

Is There Honor in the Honor Code?

Scenario: You attend a small private school called Fairview that has a long-standing reputation for honesty. Honesty and integrity are part of the school philosophy and everyone – administrators, teachers, and students – take this very seriously. For generations, the school has prided itself on using the honor system. In fact, a teacher can leave the room during an exam and feel assured that the students are not cheating. Cheating is considered an intolerable offense and any student caught cheating is immediately dismissed from school.

Recently, however, a teacher felt there was evidence of cheating on a senior final exam. A number of students received the same grade and got the same answers wrong. In general, the scores on this exam were higher than any other scores on the senior final exam in the school's history. The teacher, suspecting a class conspiracy, reported his findings to the administration, and a formal investigation began.

The class was informed that no one in the class would graduate if the cheaters did not turn themselves in, or if their fellow classmates did not turn them in. According to the honor code, protecting a guilty student is as bad as committing the offense. Each student was then interviewed separately by a panel consisting of the teacher, the dean, and the principal. The list of questions each student was asked follows:

1. Do you understand that any untruth you tell this panel will result in your immediate dismissal from school and will affect your chances of getting into the college of your choice?
2. Do you understand that you will honor the school code, attend graduation with your head held high, and gain the deep respect of this panel by admitting anything you know about the cheating?
3. Do you solemnly swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth during this interview?
4. Did you cheat on the senior final exam?
5. Do you have any knowledge of anyone in the class cheating on the senior final exam?
6. Have you ever cheated on an exam?
7. Do you associate with anyone who has ever cheated on an exam?