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Faculty

Academic Integrity Week Essay

Two questions have been posed: “What do you feel are the benefits of having an Aggie Code of Honor?” and “How does it affect academic honesty on campus?” In answer to the first question, the principal benefit of having an Aggie Code of Honor is that it makes a clear, public statement of the behavior expected of *everyone* on campus (students, faculty, and staff alike): **“An Aggie does not lie, cheat, or steal or tolerate those who do.”**

While some may feel that this goes without saying, the fact of the matter is that a large majority of students admits to having cheated during their years at Texas A&M University, according to a recent anonymous survey. Probably most of these students did not consider the long-range consequences of their actions, and would be appalled to realize them: Would you want to have your income tax forms prepared by an accountant who cheated his way through college? (Of course not, you might end up in jail.) Would you want to have a surgeon operate on you who had cheated her way through medical school? (Of course not, you might die on the operating table.) Would you want to drive on a bridge designed by an engineer who had cheated? (Of course not, the bridge might collapse.)

This is a straightforward variation on the Golden Rule enshrined in all major religions and ethical systems, “Treat others as you wish to be treated”; in this case, “Do not harm others by your cheating, so that you will not be harmed by their cheating.” In another formulation, “Protect the vulnerable,” *e.g.*, by being a trustworthy accountant, doctor, engineer, etc.

The answer to the second question is related: academic honesty is supported, promoted, and, yes, enforced by having a Code of Honor. Organizations define themselves to a great extent by what behavior they allow or do not allow, and an organization without norms is essentially irrelevant. Consider a political party which did not care whether its members supported or opposed its platform, a religion whose members could violate all of its principal tenets, or a university whose rules could be ignored with impunity. Such an organization would soon be dismissed as meaningless.

As President Gates has emphasized repeatedly, if Texas A&M University does not produce graduates with character and integrity, it has failed in its mission. The Aggie Code of Honor is a cornerstone in the foundation of ethical principles upon which we all build.