

Caden Juang

AP English C

I've always prided myself on my neat handwriting. Compared to the chicken scratch that I see on a daily basis, the neat curves of my a's and o's are a masterpiece worthy of DaVinci himself. However, when it comes to copying the honor code at the top of a major assignment, I chuck all of my pride out the window in favor of a squiggly line not unlike the ones you see filling in for text on a poorly produced Saturday morning cartoon. Both the underpaid animator and I have one thing in common - we're not going to devote our precious time towards writing out an entire word when we could be devoting our time to drawing, or in my case, the limited time I have to write an AP synthesis Essay. Although painstakingly copying down an entire sentence long honor code may seem like a potent reminder about a school's rigorous academic standards, simply revising an honor code to be at the top of a student's test is more important because the success of an honor code depends largely upon an environment, not the standards it upholds.

Establishing an honor code is a constant reminder of the rigorous academic standards of educational institutions. Concerned student Alyssa Vangelli wrote in 2013 that by "signing [a] pledge of honor, students have reminders of...moral values and a responsibility to perform honestly in the school environment". Like a police car parked at a stop sign reminds people to actually follow the law, signing an honor code at the top of a piece of work forces students to make a conscious decision about their work. That's why when the time to vote on implementing an honor code came for the school of Lawrence academy in Massachusetts, it passed so that "every student could feel comfortable taking an exam without worrying about someone looking at [their] paper and where [they] could be trusted". At Lawrence academy, student council members felt the reminder of a rigorous honor code was the best way to uphold the integrity of their school.

While reminding students about honor is important in enforcing the academic standards of an institution, whether an honor code is actually enforced depends on the environment which already exists. A 2012 incident at Harvard University, renowned for its rigorous academic

standards and codes, galvanized a discussion on the effectiveness of honor codes after a startling 125 Harvard students were reported to have improperly collaborated on an exam. Donald McCabe, professor of management at Rutgers University, explains that the success of honor codes “depend on a ‘culture of academic integrity’ that leads students to take enforcement of rules seriously[. C]ulture makes for a successful honor code as much as the honor code makes for a successful culture”. When considering the concerns of the student at Lawrence university, it's easy to say that a tough honor code makes for a stricter and more successful culture. However, this ignores the foundational concept of an honor code system defined in the same article: “students [are] expected to report or confront a fellow student if they knew that he/she had cheated, lied, or stolen”. The strictness and enforcement of an honor code itself isn't the factor that stops students from cheating; instead it is the environment created by students reporting students that makes it “socially unacceptable”. In his later article *New Honor Codes for a New Generation*, McCabe concurs: “lower levels of cheating reported at honor code schools do not reflect a greater fear of being reported or caught”. Students don't care about the stringent enforcement of an honor code or the torture of signing twelve whole words at the end of a 6 page, handwritten essay. What they care about, McCabe continues, is the “culture that makes...cheating socially unacceptable”. “Students would simply be embarrassed to have other students find out they were cheating.” Although Kahn reports that honor code violations continue to exist in higher levels of education that have codes themselves such as the university of Virginia, continuing to enforce an honor code, no matter how strict, is vital in building an honest academic environment.