

Caltech Graduate Students and the Honor Code

Honor Code

The Honor Code is a fundamental principle of conduct for all members of the Caltech community, including graduate students. The Honor Code states that:

“No member of the Caltech community shall take unfair advantage of any other member of the Caltech community.”

Enforcing the Honor Code

When graduate students fail to follow the Honor Code or violate Caltech policy, corrective measures will be taken. The graduate deans (the term “dean” will refer to the Dean of Graduate Studies, Associate Dean of Graduate Studies, and/or Assistant Dean of Graduate Studies) oversee the review process for alleged Honor Code and/or Institute policy violations by graduate students. Alleged academic violations of the Honor Code are investigated and decided by the deans (or their designee). Alleged non-academic violations of the Honor Code and policy violations that do not involve sexual harassment or discrimination are reviewed by the deans.

Reporting a Violation

Any member of the community may report a potential honor code violation involving a graduate student to the Graduate Studies Office. Reports should not be made to faculty, teaching assistants, or other community members. To refer undergraduate students to the conduct process, please file a report of a violation of the Honor Code or Caltech policy with the [Online Incident Referral Form](#). Reports involving graduate students should go directly to the Graduate Studies Office using the following guidelines:

- In the case of a suspected Honor Code violation, a message explaining the incident should be sent to the Graduate Studies Office (gradofc@caltech.edu). Copies of relevant materials should be provided.
- Members of the community are not responsible for determining if a violation of the Honor Code has occurred. Instructors, faculty and TAs should not independently investigate suspected Honor Code violations.
- For a pending case, instructors, faculty or TAs should assign a grade assuming no violation has taken place. Upon investigation and resolution of the case, the instructors will be informed of any corrective grading changes.
- Every student shares responsibility for upholding the Honor Code and Caltech policy. This responsibility implies not only refraining from actions that may be violations but also protecting our community from any who engage in such activities. A conscious failure to report suspected violations may itself be considered an Honor Code violation.

Confidentiality

The respondent should be presumed not responsible until found in violation by the process described here. The respondent has a right to confidentiality, and a complainant should not discuss cases, pending, active or closed, with other students or faculty. Hearsay and innuendo can be very damaging to a student's career and create an environment that is unacceptable at the Institute. Breach of confidentiality may be considered a violation of the Honor Code and subject to disciplinary action. If there are questions about the handling and/or status of a case, the Graduate Studies Office (gradofc@caltech.edu) should be contacted.

Violations and Their Appropriate Handling

- Examples of academic Honor Code violations include, but are not limited: plagiarism, inappropriate collaboration in a class, inappropriate use of another's work and use of unapproved resources for class work or exams.
- Examples of non-academic Honor Code violations include, but are not limited: substance abuse, disruptive behavior, harmful behavior, unlawful behavior, property damage, and misuse of facilities or digital resources.
- Some conduct issues are handled by other Institute offices. Research misconduct is handled by the Office of Research Compliance; grade disputes are handled by the Office of the Provost; and unlawful discrimination and harassment are handled by the Equity and Title IX Office.
- Retaliation against anyone involved in a complaint or investigation is strictly prohibited

Interim Measures

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In certain circumstances during the investigative process, The Dean of Graduate Studies or other Institute administrators may place restrictions on a student prior to the conclusion of the Investigative process. Restrictions that may be placed on a student may include: restricting contact with another individual or people; restricting access to the Caltech residential buildings or other buildings on campus; suspending a student from participation in classes or events and/or organizations within the campus community; or placing hold(s) on a student's transcript, registration, grades and/or diploma.

These interim actions will only be taken if it is determined that the student's behavior may make their presence on campus a danger to the normal operations of the institution, the safety of themselves, others, or to the property of the Institute or others. Students issued any interim measures may request a prompt and reasonable review of the need for and terms of any interim measure that directly affects them and may submit evidence in support of their request. Requests for review of the interim measure shall be submitted in writing to the Graduate Studies Office (gradofc@caltech.edu).

The Investigative Process

- If a student is reported to the Graduate Studies office for an alleged violation of the Honor Code, one of the deans will meet with the student to discuss the allegations. In cases where the student accepts the allegation, the Early Resolution Option may be applicable (see Early Resolution Option process outlined below).
- If the respondent denies the allegation, but there is sufficient evidence to suspect that a violation may have taken place, the Dean of Graduate Studies will typically appoint investigator(s) to investigate by interviewing the people involved, reviewing documents and considering other relevant information.
- During the investigation, the respondent will be given an opportunity to answer questions, present supporting evidence, and provide witnesses. The respondent cannot have an attorney present.

Recommendations and Decisions

- The investigator(s) will prepare a report with recommendations to the Dean of Graduate Studies.
- The Dean of Graduate Studies will decide in consultation with the investigator(s).

Notifications

- The Dean of Graduate Studies will provide a copy of the investigative report to the complainant and respondent and inform each of the outcome.
- In cases involving coursework, the instructor will be notified of corrective measures. If re-grading is needed, the Dean of Graduate Studies will indicate to the instructor what material needs to be reconsidered. After regrading, the student's transcript will be corrected.

Sanctions

If the investigation upholds the allegation, appropriate sanctions will be implemented. A variety of sanctions are possible; some common ones are listed below.

- In cases involving coursework, corrective measures will be undertaken. Depending on the circumstances, this may include a change in the overall course grade after regrading of submitted coursework, negation of submitted coursework, or required submission of new coursework.
- Disciplinary probation: during the probation period, any violations of the Code of Conduct, Honor Code, or any other Institute policy may result in more severe sanctions, including involuntary leave and/or permanent separation from the Institute.
- The respondent may be asked to write a letter of remorse to the affected party.
- In cases involving disruptive behavior in Caltech housing, housing privileges may be revoked.

Appeals

- The respondent may appeal the outcome of an investigation only on one of the following grounds:
 - A procedural error occurred that would have significantly affected the outcome of the investigation. Minor or inconsequential deviations from procedure do not give rise to an appeal right.
 - There is new evidence which would have significantly affected the outcome.
 - The sanctions imposed are disproportionate to the findings.
- Filing an appeal:
 - The respondent must submit a written appeal to vpsaoffice@caltech.edu within ten (10) business days of being notified of the resolution of the case.
 - Appeals must be written and submitted by the respondent, not a representative.
- Review of appeal:
 - The appeal is reviewed by the Vice President and Faculty Dean of Students or designee. The outcomes include:
 - Uphold: The original sanction/decision remains in place.
 - Modify/Change: The sanction is decreased, increased, or altered.
 - Overturn/Dismiss: The original decision is reversed.
 - Remand: The case is sent back to the original hearing body for further review.
 - The appeal decision is final.

Role of Faculty

- Cooperation of faculty with the Graduate Studies Office is essential to the functioning of the Honor Code. Some of the specific roles of faculty include: creation of clear policies for each class they teach, distribution of that policy to students at the start of every term and to the Registrar as a matter of record, reporting of suspected violations to the Graduate Studies Office (gradofc@caltech.edu) in a timely manner, and cooperating with the Graduate Studies Office during the review process. Faculty members that report suspected violations are responsible for re-grading material, if necessary, and submitting a new final grade to the Registrar.

Early Resolution Option

The Early Resolution Option (ERO) is available for academic Honor Code cases when the respondent does not wish to contest. It allows respondents to expedite the process by waiving the right to an investigation. Once a respondent has opted into the Early Resolution Option, the decision is final. There is no appeal process.

A respondent may choose to forgo the Early Resolution Option to contest allegations and have the case undergo investigation.

Criteria for an Early Resolution Option include:

- The responding student does not wish to contest the allegations as presented and is willing to accept the standard sanction without the option of appeal.
- The respondent has not been found responsible for any prior academic Honor Code violations
- Types of alleged academic dishonesty that may be eligible include, but are not limited to:
 - Over-collaboration
 - Consulting an unapproved resource
 - Plagiarism, if limited in quantity
 - Sharing or distribution of academic materials, including class notes, in violation of Caltech's intellectual property policy
 - Use of unauthorized materials, equipment, or assistance
 - Submission of work without permission of the instructor that has been previously submitted for credit
 - Copying someone else's work

Circumstances in which the Early Resolution Option would not be offered:

- The Graduate Studies Office determines that investigation is the appropriate process
- The respondent has a prior academic Honor Code violation
- The allegations do not have a standard sanction and/or precedent
- The allegations against a student are so egregious as to require an investigation. Types of academic misconduct that would be considered egregious include:
 - Theft of another student's work and submission as one's own
 - Violations in multiple courses
 - Deliberately damaging the academic work or effects of another
 - Widespread academic misconduct involving a group of students, such as a "cheating ring"

Early Resolution Option Process

If it appears that a case meets the standards for an Early Resolution, as outlined above, the Graduate Studies Office would notify the respondent in writing to:

- Inform them of the reported allegations
- Provide them with access to the available evidence
- Explain the Early Resolution process as an option, why they are being offered this option, and how it differs from the investigative review process
- Outline the standard sanctions and explain the lack of appeal

The respondent will be given 7 days to decide which process to follow. If the respondent decides to accept responsibility for the alleged violations, they waive their right to the investigation review process.

Glossary

Complainant: the party making the allegation

Respondent: the party that is responding to the allegation

Representative: a party representing the respondent