

International Student Orientation Honor System Presentation

1. Introduction

- The Honor System (or Honor Code) is a set of principles that should guide *your entire life* within the Caltech community.
- Central Philosophy: Never take *unfair advantage* of any other member of the Caltech community

What Does “Never Take Unfair Advantage” Mean?

It means that while at Caltech, we live in a system of mutual trust. From this trust, we receive benefits. We earn them by abiding by the Honor System and never abusing our mutual trust.

- Benefits of the Honor System include open access to campus facilities and take-home examinations.
- The Honor System is binding on us all. By enrolling at Caltech, you have agreed to abide by the Honor System.
- Failing to report an Honor System violation *is a violation*, unless it can be shown that the failure was in the best interest of the Honor System.
- Students enforce the Honor System *entirely by themselves*.
 - Graduate Students: Graduate Review Board
 - Undergraduate Students: Board of Control
- All proceedings and inquiries are held in *strict confidence*.
- *Ignorance* of the rules is *not an excuse*. You are responsible for learning about the Honor System. Some useful resources can be found below.

2. Examples

Confusing Examination

Your Professor instructs you to pick up a copy of the examination from a box outside her secretary’s office. You do so, and what you find is a piece of paper folded in half and stapled. On the outside, it says that you have four hours to take the examination, and that you may use your class notes, but no outside material. Some questions you should have:

Q: Can I take a break?

A: If no direction is given, then you should assume that the once you open the test, you have four continuous hours in which to complete the exam. Any breaks you wish to take do not stop the clock. If possible, you should ask your Professor for clarification on this issue.

Q: What happens if after four hours, I am not finished?

A: You must not work beyond your time limit. If you choose to do so, and you choose to turn in this work with your exam (which is not recommended), then you must **clearly** indicate what work was done during the allotted time, and what was not.

Q: Can I ask someone for help with the exam?

A: Do not ask for help with the exam from anyone except the TA or Professor, unless the Professor specifically tells you that this is allowed.

Q: What if someone asks me a question about the exam?

A: Unless your Professor specifically tells you that you may speak to anyone about the exam, you must not do so. Do not discuss the exam with anyone before, during, or after the exam. If someone asks you about the exam, explain that you cannot discuss it because of the Honor System. If this person continues to question you, contact the GRB or BOC and ask for help.

Q: Can I use my textbook for the class?

A: Although your textbook is not “outside material” in most cases, the directions specifically say that you should only use your class notes. In all cases, err on the side of caution. As an alternative, ask the Professor or TA or even the GRB or BOC to clarify the instructions.

Grading a Homework Assignment

You are a TA for a class. While grading homework assignments, you notice that two assignments are very similar. In both papers, the same unusual error was made. Furthermore, the same number of significant figures were carried throughout several problems. Some questions you should have:

Q: Did the authors of the assignments violate the Honor System?

A: Possibly. You should check in your notes to see if the Professor set a course policy for homework. It may be that the Professor said that it was acceptable for students to turn in identical assignments. In this case, grade the papers normally.

Q: What if the Professor did not specifically say that copying was allowed?

A: In this case, you should contact the Graduate Review Board Chair if the students are graduate students, or the Board of Control chair if the students are undergraduates. Explain the situation to them and let them investigate the situation.

Q: Shouldn't I go to my Professor first?

A: No. The Honor System is student-governed. The GRB or BOC chair will contact your Professor and clarify the situation. By going to the GRB or BOC first, you are doing your duty to the Honor System.

Working in the Lab

You are working late at night in the laboratory. You have used your entire supply of an important chemical. In order to continue your work, you take some of the chemical from a cabinet in your lab that another person uses. The next morning,

when your coworker arrives, she is unable to perform her experiments because she doesn't have enough of the chemical.

Q: Did I violate the Honor System?

A: Probably not. It is not considerate to use someone else's supplies without telling them. However, you are probably not taking unfair advantage of your labmate unless you take their supplies repeatedly, deceptively, or maliciously.

Q: How can I prevent this problem?

A: Always make sure to ask people before using shared resources. If they are not around, use your best judgment—if in doubt, it is always better to delay your own work than possibly delay theirs.

3. Contact Information

Please do not hesitate to call or email the chair of the Graduate Review Board or Board of Control if you have any questions.

- Chair of the Graduate Review Board: Email *grbchair@its.caltech.edu*
 - 2003-2004 John Murphy (x4672)
- Chair of the Board of Control: Call campus extension x6200
 - 2003-2004 Galen Loram (x1294), *galen@its.caltech.edu*
- Resources on the web (including names and phone numbers of GRB or BOC contacts):
 - Graduate Review Board Webpage:
<http://www.its.caltech.edu/~grb/>
 - Graduate Student Honor System Handbook:
<http://www.its.caltech.edu/~grb/HonorSystem.pdf>
 - Board of Control Webpage:
<http://donut.caltech.edu/about/boc/>
 - Undergraduate Student Honor System Handbook:
http://donut.caltech.edu/about/boc/ug_handbook.php