

REVIEW

# Navigating the Toleration Clause: The Complex Role of Reporting Policies in Collegiate Honor Codes

Toni Merhar, University of Minnesota

Brian Fash, Center for Character and Leadership Development, USAFA

Nathan Kuncel, University of Minnesota

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## ABSTRACT

In our Fall 2024 *JCLD* article, *The Evolution of Collegiate Honor Codes*, we traced the history of honor codes into their current form—promoting character development. Despite their wide support, several features have continually drawn criticism, including mandatory reporting policies. Due to a range of perceived risks and benefits, many institutions have struggled with the decision to include or exclude such policies in their honor codes. They require strong organizational commitment and constant re-investment. Without this, the risk of creating an environment of avoidance rather than accountability is significant. In this article, we examine the history of toleration clauses and their complex role within collegiate honor codes.

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**CONTACT** Toni Merhar ✉ [merha013@umn.edu](mailto:merha013@umn.edu)

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Collegiate honor codes have proven themselves as a productive approach to reduce cheating and promote ethical conduct. They empower students to own the culture of integrity at their institutions. Yet, several aspects continue to spark controversy—primarily unproctored exams, single sanctions, and peer reporting policies. Of all the responsibilities associated with honor codes, students consistently find peer reporting to be the most difficult (Cheung, 2014; Fiske, 1975; May & Loyd, 1993; McCabe et al., 1999; Staats, 1975; Trevino & Victor, 1992). At the same time, peer accountability is a critical skill expected of our future leaders (Wendt, 2024).

To emphasize the importance of peer accountability, some honor codes include toleration alongside prohibitions against lying, stealing, cheating, and plagiarizing. Often referred to as a toleration or non-toleration clause, it is typically included as part of a school's honor oath (Fass, 1986). The toleration clause sets an expectation that students are responsible not only for their own behavior but also for that of their peers as well (Zoll, 1996). Historically, the presence of this clause categorizes an institution as one of the stricter and more traditional honor code schools (McCabe & Pavela, 2000; McCabe et al., 2012; Nuss, 1996).

### Multiple Interpretations

When it comes to peer accountability, Dr. Donald McCabe, commonly known as the father of Academic Integrity, identified two separate expectations placed on students: non-toleration and reportage (Cole & McCabe, 1996). Non-toleration was defined as the obligation for students to take some action, while still allowing them to determine the most appropriate response based on the circumstances. Meanwhile, reportage was defined as a separate obligation to officially report misconduct. It is our perspective that, over time, these two distinct expectations have often been lumped together as one thing since the schools with non-toleration

language in their honor oath also frequently make “failure to report” a violation.

However, the existence of a toleration clause does not automatically imply that a school has a mandatory reporting policy. Similarly, not all mandatory reporting policies are emphasized with a toleration clause. The language used to promote peer accountability in collegiate honor codes ranges from clear guidance that “failure to report” is itself considered an honor violation to less-threatening statements emphasizing a student's obligation to report. Similar to the evolution of collegiate honor codes, toleration clauses have also experienced a range of interpretations among the schools that have them. Each has their own understanding of what non-toleration means and how serious a case of toleration is considered to be. Table 1 provides several examples of current toleration clauses and mandatory reporting policies at a variety of honor code schools.

At one end of the spectrum, schools such as the United States Military Academy (West Point) and the University of Notre Dame have overt language on toleration included in their student oaths followed by a reporting requirement in their honor code guidance. Rollins College specifically includes failure to report a violation within 10 class days as an honor violation (Rollins College, 2024). On the other end, Princeton and the University of Richmond have imbedded the responsibility to report more covertly in their guidance without specifically identifying it as a toleration clause. Somewhere in between, the University of Georgia includes non-toleration in their student oath but clarifies in the guidance that there is no penalty for failure to report. It is also possible to take a proactive approach to student reporting expectations without mandating it (University of Miami, 2024; University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2024). As an example, Hamilton College acknowledges the difficulty of confronting a suspected violator while promoting candor and honesty. They require student witnesses to

**Table 1**  
*Tolerance Clause & Mandatory Reporting Policy Examples*

<b>University</b>	<b>Undergrad Enrollment</b>	<b>Peer Reporting Language</b>	<b>Requirement Location</b>	<b>Data Source</b>
United States Military Academy-West Point	4,393	"A Cadet will not lie, cheat, steal, or <b>tolerate</b> those who do." Cadets violate the Honor Code by tolerating if they <b>fail to report</b> an unresolved incident with honor implications to proper authority within a reasonable length of time.	Honor Oath & Honor Code Guidance	Simon Center, 2024
United States Air Force Academy (USAFA)	4,085	"We will not lie, steal, or cheat, nor <b>tolerate</b> among us anyone who does. Furthermore, I resolve to do my duty and to live honorably, (so help me God)." Toleration is the <b>failure to promptly address</b> a suspected violation of the Honor Code. If [after confrontation] the cadet does not report the matter, you have the <b>obligation to report</b> it.	Honor Oath & Honor Code Guidance	USAFA, 2024
Virginia Military Institute (VMI)	1,512	"A Cadet will not lie, cheat, steal, nor <b>tolerate</b> those who do." A cadet who has knowledge of a breach of the Honor Code, and who <b>does not report</b> the same is guilty of toleration. Toleration is a violation of the Honor Code.	Honor Oath & Honor Code Guidance	VMI, 2024
The Citadel	2,695	"A cadet does not lie, cheat, or steal, nor <b>tolerate</b> those who do." Toleration is the <b>failure to report</b> a case of lying, cheating, or stealing to a member of the Cadet Honor Committee.	Honor Oath & Honor Code Guidance	The Citadel, 2020
Norwich University	2,854	"A Norwich student will not lie, cheat, steal, or <b>tolerate</b> those who do." Toleration is <b>failing to act on and to report</b> potential violations of the Honor Code.	Honor Oath & Honor Code Guidance	Norwich University, 2024

(Continued)

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*Toleration Clause & Mandatory Reporting Policy Examples*

<b>University</b>	<b>Undergrad Enrollment</b>	<b>Peer Reporting Language</b>	<b>Requirement Location</b>	<b>Data Source</b>
University of North Georgia	17,256	<p>"On my honor, I will not lie, cheat, steal, plagiarize, evade the truth, conspire to deceive, or <b>tolerate</b> those who do."</p> <p>A <b>failure to report</b> violations of the Honor Code may subject a cadet to discipline.</p>	Honor Oath & Honor Code Guidance	University of North Georgia, 2024
Rollins College	2,263	<p>If a student has reason to believe that a violation of academic integrity has occurred, he/she is <b>required to report</b> it to the Academic Honor Council.</p> <p>Violation #9: FAILURE TO REPORT AN HONOR CODE VIOLATION. <b>Failure to report</b> occurs when a student has knowledge of or is witness to an act in violation of the Academic Honor Code and does not report it within 10 class days.</p>	Honor Code Guidance	Rollins College, 2024
Davidson College	1,904	<p>Each Davidson student is <b>honor bound</b> to report immediately all violations of the Honor Code of which the student has first-hand knowledge; <b>failure to do so is itself a violation</b> of the Honor Code.</p>	Honor Code Guidance	Davidson College, 2023
William Jewell College	829	<p>"As a member of the William Jewell College community, I commit myself to the highest personal standards of conduct and integrity. I will not cheat, lie, or steal, nor will I <b>tolerate</b> these actions by others within this community."</p> <p>Students who possess factual knowledge of any committed violation(s) of the Honor Code are <b>honor-bound to report</b> said violation(s).</p>	Honor Oath & Honor Code Guidance	William Jewell College Honor Code, 2024

(Continued)

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*Tolerance Clause & Mandatory Reporting Policy Examples*

<b>University</b>	<b>Undergrad Enrollment</b>	<b>Peer Reporting Language</b>	<b>Requirement Location</b>	<b>Data Source</b>
University of Notre Dame	8,971	"... I will not participate in or <b>tolerate</b> academic dishonesty." Students witnessing a violation of the Honor Code or otherwise having reason to believe that a violation has occurred may use discretion in choosing among several possible courses of action. These include: [ <b>confronting then reporting, reporting to the instructor, or reporting in writing</b> ] to the Honor Code Committee.	Honor Oath & Honor Code Guidance	University of Notre Dame, 2024
Virginia Tech	30,434	"I will not lie, cheat, or steal, <b>nor will I accept the actions of those who do.</b> " All persons in the Virginia Tech academic community (students, faculty, staff, and administration) shall be <b>responsible for reporting</b> alleged incidents of academic misconduct that come to their knowledge.	Honor Oath & Honor Code Guidance	Virginia Tech, 2024
Old Dominion University	18,375	"I pledge to support the honor system of Old Dominion University. I will refrain from any form of academic dishonesty or deception, such as cheating or plagiarism. I am aware that as a member of the academic community it is my <b>responsibility to turn in</b> all suspected violations of the Honor Code. I will report to a hearing if summoned."	Honor Oath	Old Dominion University, 2024

(Continued)

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*Toleration Clause & Mandatory Reporting Policy Examples*

University	Undergrad Enrollment	Peer Reporting Language	Requirement Location	Data Source
Princeton	5,604	Every student is <b>obligated to report</b> to the Honor Committee any suspected violation of the Honor Code that they have observed. Students have a twofold obligation: individually, they must not violate the code, and as a community, they are <b>responsible to see that suspected violations are reported</b> .	Honor Code Guidance	Princeton University, 2023
University of Richmond	3,145	It shall be the <b>responsibility</b> of every member of the student body of the University, having knowledge of or being witness to a possible violation of the Honor Code, <b>to report</b> the possible violation, or ensure that the student in question makes a self-report, within 5 days.	Honor Code Guidance	University of Richmond, 2011
University of Michigan, Ann Arbor	32,695	It is the <b>duty and responsibility</b> of students and instructors <b>to report</b> promptly any suspected violations of the Honor Code.	Honor Code Guidance	University of Michigan College of Engineering, 2024
Williams College	2,152	If you are aware that another student may have violated the honor code, it is your <b>responsibility</b> as a Williams student <b>to report</b> it. Our honor code specifically describes this obligation.	Honor Code Guidance	Williams College, 2024
Baylor University	15,213	All students, faculty members, and staff members are <b>expected to report</b> violations of the Honor Code... in all cases, the incident and sanction(s) <b>must be reported</b> to the Office of Academic Integrity.	Honor Code Guidance	Baylor University, 2024
Marquette University	7,528	The honor code <b>obliges</b> students: <b>To report</b> any observed breaches of this honor code and academic honesty.	Honor Code Guidance	Marquette University, 2024

(Continued)

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*Toleration Clause & Mandatory Reporting Policy Examples*

<b>University</b>	<b>Undergrad Enrollment</b>	<b>Peer Reporting Language</b>	<b>Requirement Location</b>	<b>Data Source</b>
Dartmouth College	4,458	Any student who becomes aware of an alleged violation of the Academic Honor Policy is not merely an observer but is <b>bound by honor to report</b> it to an appropriate authority, such as an instructor, department or program chair, academic dean, or the Office of Community Standards & Accountability. Failure to do so threatens both the spirit and operation of the Academic Honor Policy.	Honor Code Guidance	Dartmouth College, 2024
Rice	4,494	It is the <b>obligation</b> of every student and faculty member to not violate the system, to not aid in any violation, and <b>to report</b> any violation seen or suspected.	Honor Code Guidance	Rice University, 2023
Emory	7,101	Apathy or acquiescence in the presence of academic misconduct is not a neutral act. ... All members of the Emory University community—students, faculty, and staff—share the <b>responsibility</b> and authority <b>to challenge and report</b> acts of apparent academic misconduct. Any member of the Emory University community who has witnessed an apparent act of academic misconduct ... is <b>responsible for promptly notifying</b> the course instructor, a member of the Honor Council, the Honor Code administrator, or the dean.	Honor Code Guidance	Emory University, 2024

(Continued)

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*Toleration Clause & Mandatory Reporting Policy Examples*

University	Undergrad Enrollment	Peer Reporting Language	Requirement Location	Data Source
University of Maryland-College Park	30,353	Any member of the university community, who has witnessed an apparent act of Academic Misconduct, or who has information that reasonably leads to the conclusion that Academic Misconduct has occurred or has been attempted, has the <b>responsibility to promptly inform</b> the Office of Student Conduct.	Honor Code Guidance	University of Maryland, 2024
Texas A&M University	57,512	"An Aggie does not lie, cheat or steal or <b>tolerate</b> those who do." Students have the <b>responsibility</b> to confront their peers engaging in compromising situations, and if unsuccessful, to report the matter to the Aggie Honor System Office.	Honor Oath & Honor Code Guidance	Texas A&M University, 2024
Middlebury College	2,773	Any member of the college community (student, faculty, or administrator) who is aware of a case of academic dishonesty is <b>morally obligated to report</b> it to the professor or the Office for Community Standards.	Honor Code Guidance	Middlebury College, 2021
University of Georgia	30,714	"I will be academically honest in all of my academic work and will not <b>tolerate</b> academic dishonesty of others." There is <b>no penalty for failing to report another student's dishonesty</b> or for failing to testify in an academic honesty proceeding.	Honor Oath & Honor Code Guidance	University of Georgia, 2024

Note. Undergraduate enrollment obtained from the U.S. News & World Report Top 100 Best National University Rankings for 2024 at <https://www.usnews.com/best-colleges/rankings/national-universities>

take appropriate action—which could be confronting, consulting faculty, reporting, or even simply tapping a pencil on a desk during an in-class exam (Hamilton College, 2024).

In addition to the obligation to act or report misconduct, a third interpretation of non-toleration simply refers to how students are responsible for and oversee the honor code's judiciary process (Streeter, 2019). This interpretation acknowledges how student-run honor systems remove violators from their institution, as they are deemed intolerable within the student body. This interpretation has also been linked to zero-tolerance and used to justify single-sanction policies (Holcomb, 1992).

### From the Beginning

Of the five Virginia schools with claims to the earliest student-run honor systems (Merhar et al., 2024), there is no clear consensus on the value of non-toleration policies. Two schools—the Virginia Military Institute (VMI) and the University of Richmond—maintain toleration clauses with mandatory reporting. Meanwhile, at the University of Virginia, the first entirely student-run honor system originally included a toleration clause but eventually dropped it. The final two schools—the College of William & Mary and Washington & Lee University—never adopted them in the first place. The variation in sentiments among these five schools highlights long-standing and conflicting views on mandatory reporting policies.

The College of William & Mary proudly claims the first collegiate honor code and has never had a mandatory reporting policy. From their founding, they viewed their students as inherently trustworthy and felt they should not be insulted by “impertinent surveillance” (Geiger, 1922, p. 399). Rather, those viewed as “spies and informers” were not tolerated within the community (Geiger, 1922). Furthermore, the administration felt mandatory reporting goes against basic human nature and is nearly impossible to enforce.

In stark contrast, VMI proudly links its zero-tolerance policy with its single-sanction honor system. Students are required to report suspected violations, and those found guilty are automatically disenrolled. Cadets express both fear and reverence for the code, and they equate non-toleration not only with reporting but also with their tradition of drumming out violators (Crouch, 2024). Alumni routinely hail the code as VMI's greatest strength and a point of pride at the heart of their institution (Jumper, 2021). With such wide support, VMI has no intention of changing its single-sanction approach (VMI Alumni, 2022).

Meanwhile, the University of Virginia's honor code started with clear non-toleration language, stating, “To ignore these acts committed by another student is to make one an accomplice and equally guilty of a violation of honor.” However, in 1979, the Honor Committee voted to soften the language and ended-up removing it altogether due to its unenforceability (Streeter, 2019). Some students feared that removing the clause would undermine the system and allow unreported violators to flourish. However, after an initial decrease in reporting, it recovered, and no long-term changes in reporting rates were noticed (Streeter, 2019). A quarter century later, in 2005, the Faculty Senate unanimously recommended reinstating the toleration clause, but the students chose not to revive it. Today, there is still ongoing debate over the pros and cons of such a policy.

### *Marching to Different Drums*

Opposing positions on toleration policies are perhaps most apparent at the Military Service Academies. Of the 11 Military Service Academies and Senior Military Colleges, eight have a toleration clause and a mandatory reporting policy. At West Point, the expectation for students to report peer misconduct was referenced as far back as the 1820s, and an unwritten code obligating students to report misconduct was acknowledged by the Superintendent in 1921. However, it was not formally written in their honor code until 1970 (Gebicke, 1995;

Sorley, 2009). The United States Air Force Academy (USAFA), Norwich University, and The Citadel similarly modeled their honor codes after West Point, including a toleration clause (Sorley, 2009; The Citadel, 2020; USAFA, 2024).

Meanwhile, when the United States Naval Academy (USNA) adopted their Honor Concept in 1952, they chose not to mandate peer reporting. They feared it would create an unthinking code, and model leadership grounded in fear rather than aspiration (Forney, 2000). They felt the decision on what action to take should belong to the student. To this day, midshipmen are allowed to approach and counsel each other without formally reporting a violation (Gebicke, 1995; Manuel, 2020).

In a 1994 Senate Armed Services Committee hearing, senior officers from USAFA and West Point praised their toleration clauses as “essential” and “the keystone” of their honor systems. In contrast, leaders from USNA argued that “more is gained without a non-toleration policy” (Senate Committee on Armed Services, 1994). Aligned with these sentiments, a 2024 survey of those who oversee collegiate honor codes revealed a strong preference for the status quo. Of the 57 cadets, midshipmen, and staff from 11 Federal Service Academies and Senior Military Colleges, 56% believed that modifying their school’s toleration policies would harm their institution’s culture. 21% felt a change would have no impact.

### *Over the Years*

Though there is no master list of schools that have mandatory reporting requirements, we know their adoption rate has fluctuated over the past century. In 1915, a review of 85 honor code institutions found that 30 (35.3%) required the double obligation to report other students (Baldwin et al., 1915). By the end of the twentieth century, three separate studies reported that four of 30 (13.3%), 28 of 51 (54.9%), and 64.4% of honor

code institutions obligated reportage (Bush, 2000; Fass, 1986; Kibler, 1994). Today, of the top 100 American Universities, 40 have honor codes, and 13 of those have a mandatory reporting requirement (32.5%). Beyond the United States, international institutions are also debating toleration policies, including Jordan, where 8 of 23 (34.8%) honor code universities obligate students to report peer misconduct (Alahmad, 2013). Though non-toleration and reportage policies are not a dominant feature in collegiate honor codes, they do exist in a wide variety of domestic and international institutions of higher education.

### **The Intent**

Toleration clauses and mandatory reporting policies were established with good intentions. They are grounded in the ideals of upholding ethical standards and building moral courage. Cole and Conklin (1996) argued that, for an honor code to be effective, mandatory reporting should be required and enforced. The theory is that doing so establishes clear expectations and helps neutralize student aversion to it. Key arguments in favor of these policies include their potential to deter cheating, promote peer accountability, increase student ownership of the honor code, and symbolize an ideal the community aspires to.

### *Student Ownership*

Student ownership of the honor code is a key for its success (Lyman, 1927), and schools that have toleration clauses often perceive them as imperative to the success of their honor code, guaranteeing student ownership (Manuel, 2020). Those who have them frequently believe the entire honor system would be threatened without including “failure to report” as a violation (Sorley, 2009; The Citadel, 2020). If students are to be entrusted with running an honor system, they should also be expected to enforce it. This self-policing is seen as essential to emphasize that an individual’s duty to society outweighs the bonds of friendship (Gebicke, 1995).

*Peer Accountability*

Honor code schools often espouse a mission to develop leaders of character. Accountability is central to this character development, and peer accountability is the most challenging. Mandatory reporting policies embrace the mindset that a failure to challenge misbehavior effectively encourages it—if you allow it, you promote it. The toleration clause was established to encourage honorable individuals to confront wrongdoers and correct dishonest behavior (Charles, 1968), skills deemed essential for the moral and ethical development of students (Sorley, 2009).

*Academic Integrity*

Beyond student development, reporting policies have also been embraced for their perceived ability to increase reporting rates and decrease student cheating. Enlisting students to monitor their peers is commonly expected to inhibit potential cheaters (Gardner et al., 1988). Multiple researchers have claimed that such policies provide the most powerful influence on a student's inclination to report and reduce the incidents of cheating on college campuses (Ayala-Enriquez & Guerrero-Dib, 2024; Bowers, 1964; Burrus et al., 2013; Carrell et al., 2008; Curphy et al., 1998; Jennings, 1991; Konheim-Kalkstein et al., 2008; McCabe & Trevino, 1993; Tatum et al., 2018; Trevino & Victor, 1992). They challenge the individualistic attitude that cheating is a personal rather than a group offense—an attitude that enables cheating and dooms students to complacency. Culiberg and Mihelic (2020) argued that without the expectation that students will monitor each other, an honor code simply provides dishonest students a convenient way to cheat.

*Symbolic Ideal*

Streeter (2019) further proposed that the power of mandatory reporting policies is purely in their ideals—an obligation of accountability and trust within a self-governing community—rather than their practical applicability. Theoretically, requiring a student to

report on their peers should force them to wrestle with the dilemma of community versus individual values (McCabe et al., 2001). Baldwin et al. (1996) further explained that students need guidance on how and when to address the ethical misconduct of their peers, and the existence of a code that requires action should hypothetically encourage witnesses to step-up and report (Rangkuti et al., 2022).

**The Controversy**

Despite the perceived benefits of mandatory reporting, there is wide disagreement around the benefit of such policies in collegiate honor codes (Gambill, 2003; Gibbons, 2007). Researchers, faculty, and students have all expressed concerns with mandatory reporting requirements for over a century (Gebicke, 1995; Lyman, 1927; Mathews, 1930; McCabe et al., 2001; Sheldon, 1901; Zoll, 1996). Though there is little disagreement with their intent, there are concerns that these policies do not meet reality and make the honor code philosophically hard to digest (Borman, 1976). The greatest concerns are unenforceability, stifling the development of ethical judgment, a disregard of societal norms, the complex dynamic with peer loyalty, and the risk of creating an environment of fear and avoidance.

*Unenforceability*

First, for any regulation to be truly effective, it must be enforceable. Unfortunately, mandatory reporting policies are hard, if not impossible, to enforce. Among 335 schools, Cole and Conklin (1996) were unable to identify any with a non-toleration or reporting clause that also enforced it. In 1976, after a cheating scandal at West Point, the Borman Commission claimed that toleration clauses actually weaken honor systems due to their unenforceability. Columbia University specifically removed their reporting requirement for this reason (Cole & McCabe, 1996). When a policy is enacted without enforcement, it is not only destined for abuse but may slowly undermine the effectiveness of other policies as well (Hoekema, 1994).

*Undermining ethical judgment*

Mandatory reporting policies have also been criticized for assuming students will not report misconduct based on their own personal integrity and, as a result, require coercion to do so. Forcing students to report without allowing them to take the action they personally feel is appropriate can reduce the development of ethical decision-making skills (Gebicke, 1995; Manuel, 2020). In 1990, Derek Bok, the 25th President of Harvard University, wrote, “to try to force students against their will to turn in friends who violate the code might actually erode rather than strengthen respect for ethical standards” (Bok, 1990, p. 87).

For most individuals, moral behavior is closely linked to their sense of self (Axelrod, 1997; Beatty, 1992), and external motivation to uphold rules can divide these two aspects of an individual. Character cannot be developed by moral regimentation (Charles, 1968), and students should not be intimidated into honesty (Cole & Conklin, 1996). The experience of successfully grappling with peer accountability when students witness misconduct is invaluable in their development (Cole & Conklin, 1996).

Furthermore, multiple studies have found that the more time students spent under an honor code, the less compliant they felt toward the toleration clause. They experienced diminished internalization of this principle as a value, even as moral development increased, and those at higher levels of moral reasoning were reluctant and often unwilling to report their peers for academic dishonesty (Goodwin, 2007). Specifically, toleration of misconduct among cadets at West Point and the Air Force Academy has been shown to increase as they progress through their four years (Roffey & Porter, 1992; Staats, 1975). Part of the problem may be the simple, dualistic nature of a clause that mandates reporting in all situations. Morally developed individuals prefer to critically analyze the facts and weigh relevant variables rather than mindlessly following rules

(Kish-Gephart et al., 2010; Roffey & Porter, 1992)—a skill that should be desired in our future leaders.

Manuel (2020) made a valuable comparison between mandatory reporting requirements in collegiate honor codes and the Model Rules of Professional Conduct for attorneys. Though the Model Rule technically imposes a duty to report on fellow lawyers, it also empowers them to make a judgment on the severity. Lawyers are only expected to report violations in which “a self-regulating profession must vigorously endeavor to prevent.” To develop this skillset in future attorneys, there is a 50-50 split among the top 100 American law schools on how to do it. Half utilize a mandatory reporting policy, and half do not.

*Conflict with Societal Norms and Peer Loyalties*

Kish-Gephart et al. (2010) identified unethical behavior as any action that violates widely accepted (societal) moral norms. Unfortunately, this means that reporting policies conflict with the long-standing and deeply ingrained public sentiment that reporting peers is dishonorable (Ball, 1997; Hall, 1996; Rennie & Crosby, 2002; Sheldon, 1901). Overcoming this stigma to meet the expectations of peer reporting can be challenging, and no one should underestimate the difficulty of doing so. Beatty (1992) argued that compelling individuals to pledge their loyalty to both an oath and their peers results in self-alienation, undermining both morality and moral sensitivity, ultimately causing individuals to experience moral hypocrisy and shame. Student surveys further confirm this conflict between honor codes, being a team player, and personal loyalty (Gebicke, 1995). It divides allegiances for students who desire to be responsible citizens while maintaining relationships and group affiliations (Axelrod, 1997).

*Fear and Avoidance*

Honor codes flourish when they foster a sense of trust and cooperation, and there is concern that pressuring students to report every wrongdoing could jeopardize the stability and trust within a group. Instead, it has

the potential to drive a culture of fear and defensiveness, inhibiting a student's willingness to participate in enforcement. Some students have even admitted they would rather pretend they never observed misconduct than risk a potential honor violation if they fail to report (Gebicke, 1995). In 2006, Duke University revised their honor policy from an "obligation to report" to an "obligation to act" to place a greater sense of trust with their students and encourage more confrontations (Ruderman et al., 2006).

### *Effects on Academic Integrity*

Finally, though there are multiple claims that mandatory reporting policies will increase student reporting and reduce cheating, there are also counterclaims—sometimes even by the same researcher. McCabe initially expressed support for mandatory reporting policies, claiming they serve as a deterrent to students contemplating cheating (McCabe & Trevina, 1993). However, by 2001, he concluded that peer reporting responsibilities are not a very strong influence on actual reporting (McCabe et al., 2001). Other scholars have also challenged their effectiveness. Borman (1976) suggested that mandatory reporting policies may actually contribute to large-scale cheating scandals. In a 2006 study of 288 Chief Academic Affairs Officers and Provosts from 4-year public and private colleges/universities and community colleges in the United States, participants perceived that penalizing those students who do not confront cheaters will increase, rather than decrease, scholastic dishonesty (Boehm et al., 2009). In 2013, Barnard-Brak et al. claimed that reporting academic integrity violations may not be effective over and above verbal reprimands and grade penalties, and faculty and students at three institutions of higher education agreed that penalizing students for failure to confront peers would have no impact on cheating at their schools (Saathoff, 2018).

### **The Recommendation to Act**

Of those who have studied academic integrity, honor codes, and peer reporting policies, the overwhelming

recommendation has been to require students to take *some form of action* in the face of peer misconduct (Borman, 1976; Cole & Conklin, 1996; Zoll, 1996). In their final report, the six-member Borman Commission recommended that the toleration clause be retained but change the interpretation to allow a cadet the option to counsel, warn, or report the violator (Borman, 1976). Zoll (1996) conducted the most comprehensive study of peer accountability among college students and similarly proposed that students should be required to take some form of action—whether that be seeking advice, confronting the individual, or reporting the incident—as opposed to complicit acquiescence. These recommendations are fully aligned with McCabe's definition of non-toleration (Cole & McCabe, 1996).

A requirement to act acknowledges the challenges of reporting and offers a level of trust and respect for students to effectively deal with complex situations. It creates a logical middle ground—upholding the ideals of non-toleration while allowing students to use discretion—and minimizes the risks associated with mandatory reporting policies.

### **Conclusion**

When developing leaders of character, there is no debate that upholding ethical standards and promoting peer accountability is essential. The ideals of a toleration clause are both worthy and noble, and their existence sheds light on an institution's values (Fass, 1986). Yet, the decision to mandate student reporting as part of a toleration clause is much more nuanced. It comes with compelling arguments from both advocates and critics, and many institutions have struggled with their decision to adopt or remove such policies.

Mandatory reporting policies should not be naively implemented with blind optimism. Institutions that have or plan to adopt them should be fully aware of their associated risks. Otherwise, the repercussions can be worse than the absence of mandatory report-

ing—driving cynicism, undermining other policies, fostering a culture of fear and avoidance, and pushing toleration underground. Managing these risks requires strong, thoughtful, and intentional organizational commitment—proactive student engagement, transparent conversations on expectations and enforcement, and constant reinvestment. The end goal should be a culture where honor violations are openly discussed, addressed when someone oversteps, and reported when appropriate (De Graaf, 2010)—an ideal environment for developing leaders of character.

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