

Disrupting plagiarism

Building an honor code: Tips for institutions and educators

The existence of an honor code will not necessarily prevent all instances of academic dishonesty within an institution, but when all stakeholders have a clear understanding of the policy, it will be more likely that academic honesty will be a present consideration in student work. Consider the following when planning, building, implementing, and maintaining an institutional honor code.



Planning your process

- **Consider and purposefully include all stakeholders in each part of the process—administrators, educators from all disciplines, students, parents, community members, etc.**

When voices from every stakeholder group, including students, are included in planning the process for building an honor code, each group will be able to voice concerns and help to mold the policy. Even in these early planning stages, consider elements of accessibility, such as language and skill differences within the community, in order to engage as diverse an audience as possible. This will ensure that the ensuing policy works best for everyone involved, creating a community culture of academic integrity.

- **Plan collaborative work sessions with stakeholders.**

Schedule iterative work sessions (monthly, quarterly, etc.) that can be attended by representatives from all stakeholder groups to develop, evaluate, and revise the plan and subsequent policy. When stakeholders feel that their time and voices are valued, they will be more likely to participate and take ownership of the honor code.

Building your policy

- **Consider the values that are most important to your institution and its dedication to academic integrity.**

Values—like honesty, trust, fairness, respect, responsibility, and courage, as defined by the [International Center for Academic Integrity](#)—should drive the policy that you craft for your institution. Explore these values, and others that are important to your institution, with stakeholders while beginning to build your policy. Be sure to include clear definitions of all values so stakeholders understand their meanings and how they can be positively emphasized in your new policy.

- **Be detailed, clear, and concise, minimizing subjectivity and personal interpretation.**

The policy that you create should be as detailed, clear, and concise as possible, leaving little to no room for any personal interpretation of the details held within. This objectivity and clarity will ensure that everyone affected by the honor code understands its meaning and impact equally, as well as how it applies to assignments across disciplines and courses.

- **Focus on honesty and transparency, rather than only punishments and consequences.**

While consequences should be clearly outlined for violations of the honor code, focus on encouraging students to follow the policy and to be honest and transparent in their work. Honesty and transparency can foster a willingness to pursue growth and encourage an environment where learning and improvement are a priority.

- **Make it easy for students to follow the honor code.**

The honor code that you create for your institution should make it easier for your students to succeed. If they follow the policy, they will be able to more confidently create authentic, original work. Be sure that your policy is clear and helps students find success in their work.

- **Ensure that any honor code effectively covers all areas of the institution.**

An institutional honor code should allow for coverage of all areas. That means that all disciplines, fields, courses, course levels, and even a pursuit of institutional accreditation should find clarity in the honor code. Because of the wide range of possibilities, your honor code should be general enough to work for all involved parties. However, consider creating supplemental resources that can help individual disciplines better understand the application of the honor code in their respective departments. Including representatives from all of these areas as developers or reviewers of the policy can help to ensure that stakeholders' concerns are included appropriately.

Communicating your policy

■ Make the policy available for stakeholder and public review, and regularly communicate updates and changes.

- Take any comments as constructive feedback and determine the best ways to incorporate revisions that benefit all those involved.
- Consider creating versions of the policy in a variety of languages so diverse groups have the opportunity to read, fully comprehend, and comment on the policy as a whole. Within classrooms, be sure educators have the appropriate skills and tools available to communicate with students who will be held accountable for understanding and adhering to the policy.
- Offer meaningful resources to encourage educators to effectively communicate with students about the policy regularly, like the [Educator tips for implementing and maintaining an effective honor code](#).
- An institutional honor code should be easily accessible to all stakeholders, especially students, and should be made available for public review and comment.

■ Purposefully engage students in the initial introduction of the policy.

Engage students in the launch of the honor code to ensure that they are aware of its existence and comprehend its overall meaning. Consider asking students to lead activities that will engage the student body in this introduction, such as leading discussion sessions or activities that explore the values, rationale, and examples of effective adherence to and departure from the institution's honor code.

Maintaining your policy

■ Regularly solicit feedback from stakeholders regarding efficacy of the honor code.

Whether it is through surveys, reviewing anecdotal data, or holding town hall meetings, regularly solicit feedback from those involved in putting the honor code into practice, as well as those directly and indirectly affected by it, including students, educators, parents, etc.

Consider posing questions about

- what's been helpful
- what's been challenging
- areas that may need to be revised or clarified for better understanding and more effective implementation

This feedback will be invaluable when determining its efficacy and whether any changes need to be made for improvement.

■ Make changes as needed. Communicate changes to all stakeholders in a timely manner.

Make changes based on the feedback that is received. Any changes that are made must be communicated broadly prior to taking effect, to ensure that all stakeholders clearly understand any changes that are going to be made.

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