**Intro**: [cue the Virginia Gentlemen – *Good Ole Song*]  
**Chase**: From WXTJ, this is *On My Honor*, a mini-series that will take a hard look into the history of academic and personal integrity at UVA – I’m Chase Browning. The University of Virginia is known for many things: top-tier academics, all-star sports, and wild weekends on the Corner. But what may be most important is that we have *The Honor Code*, to which all students pledge, on our honor, not to lie, cheat, or steal while at the University. This institutional honor code has been part of the University for nearly all of its 200-year history, and I do believe that as young men and women who stand for the virtues of honesty, integrity, and justice, upholding this honor code makes us not just honorable students, but good people.   
Then what makes the idea of a collegiate honor code worthy of a “hard look”? As a student here, I know that everyone knows that we have an honor code, so lying, cheating, and stealing clearly should not be a problem for us. Neither should the disgraceful actions of violence, sexual assault, and racial discrimination. *Then why do these problems persist*? No system of honor or morals can possibly be perfect and I think it’s safe to say we all know that even good, honorable people can do low and shameful things. Again, I genuinely think believing ourselves and our peers to be honorable benefits us all – but if we can assess *just how* imperfect this system of honor is, we can roughly determine how many students violate our code of conduct, taint our code of Honor, and “get away with it.” By taking this hard look into character and academic integrity here at the University of Virginia, I suspect we will find that our perception of our honor may be an illusion – that maybe we’re not living in the honorary academic sphere we think we are.   
In each episode of this series, I want to explore three questions about honor and integrity here at UVA: *what is* the principle of honor as UVA and its students understand it; how and to what degree does honor play a role in our everyday lives; and if we are as honorable as the University makes us out to be, then is such an impressive and intimidating institution of honor even necessary? For this episode, I will focus on why we have an Honor code at all, how it came to be such an integral part of this school, and where it stands in the university now, after nearly 170 years as a tradition and formal institution. In understanding how our current system of discipline came to be, we put ourselves in the best position to assess the problems we are dealing with now, and how we can move forward. Lets start at the beginning.   
[cue *Take A* Walk]   
 Now Phillip Bruce, author of *A History of the University of Virginia*, writes that when first contemplating a system of discipline, Thomas Jefferson had, quote “questioned the wisdom of raising the emotion of fear in order to enforce discipline among them [the students]; he [Jefferson] earnestly advised that their pride, ambition, and moral susceptibilities alone should be appealed to,” end quote. Jefferson also presciently noted that, “Finding the balance - encouraging independence yet controlling insubordination among students – has remained a challenge throughout the history of the university.” It’s clear that along with Jefferson’s many other idealized and romantic notions for what principles his university would abide by, the idea of governing less by rules and more by freedom was almost intuitive. Alas, Bruce notes on the next page, quote, “Instead of that noble band of young men visualized by him as too buried in their studies to indulge in the natural wildness of their age, numerous youths, as heady as greyhounds and as fractious as colts, matriculated in 1825,” end quote. To modernize that last bit, Bruce conveys, as he will explicitly state later, that the first young men to enter this school were more interested in drinking, gambling, rioting and assaulting one another (*but mainly professors*) rather than be steeped in their studies. Susan Hitchcock, author of *A Pictorial History of UVA*, furthers this and gives it a name: “calathumping,” as “rowdy demonstrations” were called in the 1820s. In describing these calathumps, Hitchcock quotes university librarian John Patton, by saying, quote “Masked students paraded the grounds, fired their revolvers, and made the night hideous to those who remained indoors and dangerous to those who ventured out,” end quote.   
 Hitchcock then defends the first students by attributing their recklessness as a way of acting out against the deplorable living conditions at the time. The only source of heat was provided by firewood, of light was by candles or oil, both often in short supply. Sanitation in 1825 was sub-par and there was no clinic or infirmary for the sick. Compared to our modern luxuries, and ignoring those who currently live on the Lawn, we can feel a basic sympathy towards these first students, maybe even excuse their actions. *But*, for a moment, lets look at the other conditions of the university that they were first to enjoy. In February 1826, just shy of a full year of classes, it was $15 for a year-long shared room on the Lawn or the Range, which included housekeeping services done by… “servants.” It wasn’t until 1842 that the Board of Visitors set formal duties for these “servants” which were to bring students their water and towels, make their beds, clean their rooms, clean their candlesticks, black their andirons (which hold the wood in the fireplace), wash their windows once a month, and, each afternoon, to black the students’ shoes. The history of the euphemistic “servanthood” at this university merits its own focus; unfortunately, that is not my task here. Nevertheless, Bruce writes that along with the “deplorable” living conditions, the students adamantly disliked and called for the repeal of the university’s European professors, including two who were born abroad but were fully naturalized citizens. The students hated rising at dawn and having a 9:00PM curfew, and thoroughly disliked having starch wool uniforms. What’s worse – and prepare your stomachs – but what the students most disliked was having to continue their studies through the Christmas holiday, which – and these are Phillip Bruce’s words, not mine – the students remarked that, quote “*even the slaves were tacitly granted all the privileges of freedom and indulgence which enlivened that season in every Virginian home*,” end quote.   
 The fall of 1836 is where the beginnings of the Honor code can be traced – the students had rioted over their right to maintain a military company, fully equipped with their muskets and revolvers. Though this riot was stifled after a few days, it was commemorated annually by the students – that is up until the year 1840. This is the story most popularly associated with the Honor system and is virtually part of the script for University Guides giving tours to prospective students and their parents. In commemoration of the 1836 riot, two masked students approached Pavilion X, where the professor of law, John Davis, lived. The students conspicuously approached the Pavilion with weapons drawn and attempted to lure the professor out by calls and taunts outside his door. Professor Davis emerged from his home, crossed the door-sill and attempted to unmask one of the students – before being shot and killed at point blank range a step outside his door. The annual commemoration riot was disbanded and on July 2nd, 1842, a date recognized by the Honor committee as the beginning of the institutional Honor code, Henry Tucker, the law professor who succeeded Davis, issued a formal resolution to express academic trust in the students, stating that for all future examinations, students must pledge that they, quote “do hereby certify on honor that [they] have derived no assistance during the time of this examination from any source whatever, either oral written or in print giving the above answers,” end quote. For those who are found guilty of cheating on an exam, the only result is the Honor system’s Single Sanction: immediate and permanent removal from the University. Thus marks, as Hitchcock puts it, “the beginning of a new ethic of student behavior.”   
 To parrot with some skepticism the words of Hitchcock, “The Students took pride in an unspoken code that assumed them to be honorable and honest.” Indeed, what is stressed by Hitchcock and many of the past faculty she quotes in her book is that, quote “It was the *spirit*, not the wording, of the pledges that mattered,” end quote; in 1932 law professor George Eager says similarly that the honor system is, “in essence a spirit and not a code, remaining always as elastic as the student body’s conception of the honor of a gentleman may be at any given stage of evolution.” Now an *unspoken, spirited, elastic conception* of honor does not quite sound like the sort of objective code one uses to construct a community of trust, as it would later be known. Hitchcock notes further that, quote “Before coeducation, some male students doubted whether women and men could regard each other equally under an honor system,” and, “as the university was integrated, critics noted that proportionally more African American students were accused of honor offenses,” end quote. More recently, as Sarah Salwen writes in April 2001 and Annie O’Brien writes in March 2014 for the Cavalier Daily, these issues that have proved to be perennial have grown to include other minority and international students as the seeming target for disproportionate reporting. In response to any vague or otherwise unclear notions as to what our Honor code is, Salwen also reported in 2001 that the Board of Visitors had conducted their first formal, written articulation of what constitutes a violation of Honor or of UJC, the University Judiciary Committee. UJC was implemented to adjudicate cases of non-academic infractions, in accordance with their newly appointed Twelve Standards of Conduct (and don’t worry, there will be more on that later); the Honor committee was simply instructed to, quote “further administer and enforce the Honor code.”   
 More recently, in 2012 two revisionary measures were introduced by the Honor committee. The first is the Conscientious Retraction, which allows a student who has committed an Honor infraction, but has kept a low profile, to come forward to the Honor committee, and instead of expulsion, the student makes amends with the afflicted party and is forgiven. The second is the Informed Retraction, where if a student is brought up on Honor charges, but admits to the act before going to trial, that student takes a two-semester leave of absence, before returning to the University in good standing. Both of these measures were voted on and successfully passed by the student body, and have since been the most utilized aspects of the Honor system, when compared to the use of the Single Sanction.   
 That finally brings us to where we are now. Though the institution itself comes up shy of 200 years, the legacy and ethic of the honor system has lasted just as long as the University itself, and is almost certainly one of such things that comes to mind when thinking of UVA. Time and time again, students have worked to uphold and contribute to the Honor system – but that’s not to say it has gone without criticism. Many find the Single Sanction draconian and unfair when compared to the less extreme, case by case precedent set by the University Judiciary Committee, or UJC. Others feel that the difficulty and prestige that comes with joining either Honor or UJC contribute to promoting social elitism, which actually separates the community of trust both committees are designed to uphold. Even worse, though many students feel privileged to be part of this community and are proud to be considered honorable, when it comes to reporting someone for an honor offense, many students feel that most forms of Honor infraction simply just don’t merit expulsion from the University. No one wants to jeopardize another’s personal or academic standing, or even worse, have another student waste tens of thousands of dollars and ruin their reputation based on one mistake. Ultimately, I believe it’s the student’s fear of ruining the lives of others that prevents them from reporting Honor infractions. Which, come to think `of it, looks more honorable than recklessly accusing others of what may appear to be lying, cheating, or stealing. But again, more on that to come.   
 For the rest of this series, I’ll be relying on interviews I conducted with eight students from the University of Virginia and one student from James Madison University. They will be guiding this discussion of honor and academic integrity; I will simply be moderating and chiming in from time to time. They will be formally introduced in the next episode but for now, here’s a preview of what’s to come – be sure to see how it all unfolds next time, on *On My Honor*.