

Honor and Discipline Committee Report 2009-10

To: Faculty, Staff, and Students

The Honor and Discipline Committee reports to the College each year about the nature of the cases it has heard, the judgments made, and the penalties it has determined. This report covers the meetings of the committee that reviewed cases that occurred during the 2009-2010 school year. Following this report is a report on disciplinary activity in the Dean's office.

Report of the Honor Committee

1. A sophomore was accused of copying verbatim text from online sources without proper attribution in an English class. Although the student acknowledged that the evidence clearly indicated the paper violated the Honor Code, he/she maintained that he/she did not intentionally plagiarize. Rather, he/she argued that he/she had had the flu and a very demanding week in which the paper was due. In preparing to write the paper for the class, the student then decided to read, somewhat idly, online reviews of the book that was the focus of the essay, despite the professor's instructions not to read outside works for the course's writing assignments. The student argued that he/she didn't know how exact phrases from those reviews made it into the essay; indeed, he/she claimed that he/she did not even take notes on the reviews he/she read. This explanation struck the entire Committee as implausible. The Committee also was deeply concerned about the student's consulting outside work without explicit permission, since the professor made it clear that students should not consult works outside the assigned reading. The Committee therefore recommended that the student receive an "E" in the course and be put on Disciplinary Probation for the remainder of the year.
2. A sophomore was accused of copying verbatim text from online sources without proper attribution for a paper in a Philosophy class. The student accepted full responsibility for his/her actions and expressed great remorse, explaining that he/she had had a very difficult semester. The Committee recommended as a sanction that the student receive failure in the course.
3. A Junior was accused of copying verbatim text from an online source without proper attribution in an Arabic Studies class. The student accepted full responsibility for his/her actions and expressed great remorse, explaining that he/she had had a very difficult time personally at Williams. The Committee recommended, as sanctions, that he/she receive an "E" in the course.
4. A senior was accused of unacknowledged and unauthorized appropriation of a classmate's work in an assignment for a Chemistry class. The student accepted responsibility for his/her actions and apologized to the committee, though the Committee was concerned that the student had not yet gained any insight into why he/she had knowingly violated the Honor Code. The Committee recommended, as sanctions, that the student receive an "E" in the class and Disciplinary Probation until he/she graduates.
5. A sophomore was accused of copying verbatim text from online sources without proper quotation and attribution in an end-of-semester paper for a Political Science class. The student

acknowledged plagiarizing the paper but explained that he/she never exactly intended the paper you handed in to be the final version. His/her intention was to hand in the paper as a kind of “placeholder” and then to submit a final, polished, and presumably un-plagiarized version later when he/she returned home for break and had more time to finish the paper. But the student claimed that a stressful family situation made him/her forget to write the final paper. The Committee did not find the explanation fully plausible and wondered why the student did not talk to the professor. The Committee recommended, as sanctions, that the student receive an “E” in the course and Disciplinary Probation for the spring semester of 2010.

6. A sophomore was accused of copying verbatim text from an online source without proper attribution in a Political Science class. The student acknowledged that he/she plagiarized the paper but maintained that he/she had no idea of doing so until hearing from the chair of the Honor Committee. The reason was because the student was having issues with chronic pain, requiring the daily use of a prescribed pain-killer. The professor confirmed that the student was in pain and certainly had trouble, at times, keeping up in class. But the student’s statements in the hearing strained the Committee’s credulity, because he/she essentially claimed that he/she had no conscious control or even memory of what he/she did. The Committee did not find the student’s explanation plausible. Moreover, the Committee was concerned that the student was not more proactive with the professor in arranging for extensions, given that the student had a very legitimate reason for needing extra time. The Committee recommended, as sanctions, that he/she receive an “E” in the course and Disciplinary Probation for the semester.
7. A first-year student was accused of appropriating the intellectual work of others by not providing sufficient or proper attribution for a paper in a Winter Study course in Psychology. The student clearly evidenced a profound misunderstanding about how to cite sources in a paper and, in the course of the hearing, indicated that his/her process for writing papers left him/her open to the risk of unintentional plagiarism. Given the student’s confusion about citations, the Committee recommended that the student receive an “E” only on the assignment.
8. A first-year student was accused of copying verbatim text from online sources without proper attribution for a paper in Women’s and Gender Studies class. The student accepted full responsibility for his/her actions and expressed great remorse, explaining that his/her time at Williams had been marked by periods of tremendous stress and frustration. Because of a past disciplinary record, the Committee recommended that, in addition to receiving an “E” in the course, the student be placed on Disciplinary Probation for the remainder of the semester and the following three semesters.
9. A sophomore was accused of submitting another student’s homework as his/her own in an assignment for a Computer Science course. The student accepted full responsibility for his/her actions and expressed very great remorse. The Committee recommended as sanctions that he/she receive an “E” in the course.
10. Two first year students were accused of collaborating inappropriately for their papers in a History course. Although there were some similarities between the papers, the students convinced the committee that these were due to both papers being about the same book (assigned in class) and to conversations over dinner among students about themes of the

course. The students were found innocent by the committee, and no sanctions were recommended.

11. A sophomore was accused of submitting work for an assignment in a Romance Languages class that purported to be based on research that the student did not, in fact, actually do. The student maintained that he/she had completed the research, which involved interviewing an individual. The Committee determined that the conversation the student had with the individual could not be construed as an actual interview, although the student went on to write the assignment as if he/she had interviewed the individual. The Committee therefore voted that a violation of the Honor Code had occurred. The Committee had a spirited discussion about what the proper sanction should be but did not reach the required number of votes to recommend a sanction of failure in the course. The Committee therefore recommended that the student receive a failure in the assignment. In accepting that recommendation, the Dean also added a formal letter of warning to the student.
12. A senior was accused of copying verbatim text from an online source without proper quotation or attribution in a paper for a Political Economy class. The student accepted full responsibility and expressed great remorse, explaining that he/she was under tremendous duress to get the paper draft done. The Committee recommended that the student receive an "E" in the course. The student did not graduate with his/her class.
13. Two first-year students were accused of collaborating beyond what was permitted on a homework assignment for a Statistics class. They admitted that they had worked on the homework together, including looking back and forth at one another's papers while writing up solutions. (The syllabus stated that solutions must be written up independently.) They were very forthright with the committee about their process, and the committee was convinced that they only realized that they had "crossed a line" beyond acceptable collaboration when they were called by the Honor committee chair. The committee recommended that both students receive a sanction of failure in the assignment.
14. A junior was accused of plagiarizing from two books large portions of a final paper for a Music history class. He/she was very open with the committee, immediately stating that he/she had, in fact, plagiarized, and attempting to give the committee the context in which he/she was working on the paper, when he/she was under great personal stress. The committee appreciated his/her forthrightness, and recommended as a sanction that he/she receive an "E" in the course.

Report of the Discipline Committee

The Discipline Committee consists of all members of the Honor Committee plus four additional members of the faculty. All members of the Committee vote. The Discipline Committee heard one case and two appeals for incidents that occurred during the 2009-2010 academic year.

Dean's Office Action

For the 2009-2010 academic year, there were 19 disciplinary actions taken by the Dean's Office;

Five students were suspended for participating in the damage of college and community property.

Two students were put on interim suspension for drug-related offenses.

Five students were placed on disciplinary probation for honor code violations. In addition, six students were placed on disciplinary probation for exhibiting other behavior not in accordance with the College's Standard of Conduct.

Six students received written reprimands for exhibiting behavior not in accordance with the College's Standard of Conduct.

The Security Department conducts initial discussions with students about underage drinking and marijuana smoking; these discussions are not a part of the students' disciplinary record. There were 41 such discussions. In especially problematic cases, or in the case of repeated warnings, the student is referred to the Dean's Office.

Respectfully submitted, 2009-2010 Honor and Discipline Committee

Peter Just, Faculty Chair

Mia DeSimone, Student Chair

Karen Merrill, Dean of the College 2009-2010 and Sarah Bolton, Dean of the College 2010-2011