

Honor Committee Report 2020-2021

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 during the 2020- 2021 school year. Following this report is a summary of disciplinary activity in the Dean's office.

NOTE: Due to COVID-19, remote learning, and general disruptions in teaching and learning during the 2020-2021 academic year, the Honor & Discipline Committee issued noticeably lighter sanctions this year. Violations that would have typically resulted in a sanction of failure in the course resulted instead in failure in the assignment. Lesser violations were given warnings. Committee members recommended this lesser sanction because they felt that the extraordinary stress of the year warranted some leniency.

- 1) A first-year student was brought to the committee when the professor noted some language in a quiz that was taken directly from the textbook without citation. The student stated that they took verbatim notes from the textbook, and then used the notes for the quiz (which was allowed). The student acknowledged that they should have cited the direct quotes from the text book in their notes, so that they would not inaccurately portray them as their own words in the quiz. The student was found responsible for violating the honor code, and was given a warning along with a requirement to complete an educational tutorial.
- 2) A senior was brought to the committee when the grading TA noticed some usual language in a problem set and discovered that it came from a Wikipedia site. The student noted that she viewed the terms in question as definitional in nature, and therefore believed they fell under the category of the kind of common knowledge that did not require citation. Following the hearing and deliberations, the committee did not find the student responsible for violating the Honor Code.
- 3) In separate cases, two sophomores were brought to the committee when the professors co-teaching the course grew concerned that students may have been accessing the Glow course page during an exam. When they checked, they found that both students had indeed logged onto the Glow page during the exam period. In each hearing, the students acknowledged that they violated the policy for the exam. Both students were found responsible for violating the honor code, and were given a sanction of failure in the assignment.
- 4) A junior and a senior were brought to the committee when a professor noticed some unusual phrasing in one student's exam, and then later read the same phrasing in another student's exam. During the hearing, the students acknowledged that they violated the honor code by collaborating during the take-home exam. They were found responsible for violating the honor code and given a sanction of failure in the assignment.
- 5) A junior was brought to the honor committee when a professor noted that his login had been used to access the solution to a problem set at the same time that the student was taking an exam during which no outside sources were allowed. During the hearing, the student immediately acknowledged that they did access the problem set during the exam.

They explained that they opened a preview of the file and then immediately grew uneasy and realized that looking at the problem set would be the wrong thing to do; the student reported that they quickly left the page without using the information therein, and returned to the tab containing your midterm. The committee members found the responsible for violating the honor code and issued a warning.

- 6) Another junior was brought to the honor committee for the same reason as above (professor noted his login was used to assess course material during an exam). In this case, the student reported that while they were taking the self-scheduled exam, they received an automatic notification on their mobile phone stating that a homework assignment had been graded. Without thinking about the potential content, the student automatically clicked on the iphone notification out of habit. This triggered the phone to automatically open GLOW to the submission page for the graded assignment. As soon as the student realized that their phone had opened GLOW, they immediately locked the phone without looking at any content from the graded problem set. Committee members found the student's explanation for the events to be credible, and did not find them responsible for violating the honor code.
- 7) A sophomore was brought to the honor committee when the professor grew concerned about dishonest communication. The student reported that they could not submit work because their computer was being repaired by OIT. When the professor contacted OIT for confirmation, they stated that they had not had any communication with the student about a broken computer, and were not repairing it. Committee members found the student responsible for violating the honor code by sending an untruthful email about a late assignment and issued a sanction of failure in the assignment.
- 8) Two first year students were brought to the committee when a professor noted several similarities between their work on an exam, including identical incorrect answers, similar graphs, as well as an additional component to an answer that was not included as part of the question. During the hearing, the students explained that they had hired the same tutor to assist them in the course; the tutor gave them multiple sample problems and helped them work through them. The students then used their notes from those sessions to assist them in the exam (in which use of notes was allowed). Committee members found his explanation credible and did not find the students responsible for violating the honor code.
- 9) A sophomore was brought to the committee when her professor noticed that their response to a definitional prompt on an exam seemed unusual in that it included material not directly linked to the content covered in lecture or the textbook. When the professor googled the concept, she discovered that the first "hit" was a definition that was nearly identical to the one the student provided. During the hearing, the student explained that they were preparing for the exam with a study group, and that one of the members of the group typed a question about a concept into the group chat. Another student responded to the query, including a definition of the term. The student stated that they memorized the definition provided in the group chat. Later, when that concept emerged on the exam, the student produced the answer that they had previously memorized. Committee members found this explanation credible and did not find the student responsible for violating the honor code.

- 10) Two sophomores were brought to the committee when a professor noticed that they both took the exam remotely during the same time slot and produced numerous answers that were unusually similar to each other. During the hearing, both students acknowledged that they took the exam in nearby seats in the library. After one of the students completed and submitted the exam, the other student asked very specific questions about how to approach particular problems and included the answers, verbatim, in his submission. The committee found both students responsible for violating the honor code by collaborating inappropriately, and gave a sanction of failure in the assignment.
- 11) A junior was brought to the committee after the professor noticed that their lab report contained some odd errors which would have been correct based on the *prior* year's lab data but not on the current year's data. In addition, the structure of the lab report was highly similar to last year's report in way that would not be expected unless the student was using it as a template and following it closely as they produced their work. During the hearing, the student acknowledged that a tutor for the course had provided them with the lab report from last year, and that they used it to create their own graph. The student disputed that they copied the text of the lab from the old report. While the committee had mixed views about whether changing the graph to match an older version was an honor code violation, they were unanimous in finding that the number and extent of similarities between the two reports was extensive; there were specific sentences that were very close in phrasing, as well as additional similarities that were pervasive throughout the report. As a result, the committee found a preponderance of evidence to suggest that the student violated the honor code by copying from the previous year's lab report and gave a sanction of failure in the assignment, as well as required completion of an educational tutorial. The tutor who provided the previous year's lab report was also brought before the honor committee. The tutor stated that they understood that providing previous examples of completed assignments was a common practice for tutors, and that they expected the student to use it as a reference and not to copy it. Committee members were unanimous in their decision that the tutor was not responsible for violating the honor code.
- 12) A sophomore was brought to the committee when the professor noticed that their responses on an exam did not match the way that the material was presented in class or the textbook, and included elements that are typically not covered until advanced level courses. During the hearing, the student reported that she had employed an outside tutoring company to help her prepare for the final exam, took detailed notes from the tutoring sessions, and used the material from the tutoring sessions as templates for their responses. Committee members did not find the student responsible for violating the honor code.
- 13) A senior was brought to the honor committee when the professor noted that 2 homework assignments bore close similarity to the solution manual – a source that is off-limits for students. In particular, the TAs noted similar phrasing, unusually short proofs, and some elegant solutions that seemed somewhat advanced. During the hearing, the student stated that they never had access to the solution manual; they did note that they had been relying on a used copy of the textbook that including some annotations in the margins. The professor agreed that the notes in the margin could explain the unusual homework

responses. Committee members did not find the student responsible for violating the honor code.

- 14) Two first year students were brought to the committee when the professor noticed unusual similarities between their exams. During the hearing, the students explained that they studied together throughout the semester, and met weekly to go over the lectures and notes. This kind of collaboration was allowable and encouraged. As part of their work together, they jointly created a new set of notes that were organized and indexed according to key concepts. Both students emphasized that while they referred to the same study guide during the exam, they had no unauthorized contact and did not break the rules. Committee members were mixed in their thinking about whether the students violated the honor code. Some members believed that some of the exam similarities fell outside the scope of the joint study guide or lecture notes; others found the study guide to be a credible explanation for the similarities. Ultimately, the committee did not find a preponderance of evidence for a violation, and the students were not found responsible.
- 15) A first-year student was brought to the committee when the professor noticed that several sections of their paper were taken verbatim (or nearly verbatim) from other sources without use of quotation marks. The sources were included at the end of the paper. During the hearing, the student explained that they were confused about the citation method suggested by the professor, and also about how much reworking of original text would be necessary in order to paraphrase rather than quote. Committee members found the student responsible for violating the Honor Code because they used language that came directly from source material without the use of quotation marks, and recommended a sanction of failure in the assignment, along with a requirement to complete an educational tutorial.
- 16) A first year and a sophomore were brought to the committee when the professor noticed a high degree of similarity between their work on 2 lab assignments. The honor code for the course required assignments to be the sole work of each student; students were explicitly prohibited from viewing or sharing each other's code or design documents. During the hearing, the students stated that they did share code, but did not believe they violated the honor code. Committee members found both responsible for violating the Honor Code since the professor's instructions about appropriate and inappropriate collaboration were made exceedingly clear. Both students were given a sanction of failure in the 2 lab assignments.
- 17) A first year student was brought to the committee when the professor noted that their answers on a closed book take-home exam included material that was identical to an online answer key for another textbook, and included a hyperlink that appeared to be directly cut-and-pasted from an online source. During the hearing, the student immediately acknowledged that they did, in fact, use online resources during the exam. The committee found the student responsible and gave a sanction of failure in the assignment.
- 18) Two sophomores were brought to the committee when the professor noted an unusual degree of similarity between their submitted assignment (one in which collaboration was expressly forbidden). During the hearing, one of the students acknowledged that he grew anxious when he could not answer some questions for a module check, and asked the

other student for help. Both students were found responsible for violating the honor code. The student who asked for assistance for an assignment was given a sanction of failure in the assignment; the student who provided the aid was given a warning.

- 19) Two juniors were brought to the committee when the professor noticed common errors on their exams that were not only identical but also highly idiosyncratic. During the hearing, both students acknowledged that they engaged in improper collaboration during the exam (they discussed specifics of their answers during a dinner break while the exam was still ongoing). Committee members found the students responsible for violating the honor code and gave a sanction of failure in the assignment.
- 20) Two sophomores were brought to the honor committee when the professor noticed that their answers on an exam were strikingly similar to those on the previous year's key. Similarities included particular word choices, portrayal of formulas, structure of answers, and the inclusion of 2 lines of math that were in the key, but were actually incorrect. During the hearing, both students acknowledged that they studied together and used the previous exam key extensively in your preparations. Committee members found both students responsible for violating the honor code by using an outside source that was expressly forbidden on your exam and gave a sanction of failure in the assignment.
- 21) A first year and a sophomore were brought to the honor committee when the professor noticed that there were a number of idiosyncratic similarities between their responses on an exam. During the hearing, both students explained that while they did study and work on problem sets together throughout the semester, they did not collaborate in any way during the exam itself. Committee members did not find a preponderance of evidence that the two students collaborated during the exam itself and thus did not find them responsible for any violation of the honor code.
- 22) A sophomore was brought to the committee when the professor noticed that some of their answers to the exam were strikingly similar to those on last year's key. Similarities included particular word choices, portrayal of formulas, and structure of answers. The student explained that while they did briefly open and skim the midterm key that the professor had inadvertently posted before the beginning of classes, they did not download it, take notes from it, or even inspect it very closely at that time. The student provided the committee with a very detailed study guide and 1-sheet guide for the exam itself, which credibly explained how they produced answers that were similar to the midterm key. Committee members did not find a preponderance of evidence that the student used the posted midterm in any way while taking the exam, and therefore, they did not find them responsible for any violation of the honor code.
- 23) A senior was brought to the committee when the professor noticed two concerning aspects of an assignment submission: (1) it contained tables that could not have been created with the information provided, and (2) the narrative portion of the assignment contained multiple chunks of text as well as equations that were directly copied from the original authors' published paper. The student explained that they mistakenly used the data from published tables to produce their assignment, rather than using the data they had computed for themselves. In addition, the student noted that when they took notes from the original paper, they copied text verbatim; they then inadvertently incorporated that verbatim text into the final paper without citing the source or using quotation marks.

Committee members found the student responsible for violating the honor code and gave a sanction of failure in the assignment.

- 24) A sophomore and a junior were brought to the committee when the professor noticed striking similarities between their exams. During the hearing, both students walked the committee through their thinking process for handling the problems independently. The committee found these explanations credible, and did not find the students responsible for collaborating during the exam.
- 25) A junior was brought to the committee when the professor noticed that they included citations in their paper only when they directly quoted from a source. There were other portions of the paper that warranted citation even though they did not include direct quotations because they captured the ideas of others; the student did not cite these sections. During the hearing, the student acknowledged that they made citation errors. Committee members found the student responsible for violating the honor code, and gave a sanction of a warning and required completion of an educational tutorial.
- 26) A first-year student was brought to the committee when the TA noticed marked similarities between their problem set and the one that had been posted in a previous semester. The course syllabus stated that *"It is a violation of the Honor Code to obtain access to, or make use of, answers to weekly problem sets provided in connection with any X course taught by any professor at Williams, whether taught in the current semester or an earlier semester."* During the hearing, the student acknowledged that they did use a prior answer key to complete your problem set. Committee members found the student responsible for violating the honor code and gave a sanction failure in the assignment.
- 27) A first-year student was brought to the committee when the professor noticed several unusual aspects of their translation of English phrases into another language during an exam. During the hearing, the student explained that they used Google Translate during the exam, and acknowledged that they were aware that using this source was not allowed. Committee members found the student responsible for violating the honor code and gave a sanction of failure in the assignment.
- 28) Two first-years were brought to the committee when the professor noticed that both students used a very unusual approach to an exam problem. Both students immediately acknowledged that they did collaborate with each other on the exam. Committee members found the students responsible for improper collaboration, and gave a sanction of failure in the assignment.
- 29) Two sophomores were brought to the committee when the professor noticed that one student's responses to two problems on an assignment were very similar to feedback she had given another student on those same problems one week prior. During the hearing, both students stated that they did not violate the honor code in any way, and that, in fact, that did not know each other or have any communication with each other. Committee members did not find a preponderance of evidence that the students collaborated on the assignment, and they were not found responsible for violating the honor code.

- 30) A junior was brought to the honor committee when the professor grew concerned about a paper they had submitted. When the student originally submitted a proposal for the assignment, the professor noted that the topic was not a good fit, but agreed to let the student proceed when the student explained how much they were interested in pursuing it. When the professor received the final paper, he noted that it seemed to be written in response to a different assignment. When he checked with the professor of another course that the student had taken in a previous semester, he discovered that the entire paper was taken verbatim from an assignment the student had already submitted for that previous class, with the exception of several additional sentences at the end of the document. The student acknowledged that they submitted a paper that they had already written and received credit for in a previous class. Committee members found the student responsible for violating the honor code by misrepresenting previously completed work for another class as a new paper and gave a sanction of failure in the assignment.
- 31) A sophomore was brought to the committee when the professor noticed large sections (sometimes comprising multiple sentences) of their problem set appeared to be taken verbatim from outside sources without including any citations or quotation marks. The student described extremely stressful family circumstances that they faced at this time, and noted that they were not able to focus and were not aware that they had copied exact text without paraphrasing and citing. Committee members found the student responsible for violating the honor code and gave a sanction of failure in the assignment.
- 32) A junior was brought to the committee when the professor noticed that an assignment was unusual in that the handwriting was different from the text on past problem sets and exams. In addition, this problem set had more elaboration of answers than previous sets. The student explained that their handwriting changes and shared examples of their different handwriting styles. Committee members found there was insufficient evidence to suggest a violation of the honor code.

Part II: Summary of Honor Case Data

Figure 1: Findings of Responsibility

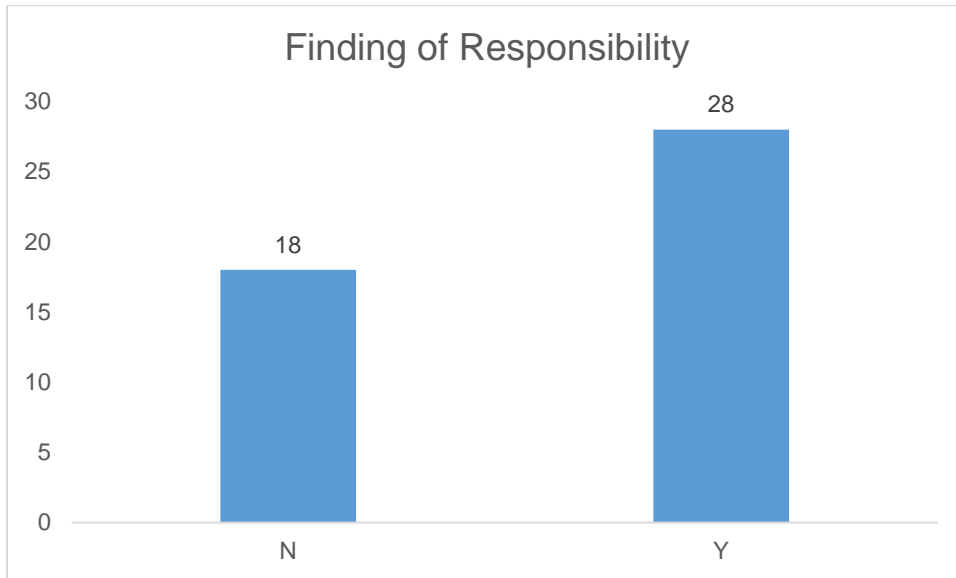


Figure 2: Involved Students by Course Level

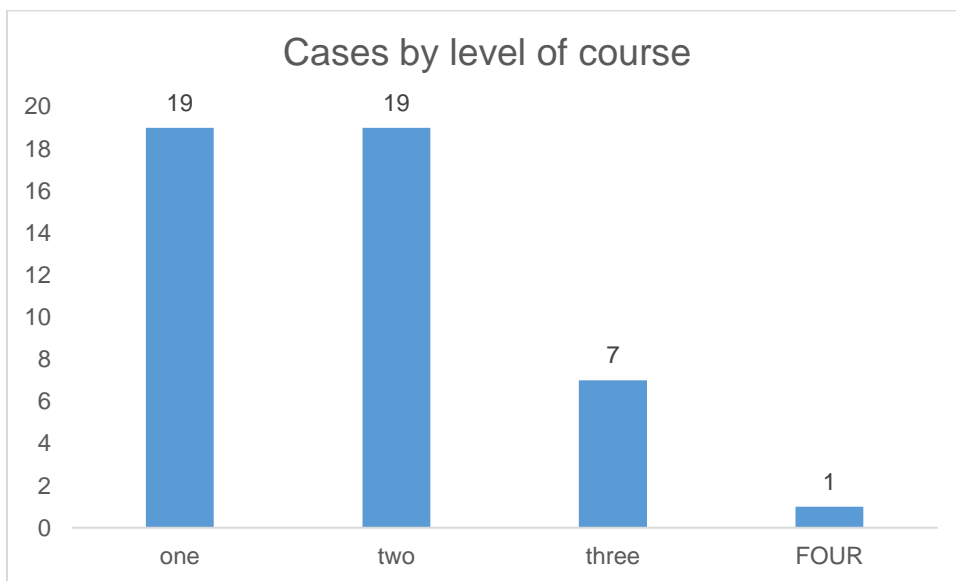


Figure 3: Involved Students by Course Department

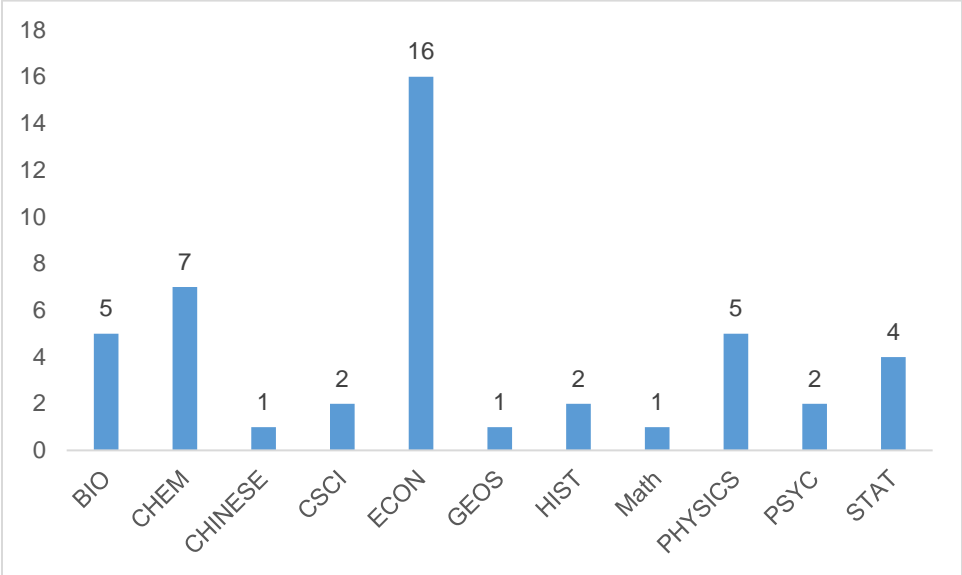


Figure 4: Involved Students by Course Division

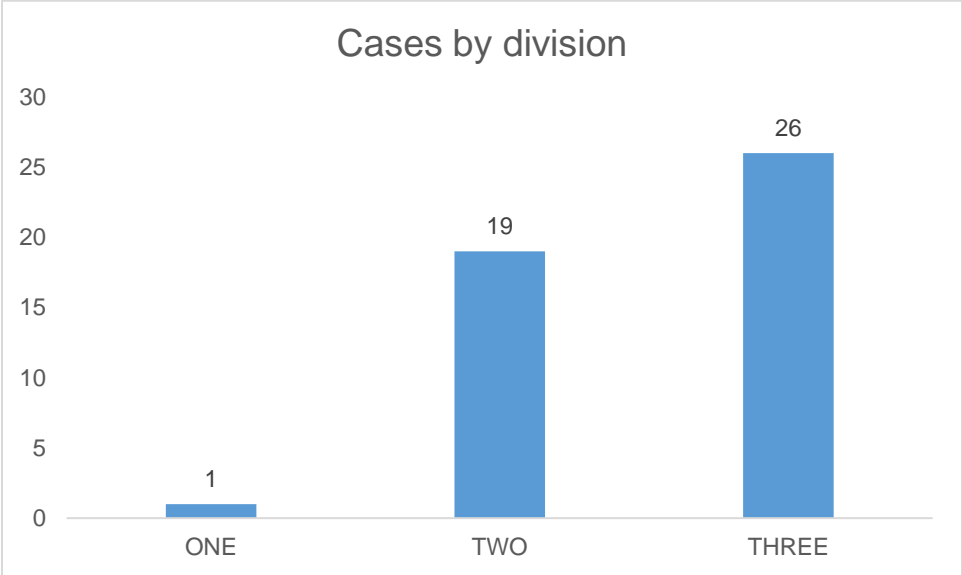
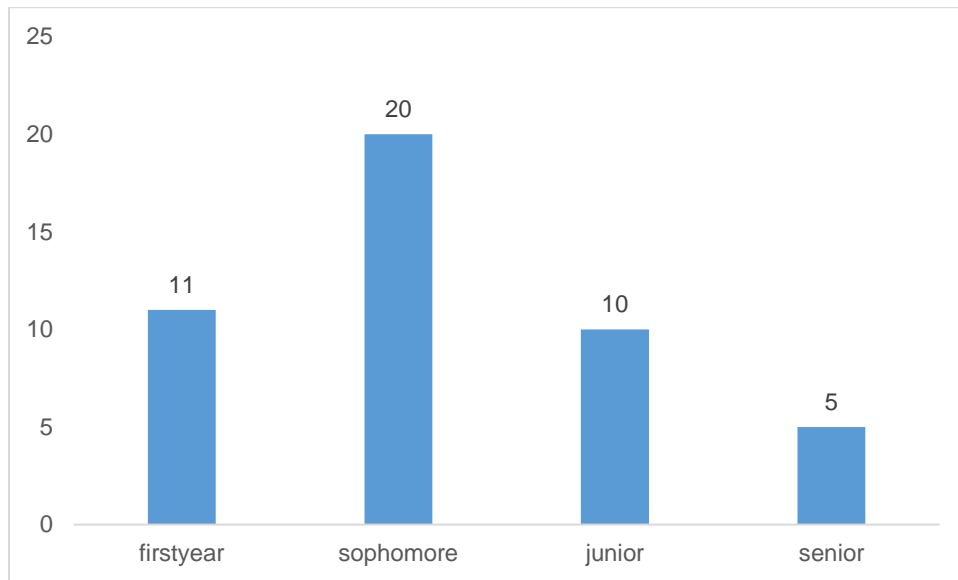


Figure 5: Involved Students by Class Year



Part III: **Disciplinary cases**

For the 2020-2021 academic year, one student was suspended between one semester to two years along with disciplinary probation for violations of the College's Code of Conduct with regard to disruption. Two students were placed on disciplinary probation due to violations involving disruption. An additional 49 students received warnings about minor violations related to underage drinking, marijuana possession/use, disruption, and copyright infringements.