

The Ethical Professor

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Academic Dishonesty & SMC's Honor Code

If you've ever been confronted by a student cheating on a test or handing in a paper that was clearly plagiarized, you know how disappointed or even dismayed you feel when academic dishonesty appears in your own classroom. **Santa Monica College has recently instituted a College Honor Code**, which is a good place to begin addressing student cheating. All students are now required to sign this statement when enrolling at the college:

In the pursuit of the high ideals and rigorous standards of academic life, I commit myself to respect and uphold the Santa Monica College Honor Code, Code of Academic Conduct, and Student Conduct Code. I will conduct myself honorably as a responsible member of the SMC community in all endeavors I pursue.

This is a good first step, but a bit lofty and abstract. A recent survey at SMC found that half the students admitted to cheating at least once. **How can we help students to actually act honestly when confronted with temptations to cheat?**

In the September 28, 2007 issue of *Inside Higher Ed*, Timothy R. Austin suggests that we be proactive, rather than waiting until confronted with that sheepish or belligerent cheater. He suggests, "First, offer students a forthright, unembarrassed explanation of what constitutes the work you expect in a course or assignment and of what help they may and may not seek from others in completing it. Second, take reasonable care to design assignments and examinations in such a way that cheating on them will be difficult and could only result from a conscious effort on the part of the student to deceive....Make clear that you will be expecting all students to check their handheld devices at the door on each and every exam day. Third, always offer a sympathetic ear to students with honest questions."

Another good way to create a climate of academic honesty is to **refer to the College Honor Code on your syllabus, or perhaps actually copy it there**. As part of your opening day class meeting, you could also include an analytic or application activity using the Code. As part of the introductory discussion of class rules, inform students that if they do cheat, you will (if warranted and after discussion with the student) report him/her to the Campus Disciplinarian. (This should be done within 10 days of the incident.)

Beyond teaching our subject matter, and the techniques we train students to use, we hope that our students come away from their college experience with a strong commitment to intellectual integrity. The more opportunities we give them to act honorably, and enjoy the rewards of such behavior, the more they will take these qualities into the rest of their lives.