

# George Mason University Honor Code

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## Introduction

At George Mason University, Academic Integrity is demonstrated in our work, community, the classroom and research. We maintain this commitment to high academic standards through Mason's Honor Code. It is an agreement made by all members of our community to not "cheat, steal, plagiarize, or lie in matters related to academic work." Students sign an agreement to adhere to the Honor Code on their application for admission to Mason and are responsible for being aware of the most current version of the code. Having an Honor Code allows us to ensure that every student does his/her own work and to protect ALL students from others who may want to gain an inappropriate academic advantage over them.

The Honor Committee exists to affirm academic integrity as a core value for our university community. Members of the committee serve on hearing panels established to investigate and resolve alleged violations of the Honor Code. The Scalia School of Law has an Honor Committee that is independent from the University's Honor Committee. Questions about cases brought by the Scalia School of Law should be referred to that committee. All undergraduate and graduate students (in both degree and non-degree status) are subject to the university Honor Code.

In addition, Mason has an office that deals with issues around research misconduct. Those incidents are investigated through the Office of Research Integrity and Assurance. As it states in policy 4007, "Allegations of academic misconduct against graduate students are governed solely by the university's honor code, except for 1) research activities as defined above regardless of sponsorship; and 2) master's theses and doctoral dissertations, both of which are governed by this policy. Allegations of academic misconduct against undergraduate students are governed solely by the university honor code, except for sponsored research activities which are governed by this policy." For more information, contact the Office of Research Integrity and Assurance at [irb@gmu.edu](mailto:irb@gmu.edu).

## Honor Code Statement

***To promote a stronger sense of mutual responsibility, respect, trust, and fairness among all members of the George Mason University Community and with the desire for greater academic and personal achievement, we, the student members of the university community, have set forth this Honor Code: Student Members of the George Mason University community pledge not to cheat, plagiarize, steal, or lie in matters related to academic work.***

## Definitions

### Cheating

Cheating encompasses the unauthorized use of, access to, or provision of academic work in an attempt to misrepresent a student's actual efforts. This includes submitting another individual's work for a grade, soliciting solutions/assignments from online websites, unauthorized collaboration, or failing to adhere to requirements (verbal and written) established by the professor of the course. Subcategories of cheating include:

- Use of unauthorized material
- Use of unauthorized assistance
- Duplicate use of student's work
- Providing or attempting to benefit from unauthorized academic material
- Submission of another individual's work
- Violation of course requirements regarding integrity

### Plagiarism

Plagiarism is defined as using another individual's ideas or words without attribution or credit. It also includes using prior work that has been submitted for credit or published in another venue as a new submission without citation. Using the ideas of others without proper attribution or citation is unethical and a violation of the Honor code. Subcategories of plagiarism include but not limited to:

- Self-plagiarism
- Inadequate citation
- False citation
- Failure to quote sources or material

Plagiarism does not include mistakes in the format of a citation as long as the student has clearly indicated the materials quoted or relied upon and the source of the materials.

## Stealing

Stealing from an academic perspective means obtaining and/or providing unauthorized access to educational materials. These materials might be tests or quizzes from faculty members, or they may be the work product of another student. Subcategories of stealing include:

- Removing an exam or other academic work from a classroom without authorization
- Taking photos of exams/academic work without authorization or permission
- Taking someone else's work without their knowledge

## Lying

Lying in an academic context refers to providing information known to be false as a way to bypass classroom expectations or gain an unfair advantage in completing academic work. Subcategories of lying include:

- Falsifying sources, data, or information
- Providing a false excuse for missing a test or class
- Providing false information, including identifying information
- Falsifying official correspondence

## Notification and Obligations

All suspected violations must be reported to the Office of Academic Integrity within a reasonable time period of discovery of the misconduct. Information on how to refer a student can be found on our website [oai.gmu.edu](http://oai.gmu.edu). Professors are encouraged to check for code violations regularly during the semester and to report in a timely manner. **It is the professor's responsibility to provide all the material necessary to support the referral. The Office of Academic Integrity does not investigate cases. The Office of Academic Integrity reserves the right to dismiss cases without a hearing when (1) the allegations do not rise to the level of an honor code violation, (2) there is insufficient material to support the allegation, or (3) the referral is not made in a timely manner.**

If the Office of Academic Integrity proceeds with a referral, the student who is referred will be notified in writing via their Mason email (Mason's official form of communication) that a referral has been received. The student will need to schedule a pre-hearing meeting with a staff member in the Office of Academic Integrity within seven days of the letter to review the case materials and decide on the next course of action. Failure for a student to schedule or attend a meeting will result in a hold being placed on the student's account and the case being forwarded to the Honor Committee for review in absentia. Students and referring parties will receive decision notices via their Mason email account.

Students referred to the office are subject to the following honesty statement in all steps of the process:

George Mason University students pledge to conduct themselves with integrity and honesty at all times. It is expected that all information presented in this process will be true and correct. George Mason University students who willfully and knowingly provide false information may be referred to the Office of Student Conduct for violating the University's Code of Student Conduct.

A student who is referred for a violation of the Honor Code is not allowed to drop or withdraw from the course in question until the case is resolved and the student has been found not in violation. If a student drops or withdraws from the course in question, they will be re-enrolled, charged tuition and fees for the course, and have a hold placed on their account until the matter is concluded.

Upon resolution of the case, faculty are responsible for updating grades with the Registrar. To do so, faculty members must access a grade change form and obtain the required signatures and submit it to the Registrar. The Office of Academic Integrity processes educational sanction materials as well as suspension and permanent dismissal sanctions with the Registrar.

## The Honor Committee

Membership on the Honor Committee is limited to 100 members who apply for membership. Undergraduate students who apply must have and maintain a minimum cumulative G.P.A. of 2.66, be in good academic and conduct standing, and successfully complete the training and orientation program. Graduate student members must have and maintain a cumulative G.P.A. of 3.00 and must be in good academic and conduct standing as well as successfully complete the training and orientation program.

Faculty members and administrative faculty members who join the Committee must have a minimum of a Master's degree from an accredited program. Faculty members cannot participate in resolving cases they have referred.

Honor Committee panels consist of three Honor Committee members. In cases where a graduate student has been referred, at least one member of the Honor Committee must be either a graduate student, an administrative faculty member, or a faculty member.

## The Process and Resolution Options

Students have three resolution options: a prehearing resolution, a full case review, or a sanctions only case review.

Students can access all information in a case referred by submitting a request in writing. In cases where retaliation is a legitimate safety concern, the information may be redacted or presented in a manner to prevent identification.

All hearings are attended by an Honor Committee advisor. The role of the Honor committee advisor is to ensure that the hearing proceedings follow the stated guidelines, to answer procedural questions, to provide Honor Committee members with background information when necessary, to ensure the proceedings and deliberations are free of bias, and to assist the Honor Committee members in thinking through the information provided when needed. The advisor does not have decision making authority in the cases or hearings.

The student may have one advisor present during any meeting or hearing related to the honor code process. The advisor does not represent or speak on the student's behalf or address the Honor Committee, but can be present to advise the student through the process as long as such presence and/or advice is not disruptive to the hearing and does not unreasonably lengthen the time of the hearing. If an advisor repeatedly fails to adhere to this requirement they will be asked to leave the hearing room and will not be allowed to be present and advise the student during in the hearing. Any behavior that violates the rules of the proceedings will result in removal from the hearing room. If the advisor repeatedly violates the rules and procedures for the Honor Committee proceedings, such violation may result in the immediate and permanent removal of the advisor from the current and any future proceedings.

### Prehearing Resolution

During the prehearing meeting, the student is presented with all information submitted by the referring party. At the hearing, the student may choose to accept responsibility and the faculty recommended sanction. If a student accepts responsibility and the sanction during this meeting, the matter is concluded and the student does not have the option of appealing the outcome.

### Full Case Review

A full review is a resolution option when a student indicates that they are not in violation of the alleged honor code violation and wants the Honor Committee to review their case.

Students are held responsible if the Committee finds clear and convincing information to hold them responsible based on the facts presented. Two of the three panel members must vote to find the student in violation of the honor code for a student to be held responsible.

Students can appeal a finding of responsibility based on the appeal criteria set out in this document. Faculty cannot appeal a finding in a case, but can refile a case if new evidence arises that was not available at the time of the original hearing. There are two types of full review, and which review a student is eligible for depends on the circumstances of the case.

### In Person Hearing

An in-person hearing is a resolution whereby the student appears with the professor and any witnesses or advisors before the Honor Committee. All in-person hearings are audio recorded by the Office of Academic Integrity with the exception of the Honor Committee's deliberation process. The audio recording is kept as a part of the student's record unless the student is found to be not in violation. The referring party is provided 20 minutes to present their case (including any witnesses), and the referred student is allowed to ask questions of the referring party and any witnesses. The referred student is then allowed 20 minutes to present their case (including any witnesses), followed by a period of questioning of the referred student and any witnesses by both the Committee and the referring party. The Honor Committee may extend these time limits, if necessary. The student leaves the hearing with a decision the day the hearing takes place. Students are allowed to bring a single advisor to the hearing with them, and any relevant witnesses.

If a student disputes responsibility and qualifies for an in-person hearing, the Office of Academic Integrity shall schedule an in-person hearing and send the student and the referring party a notice with the date, time, and location of the hearing. The hearing will be scheduled at least one week from the date of the notice. Once set, the date and time of the hearing will not be changed. The unavailability of a witness or advisor is not a basis to reschedule a hearing; parties are responsible for ensuring their witnesses are present.

No later than 72 hours prior to the scheduled hearing, each party must submit any documents and the statements of any witnesses the party wishes to present at the hearing. The referred party must also submit the name of any advisor that will accompany the referred party at the hearing. Witness statements should be sent directly by the witness to our office account at [oai@gmu.edu](mailto:oai@gmu.edu), or a notarized copy can be included with your submission. The witness's statement must identify the facts to which the witness will testify. The witness will be limited to testifying to the facts in the witness statement, except in response to questions from Committee members or the party not offering the witness. Upon receipt of the documents and witness statements, the Office of Academic Integrity shall distribute the documents and statements to all parties. No later than 24 hours prior to the hearing, the parties may submit any rebuttal documents and/or names of any rebuttal witnesses along with statements from the rebuttal witnesses. A rebuttal document or witness must provide information that responds to or refutes information contained in a previously submitted document or witness statement. A party offering rebuttal submission must provide an explanation as to what the document or witness will be rebutting. The Office of Academic Integrity has the discretion whether to accept the submission of a rebuttal submission. **Failure to submit witness statements and the names of advisors and witnesses by either party by the applicable deadline will result in those individuals being barred from the hearing proceedings.**

The Honor Committee shall have the discretion to decide whether to hear from witnesses submitted by the parties. The Honor Committee may decide not to hear from a witness if it determines that a witness's testimony is not relevant. Testimony is relevant if it makes a fact in question more or less likely to be true.

In-person hearings are reserved for students whose cases meet one of the following criteria:

- The incident reported is **only** supported by eyewitness testimony
- The student is facing suspension or permanent dismissal from Mason.

A case where a student receives a grade related sanction that triggers an academic suspension or program dismissal is not eligible for an in person hearing. If a case does not meet the above mentioned criteria, a student is referred to the expedited review process.

### Expedited Review

An expedited review is a resolution option where neither the student nor the faculty member appear in person before the Honor Committee. The student submits a written statement with any documentation (including statements from witnesses) they feel supports their case within seven calendar days after their pre-hearing meeting. Witness statements should be sent directly by the witness to our office account at [oai@gmu.edu](mailto:oai@gmu.edu), or a notarized copy can be included with your submission. Documents and statements shared by the student will be provided to the faculty member who will have an opportunity to draft a written response and provide any additional supporting documentation within two business days of receipt. This response will be shared with the student, who will be given two business days to provide a final response, including any rebuttal documents or witness statements. The Committee will meet, review the materials from the referral party and the referred student, and use the standard of clear and convincing to determine if enough information is present to find the student in violation. If so, the Committee will assign the grade related sanction and deliberate with regard to any educational sanction. If not, the Committee will determine the student is not in violation and instruct the professor to grade the assignment accordingly. Expedited reviews are not audio recorded.

### Sanctions Only Case Review

A Sanctions Only Review takes place when a student accepts responsibility for the honor code violation but wants to plead a case to amend/adjust the recommended faculty sanction. Please note that amendments of grade related sanctions can only take place if the following two criteria are met:

- The professor agrees to an amended grade related sanction, and;
- The referred student demonstrates that extenuating circumstances exist that would justify the sanction being amended.

Additionally, the resulting consequences of a sanction does not constitute an extenuating circumstance that would indicate the need for an adjusted sanction. A student must provide information that external factors influenced the incident in such a way that no other option was available for the student, or that the sanction as indicated is too harsh for the violation for which the student was referred. If a student's request to amend the sanction is denied, they can appeal under the appellate criteria set forth in this document. There are two types of Sanctions Only reviews-an in person hearing and an expedited review.

### In Person Hearing

An in-person hearing is a resolution whereby the student appears before the Honor Committee with any witnesses or advisors.

In-person sanctions only hearings are reserved for students whose cases meet one of the following criteria:

- The incident reported is **only** supported by eyewitness testimony
- The student is facing suspension or permanent dismissal from Mason.

If a student requests a Sanctions Only Review and qualifies for an in-person hearing, the Office of Academic Integrity shall schedule an in-person hearing and send the student a notice with the date, time, and location of the hearing. The hearing will be scheduled at least one week from the date of the notice. Once set, the date and time of the hearing will not be changed. The unavailability of a witness or advisor is not a basis to reschedule a hearing; parties are responsible for ensuring their witnesses are present.

All in person hearings are audio recorded by the Office of Academic Integrity with the exception of the deliberation process. The referring party may provide a written statement indicating their opinion on why the recommended sanction is appropriate and whether it would be proper to impose a different sanction. The statement will be shared with the student prior to the hearing. That statement is read in front of the Committee. The referred student presents their case (including any witnesses or documents), followed by a period of

questioning by the Committee. Following deliberations, the Committee will inform the student if their request to amend the sanction was granted or denied. The sanction recommendation received by the Office of Academic Integrity must include one of the preceding outcomes. A case where a student receives a grade related sanction that triggers one of those outcomes does not apply to this process and does not result in an in-person hearing being granted. If a case does not meet the above mentioned criteria, a student is referred to the expedited review process.

### Expedited Review

An expedited review is a resolution option where neither the student nor the professor appear in person before the Honor Committee. The student submits a written statement with any documentation they feel supports their case within seven calendar days of their pre-hearing meeting. The Office of Academic Integrity will request that the referring party provide a written statement indicating their opinion on why the recommended sanction is appropriate and whether it would be proper to impose a different sanction. The statement from the referring party will be shared with the student, who has two days to provide any additional information in response to the referring party's statement.

Witness statements should be sent directly by the witness to [oai@gmu.edu](mailto:oai@gmu.edu), or a notarized copy can be included with your submission. The Committee will meet, review the materials from the referring party and the referred student, and determine if the sanction should be adjusted. A letter with the outcome will be emailed to the student's Mason email address. Expedited reviews are not audio recorded.

### Sanctioning

The hearing panel may impose non-academic sanctions as it deems proportionate to the offense. Failure to complete non-academic sanctions will result in a registration hold being placed on the student's account until the sanction is completed. Grade-related and program related sanctions are coordinated between the referring party and the department based on the recommendation of the referring faculty member.

Sanctions include but are not limited to the following:

- Assignment rewrite
- Grade Reduction on Assignment
- Zero for the Assignment
- Grade Reduction for the Course
- Grade of F in the course
- Academic Integrity Seminar
- Avoiding Plagiarism Online Seminar
- Writing Center Visits
- Non-Academic Suspension
- Permanent Dismissal

Recommendations for nonacademic suspension or permanent dismissal are typically made in situations where an individual has repeatedly engaged in academic dishonesty, or has been involved in a case so egregious that such a recommendation is commensurate to the offense. This recommendation is forwarded to the Provost or the Provost's office designee for approval. If a student is referred for a second violation of the honor code a suspension may be a potential outcome, even if the professor doesn't recommend it. If a student is referred for a third violation of the honor code, a finding of responsibility will result in a suspension, and if appropriate, permanent dismissal, depending on the severity of the case.

In determining sanctions, panel members will consider the non-punitive educational purpose of the Honor Code process as well as any previous Honor Code cases resulting in a finding of responsibility. Please note that a failing grade or an inability to continue as a student of George Mason University is not considered a punitive measure. Indeed, we ask that students consider the potential outcomes of the Honor Code process if found in violation when making an informed decision whether to abide by the Honor Code or to violate it.

## Appeals Process

The decision made in the appeal process is final and the case will be closed upon completion of the appeal process. There are no further grounds of appeal beyond this process and the student does not have the option to appeal a single case multiple times.

Appeals of Honor Committee decisions must be submitted in writing within five business days of receipt of the decision letter. The decision letter will list the deadline for the appeal. All appeal requests should include the appeal submission form which is attached to the email containing the decision letter and should be filled out completely. Requests must include the following information:

- Name and G number of the student
- Sanction assigned by the Honor Committee
- Clearly stated grounds upon which the student is appealing
- A written statement detailing the appeal. Optional additional information, including witness statements in cases asserting new information, can be included

Appeals can result in a new hearing if they meet one of the following criteria:

- New information that was not available at the time of the original hearing that would have materially impacted the original outcome. This does not include an individual failing to show up for their hearing who wants to present evidence they would have presented had they appeared, or information that was available at the time of the original hearing/review that the student failed to present.
- Material Procedural irregularity. Please note this is an allegation that the Honor Code process was not adhered to, and the result of which would have had a material effect on the outcome, not an allegation of a violation of academic department policy.
- Severity of sanction only when suspension or permanent dismissal are assigned.

The appeal process is not an in person review, so it is important to include any and all information you want considered by the Committee in your appeal submission packet. Appeal reviews are not audio recorded. The decision to grant or deny the appeal will be made by three Honor Committee members who have no prior knowledge of the case. Two of the three members must support any decision on appeal. These individuals will review the information and, if necessary, the audio transcript of the original hearing. In cases where no Committee is available to hear the appeal and the result of the appeal may impact a student's graduation, tuition payment, or other extraordinary circumstance, an individual appeal officer may be assigned to review the appeal. Students will be given the option to proceed with an individual appeal officer or wait until a Committee is available to review the appeal. The Committee can decide to grant the appeal and have the case reheard, or deny the appeal and let the original decision stand.

In the event that a faculty member chooses not to follow the Honor Committee's recommended sanction or refuses to acknowledge a finding of not in violation and grade the student's assignment accordingly, students may appeal the faculty member's action to the Academic Appeals Committee via the Office of the Provost. The decision of this Committee is the final step in the Academic Integrity Process. Conversely, a student cannot appeal a violation finding that results in a grade related sanction through the Academic Appeals Committee.

## Record Keeping and Reporting

An honor code referral is part of a student's educational record and, as such, is subject to guidelines put forth by the Library of Virginia as well as laws and statutes put forth by the Commonwealth of Virginia. Educational records are protected by FERPA. As such, only the student has the right to access them. A student may sign a waiver allowing access to a third party for a specified period of time. Without a waiver, our office does not share the information with anyone who does not have an educational need to know.

A student who is found to have not violated the Honor Code or whose case is dismissed prior to resolution can be assured that no record is maintained and that the OAI office shares no information about their involvement in this process.



Resolutions that result in altered grades do not have an Honor Code designation on the student's transcript. However, a resolution that results in a suspension or permanent dismissal will be noted on the student's transcript with an Honor Code designation. A transcript notation will be made if a student withdraws from the university while under investigation for academic dishonesty. Suspension notations are removed from the transcript upon the completion of the suspension period.

On occasion, a student may apply for a graduate program, internship, or job that asks about involvement in an integrity case. Information is not shared from our office without a signed waiver from the student.