

SCC rules on Honor Code resolutions, constitution

Plagiarism change rejected, but constitution and counsel resolution approved

BY LINDY BALDWIN
News Editor

On Wednesday, January 30, the Student Conduct Council handed down rulings on three pieces of legislation submitted by the Honor Council last November. While a resolution clarifying the policy on "counsel" during hearings and a new Constitution for the Honor Council were approved, a high-profile proposal to change the definition of plagiarism in the Honor Code was not. Despite the rejection of the plagiarism change, however, outgoing Honor Council officers regard the past semester's work as productive and beneficial.

The Student Conduct Council is composed of Dean of Students Tom Shandley, SGA officers, class presidents, several faculty members, and other students specifically elected to SCC. All of the SCC's rulings are conditional on the approval of College President Bobby Vagt.

The "legal counsel" resolution, approved by the SCC, involved a minor change in the Code of Disciplinary procedures. "As they were written, students were 'entitled' to have a legal adviser present at hearings. However, since the school would not provide this attorney to students who could not afford legal advice, there was an inequity," said outgoing Honor Council Chair Will Parker '02.

The approved change allows for parents, spiritual advisors or legal counsel to sit in a waiting room outside hearings; it does not,

however, admit such persons to closed proceedings. Fellow Davidson students may sit in the hearings provided that the Chair agrees, and will be expected to remain silent.

A more unusual submission to SCC was an Honor Council Constitution, authored by Adam Hill '03. According to Hill, the Honor Council does not usually submit a constitution. "[Parker] assigned this project to me in order to solidify some traditional ways that the Council works as a body.

"Now that this document exists, the Council may only send policy proposals forward to the SCC with 2/3 favorable vote.

Another significant gain from this constitution is the precise definition of the Council's purpose . . . We also included regulations for our internal and campus-wide elections, standards for

council leadership and representatives, duration of leadership/officer terms, etc."

Another major provision of the Constitution is the transformation of the Honor Council Secretary into the Honor Council Vice-Chair, who will sub for the Honor Council President if he or she is unable to serve on a hearing. This particular change will be added to the Code of Disciplinary Procedures.

Perhaps the most visible proposal sent to the SCC was the only one that did not pass—a controversial resolution which would have changed the definition of plagiarism to include "negligently representing another's words or ideas as one's own." This proposal

had been in the works for over a year before it was submitted to SCC.

"The plagiarism resolution was the Honor Council's attempt to expand the treatment of plagiarism within the Honor Code—in effect, to make it easier for the Council to convict the student who denies guilt despite considerable documentary evidence to the contrary," explained Parker.

"One of the reasons that the plagiarism resolution failed is that there is wide disagreement among the faculty as to which varieties of plagiarism constitute an honor

code violation," said Phil Reed '02, a member of the Honor Council. "Some claim that unintentional plagiarism should be considered a violation of the Honor Code while others insist it must not."

However, Reed argued, "the

Council must take fault for wanting to pass this resolution because it attempts to compensate for an unfortunate idea among the members of the Council that we should be reluctant to convict those who plead innocent to plagiarism."

Parker agreed with Reed's assessment of the reasons for the proposal's rejection, adding, "Plagiarism as an 'issue' has lost its urgency after over a year of discussion and given no particular cases that have seemed to signify the need for change."

This sentiment was echoed by College President Bobby Vagt, who said, "part of the decision is a result of discussion, enhanced

clarity and comfort on campus. In effect, the process initiated last spring reduced the need for a wording change."

Although the proposal did not pass, the members of the Honor Council still look on its creation as one of the past year's major successes. "It's a perfect example of the process working," said Honor Council member Mike Anderson '02. "We saw a need, considered it thoroughly, and found that our efforts to amend the Code actually threatened to make matters worse—by putting well-intentioned students in danger of an inadvertent Honor Code violation. With that in mind, the SCC vote is a victory for the student body and the Honor Code, not a failure."

Parker echoed Anderson's sentiments. "The resolution process required Council members to think about their jobs in abstract terms—beyond the walls of the hearing room—and it beckoned people from all parts of the campus community to think about our Honor Code in a more sophisticated way. Our Honor Code necessitates ongoing discussion; there is more to it than its components than what we rightly display in our 'store-front window' admissions literature."

"It [the plagiarism issue] has forced the council to look at the code differently and forced them to examine and attempt to answer some difficult issues," concluded outgoing Honor Council Vice-Chair Tara Davidson '02.

"The SCC may also be encouraging professors to get together within each department and decide how each department is going to define plagiarism and whatever necessary steps they need to do to ensure that students understand proper methods of documentation, etc. for that department. That is a very positive result of this discussion!"

"The SCC vote is a victory for the student body and the Honor Code."

-Mike Anderson '02

Caller to show may have violated Code of Conduct

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in to explain why he was kicked out of a recent party at the Black Student Coalition—he asked the DJ to play a bad song. Some callers used racial terms during the course of their comments. The hosts promised to present a list of "Top 10 Sketchiest Guys" on next week's show.

During the show's first episode on Jan. 27, the hosts announced a list they called the "20 Most Terrible" people at Davidson.

Administrators received several phone calls and e-mails from offended listeners in the days following, and on Monday Dean of Students Tom Shandley met with Carvalho and Njie to share those complaints.

"He wanted to have us in to hear our side of the story," said Carvalho, of Austin, Texas. "He was just bringing to our attention what people are saying. He wanted us to think about how to clean up the show."

Both hosts said they regret targeting individual students three weeks ago, and plan to discuss more serious campus issues in future episodes.

"After that first show, we've been trying to change," said Carvalho. "The first show was a disaster. That was just us trying to learn the ropes. I think if we left it this way, it would get old. It's moving in a direction towards less personal attacks and more discussing controversial issues on campus. At the same time, I'm not going to say it's all serious."

Added co-host Njie, a Serekundah, Gambia native whose family now lives in Macon, Ga.: "We're going to address more serious issues, but it's still going to be a comedy show. If we do [attack someone], we'll talk to them first. We're going to move to group attacks now. You can't get as easily offended as a group as you can as an individual."

Associate Dean of Students Kathy Bray Merrell serves as chairperson of the Media Board and said it hopes to meet sometime this week. A little-used, but powerful, oversight

committee in charge of ensuring quality content in campus media outlets, the board has the authority to appoint and dismiss editors, approve annual budgets and review standards of decency.

The radio show will be "one of the issues on the table," said Bray Merrell, a former associate dean of admissions. The hosts will not attend the closed meeting.

Bray Merrell declined to discuss specifics, but in a written statement said, "I would hope that the Board's definition of decency would include, at a minimum, a respect for the rights of the people involved in the news and a degree of civility in the treatment of the people in this community."

Asked if he believes the Media Board will decide to cancel the show, Njie said, "They might. Besides the first show, which we've already admitted was a mistake, I don't see what we've done to get taken off the air. I hope the [Media Board] would have the common courtesy to come talk to me and ask me about my own show."

The Judicial Board will also hear arguments on whether violations of the Code of Conduct were committed by a caller on the show's first episode. Administrators declined to discuss specifics of the case, but some shared their opinions on the "20 Most Terrible" list.

"I find that particular show reprehensible," said College President Bobby Vagt.

Dean of Residence Life Leslie Marsicano, a former member of the Media Board as Associate Dean of Students, said her office also received several complaints from residence hall advisers acting on behalf of offended students. She encouraged them to contact the Dean of Students Office and speak directly with Carvalho and Njie.

"I don't think it's quality programming," said Marsicano, who was provided with excerpts of the show but has not listened to it. "I think it's inappropriate on a number of levels. It does not meet our community standards

and it's just lousy radio . . . Minimally speaking, [the hosts] need some advice on how to improve their product."

Marsicano said improving the show doesn't mean avoiding controversial topics, but takes "some preparation, creativity and skill."

"I don't think the goal is not to offend anybody. One reason for coming to college is being exposed to new ideas. Sometimes that means you get offended. I'm less concerned about making sure nobody gets offended than I am about . . . a high quality discourse between people."

Junior Adam Dutko said he was labeled during the show's second episode on Feb. 3 as one of the six "most annoying" people at Davidson, despite not knowing either of the hosts. "I've never had interaction with them,"

he said.

After hearing parts of the discussion, Dutko said he went to the studio to confront the hosts and ended up cursing at Njie, an action he says he now regrets.

"I do in a sense regret it because I acted the same way they were acting toward me," said Dutko. "If all they're going to do is incite hatred between fellow students, then they shouldn't be on the air. I don't see how they could have issues with someone they didn't know," he said.

Just after Sunday night's broadcast, Carvalho said listeners should not take the show seriously.

"We're just out to have fun," he said. "It's a joke. I wouldn't say our views are representative of anyone."

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