

Honoring St. Andrew's

Elizabeth Torrey, Sep 15 2015

Last Monday, after a busy Opening Day weekend, Headmaster Tad Roach asked St. Andrew's students to pause and contemplate the school's Honor Code. Three sentences long, the Honor Code is a clear and concise set of standards by which members of the school community are guided:

We tell the truth at all times.

We submit our own academic work.

We do not steal.

A seemingly simply set of guidelines, but making a habit of applying them to each interaction, decision, and corner of our lives, both on-campus and off, takes no small amount of self-reflection, and self-criticism.

“One of the most remarkable things about St. Andrew's is the school culture that students and faculty have worked together to build over the years—a culture that values compassion and empathy, meaningful relationships between people, and the honor and integrity of individuals and of our community as a whole,” noted Emily Pressman, faculty advisor to the school's student-led Honor Committee. “The Honor Code at St. Andrew's is both an expression of this culture and a bulwark protecting it, so we want the Honor Code to be something students and faculty are thinking and talking about together in ongoing ways.”

Thus, on the night before classes began, Tad tasked students with their first all-school writing assignment: consider the Honor Code, and your individual relationship to it. What does hewing to the Honor Code look like in practice? Why do we take the time to live up to such a standard? What steps do we plan to take in the coming year to ensure we maintain personal and academic integrity, and to help others in the St. Andrew's community remain fully invested in our culture of honor?

Students answered these questions via written reflections sent to their advisors and Tad. “As a teacher, I firmly believe we develop our deepest and most meaningful thinking through writing, so this seemed like a wonderful prompt for St. Andrew's students,” Pressman said. “We hope it will be a great starting point for the conversations about honor that will continue throughout the year.” We've excerpted a few student responses below.

“My approach to academic integrity has morphed over the last three years. Through my experiences at St. Andrew's, the importance of academic integrity has stretched beyond merely avoiding disciplinary action. When it comes to my academic work, my integrity reflects my work ethic, my accountability as a person, and my true opinions and brilliance, or lack thereof. Academic integrity allows me the opportunity to think critically about various aspects of my academic life. St. Andrew's and its Honor Code are a reflection of [how] St. Andrew's as a whole [is] striving to be its best self. A school with locks on the doors solves one problem, and creates many more. For St. Andrew's to avoid becoming such a school, students and faculty need to actively teach the importance of remaining honest, and highlight the repercussions of what failing to uphold these values can do. As a classmate of mine said, ‘If you're having trouble seeing what the importance of something is, try to imagine what things would be like without it.’ To remind each other of

how flawed we as individuals and as a school would be without the Honor Code is one of the best ways we can come to appreciate it.”

-Kieran Murphy '16, 2015-16 Co-Head of Honor Committee

“I think the driving force behind my academic work and integrity will be the relationships I form with teachers and my peers. The Honor Code mentions the trust between students and teachers, and how cheating disrupts this trust. No matter how challenging this year becomes, I believe the moments that will uplift me will come from my teachers and peers, so doing anything to damage our relationship is unacceptable.”

-Lynden Fausey '17

“Not only does the Honor Code protect me—it also gives me the opportunity for academic exploration in class. My teachers want to see how much I know so that I can improve; they do not want somebody else’s work. I believe that my personal and academic integrity is guided not only by my expectations of others but for myself. I want to feel proud of my work and participation in school activities, assemblies, chapels, etc., and know that I am a vital member of this community because of my own personal thoughts and achievements.”

-Meredith Krebs '16

“What leads people to break the Honor Code is the build up of work and the mismanagement of time, until a student finally reaches a breaking point. We should consider ourselves accountable for each other, meaning we look out for roommates if we see work start to pile on them. We should consider any violation of the Honor Code as a personal loss in the community, something that we could have prevented, and [resolve] that we will work even harder after that event to fix and maintain the culture of honor at St. Andrew’s.”

-Justin Duncan '16

“Our culture at St. Andrew’s revolves around doing the right thing. It is inevitable that people will look to their peers to make decisions. Even when we try not to do this, it tends to happen subconsciously. If we can make the ‘cool’ or the majority decisions to do what is morally right and expected, then younger students and even new faculty will see this and hold themselves to these standards.”

-Charlotte Berl '17

“Having academic integrity, to me, is to possess the courage to accept and learn from the inevitable mistakes made during this period of self-growth. I am here to improve myself, to learn to solve my own problems, and to become more confident in facing challenges. When I feel tempted to ask a classmate for help on a math problem, I could instead try to review the materials, learn ahead a little bit, or look at the problem several times to solve it myself, before I ask for help. Honesty and integrity will always be two qualities I want to be labeled for, and the Honor Code is like a criteria for self-examination to see if I have [become] who I want to be. Trust is a form of generosity, and this generosity impacts those of us who might for a second want to let go of principle, to be pulled back on the right road.”

-Stella Zhou '18

“When thinking about the issue of honor, the first thing that comes to mind is my relationships and the people I would disappoint if I were to compromise my integrity. I have been fortunate enough to meet and work with the greatest teachers in the world at St. Andrew’s, and they have given me some of the most meaningful relationships of my life. In my eyes, cheating on any assignment, whether it be for St. Andrew’s or anywhere else, is a personal statement that tells the teacher that their class is not important enough to warrant my full and genuine effort, or that I do not value their trust. I have had opportunities to cheat, to make those statements, when teachers have trusted me with take home tests and work that is not completely supervised. It has never occurred to me, and I hope that it never will, to cheat on these assignments because I could not bring myself to tell my teacher that their class does not matter or that I do not value their trust. I cherish my relationships with my teachers, and I see cheating as a threat to those relationships.”

-Thomas Lindeman '16