

Office of Academic Integrity and Student Conduct

# Harvard College Honor Council Annual Report 2020-21



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## The Harvard College Honor Code

Harvard College is an academic and residential community devoted to learning and the creation of knowledge. We – the academic community of Harvard College, including the faculty and students – view integrity as the basis for intellectual discovery, artistic creation, independent scholarship, and meaningful collaboration. We thus hold honesty – in the representation of our work and in our interactions with teachers, advisers, peers, and students – as the foundation of our community.

Members of the Harvard College community commit themselves to producing academic work of integrity – that is, work that adheres to the scholarly and intellectual standards of accurate attribution of sources, appropriate collection and use of data, and transparent acknowledgement of the contribution of others to their ideas, discoveries, interpretations, and conclusions. Cheating on exams or problem sets, plagiarizing or misrepresenting the ideas or language of someone else as one’s own, falsifying data, or any other instance of academic dishonesty violates the standards of our community, as well as the standards of the wider world of learning and affairs.

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# 1 Introduction

The Honor Code is an integral part of the academic experience at Harvard College and emphasizes a centuries-old commitment to truth and the belief that we “hold honesty – in the representation of our work and in our interactions with teachers, advisers, peers, and students – as the foundation of our community.” The sixth annual report of the Harvard College Honor Council provides a chance to reflect on that commitment to honesty and the developments that have taken place since the faculty approved the Honor Code in the spring of 2014.

The Harvard College Honor Council, where students, faculty, and staff share equal responsibility for upholding the Honor Code, both reflects and works to strengthen our collective commitment to academic integrity.

The Honor Council also responds to potential violations of the Honor Code, and in responding it emphasizes educational development and a pedagogical response to student action. Our mission is to help students understand the rules and consequences of their actions so that they can learn greater responsibility both within Harvard College and beyond its gates.

Open communication with the entire community is central to creating and maintaining the shared commitment to academic integrity inherent in the Honor Code. While the Honor Council is charged with informing the community about its decisions, we also work to maintain strict confidentiality regarding individual students. The statistics presented here are reported in aggregate to maintain the privacy of the individual students concerned.

## 2 Honor Council Activity

### 2.1 Findings of Responsibility

During the 2020-21 academic year, the Honor Council reviewed 138 individual cases. Thirty-nine (28.3%) were cases in which the student was found not responsible for any violation, while 99 (71.7%) were cases in which the student was found responsible.<sup>1</sup> Please note that some of those 138 cases included more than one type of violation within the same case (for example, inappropriate collaboration and plagiarism).

Figure 1: Percentage of Cases Ending in a Finding of Responsibility, 2020-21

71.7%

### 2.2 Responses by Type 2020-21

Figure 2

<u>Response</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
Scratch	12	8.7
Take No Action	27	19.6
Referral for a Local Sanction	6	4.3
Exclusion from a Course	0	0.0
Admonish	10	7.2
Probation	56	40.6
Require to Withdraw	27	19.6
Total	138	100

The Honor Council's decisions are governed by the rules and regulations contained in the *Handbook for Students* and are guided by considerations of equity. The Council is careful to treat each student fairly, and in reaching its decisions, considers whether the outcomes are consistent with its treatment of other students. To take action, the Council must be sufficiently persuaded that the student has violated the Honor Code and/or the rules on academic integrity.

The Honor Council has a specific range of responses, set by the Faculty, with which to respond to violations of the Honor Code and other violations of academic integrity. These can be organized into two separate categories. First is a response indicating that there was no finding of a violation, either because no violation occurred or there was insufficient evidence of a violation. This type of response means that there is no finding of responsibility on the part of the student.

The second main category of responses indicates that the Council believes a violation of the rules did occur. This category encompasses a range of actions reflecting the severity of the violation. The

<sup>1</sup> A case in which a student is not responsible may lead to a decision of Scratch or Take No Action. Findings of responsibility include cases in which students are referred for a Local Sanction, excluded from a course, admonished, placed on probation, or required to withdraw.

Council takes into account any mitigating circumstances, including the extent to which a student has had similar issues prior and the severity of the matter, when determining the appropriate response. Within this second category, there are two subsets. The first subset includes responses that address less severe violations and indicates that the Council considers the matter to be an opportunity for pedagogical intervention. These matters may result in warnings or referrals back to the course instructor (see Section 2.3).

The second subset reflects more serious concerns. These responses result in what is known as a change of status. Normally, students at the College are considered to be “in good standing.” With these types of responses, a student’s status can change from being “in good standing” to either “on probation” or “required to withdraw.” In practical terms, this change of status means that a student “on probation” or “required to withdraw” may not be eligible for certain opportunities or programs at the College, such as independent study, cross-registration, and study abroad, until the student’s status is restored to “in good standing.” A student’s status changes only for a specific length of time, outlined in the Council’s response.

## 2.3 Explanation of Responses

The basic range of responses is as follows, in order of increasing severity. The first two indicate that the Honor Council did not find a violation.

*Scratch* - A finding that nothing wrong occurred, or that there are no grounds for action. A decision of scratch is recorded in the student’s file to signal that the Council found no fault.

*Take No Action* - This response indicates that a serious accusation was made but was not or could not be substantiated.

The following responses indicate that the Honor Council found that a violation did occur but do not involve a change of status. They signal different levels of responsibility and seriousness.

*Referral for a Local Sanction* - A referral to the faculty member teaching the course in which the finding of academic dishonesty was made with a recommendation that “Local Sanctions” (for example, mandatory tutoring, a course warning, an ungraded rework of the assignment in question, a grade penalty, or a failure for the assignment) are appropriate. Such sanctions are imposed at the discretion of the faculty member, in consultation with the Secretary.

*Exclusion from a Course* - Exclusion is an indication that the student was not permitted to continue in the course and received no credit. It is equivalent to a failing grade in the course. Exclusion is ordinarily an action taken in conjunction with another outcome, such as Admonish, Probation, or Requirement to Withdraw.

*Admonish* - Admonition is a warning that a student has violated rules or standards of conduct, and it begins a state of jeopardy (i.e., it signals to the student that the Council may respond to future misconduct with formal disciplinary action).

The following responses cause a change of a student's status (see Section 2.4 for further details).

*Probation* - Disciplinary probation puts a student on notice that their conduct gives considerable cause for concern. The Council will likely respond more seriously (e.g., Requirement to Withdraw) to further violations. The length of disciplinary probation can vary.

*Requirement to Withdraw* - This action is taken when a student's conduct is unacceptable and the Council has determined that the student needs to be separated from the College in order to gain perspective on their actions, or to address and resolve any difficulties. In these cases, the Council ordinarily requires the student to leave the Harvard community completely and to hold a full-time, paid, non-academic job in a non-family situation for at least six consecutive months before petitioning for readmission to the College. The length of withdrawal normally ranges from two to four terms.

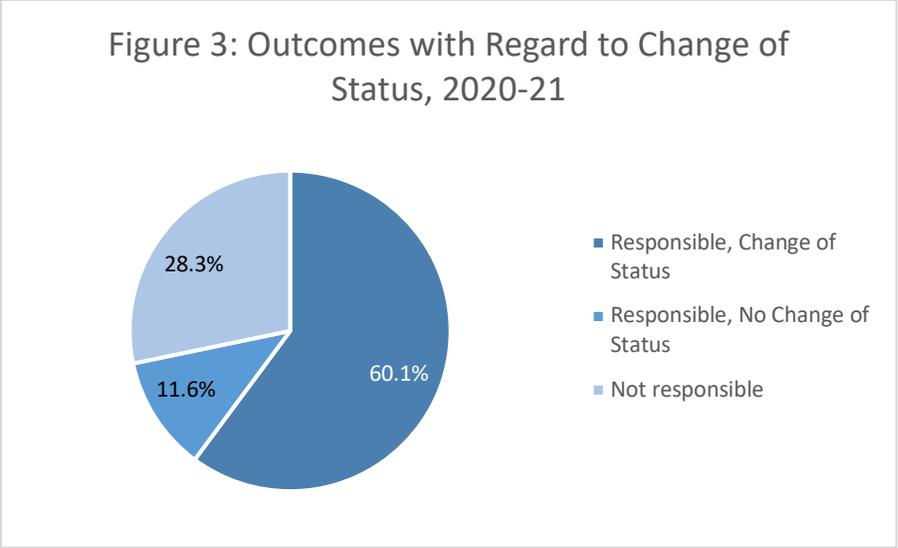
*Recommendation for Dismissal or Expulsion* - In the most serious cases of misconduct, the Honor Council may require a student to withdraw and make a recommendation to the Faculty Council that the student be dismissed or expelled from the College. Dismissal severs a student's connection with the University, and they can be readmitted only in the rare instance of another vote by the Faculty Council; expulsion severs the student's connection with the University permanently.

The Honor Council can also choose to "bracket" a case when a decision is postponed pending receipt of additional information or documentation.

## **2.4 Case Outcomes Resulting in a Change of Status**

Of the 138 cases reviewed by the Honor Council, 99 cases resulted in a finding of responsibility. Out of those 99 responsible findings, 83 (60.1%) resulted in outcomes that changed a student's status, and 16 (11.6%) resulted in decisions that did not change a student's status (see Figure 3).

Normally, students at the College are considered to be "in good standing." Some responses by the Honor Council change a student's status from "in good standing" to "on probation" or "required to withdraw." As described above in Section 2.2, students "on probation" or "required to withdraw" may not be eligible for certain opportunities or programs at the College, such as independent study, cross-registration, and study abroad, until their status is restored to "in good standing." The Council's decision to respond with an outcome that affects a student's status reflects its understanding of the gravity of the violation and the extent of a student's responsibility for it.

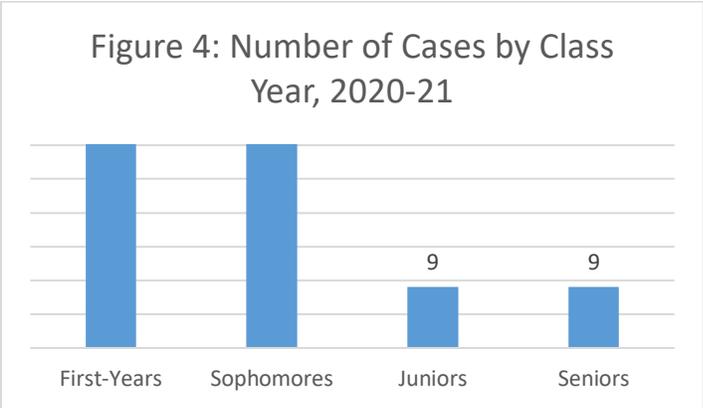


In Figure 3, the categories are defined as follows:

- Not Responsible: Scratch or Take No Action
- Responsible, No Change of Status: Referral for a Local Sanction, Exclusion from a Course, or Admonish
- Responsible, Change of Status: Probation or Requirement to Withdraw

**2.5 Reports by Class Year<sup>2</sup>**

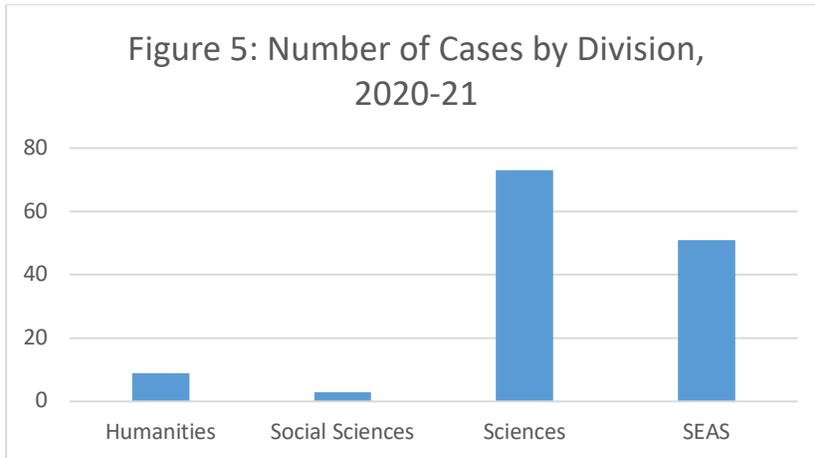
Of the 138 cases reviewed, the largest number involved students in their first year of study (88 students), followed by those in their sophomore year (32 students) (see Figure 4). This is the fifth consecutive year in which first-year students had the largest number of reports. The total percentage of cases involving first year students increased from 38.3% in 2019-20 to 63.8% in 2020-2021. First year students continue to be significantly overrepresented in Honor Council cases.



<sup>2</sup> Please note that sample sizes of fewer than five cases are not included.

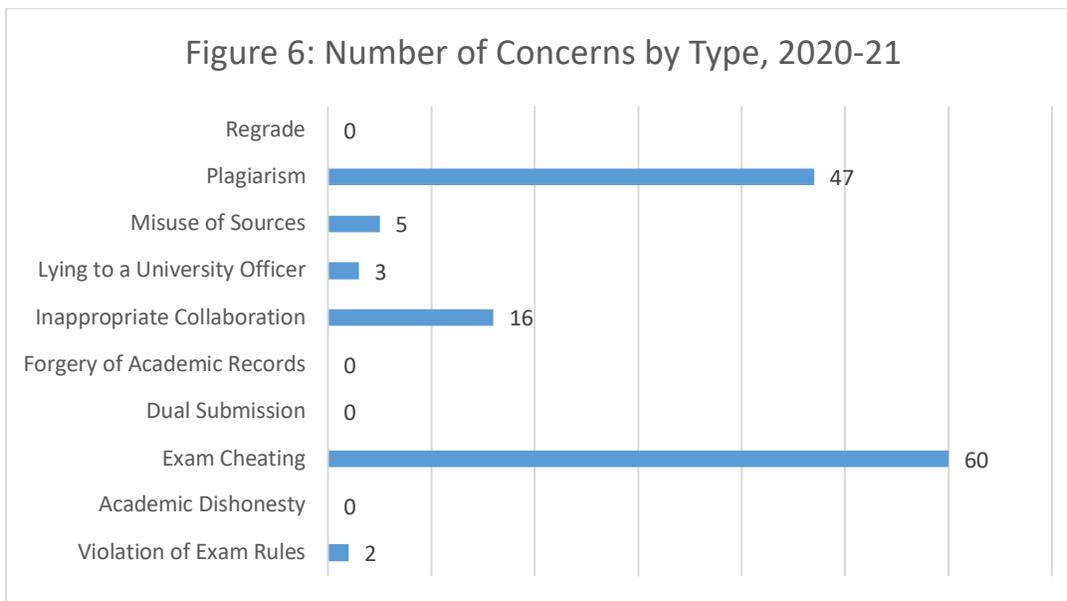
## 2.6 Reports by Division and SEAS

Of the 138 cases reviewed, the majority were referred to the Honor Council by courses in the science division and the School of Engineering and Applied Sciences (SEAS) (see Figure 5).



## 2.7 Types of Concerns

Figure 6 shows the types of concerns that the Honor Council investigates. A report to the Council can include multiple concerns. For example, one assignment might raise concerns about a misuse of sources or improper citation, as well as text that is copied from another source (i.e., plagiarism). Because of this factor, the number of concerns exceeds the number of individual cases. Sometimes inappropriate collaboration and plagiarism were a factor in the same concern. Please also note that the definition of plagiarism is broad and can include copying another student's problem set as well as the traditional "cut and paste" plagiarism without attribution that is the more familiar definition. For example, consider an instance in which Student A and Student B work together on a problem set. If Student B copies Student A's work and submits it as their own, that could be a violation both in terms of inappropriate collaboration and plagiarism since the work submitted is not Student B's own. The most common concerns reported to the Honor Council in 2020-2021 were exam cheating and plagiarism. Out of the 138 cases, 60 included concerns about exam cheating and 47 included concerns about plagiarism. At the same time, reports of inappropriate collaboration, the second most reported concern in 2019-20, fell to just 16 in 2020-21.



### 3 Aggregate Data

The Honor Council commits to providing the Harvard College community with six years of aggregate data with which to assess the state of our academic community.

#### 3.1 Additional Support for Students

Students' desire for additional support, largely from their peers in the form of Student Academic Integrity Fellows (SAIFs), remains relatively consistent. Over the Council's first six years, 60.2% of students have chosen additional support from either a SAIF or a Personal Adviser (see Figure 7).

Figure 7: Percentage of Students Who Chose Additional Support, 2015-21 (SAIF or Personal Adviser)

60.2%

#### 3.2 Explanation of Responses

There is a range of possible responses from the Honor Council, and over the past six years, 35.2% of the students referred to the Council were placed on disciplinary probation (see Figure 8). While this response results in a change of status and thus limits some student opportunities, disciplinary probation means that the Honor Council has determined that the student can remain enrolled. About 23% of students were found not responsible (Scratch or Take No Action). The remaining responses (referral for a local sanction, admonish, and requirement to withdraw) have been distributed relatively evenly.

Although faculty rules allow the Honor Council the option to exclude a student from a course (the equivalent of a failing grade), the Council has not voted for that option up to this point. Community feedback on the efficacy and appropriateness of Council votes to exclude students from courses is welcome.

### Figure 8

#### Responses by Type (2015-21)

<u>Response</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
Scratch	52	8.3
Take No Action	92	14.6
Referral for a Local Sanction	66	10.5
Exclusion from a Course	0	0.0
Admonish	93	14.8
Probation	221	35.2
Require to Withdraw	104	16.6
Total	628	100

### 3.3 Findings of Responsibility

Over the past six years, the Honor Council has had a finding of Responsible in 77.1% of the cases it has reviewed (see Figure 9). The Honor Council’s findings of responsibility may reflect that our faculty are likely to report only when they are confident that the Honor Code has been violated.

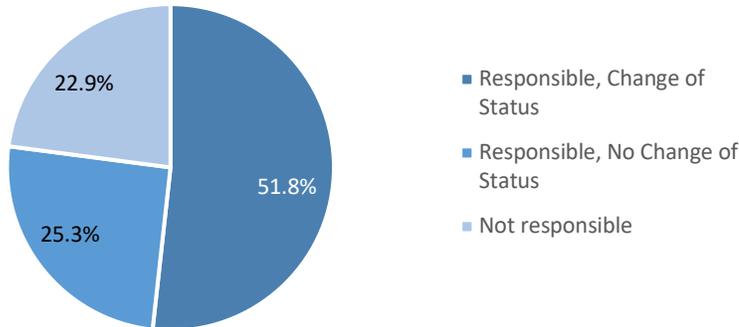
Figure 9: Percentage of Cases Ending in a Finding of Responsibility, 2015-21

**77.1%**

### 3.4 Case Outcomes Resulting in a Change of Status

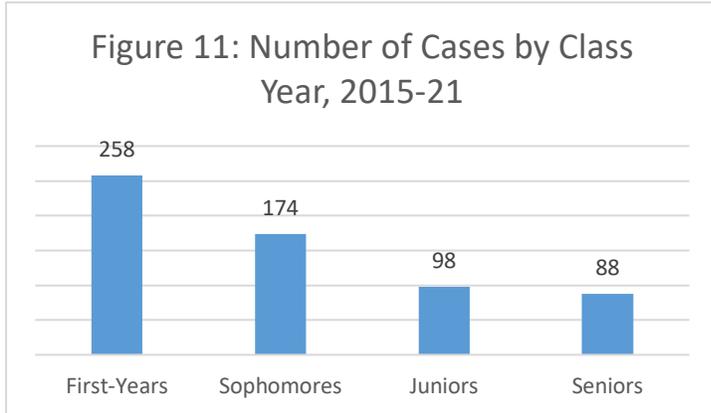
About half of the cases reviewed by the Honor Council from 2015-21 resulted in either a finding of Not Responsible or a finding that did not change the student’s status (see Figure 10). These data suggest that the Honor Council makes use of the range of responses available to it under the Faculty’s rules and that the actions reported by the community range from relatively minor concerns to more significant ones.

Figure 10: Outcomes with Regard to Change of Status, 2015-21



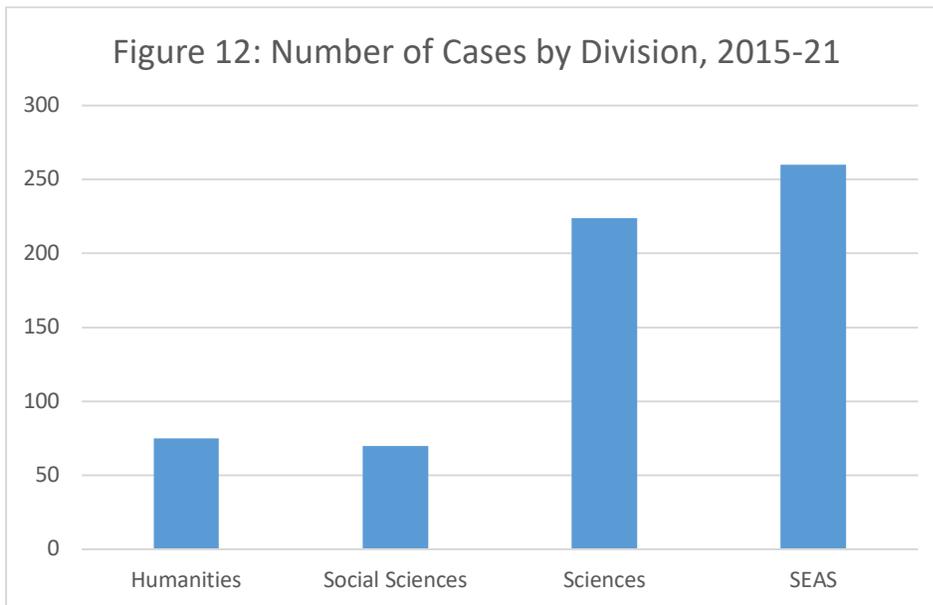
### 3.5 Reports by Class Year

For six consecutive years, first-year students have had the greatest number of cases (see Figure 11). A broader pattern is clearly emerging, in which students early in their academic careers are overrepresented and juniors and seniors are underrepresented. For additional thoughts on this potential pattern and recommendations, please see Section 5.



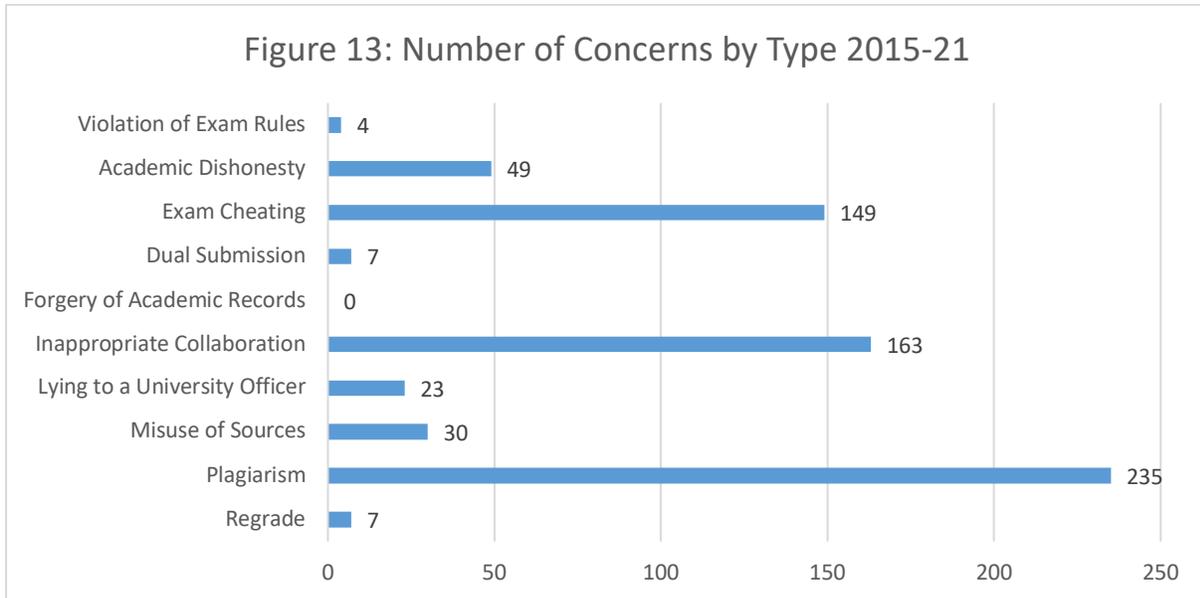
### 3.6 Reports by Division and SEAS

From 2015-21, the Sciences and SEAS reported the largest number of potential violations of the Honor Code, while Humanities and Social Sciences reported fewer potential violations (see Figure 12). This is a pattern that is consistent across colleges and universities.



### 3.7 Types of Concerns

Concerns about plagiarism and inappropriate collaboration have accounted for the majority of Honor Council cases (see Figure 13). As noted in Section 2.7, plagiarism includes all instances where a student submits written work that is not their own. This designation applies to more types of assignments than papers; it includes copying on problem sets and other written work. Cheating on exams is the third largest potential infraction.



## 4 Role of the Honor Council

The Honor Council is composed of undergraduate and graduate students, faculty, and administrators working together to uphold the Honor Code, to review possible violations, and to raise awareness about the importance of academic integrity within the Harvard College community.

### 4.1 Explanation of Roles and Membership List

The Honor Council comprises voting members who respond to potential violations of the Honor Code and rules on academic integrity, and Student Academic Integrity Fellows (SAIFs) who provide support to students throughout the Honor Council process.

#### 4.1.1 Voting Members

The voting body of the Honor Council ordinarily consists of 24 members, including an equal number of Harvard College undergraduates and Faculty of Arts and Sciences faculty members, administrators, and Graduate School of Arts and Sciences teaching fellows. Voting members are organized into three teams of eight; each team has the same balance of individual roles as the entirety of the Honor Council. Voting members investigate, deliberate, and decide on responses for

cases in which students may have violated the Honor Code and/or rules on academic integrity. The Council is committed to reviewing every case thoroughly and fairly and to providing the involved students multiple opportunities to share their perspective and engage with the Council. In considering a case, voting members determine appropriate responses aligned with the Council's educational, community-centered mission.

The 2020-2021 voting members are listed below.

Annie Zhao  
Maryam Hiradfar  
Owen Sughrue  
Logan McCarty  
Caitlin Casey  
James Herron  
Braeden Foldenauer  
Udochi Emegara  
Alayna Jenkins  
Saul Soto  
Monique Roy  
Jay Harris  
Emily Kerr  
Adrienne Tierney  
Elizabeth Guo  
Connor McRobert  
Ami Ishikawa  
Mari Bothner  
Karen Heath  
Luke Leafgren  
Dwight Fee

#### **4.1.2 Student Academic Integrity Fellows (SAIFs)**

A Student Academic Integrity Fellow (SAIF) is an undergraduate student trained in the procedures and policies of the Honor Council. SAIFs provide support to students going through an Honor Council process by explaining procedures, helping students understand their options, offering feedback on draft personal statements, connecting students to resources outside of the Honor Council, and remaining a point of contact for the student following the conclusion of the review. While SAIFs may accompany students in their interactions with the Honor Council, they do not deliberate or vote on cases.

When a student is going through the Honor Council process, they have the choice of whether to work with a SAIF, as well as the choice of which SAIF to work with. Selecting a SAIF, or choosing not to work with one, does not affect any proceedings or how the Honor Council reviews a case. SAIFs are representatives of the Honor Council and do not serve as advocates for the students they support.

The 2020-2021 SAIFs are listed below.

Eliza Oehmler  
Menat Bahnasy  
Smit Chire  
Evangelos Kassos  
Julie Hartman  
Mike Doggett  
Reeda Iqbal  
Logan Clifton  
Kalos Chu  
Analli Torres  
Jayla-Whitney Spidell  
Orelee Marini-Rapoport  
Andre Ferreira

### **4.1.3 Additional Members**

#### **Chair**

The Danoff Dean of Harvard College, Rakesh Khurana, is Chair of the Honor Council. Before the first meeting of each term, the Dean establishes three teams of eight voting members each; each team has the same balance of individual roles as the entirety of the Honor Council. One member of each team is designated as chair and functions as chair for that team's meetings. Members serve at the discretion of the Dean.

#### **Secretary**

The Secretary of the Honor Council functions as the Dean's designee in daily operations. The Secretary is the recipient of reported concerns and conducts most initial and follow-up student meetings. While the Secretary is present at meetings of the Council, they only vote in the instance of a tie. Brett Flehinger and Brigitte Libby served as Co-Secretaries of the Honor Council in 2020-2021.

#### **Case Managers**

The Case Managers are responsible for managing Honor Council cases. They organize investigations by collecting relevant case materials, analyzing material for relevance, and preparing case materials for meetings. The Case Managers are also responsible for scheduling initial and follow-up student meetings, preparing Honor Council meetings and SAIF schedules, and conducting initial meetings in the absence of the Secretary. The Case Manager in 2020-2021 was Charlie Stuart.

#### **Guests**

The Honor Council may, at its discretion, invite guests to provide assistance and expertise in its deliberations. Guests do not vote on the case.

## **4.2 Honor Council Process**

The primary role of the Honor Council is to respond to potential violations of the Honor Code and rules on academic integrity. The Council evaluates cases by gathering information through a multi-

step process and determining appropriate responses on behalf of the College community. The Council process is grounded in a commitment to transparency and a balance of student agency and support.

#### **4.2.1 Report and Notification of a Concern**

An Honor Council review begins when a member of the Harvard community raises a concern over the academic work of one or more students. Any member of the community may submit a report to the Office of Academic Integrity and Student Conduct (OAISC), which houses the Honor Council.<sup>3</sup> OAISC staff gather materials related to the concern and then contact the student(s) involved to schedule an initial meeting. Any materials OAISC receives that will be reviewed by the Honor Council are provided to the student(s) involved.<sup>4</sup> The Secretary, or another member of OAISC staff, conducts the initial meeting, ordinarily accompanied by a SAIF. At the initial meeting, the College's rules on confidentiality are explained to the student, as well as the steps of the Honor Council process. The student receives a copy of the Honor Council procedures, the letter of concern, and supporting materials received from the course.

#### **4.2.2 Student Support and Agency**

All students involved in an Honor Council review are supported by an Allston Burr Resident Dean (ABRD) or Resident Dean of First-Year Students (RDF). While typically students work with the Dean in their House or Yard, students may elect to work with a different ABRD or RDF. The role of the ABRD or RDF is to help the student understand the Honor Council process and to explain the issues the Council is considering.

In addition to their Dean, students are presented with the opportunity to work with either a SAIF or a Personal Adviser for extra support. At the initial meeting, the student receives information on the roles of the SAIF and Personal Adviser. Students are provided a list of all current SAIFs, with information on their class years and concentrations. Students who prefer not to select a SAIF may choose instead to be supported by a Personal Adviser. A Personal Adviser is an officer of Harvard University affiliated with the Faculty of Arts and Sciences, such as a faculty member, teaching fellow, varsity head coach, tutor, or proctor. Both SAIFs and Personal Advisers have access to the material being reviewed and can offer feedback on written statements, help a student prepare for an Honor Council meeting, and accompany the student to the meeting.

Of the 138 cases reviewed by the Honor Council in 2020-21, 77 students (55.8%) chose to work with a SAIF or Personal Adviser in addition to their ABRD or RDF, while 61 students (44.2%) chose to work solely with their ABRD or RDF.

#### **4.2.3 Resolving a Review**

The next step is for the student to decide whether to write an initial statement. The initial statement is an opportunity for the student to respond to the issue(s) raised in the concern and to provide

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<sup>3</sup> For information on how to report an academic integrity concern, please visit: <http://honorcouncil.fas.harvard.edu/how-report>

<sup>4</sup> When multiple students are involved in the same review, names of other students are redacted from case materials.

context and information to broaden the Honor Council’s understanding of the circumstances. If the student chooses not to submit an initial statement, the Honor Council will proceed without it.

After a student has had the opportunity to submit a written statement, OAISC staff review the case and determine if more information is needed. The Secretary may invite other members of the community who may have relevant information to share that information. Any additional materials gathered are shared with the student(s) involved, including the name(s) of the person(s) submitting information.

When a case is ready to move forward, the student is provided a chance to meet with a team of Honor Council voting members. This meeting, also referred to as an appearance, is an opportunity for the student to explain the situation from their perspective, to expand on the initial statement if desired, and to take questions from members of the Honor Council team. The student may choose whether to attend the appearance. If the student chooses to attend, they can decide which questions to answer. The Honor Council team does not draw any conclusions from a student’s decision not to attend an appearance or not to answer questions. If the student decides not to attend the meeting, the Honor Council team evaluates and votes on the issue based on existing materials.

Honor Council voting members consider two questions when reviewing a student’s case. After a period of deliberation, Honor Council members vote first on whether they are sufficiently persuaded that the student is responsible for violating the Honor Code and/or rules on academic integrity.<sup>5</sup> A second vote is then taken to determine the appropriate response. All votes are taken based on a simple majority of the members of the Honor Council team present and eligible to vote, except for votes to require a student to withdraw, which require a two-thirds majority of the members of the Honor Council team present and eligible to vote. In deciding on an individual response, Council members reflect the values of the shared academic community. As members of the Council review matters together, they articulate shared norms for handling violations of the Honor Code and rules on academic integrity.

In cases in which the concern does not seem serious enough to warrant review by an Honor Council team, the Secretary may refer the matter back to a course for a “local sanction” (e.g., mandatory tutoring, a grade penalty, a course warning, etc.). Such sanctions are imposed at the discretion of the faculty member in consultation with the Secretary. Ordinarily, the decision to refer a matter back to the course for a local sanction is made after the receipt of a student’s initial statement and it eliminates the need for a meeting with an Honor Council team.

The full range of Honor Council responses are described in Section 3.

#### **4.2.4 Closing Stages**

The student is ordinarily notified of the Honor Council’s decision by their Resident Dean following the conclusion of the Honor Council meeting. The student has the option to request a follow-up meeting with the Secretary and a voting member of the Honor Council as an opportunity to ask

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<sup>5</sup> To review the rules on academic integrity, please refer to the *Harvard College Handbook for Students*: <http://handbook.fas.harvard.edu/book/academic-integrity>

further questions about the decision and how it fits into the student's educational career at the College. The follow-up meeting is highly encouraged but optional.

## **5 Observations**

The purpose of this report is to help shape the Harvard College community's conversation about the foundational value of academic integrity. Our intent is to continue to encourage students and faculty to reflect on the community as we find it and to advocate for the kind of academic community and culture they want at the College. Comments and interpretations may be offered by email at [honorcouncil@fas.harvard.edu](mailto:honorcouncil@fas.harvard.edu). We welcome the community's engagement and conversation.

## **6 Conclusion**

From orientation through final exams, students engage with the Honor Code because their lives, both inside and outside the classroom, constantly involve complex and important questions of academic integrity. The Honor Code's purpose is to provide a language and framework for these conversations and to encourage the community to see academic integrity both as an individual question and a shared issue. This report aims to provide all members of the College community with information, to encourage conversations, and to enable us to work together to build a stronger culture of academic integrity.

If you have any questions, comments, or concerns, we can be reached at:

Harvard College Honor Council  
617-384-7239  
[honorcouncil@fas.harvard.edu](mailto:honorcouncil@fas.harvard.edu)