

1920

UA3/1/4 The Honor System

Unknown

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.wku.edu/dlsc_ua_records



Part of the [Education Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Unknown, "UA3/1/4 The Honor System" (1920). *WKU Archives Records*. Paper 1831.
http://digitalcommons.wku.edu/dlsc_ua_records/1831

This Transcription is brought to you for free and open access by TopSCHOLAR®. It has been accepted for inclusion in WKU Archives Records by an authorized administrator of TopSCHOLAR®. For more information, please contact topscholar@wku.edu.

--The Honor System--

Introduction.

Such words as religion, democracy, liberty, honor, chivalry, etc., are incapable of exact definition or delimitation. So with that form of self-discipline and idealism known as the student "honor-system". No two campus groups professing to practise it accept the same code of honor or professing to practise it accept the same code of honor or agree as to the exact function and limitations of the "system". In many institutions it is no more than a traditional "verbal asset", sometimes the present empty husk of a past reality. In its application to student conduct it is often fantastically narrow and one-sided, like the chivalry of the middle ages. It is also sometimes unfortunately harsh in its treatment of individual cases. To many outsiders, it seems, like religion, idealism, and the golden rule, too vague, illogical, and sentimental to be a really workable program with human nature as it is.

Yet a life-time of practical experience with the "honor system" convinces me that of all the character-building agencies of the American college campus it may become, if effectively utilized, by far the most valuable and efficient.

Its Definition.

Merely abstaining from faculty supervision, "trusting" everybody, and "putting every student on his honor," whether he has any or not, is as far from the honor-SYSTEM as anarchy is from ordered liberty.

The "honor-system" is a form of STUDENT SELF-GOVERNMENT which, assuming that every student is a man of absolute truthfulness and honesty, takes immediate cognizance of all violations of an accepted code of honor; and THRU STUDENT ORGANIZATIONS procures the permanent removal from the student-body of all those who, by violating in any degree this accepted code, prove that they cannot thus be safely trusted.

Its Essentials.

That the honor-system may be a working reality and not, as it so often is, a mere pretense, at least two things are essential:

1st. The whole student-body must be organized to enforce it, and must accept, willingly and courageously, its heavy responsibilities. In matters embraced by the accepted code the faculty, while reserving its ultimate control, relinquishes its disciplinary function not to the individual student, but to the organized, sympathetic, and willing student-body.

2nd. Campus sentiment must be overwhelmingly in favor of a rigid and impartial enforcement. If a student loses caste for reporting to the honor committee a frat-rate or close associate who has violated the code, the so-called honor-system at that institution is already a corpse.

Its Practical Operation.

To observe the daily life of a group of Christians gives one a better idea of religion than reading a whole library of abstract theology. So a few concrete illustrations of the daily operation of the honor-system at Washington and Lee will supplement and clarify this brief and fragmentary statement of its principle.

1st. Its Application to Examinations and Class-room Work.

Examination-rooms are entirely free from faculty espionage. The professor in charge does not hesitate to leave the students alone and go down town or to his office at any time. Any student may obtain permission to leave the room and while absent goes wherever he pleases.

Formal examination papers always contain a signed statement that no aid has been given or received, but the honor-system at W. & L. covers with equal rigidity daily recitations and all outside written work which, according to the professor's announcement, is to be performed by each individual for himself. Students are often requested to withdraw from the University because of obtaining information from a neighbor's paper during a written one-hour quiz.

2nd. Personal and College Property.

A visitor can at any time count scores of text-books, scratch-pads, etc., piled at the campus entrance, under the trees, or on the doorsteps of the college buildings, awaiting the return of their owners. Very few college doors on the campus are ever locked. In Newcomb Hall, swarming with students at all times and open all night, are the administrative offices of the University. The president's and Dean's offices and the filing-rooms near them, with all their valuable cases, private letters, and irreplaceable records, the various stenographers' offices, and the mailing room of the W. and L. Bulletin often remain unlocked day and night the whole year, even when their occupants are out of town, while the Registrar's office is only locked at intervals. Yet nothing is ever disturbed in any one of them. Good overcoats often hang untouched in an open corridor of Newcomb Hall from midwinter till after Commencement.

3rd. Libraries and Reading-Rooms.

The numerous departmental libraries and reading-rooms are all examples of the honor-system in daily routine operation. The large and valuable law library will be taken as an illustration of them all. Tucker Hall, the law building, is the home, club, and study-hall of the law-school, numbering ordinarily over 100 men from every section of the country. It is open day and night, lighted till mid-night, and always full of students. Its main library opens on each side into a large study-hall, and every student enters it at will, takes out whatever books he may select, carries them for study anywhere in the building, and uses them as long as he wishes. This goes on day and night the whole session, the only guardian of these thousands of costly volumes being the "atmosphere" and habits of the honor-system.

4th. Honor-system Buying and Selling.

There has grown up on the W. & L. campus a method of buying and selling which must be unique since it seems to awaken such amazement among visitors. The "Co-op" store in the Washington Building has regular counters piled with priced articles where every customer pockets whatever articles he selects, makes his own change out of an open money-box, and departs, without the intervention or even the notice of a salesman. The day before a recent "great game" with the

University of Virginia some enterprising student placed hundreds of celluloid lapel buttons with the college colors on a table under a campus tree, priced at twenty and thirty-five cents, according to size, with an open cigar box to afford change and hold the money. Before night the box was so overflowing with bills that a passing professor placed a weight on them to keep the pile from blowing away. Over 300 emblems were sold in this way without a salesman in sight, and before dark the pile of bills and coins on the lonely table exceeded \$125. At the same time the following were noticed in a walk thru the University buildings:

In the basement of the Doremus Gymnasium was an immense box of bagged peanuts with an open cigar-box nearby to hold the money. Near the stair landing of the largest dormitory an open barrel of fancy Winesap apples was found, with a money-box resting on the apples, and a card put up by the unknown salesman stating that the price was five cents apiece. Meanwhile, in one of the corridors of the Graham Dormitory, holding 116 students, might be found every night in the lighted open hall a well-stocked "midnight" lunch table with money-box and schedule of prices, but no visible salesman. It was stated that the box generally held from three to five dollars by morning.

The above are but a few concrete examples of the honor-system in actual operation. Perhaps other institutions may be even more successful in realizing its full possibilities as a character-builder. Amid the ebb and flow of incoming and outgoing classes these methods and customs illustrate the amazing dominance of the atmosphere and traditions of a college campus, which are often more permanent than its buildings and always more powerful than its faculty regulations. They illustrate also the non-sectionalism of the so-called "Southern" Honor-System and the gratifying promptness with which such an atmosphere and such traditions beget trustworthiness among the future leaders of the nation.