” His 2008 study found that 15.6% of Vanderbilt students reported witnessing plagiarism of some kind, 22% witnessed cheating of some kind, and 36.6% of students witnessed unauthorized sharing of information of some kind.

The VIRG Honor Council Report of April 2011 contains data about Honor Code violations taken up by the Honor Council. These data pertain only to cases that were prosecuted by faculty, so they address the Honor Code only in that they track documented violations and not attitudes or perceptions, as described above. One finding is particularly relevant to the student comments about “soft” cheating: “The most frequent Honor Code violation was receiving or giving unauthorized aid. Approximately 55% of the cases involved a violation of receiving or giving unauthorized aid.” The VIRG data also reveal that students who come to Vanderbilt less academically prepared than their peers are more likely to be reported to the UHC for an Honor Code infraction than their peers, and that incidents among all students are most likely to occur in the third semester. The university could use this information, as well as other information in the VIRG report, to identify appropriate points and means of programmatic intervention throughout the undergraduate experience.

The VIRG analysis also sought to identify information about the students whose cases were reported to the Undergraduate Honor Council. More specifically, the Student Life Committee asked VIRG to consider a wide range of demographic information about such students to see if

we could identify any trends or patterns. This request was made in part as a response to the Provost's expressed concern about the possible overrepresentation of students from historically underrepresented groups within cases reported to the Undergraduate Honor Council. The VIRG report is suggestive but inconclusive; that is, our committee's opinion is that more analysis of this data is needed before it can serve as the basis for strong conclusions. Similarly, the committee also acknowledges a potential need for additional data collection and analysis (e.g., surveying both students and faculty about the Honor System). In short, the committee feels that the existing VIRG analysis, while preliminary, enables us to identify issues and stakeholders to be involved in future study. This conclusion motivated one of our recommendations: that further analysis of these data and possibly of additional data be conducted by the Task Force convened by the Associate Provost for Undergraduate Education (Recommendation 2).

2. FACULTY AND THE UNDERGRADUATE HONOR CODE

Many faculty members are not sufficiently knowledgeable about the Honor Code or their role in it, and thus interpretation and enforcement of the Honor Code vary greatly. Some faculty appear to be unaware of cheating as an issue in their classes. Compare the results from Heuser's 2008 student survey cited above (15.6% of Vanderbilt students reported witnessing plagiarism of some kind, 22% witnessed cheating of some kind, and 36.6% of students witnessed unauthorized sharing of information of some kind) with the results of a Faculty Senate survey conducted in September 2010, in which 75% of respondents said that Honor Code infractions do not occur frequently in their classes. The full results of this survey are contained in the appendix to this report.

The Faculty Senate survey responses most relevant to this section indicated that only 62% were familiar with the Honor System, 51% cover the Honor System in their syllabi, and 43% discuss the Honor System in their courses. If the Senate can be taken as representative, then many faculty are not sufficiently knowledgeable about the Honor Code or Honor Councils, and many do not integrate the Honor Code into their syllabi or classes. Faculty members have different interpretations of their roles in upholding the Honor Code. Some faculty members proctor exams because they believe it is their responsibility to create an environment in which students are not tempted to violate the Honor Code. Others do not proctor their exams because they believe that this show of trust is part of the Honor Code, as indicated in the "General Information" section at the Honor Council website: "Faculty members do not routinely monitor tests and examinations to apprehend violators. Instructors who remain in

examination rooms are there primarily to give assistance.”¹⁸ Some students prize this highly, as is evident in this post on the Vanderbilt Admissions Blog. Here a Vanderbilt student notes that his favorite professor “takes part in one of my favorite traditions and leaves the room during a test to ‘let the Honor Code rule.’”¹⁹

This range of opinions and practices in faculty implementation of the Honor Code is significant in light of student comments in Associate Provost Cyrus’s report: “First: please proctor the examinations. Students are more comfortable when there is an authority in the room. Also, have students drop off phones before a test (and not just ‘turn them off’), particularly if the test is being given at two different times – the temptation to circulate questions is too great. One student said, ‘make it easy to abide by the Honor Code; it’s less stressful that way.’ (At the same time, three students explicitly asked faculty not to walk around the room during the exam – it’s considered distracting.) Some students like pre-assigned seating where students are directed where to sit during the tests; others didn’t like the change of seat location but thought that it did ‘help’ reduce the temptation for unauthorized collaboration during the examination.”

Different interpretations of the faculty’s role in the Honor Code may also contribute to what students perceive as unclear expectations regarding collaboration on assignments. The Honor Code clearly states that it is the student’s responsibility to clarify expectations with faculty. Nevertheless, Cyrus reports that “students complain that some faculty encourage working together, and others forbid it, and find those ‘mixed messages’ to be ‘confusing.’” This is directly related to the category that accounts for the largest percentage of reported violations (giving and receiving unauthorized aid), much of which would fall under what students describe as “soft cheating.”

Research revealed a lack of consistency among faculty in responses to Honor Code violations. For example, according to the Faculty Senate survey, 51% of respondents believe that Vanderbilt faculty generally address Honor Code violations, but only 27% had reported an Honor Code violation to an Honor Council. When asked how faculty members typically address Honor Code infractions, 48% said that the range of faculty response was “too variable to say,” while 41% said faculty handle them directly; only 11% selected “report to an Honor Council.” See the appendix for the complete survey and results. These responses are consistent with what the committee heard anecdotally from colleagues throughout the university: reporting violations to the Honor Council is not the preferred means of dealing with alleged Honor Code infractions.

¹⁸ http://www.vanderbilt.edu/student_handbook/the-honor-system

¹⁹ <http://admissions.vanderbilt.edu/vandybloggers/2010/01/back-to-school-back-to-school/>

Inconsistent faculty response to Honor Code infractions raises two issues. First, technically speaking the Honor Code does not permit faculty to handle infractions directly or otherwise outside of the Honor Council. Nevertheless, the majority of stated faculty responses to alleged infractions could be interpreted to constitute a kind of shadow system that operates without guidance or oversight. Under these conditions, faculty bias may play a role in deciding which cases to handle privately and which cases to report to the UHC. For example, David Williams referred to the “isolation and discomfort” felt by some student-athletes from historically underrepresented racial and ethnic groups and also expressed concern that “faculty preconceptions are a problem.”²⁰ Likewise, there is no consistency in determining what qualifies as a violation or the kind of penalty assessed when faculty response occurs outside of the Honor Council, and there is no documentation with which to track patterns for repeat offenders. Second, when students know that faculty members do not buy in to the Honor System, it undermines the legitimacy of the Honor Code and the work of the student-run Honor Council. According to Brian Heuser’s research cited above: “(T)he No. 1 reason students cheat is because they think they can get away with it. And the No. 1 reason they think they can get away with it is because faculty won’t turn them in.” He cited national studies indicating that “90 percent of the time they [faculty] do not.”

Participants in the Faculty Senate survey were asked why faculty avoid taking cases to the Honor Council. The two most common reasons given for avoiding the Honor Council – concern for student (24%) and preferring to handle directly (31%) – speak to an issue the committee heard repeatedly from faculty colleagues: the Honor System does not currently provide any space for faculty to exercise discretion in identifying “teachable moments,” instances in which the faculty member may feel that there is much to be gained from using the opportunity to discuss academic integrity with the student. All infractions, no matter how minor or how unintentional, are subjected to the same Honor Council process, and some believe all violations do not warrant the same level of sanction.

The 1987 Birkby report contains interesting discourse upon the issue of faculty discretion, phrased in terms of a recommendation: “After some discussion, there seemed to be general consensus that the professor always has the option of grading the work on grounds relevant to the standards of the course which includes the possibility of failure. This procedure demonstrates explicitly that an offense against the Honor Council is an offense against the entire University community and stands apart from the student’s failure to perform appropriately in the course in which he and his/or her professor have entered into an academic relationship.”²¹ Our Committee did not find evidence that this consensus exists among the

²⁰ Bobby Bodenheimer interview with David Williams.

²¹ Birkby, Rec. 15, p. 12.

current faculty. In fact, we could not find evidence that there was sufficient knowledge among the faculty to facilitate agreement, disagreement, or consensus.

There is some common ground here between faculty and students, however. In October, 2010, Student Honor Council president Steven Menendez told the committee that the Council sees the Honor Code as a partnership between students and faculty; he mentioned the value of faculty taking advantage of “teaching moments” as opposed to turning everything in to the Honor Council. Students in Cyrus’s interviews said something similar: “Students generally thought that ‘soft cheating’ should be handled by the faculty member, not the Honor Council, perhaps with a right to appeal the faculty-imposed sanction to the Honor Council or to the administration if the student thought the faculty member was being unfair. There’s a sense among the students I’ve talked to that the Honor Council is an adversarial process, whereas ‘soft cheating’ demands an educational process as a response.” In sum, students are responsible for their own actions, but faculty can be, and many would like to be, more responsible for creating an educational environment more conducive to supporting and adhering to the Honor Code.

3. HONOR CODE: RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations focus on the Honor Code.

a. PRINCIPAL RECOMMENDATIONS

(R1) The Associate Provost for Undergraduate Education should oversee the development of a centralized website dedicated to the Honor Code. The website should contain a succinct, non-self-referential statement of the Honor Code. It should also contain information for faculty including: what to do when encountering a possible violation of the Honor Code; advice on communicating with students who have possibly committed an Honor Code violation; faculty resources for advice; what to do to prepare a charge; what to expect out of the Honor Council process; the expected life cycle of an Honor System charge; advice from the General Counsel’s office; resources for handling dissatisfaction with the Honor Council process or outcome. While the focus of this website is intended to be on the undergraduate system, links to the graduate and professional schools’ websites for their respective Honor Codes and Councils should be maintained on this site as well.

(R2) The Associate Provost for Undergraduate Education should convene a Task Force to explore ways that education on the Honor Code and academic integrity could be included at multiple points in the undergraduate student experience. The committee should include representatives from the Faculty Senate Student Life Committee, Athletics, the Center for

Teaching, the Undergraduate Honor Council, and other stakeholders as identified by the Associate Provost. This Task Force's charges would include (a) clarifying the role of faculty in educating students about the Honor Code, (b) developing guidelines for best practices in teaching (e.g., identifying guidelines for academic integrity within collaborative/group work), (c) identifying opportunities for members of the Undergraduate Honor Council to be more effective in educating their peers, and (d) identifying extracurricular programs and/or opportunities for intervention at multiple points during the undergraduate career. On this last point, for example, we note that the current Visions module on the Honor Code is optional, and we urge it to be required. Likewise, the Task Force should refer to and extend analysis of the VIRG report of April 2011 in order to identify opportunities at the most appropriate times for programmatic intervention (e.g., third semester of enrollment) *before* an Honor Code violation occurs.

(R3) The Provost should convene a Task Force composed of faculty members from all colleges and schools to consider modifications to the prescribed roles faculty play in upholding the Honor Code. These modifications would increase faculty discretion about when to report a student to the Honor Council. Any such changes would necessitate changes to the Faculty Manual as well. This Task Force would be charged with creating guidelines about how and why faculty may be expected to use their own judgment regarding "teachable moments" (i.e., opportunities to handle small infractions outside of the Honor Council). These modifications may include the development of a means of tracking interventions so that faculty would know when apparently isolated incidents are actually patterns of behavior.²² In addition to faculty members, this committee could include representatives from University General Counsel, the Office of the Dean of Students, Associate Dean Daniel Swinton, and other relevant parties as identified by the Provost.

(R4) On matters of academic integrity, the Director of the Office of Student Conduct and Academic Integrity should report to the Associate Provost for Undergraduate Education, who convenes a committee of the Associate Deans of the Undergraduate schools.²³ Modifying the reporting structure so that the Undergraduate Honor Council is better aligned with academic affairs seems more consistent with its mission and may give it greater visibility and credibility to the faculty. To foster this visibility and credibility, the committee recommends that the

²² We envision a centralized database with a web interface that faculty could use, or they could call the Office of Student Conduct and Academic Integrity to report an incident. Repeat violators would be flagged and brought to the attention of the proper person. The faculty member might then be told that this behavior was not an isolated incident and an honor council incident report must be filed. We note that the University has a variety of tools, from redcap to the MIS department, which may be appropriate for developing this database and interface.

²³ As a point of clarification we are purposefully making a distinction between matters of Academic Integrity and Student Conduct. We were not charged with studying Student Conduct, and did not do so.

Associate Provost for Undergraduate Education make an annual appearance before the faculties of each of the undergraduate schools to discuss academic integrity and the Honor System. One component of informing the faculty about the Honor Council may be through the Associate Deans for Undergraduate Affairs in each of the Undergraduate Colleges.

(R5) The Vice Provost for Enrollment and Dean of Admissions should require all matriculating students (first-year and transfer) to indicate that they have read about the Honor System, understand that they will be participating in it, and agree to abide by it as students at Vanderbilt.

b. RECOMMENDATION

(R6) The Associate Deans should strongly encourage faculty who advise undergraduates, including CASPAR advisors (College of Arts and Science Pre-major Academic Advising Resources), to discuss the Honor Code with each advisee.

B. UNDERGRADUATE HONOR COUNCIL

1. UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS AND THE UNDERGRADUATE HONOR COUNCIL

The committee agrees with the findings of the Associate Deans' Report on the Honor System (October 2010) that, generally speaking, the Undergraduate Honor Council (UHC) functions well, and "it deserves our vocal and public support." We also believe that the UHC should remain a student-led and student-directed undertaking. Nevertheless our research indicates that improvements could be made with regard to educating undergraduates about the UHC and facilitating and incentivizing greater faculty engagement.

Associate Provost Cyrus's interviews revealed that undergraduates "have very little personal knowledge of the Honor Council beyond the initial Honor Code signing," and several recommended "outreach from the Honor Council to the student body both about the existence of the Honor Council and about the processes it follows." Members of the UHC describe their mission as both educational/preventative and punitive, but despite their best efforts the undergraduate population remains insufficiently aware of the UHC's work.

The report created by VIRG in April, 2011, analyzed data pertaining to cases brought before the UHC between Fall, 2005, and Spring, 2010. Among this report's findings were the following:

- Between Fall, 2005, and Spring, 2010, 375 undergraduate degree-seeking students were charged with an Honor Code violation.

- Of the 375 students charged with an Honor Code violation, 68.5% (257) were found guilty of at least one violation. Furthermore, of the 257 students found guilty of an Honor Code violation, 25 had more than one violation.
- The most frequent Honor Code violation was receiving or giving unassisted aid. Approximately 55% of the cases involved a violation of receiving or giving unassisted aid.
- Overall, the most common penalty was failure in the course. In 65.4% of the cases, the penalty for the Honor Code violation was failure in the course.

The number of undergraduates that the UHC found guilty during this ten-semester time period (257) should not be interpreted as representing the number of undergraduates who committed Honor Code infractions during that time period or even the number of students faculty accused of committing Honor Code infractions. The Faculty Senate survey indicated that most faculty members handle most Honor Code infractions outside of the Honor Council system, and there is no way to track those instances. Furthermore, these data cannot account for Honor Code infractions that went undetected. The 257 undergraduates found guilty by the UHC represent a small fraction of the 13,409 Vanderbilt undergraduates enrolled during that time, and Heuser's data cited above suggest that cheating is more prevalent than that. In sum, the number of cases tried by the UHC and reported to VIRG (375) represents only the number of students that faculty chose to report to the UHC.

2. UNDERGRADUATE FACULTY AND THE UNDERGRADUATE HONOR COUNCIL

Most faculty members do not engage with the UHC, either to pursue alleged Honor Code violations or to participate as faculty advisors, and there are those who have a low opinion of it. As noted in the Associate Deans' report, the operations of the UHC in particular suffer from a poor reputation. This perception was confirmed in conversations with colleagues across campus. Some departments discourage faculty from taking cases to the UHC because processes are perceived to be time-consuming, shrouded in mystery, and potentially litigious, which can be dangerous for the faculty member; the verdicts are said to be capricious; and there is a perception that the burden of proof placed on the faculty member is excessive.

Because senators represent every college and school at the university, the Faculty Senate survey asked participants to indicate which Honor Council they report to. Twenty-eight percent of respondents could refer cases to the UHC and 31% could refer cases to either the UHC or to a school Honor Council; 42% could refer only to a school Honor Council. When asked "If faculty address Honor Code violations, what method is *usually* used," only 11% said that violations were usually reported to the relevant Honor Council. When asked why faculty members avoid taking cases to an Honor Council, two responses are particularly relevant in this

context: Uncertainty of violation (16%) and uncertainty of process (17%). The General Counsel of the University states that many faculty members do not understand the evidence required to be successful in an Honor Council case, and warns that students' families may "lawyer up" because they perceive the stakes to be high (i.e., an "F" on the transcript will keep a student out of graduate, Medical, or Law school).²⁴ According to the General Counsel, faculty must also be willing to "go the distance" with a case. This suggests that faculty concerns about the potential legal ramifications of taking a case to the UHC are not unfounded. Because most faculty are not trained attorneys, more information about the legality of the process should be readily available in order to protect the student, the faculty member, and the University. The UHC faculty advisors could also act as consultants for faculty members who are considering sending a case to the UHC or who need advice on preparing such a case.

When asked how faculty usually felt about the result of taking Honor Code violations to their Honor Council, 48% of senators said that faculty were *usually dissatisfied* with the outcome; only slightly more (52%) said that faculty were *usually satisfied* with the outcome. This is despite the fact that the VIRG data indicated that the UHC found the reported students guilty 68.5% of the time, meaning the UHC sides with the faculty most of the time. As reported by the Associate Deans, this outcome does not appear to warrant "the extreme views held by some of our colleagues; i.e., that the Council is not worth fooling with because it lets cheaters off with a slap on the hand, or that the Council imposes draconian penalties and should be avoided."

There is a strong sense that faculty would like more information. Some report feeling disenfranchised from the process because faculty members who prosecute alleged violations are informed only of the UHC verdict and the penalty; they do not receive information about the process, or how the verdict was reached. Some faculty noted that there was an asymmetry in the appeals process: students could appeal, but faculty had no basis upon which to appeal a decision because they received no information on the process.²⁵ John Callison, Senior Deputy General Counsel, has stated that FERPA imposes no legal limits on feedback that the accusing faculty member can be given, provided that this faculty member treats the information confidentially. The Faculty Senate survey indicated a strong preference for more information, with 98% reporting that they would like to receive Honor Council summaries after a case.

²⁴ Bobby Bodenheimer interview with David Williams.

²⁵ The 1987 Birkby Report (ref. above) considered the issue of a faculty appeal and rejected it because "To provide for such an appeal would make the process too much of an adversarial process, too much of a contest." However, the Birkby report advocated a faculty presence and vote in Honor council hearings and continued "The recommendations above for a faculty presence in the actual hearing, for Council consultation with the Board of Advisors, and for a hearing when the faculty member demands it should provide a greater degree of credibility than presently exists and accomplish the same purpose without the overtones of a judicial contest." (Birkby, Rec. 14, p. 12).

Furthermore, 78% of senators surveyed indicated that they would like to receive annual aggregate data from the Honor Councils.

Participation rates in the UHC as faculty advisors are also very low, although this appears to be less about the reputation of the UHC and more about the burdensome nature of the process. The Honor Council Constitution provides for 30 faculty members who serve two-year, staggered terms to “advise the Honor Council during hearings and investigations.” The number of faculty advisors is consistently much lower than 30, however, and term limits are not observed. In 2009-2010, two of the seventeen faculty advisors (both lecturers) accounted for 40% of faculty advisor participation in the 63 panels convened. Hearings are scheduled on very short notice and may run late into the night, which makes it difficult for some faculty to participate. The UHC also reports that most faculty advisors do not respond promptly to hearing requests.²⁶

The committee takes the position that a large, active set of faculty advisors is best for purposes of engaging the faculty in the Honor System. The University could incentivize participation in the UHC faculty advisor program by offering financial compensation and by scheduling hearings with more lead-time and at different times of the day. Increasing the number of faculty familiar with the UHC would go a long way in reducing faculty mistrust and misunderstanding of the UHC. In studying the history of the Honor System at Vanderbilt, the Student Life Committee has learned that in its beginnings there was little role for faculty: students accepted and bore the responsibility of preserving their own honor and that of their peers.²⁷ This situation gradually changed in the decades after World War I, and although the reasons are debatable, the change necessitated greater faculty involvement in the process. Some vestiges of that earlier time can be seen today, for instance, in the confusion some faculty have over whether exams should be proctored.

The situation today is drastically different, and the vast majority of Honor Council cases are faculty-reported. This situation leads to debate among the faculty. Some believe that the present system has evolved to a system that works reasonably well; others believe that the system is completely broken. The Student Life Committee takes the view, reflected throughout this report, that the system generally works but needs several process improvements. One such improvement is to expand the role of the faculty advisor to include casting a vote regarding the penalty phase in large panel cases,²⁸ after the students on the UHC have reached a guilty

²⁶ Data provided by the UHC in September 2010

²⁷ *A Study of the Honor System at Vanderbilt University with Recommendations for Its Improvement*, 1944.

²⁸ UHC cases are either “small” or “large” panel. In a small panel case, the faculty member is a voting member; outcomes and sanctions are limited. In a large panel case, the faculty member serves in an advisory role only. See

verdict. This would enhance faculty investment in the UHC and assuage those who are dubious about a student-only process, even while the students on the UHC remain solely responsible for the deliberation and the verdict while also retaining primary responsibility for assessing the penalty.

3. UNDERGRADUATE HONOR COUNCIL: RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations deal with the Undergraduate Honor Council.

a. PRINCIPAL RECOMMENDATIONS

(R7) The Undergraduate Honor Council should submit annual reports to the Deans and the Provost, with copy to the chair of the Student Life Committee of the Faculty Senate.

(R8) Given the nature and import of the responsibilities of UHC faculty advisors, we recommend that the Provost consider additional compensation for them, either in the form of salary supplement or research funds. Faculty should be compensated according to the number of cases they oversee. While the committee does not make recommendations about the amount of compensation or number of cases, the committee feels that cash compensation is appropriate, and that the model used in the School of Medicine to incentivize medical faculty to interview medical student applicants is a good model to adopt for Honor Council service. Under this model, faculty advisors who sat in on a set minimum number of cases per semester would receive a cash incentive.

(R9) The Director of the Office of Student Conduct and Integrity should provide a report to the faculty member who brought the Honor Code violation to the UHC.

(R10) The Associate Provost for Undergraduate Education should convene a committee to study expanding the faculty advisor's role to include casting a vote in the penalty phase of large panel cases. The Student Life committee recommends this change, but recognizes that the faculty are not the only stakeholders in the process of changing the Undergraduate Honor Council process.

b. RECOMMENDATION

(R11) The role of faculty advisors should be expanded to include acting as resources for faculty who need guidance in navigating UHC procedures. We believe that the Associate Provost for Undergraduate Education is the administrator properly tasked with carrying out this recommendation.

III. GRADUATE AND PROFESSIONAL SCHOOLS

“All Vanderbilt students are bound by the Honor System inaugurated in 1875 when the university opened its doors.” This quote is taken from the Owen Graduate School of Management’s website, and its placement there underscores a fundamental assumption of this report: Vanderbilt University expects all students, not just its undergraduates, to conduct their studies in accordance with the university’s Honor Code “to preserve and promote academic integrity.”²⁹

For students seeking an undergraduate degree, the Undergraduate Honor Council is the body that hears, adjudicates and, when necessary, punishes alleged violations of this code. For students seeking graduate and professional degrees at Vanderbilt, however, there is no one adjudicating body. Instead, each professional school (Law School, Owen School of Management Medical School, Nursing School and Divinity School) as well as the Graduate School has its own Honor Council with its own unique procedures and membership. Additionally, in some professional schools (e.g., the Law School and the Divinity School) the faculty is required to provide certification of individual degree candidates’ character before the graduate degree can be awarded, making issues of personal honor and integrity even more central to the educational process.

Despite the varying nature of some of these needs, a recurring question has been whether or not one central body should be created and charged with hearing Honor Code infractions coming from any of the graduate and professional schools. Based on our study, however, the Student Life Committee does not see a compelling need for the creation of one such body. Our position rests on two main considerations: first, the academic leaders of the professional schools strongly oppose the idea, and second, a series of alternative changes can address the challenges raised by the current system(s) and their differences. In the rest of this section, we review what we learned from two previous reports and then present our findings relative to the presenting issues and our related recommendations.

²⁹ Student Handbook at http://www.vanderbilt.edu/student_handbook/the-honor-system#introduction

A. **PREVIOUS STUDY**

The Honor Council in the Graduate School was established in 1970.³⁰ The Divinity School and the School of Law had functioning Honor Councils prior to that, and so, we believe, did the School of Medicine, although it may have functioned intermittently.³¹ The issue of a unified graduate and professional Honor Council was considered at the formation of the Graduate School Honor Council,³² and again in 1980, when a committee creating the Peabody Honor Council for professional schools proposed it.³³ At both times it was decided that separate Honor Councils should be maintained. The issue of the Honor System(s) within graduate and professional schools at Vanderbilt has been addressed in at least two other recent reports made available to the Student Life Committee: *Next Steps Forward: Graduate Education at Vanderbilt* (2009) and a memorandum from the Associate Deans of the Undergraduate Schools sent to Provost McCarty (October, 2010). What follows is a necessarily brief overview of the relevant parts of each report.

1. **NEXT STEPS FORWARD: GRADUATE EDUCATION AT VANDERBILT (2009)**

Next Steps Forward was the report of the Graduate Education Task Force, chaired by Jay Clayton (A&S), Craig Anne Heflinger (Peabody), Bridget Rodgers (Engineering) and Susan Wente (Medical Center). The report was only concerned with The Graduate School and thus not any of the professional schools *per se* except in cases of joint degree programs. Furthermore, the scope of this report's discussion was quite broad. Nevertheless, there was a discussion of the Graduate Student Honor Council as well as a corresponding recommendation (highlighted emphasis added, italics in original) that, to our knowledge, has not been implemented:

There needs to be greater clarity over who is in charge of which areas of graduate education. There are some issues over which the Graduate School ought to have control and oversight that are beyond the purview of college or school deans. We believe that the Graduate School should be in charge of student affairs and mentoring. An example of the need for Graduate School oversight of student affairs is the area of discipline, *Humanities Subcommittee Report 2009 IV-23*, which is currently handled by a graduate Honor Council. The Honor Council model is better suited to undergraduate than to

³⁰ Report of the Committee Concerned with an Honor System in the Graduate School. 26 May 1970. Record Group 700 Student Affairs, Box 1257 File 2.

³¹ Boutwell, Sidney F. Memorandum to Dean Robert Lagemann. 3 October 1967. Record Group 301 Senior Vice-Chancellor, Box 390, File 17. Excerpt on the Honor System from the Report of the Dean of the School of Medicine, Record Group 520 Graduate School, Box 786, File 21.

³² Report of the Committee Concerned with an Honor System in the Graduate School.

³³ Madson, Johan. Memorandum to Jim Sandlin. 16 February 1981. Record Group 700 Student Affairs. Box 1308, File 2. Sandlin, James H. Memorandum to Johan Madson. 4 March 1981. Record Group 700 Student Affairs, Box 1308, File 2.

graduate education; members appear to have limited understanding of the conventions governing fields beyond their own expertise (and, in particular, of what plagiarism—a prime offense in the humanities—actually consists). We suggest that academic discipline ought to be the charge of the Graduate Dean. We recommend that the Graduate Dean form a disciplinary subcommittee of the Council of DGSs, and that this subcommittee—on which the Dean would sit—hear cases of suspected academic violations and advise the Graduate Dean on their resolution.

2. **MEMORANDUM FROM ASSOCIATE DEANS OF THE UNDERGRADUATE SCHOOLS (2010)**

On October 22, 2010, Associate and Assistant Deans from the four undergraduate colleges sent a memorandum to Provost McCarty in response to his request for them to examine “the workings of the Honor System.” This report’s main focus was the undergraduate Honor Council, and it highlighted issues related to faculty participation. However, the memo included the following quotes regarding the Honor Systems currently in place in graduate and professional schools:

- “The post-graduate Honor Systems do not function effectively. You did not assign us to address this problem, but most of us are members of the graduate faculty and we have learned enough from the data, from our considerable experience, and from our interviews to understand that having an Honor Council in each post-graduate school does not work well. Cases are rare, institutional memory is lost, and wise procedures are not always followed.” (page 2)
- Listed under “Other Recommendations:” “Consider a common postgraduate Honor Council. Depending on what the Faculty Senate suggests, you may wish to appoint a 2011-2012 task force comprising appropriate representatives to consider the suggestion of Professor Brau that Vanderbilt might be better served by a single post-graduate Honor Council.” (page 3)

B. **STUDENT LIFE COMMITTEE’S STUDY**

Our study of the graduate and professional school’s Honor Systems was conducted almost exclusively through interviews. As alluded to earlier, we met with academic leaders, primarily Deans and Associate Deans, of all the professional schools. We also interviewed a student leader from the Graduate Student Honor Council. In addition, the topic of Honor Systems within graduate and professional school education was also discussed in interviews with Charlie Brau (Chair, ARB). One of our conclusions is that there are differences between the needs of

the professional schools and the Graduate School; therefore, we have separated the findings and recommendations accordingly.

1. **PROFESSIONAL SCHOOLS**

The following issues were identified in these interviews. There are relatively low numbers of Honor Code violations in all the professional schools. This rarity creates difficulty for institutional memory. Cases that do occur are most often at the end of semesters, making it more difficult for the relevant Honor Council to address in a timely way. Second, there are significant differences between how the Honor Systems function between the professional schools. These differences include the make-up of the Council, types of cases eligible to be heard, and the procedural functioning of the Council. Likewise, the primary guiding faculty member or staff assigned to the Council varies between schools. The types of violations that occur in each school are somewhat unique because of the nature of each profession and the type of educational programs students are completing.

The Honor Council of the Divinity School is probably the most atypical in that faculty sit on the Honor Council as well as students. In terms of process, the schools of Law and of Medicine have what the committee calls “dual-track” procedures. In the School of Law, for example, a separate faculty investigation of Honor Code violations may occur, that is, a distinct and separate operation from the function of its Honor Council. This investigation is done to determine whether a student is of good moral character as required for admission to the bar. In the School of Medicine, faculty can refer allegations of misconduct directly to the Honor Council or to the Academic Promotions Committee, the latter of which is composed of only faculty members who would then determine whether the allegation is a matter of professionalism or one of academic integrity. If the Academic Promotions Committee determines that the allegation is a matter of professionalism, then that committee itself adjudicates the case; this committee can also forward the case to the Honor Council if it determines that there has been a violation of academic integrity. These dual-track processes may mean that there is less of an incentive for faculty to pursue Honor Code violations through the Honor Council.

There is a strong desire by the professional schools to maintain their own identity and professional Honor Code through maintaining their own Honor Systems. This was emphasized by the deans of the schools. Even with low incidents, it was thought that the importance of maintaining their own identity and supporting their own professional codes of honor outweighed concerns about the low frequency of cases. The importance of peer-students evaluating cases was also evident in these schools, where the Honor System process is clearly posted and available to all students in each school.

Several reasons were offered for this wish to remain independent. A primary reason was the danger of creating a large, non-specialist, and unwieldy Council that would be ill-suited to resolve cases in the professional schools. Dean Chris Guthrie (Law) amplified upon this noting that (a) citation standards in the School of Law are quite different from most other disciplines: it might be quite difficult for a non-legal scholar or student to make an informed decision about plagiarism in a Law School case; and (b) the Law School feels that it is training process experts, and the Honor Council, when it does meet, provides a valuable experience for the students in real-world process with real-world consequences. Dean Jim Hudnut-Beumler (Divinity) offered a similar justification for uniqueness and specialization in the Divinity school, in that there are still ecclesiastical courts, and having students involved in a real-world process with real-world consequences is part of the school's training and education mission. Dean Jim Bradford (Owen School of Management) pointed out that Honor Councils housed in the professional schools provide a culture of ownership for academic integrity and a sense of ownership of the system that may be particularly important in a professional program that only lasts one year. In particular, students want to enforce the integrity of the professional degree. This latter comment echoes the sentiment expressed by Vice Chancellor David Williams regarding the Undergraduate Honor Council. Meredith Albin, Chair of the School of Medicine Honor Council, noted "We work hard to ensure that all students understand the Honor Code and ... we also work to target areas of potential concern specific to medical students."

There is currently no joint reporting or external reporting of the professional schools to the university administration. There are no joint meetings between the professional schools regarding the Honor System. This made it difficult to obtain data from or make comparisons between these schools.

In spite of these variations among the professional schools' systems, all appeals are directed to a single body: the Appellate Review Board (ARB). Yet representatives from the professional schools reported unclear interpretation of what "processes" the appellate court uses to evaluate due process for the student. There was concern expressed that the appellate system does not necessarily evaluate the due process according to the individual professional school's published processes. This has caused confusion and frustration by faculty and school administration.

There was much interest in decreasing the number of violations (i.e., prevention). The long-term penalty to a student in any of the schools was significant, which is thought to influence the frequency of reporting. There was also interest in identifying "best practices" among the professional schools, and discussion of processes and outcomes were of interest.

2. PROFESSIONAL SCHOOLS: PRINCIPAL RECOMMENDATIONS

(R12) Professional schools (Divinity, Law, Medicine, Nursing, Owen, and Peabody) should maintain their own Honor Systems. The committee found the arguments made for preserving a professional ethic and standard of conduct persuasive and was sympathetic to the argument that local authority might be the best arbiter of Honor System violations. Moreover, the committee felt that a recurring theme running through its investigation of the Honor System was an issue of faculty involvement; the committee believed that leaving the professional schools with their own Honor Codes and Councils places a responsibility on the faculty of those schools to ensure that the Honor Codes and Councils are working properly.

(R13) In each of the professional schools (Divinity, Law, Medicine, Nursing, Owen, and Peabody), the Dean or Associate Dean charged with oversight of the Honor System should submit the school's Honor Code to the university's General Counsel for review of procedural and legal issues.

(R14) Representatives from each professional school (Divinity, Law, Medicine, Nursing, Owen, and Peabody) appointed by the Dean or Associate Deans should meet annually for the purposes of (a) increasing the similarity of the various Honor Code processes; (b) sharing challenges and successes; (c) compiling and reporting data to the university. The Provost's office should be responsible for scheduling this meeting.

(R15) An annual report summarizing the work of each professional school's Honor Council should be submitted to the respective Dean, to the Provost, and to the Student Life Committee of the Faculty Senate. Having Honor Codes and Councils specific to each professional school does not release them from overall accountability and commonality to standards of academic integrity of the University community. The committee believes that the preceding two recommendations will help ensure this.

(R16) The Provost should provide a paralegal to assist with objective fact-finding. This person could be used by the professional schools as needed or desired.

3. THE GRADUATE SCHOOL

The Committee is quite concerned about the functioning of the Graduate School Honor Council and Honor System. Above we noted that the recent Task Force on Graduate Education also included a reference to its concerns. The following issues were identified in the interviews conducted by the Committee.

First, there are very few Honor Code violations annually. Part of the reason for this may be that when a graduate student is reported with a potential violation, he or she often leaves school and the violation is not investigated. The reported violation is not counted anywhere. It was noted anecdotally that these students are frequently international students.

Second, the elected officials of the Graduate Honor Council consist of a chair and vice-chair, but sometimes there is only a chair. When there is a case, the chair asks other graduate students if they will participate. Thus Honor Council participation at the graduate level is more *ad hoc*. Institutional memory of process and procedures can be a problem. It may be alleviated somewhat in that some graduate students may come from undergraduate institutions where an Honor Code is in force, but there are currently no mechanisms for quality assurance on the Honor Council itself.

Third, the documents of prior cases are currently not housed in a secure location.

Fourth, there is no report of graduate school cases given to the university.

Fifth, there are cases in which a graduate student and another student (i.e. in a professional school) are accused of violating the Honor Code together in a single incident, but the two students then fall under different codes of conduct and processes.

4. THE GRADUATE SCHOOL: PRINCIPAL RECOMMENDATIONS

(R17) The Graduate School Honor Council structure and support should be re-evaluated. The Dean of the Graduate School should convene a committee with representatives from all colleges that report to the Graduate School to discuss an increase in administrative support and oversight conducted by a staff member from the Graduate School. Representatives should include graduate students as well as faculty. The committee believes that the Graduate Honor Council should be preserved, as it should not be the only school at Vanderbilt that uses a different set of processes. The committee notes the University's preference for local, departmental control of graduate education, but points to the analog within the undergraduate colleges: undergraduate degree requirements are set by departments and yet we maintain a strong, functioning Undergraduate Honor Council.

(R18) The Graduate School staff member charged with oversight of the Honor Council should consult the Center for Teaching about creating programming for educating graduate students about the Honor Code at Vanderbilt. We see this programming as having two purposes: one goal would be to teach the graduate students about how to maintain and

promote academic honor when teaching undergraduates and the second one would be to underscore the centrality of academic integrity in their own work as scholars and researchers.

(R19) The Dean of the Graduate School should submit the Graduate School's Honor Code to the university's General Counsel for review of processes and legal issues.

(R20) The paralegal available to the professional schools in R16 should also investigate graduate school cases.

(R21) The Dean of the Graduate School should guarantee that Graduate Honor Council records are housed in a secure place on campus, with access controlled by a full-time University employee.

(R22) We recommend that the committee for the Graduate School mentioned in R17 be charged with amending the Graduate Honor Council Constitution to require the President of the Graduate Honor Council to give an annual report to the Deans of Schools with graduate students, the Provost, and the Student Life Committee of the Faculty Senate. These reports should include the number of students reported who ultimately withdraw, resulting in the case being dropped.

(R23) The Dean of the Graduate School should provide all incoming graduate students a tutorial on the Honor System at Vanderbilt.

IV. APPEALS AND APPELLATE REVIEW

A. THE STUDENT LIFE COMMITTEE STUDY

According to the 2011-2012 edition of the Student Handbook, the Appellate Review Board (ARB) is "a university-wide body consisting of faculty and students appointed by the Chancellor (or the Chancellor's designee) to review appeals from decisions of administrative offices and hearing bodies that have the authority to impose sanctions upon students in academic and co-curricular disciplinary matters."³⁴ The ARB was formed in 1971 after the first appeals of Honor Council decisions occurred in 1969.³⁵ Prior to its formation, students appealed

³⁴ http://www.vanderbilt.edu/student_handbook/student-conduct

³⁵ Office of the Chancellor. Memorandum to Vice-Chancellor R. R. Purdy. 6 June 1969. Record Group 300 Chancellor's Office, Box 177, File 17.

to the Board of Trust. Once the ARB was formed and a process for appeals became formalized, the number of appeals increased.³⁶

For the purposes of this report, we are only concerned with the appeals process and procedures related to academic matters, not conduct. In such cases, according to the 2011-2012 Student Handbook, “(a)ny Vanderbilt student, having been found guilty of a violation of the applicable Honor Code (the “Petitioner”), with resultant imposition of penalty by any of the following hearing bodies, may petition the Board for a review of the determination: The Undergraduate Honor Council; The Honor Council of any graduate or professional school.”³⁷

During the Student Life Committee’s study of the Honor System, we heard several concerns about the appeals process.

First, there were questions regarding the fundamental nature of the appeals process (i.e., was it *de novo* or procedural?) and specifically whether or not the fourth set of grounds providing the basis for review (“new evidence that was not reasonably available to be presented to the original hearing authority, the introduction of which may reasonably be expected to affect the decision”) was problematic. We were concerned that the introduction of new evidence could mean that the case was essentially re-tried by the ARB as opposed to, for instance, going back to the original adjudicating body for re-hearing after the ARB had ruled the new evidence admissible. Similarly, we also heard concerns from academic leaders in the professional schools about whether or not the ARB utilizes the processes and procedures unique to the school in which the charge was made (as opposed to holding these schools accountable to standards that they may or may not have in place locally) in its review.

To amplify, the governing rules for the ARB indicate that “it is not the role of the Appellate Review Board to substitute its judgment for the judgment of the original hearing authority if there is a reasonable basis for that authority’s determination” and “only in extraordinary circumstances would the Appellate Review Board ever reconsider an entire case *de novo*.”³⁸ The Deans of Law, Owen, and Divinity expressed to the committee the view that a presumption of procedural fairness should begin with their published policies. In addition, the Deans of Law and Owen were concerned that the ARB had not recently been acting in accord

³⁶ Birkby, Robert H. Letter to Vice-Chancellor R. R. Purdy. 9 June 1972. Record Group 301 Senior Vice-Chancellor, Box 400, File 7.

³⁷ http://www.vanderbilt.edu/student_handbook/student-conduct

³⁸ http://www.vanderbilt.edu/student_handbook/student-conduct

with that view. The committee takes no view on the past actions of the ARB but does believe that overruling the published policies of an Honor Code should be outside the scope of its action. The committee recognizes that the differences among the professional, graduate, and undergraduate Honor Codes will potentially make the task of the ARB more difficult, hence the recommendations for increased similarity in the section on Graduate and Professional Schools.

The second set of issues we identified was faculty involvement in the appeals process. According to the Student Handbook, the “Appellate Review Board is chaired by a member of the faculty. Faculty and student representatives from each school of the University complete the board.” There are at least two issues related to the involvement of faculty in this process. The first issue affecting faculty involvement pertains to timing. The nature of the appeals process is such that a number of cases are presented, processed, and/or heard during the summer. This represents a challenge to faculty participation, especially in light of 9-month-contracts as well as research obligations that take faculty away from campus during this time. If faculty members are not present to participate in the hearing, then there are obviously issues related to both procedure and efficiency. In fact, inefficiency over the summer was a problem raised by the first chair of the ARB, Robert Birkby, in 1972.³⁹ The second issue affecting faculty involvement pertains to the tremendous responsibility placed on the faculty member appointed Chair of the ARB by the Provost. Effective and efficient performance of this role is very important for several obvious reasons, including the responsibilities involved in the investigation process, communication with various parties, and coordination of effort to make sure the process moves forward in a timely fashion. Likewise, the ARB Chair is responsible for determining which cases will be reviewed in the first place. We also understand that the letter indicating student expulsion goes out under the signature of the ARB Chair and thus a faculty member rather than an administrator.

To be clear, it is not our opinion that these responsibilities have been handled poorly. Rather, our committee notes that these responsibilities, taken together, constitute an extremely large service load, and we also have questions related to the nature of any additional legal liability that goes with this faculty position.

A third concern that the Student Life Committee members heard repeatedly was the length of time this process can take. Prof. Brau also mentioned this concern in his remarks to the full Senate on October 7, 2010, when he conveyed his feeling that the appeals process can take 2-3 times longer than necessary in some cases. This delay can be particularly problematic

³⁹ Birkby, Robert H. Letter to Vice-Chancellor R. R. Purdy. 9 June 1972. Record Group 301 Senior Vice-Chancellor, Box 400, File 7.

for cases in the professional schools or for graduating seniors, where a typical ARB case may go well beyond the expected graduation date, in which case graduation is delayed even if the appeal is successful. We have learned, however, that the administration is opposed to setting deadlines which seem arbitrary and/or may provide grounds for dismissal if the case is not heard and/or adjudicated by then.

The fourth and final concern that we heard often involved specific assignments or types of work that seem especially problematic and/or overrepresented in cases sent to the ARB. In his comments to the Faculty Senate on Oct. 7, 2010, for example, Prof. Brau indicated his concern about two general types of cases: (a) “group work” in which boundaries and individual responsibilities may be unclear; and (b) graduate and professional schools systems in which differences within and among the Systems or Councils may lead to confusion about norms and procedures.

B. APPEALS AND APPELLATE REVIEW: PRINCIPAL RECOMMENDATIONS

(R24) The Appellate Review Board (ARB) should follow the rules, procedures, and policies that flow from the originating school’s Honor Code (i.e., undergraduate, graduate, or professional schools).

(R25) Given the nature and import of these responsibilities, we recommend that the Provost consider additional compensation for Chair of the ARB, either in the form of a salary supplement or research funds. (NB: The committee believes that this has been implemented since we begin our deliberations, but we leave this recommendation in the report to underscore our support for the continuation of this practice.)

(R26) The associate deans of each school should assist the Provost in identifying senior faculty who are interested in serving on the ARB and could serve over the summer.⁴⁰

(R27) The committee recommends that stakeholders explore the possibility of making expedited options available to students if the ARB chair grants an appeal. These options might be similar to the administrative hearing option that is offered to students in Student Conduct

⁴⁰ One model is that of the University Standing Committees.

cases. This recommendation might be included in the charges to the Task Forces requested in recommendations (2) or (3) if appropriate.

V. RECOMMENDATION FOR THE FACULTY SENATE

(R28) The Faculty Senate should continue active involvement in the following ways. The Student Life Committee of the Faculty Senate should be charged with assessing the status of these recommendations in two years' time. A recurring annual charge to the committee should be to assess the annual reports requested by the recommendations in this report and then report on the status of the Honor System to the Faculty Senate. The Executive Committee of the Faculty Senate should identify ways in which the Senate can engage faculty in the ongoing discussions about the Honor System.

VI. CONCLUSION

This report has focused on the Honor System at Vanderbilt University. It was written by the Student Life Committee of the Faculty Senate after three semesters of study and discussion in response to a charge created by the Faculty Senate in the fall of 2009.

Some readers may note that this report does not include any calls to dismantle or abandon existing systems. Indeed, our committee has concluded that a peer-led Undergraduate Honor Council is both important and effective, for example, and we were also persuaded that there is no compelling reason to unify the currently unique Honor Councils for the Graduate School and the professional schools.

However, our study has resulted in the identification of clear challenges and opportunities for all of these groups, particularly with regard to the need to improve faculty awareness and involvement with the Honor System. To that end, the 28 recommendations in this report can be viewed as clustering around three primary themes.

1. Information: These recommendations share the goal of raising awareness of the Honor System, promoting it among both students and faculty, and increasing access among students and faculty to important materials. (Recommendations 1, 2, 5, 6, 7, 23)
2. Engagement: These recommendations are primarily faculty-directed and seek to address faculty concerns, incentivize faculty to use the Honor System, increase trust in the Honor

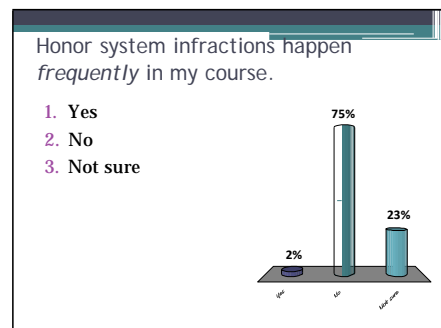
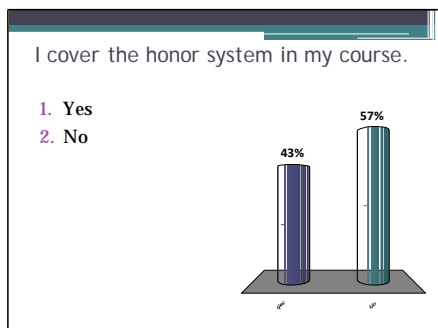
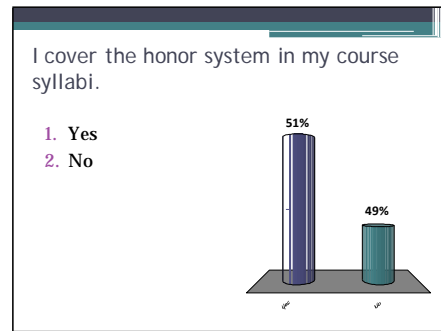
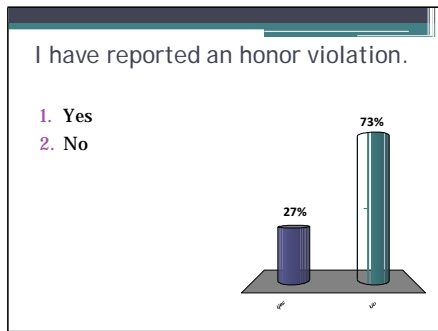
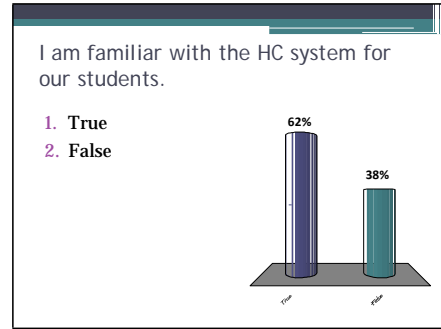
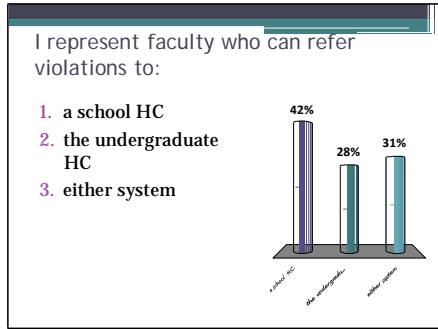
System, and make the process of doing so less burdensome. (Recommendations 3, 8, 9, 10, 11, 25, 26, 28)

3. Process Improvements: These recommendations were designed to explain and increase the value of academic integrity among all Vanderbilt students (beyond raising awareness about how various systems work) and to improve the functioning of the Honor Code and Honor Councils. (Recommendations 4, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 24, 27)

All of the recommendations have one assumption in common: Vanderbilt University can and should promote a positive culture of honor. This view is not controversial; there has always been a strong desire for such a culture at Vanderbilt, as evidenced by the previous faculty reports and studies of the Honor System from 1936 to 1995. Although some of the discussion in the current report refers to reporting alleged violations and punishing proven offenses, our committee strongly supports the idea that a central part of the educational experience of Vanderbilt students at all levels should include a respect for both personal and academic integrity. Indeed, recent changes in technology and student attitudes about collaborative work may mean that this conversation is more needed than ever in the current moment. In order for this goal to be met, however, it is our firm belief that faculty engagement within the Honor System, broadly defined, must be sought, promoted and rewarded by the university.

VII. APPENDIX

Survey of Faculty Senators conducted in September 2010



Student Life Committee Report on the Honor System
Submitted on Feb. 2, 2012

