Discussing Honor in the Classroom

Instructors who talk with their students about academic integrity at the beginning of the course have often found the experience a worthwhile one that also helps students recognize how important it is for them to take responsibility for their learning. Individual faculty members may prefer to develop unique approaches to beginning such discussions. The following outline is offered as one approach that may be helpful in approaching this discussion.

Start with a simple statement such as: "Today (the first day of class or shortly thereafter) I want to spend some time talking about academic integrity and why it matters to you, to our University, and to me."

One method of engaging students might employ open-ended questions to draw them into active participation (such an approach might take as little as 10 minutes or as much as 30 minutes):

- "What do you think I mean by 'academic integrity'?"

Draw out the class's ideas and array them on the board.

- "What exactly does 'x' mean?"

Take the group through clarification of their statement.

- "Why do you think I care about academic integrity?"
- "Do you think that students care about academic integrity? Why? Why not?"
- "How many of you have ever observed anyone cheating (here at the university or in high school)? What were they doing? How did that make you feel? What did you do about it? Why?"
- "Have you heard of the Honor Code here at Carolina? Why do you think we have an Honor Code? Let's take a look at the provisions on academic misconduct. (provide handout) What does 'x' mean?"
- "What else should the University do to discourage academic dishonesty? What kinds of things do you think I should do in this class?"
- "What else should the University do to aspire higher and to become known as a leader in graduating students who are committed to honor and integrity? What else might I do in this class?"
Be prepared to draw them out, then offer comments that touch on matters such as the following:

- The importance of having the same ground rules for all students so that everyone is treated and evaluated fairly;
- The importance for students to take responsibility for learning in a disciplined manner;
- The importance of personal integrity as part of individuals’ reputations, and the loss of ability to function effectively in various settings when someone becomes known as a person who cannot be trusted;
- The importance of integrity as a philosophical matter (the pursuit of truth and why truth is important);
- The importance of integrity to the University’s reputation (and to the “value” of students’ degrees as members of the University’s extended community);
- The importance of mutual respect (faculty’s respect students, students’ respect for faculty, and students’ respect for each other);
- The importance of integrity in students’ future roles as citizen-leaders in various settings;
- The problems that arise for society when integrity is compromised;
- The special responsibilities of those students who aspire to be professionals, including, but not limited to: the need to report misconduct on admissions applications and to licensing bodies; the need to maintain good character so that students will be able to provide solid references; and the risks to the citizens that students are pledged in their future professions to serve if students get into the habit of cutting ethical corners.

Another approach might be to present a short fact pattern raising issues of integrity relevant to the course discipline or something of widely shared interest to a cross section of the public.

- Consider using the “one minute paper” reflection strategy to get students to think more deeply before they speak. Describe the scenario or distribute a short summary of facts describing the situation, then ask students to read and reflect on it for a few minutes while jotting down notes on the nature of the problem presented, the choices available, the reasons why they agree or disagree with what occurred, or the approaches they might take to resolving the stated dilemma.
- Next, move to discussion of the scenario, exploring these or other questions, drawing in comments from all around the class.
- Move on to make the link into their experience in the University and in class. A possible segue might be: Have you or someone you know ever faced what you think of as an ethical dilemma relating to academic integrity? What kinds of dilemmas?
Another option is pointing out the statement regarding academic integrity on the syllabus, then discussing with the class "what does 'academic integrity? mean to you?? in a manner following the script above.

For more more information, ideas, or programming options on how to address with students the topics of honor, integrity and the Honor System, please feel free to contact Honor System Outreach at h[1]onorcourt@unc.edu [2] or the Office of Student Conduct [3].

Source URL: https://studentconduct.unc.edu/faculty/discussing-honor-classroom

Links
[1] mailto:hsoc@unc.edu
[2] mailto:honorcourt@unc.edu
[3] https://studentconduct.unc.edu/about/contact-us