**HONOR SYSTEM COUNCIL**

**WORKSHOP**

**“A Problematic Group Project”**

This workshop is one used by Stetson’s Honor System Council as a classroom presentation. The aim is to have workshop participants work through a “real live” issue in academic integrity. A secondary goal is to familiarize participants with the workings of the Council.

The workshop is structured to mimic an Honor System Council hearing on a case involving an apparent breach of academic integrity. When a case is reported to the Council, one member is appointed as Investigator of the case. This is a fact-finding role – the Investigator interviews all parties involved to get their information and perspective on what happened. The Investigator then prepares a report summarizing these findings. This report is read at the beginning of the hearing. Members of the Council then will ask questions (of both students and faculty) to clarify or to deepen their understanding of what transpired.

Attached is a sample “Investigator’s Report.” In conducting the workshop, a copy of this report should be distributed to every workshop participant. Typically, one member of the Council role-plays the Investigator and another member of the Council role-plays the hearing moderator. (Depending on available personnel, other Council members may role-play the professor and students in the case.)

The “Moderator” calls the hearing to order, and the “Investigator” begins by reading the report. The floor is then turned over to workshop participants, to ask questions that will facilitate their understanding of what happened. After this questioning period, the “Moderator” then asks the workshop participants to assume the role of Honor System Council members. Two issues must be addressed:

1) Has a breach of academic integrity occurred?

2) If so, what is an appropriate remedy?

Burden of proof on the first question is “preponderance of the evidence” – that is, whether it is more likely than not, that academic dishonesty was happening. This decision requires a two-thirds vote. For the second question, the Council recommends the most severe sanction supported by a majority of the Council.

Effective use of this case requires workshop participants to confront several issues. One key matter is the assessment of responsibility in a group project. (Are all group members responsible for a breach, or only some?) An important peripheral issue: what needs to happen to make group projects function well? (What should students be doing to ensure a healthy group? What should faculty be doing?) Since the Council’s primary remit is to educate the campus community on issues of academic integrity and excellence, this is a valuable conversation to have. Workshop participants should also address grading issues (noting that the Council only recommends grade penalties; grade decisions remain the purview of the instructor).

NOTE that this workshop case is based upon a real incident, where five academic researchers were accused of academic fraud. They ultimately retracted their published paper. For further details, see “The font’s the thing,” *The Economist*, 28 August 2001, p. 81.

**STETSON UNIVERSITY**

**HONOR SYSTEM COUNCIL**

**Investigator’s Report**

The case brought before the Council today is one of alleged fabrication of data on a group project in Dr. Jane Doe’s PHIL 411 – Applied Ethics class. The students involved are Dan Ariely, Max Bazerman, Francesca Gino, Nina Mazar, and Lisa Shu.

The group project constitutes 40% of the grade in the course. In the class syllabus, and in the instructions on the assignment, Dr. Doe indicates that all members of a group are collectively responsible for all work submitted as a group, and will under normal circumstances all receive the same grade.

In the project, students are asked to survey the existing academic literature on a particular ethical issue, and to provide additional evidence (beyond extant publications) on the topic in question. This additional evidence could be via philosophical inquiry, discussion with focus groups, experimental data, or any means that goes beyond existing literature. The group is simply asked to make some original contribution on the topic.

The student project argues that “people act more honestly when they state in advance that they will be truthful.” The group cites two published articles on this topic, both of which are based upon laboratory experiments. The group further, as their “new contribution,” gives a third study based upon automobile insurance data. In that study, applicants for insurance were asked how much they drive in a year, and are asked to sign a statement that the information they are given is truthful. Half were asked to sign at the top of the form, and the other half signed at the bottom of the form. The miles cited by the “top of form” group were 10% higher than those cited by the “bottom of form” group. Since higher miles driven can result in higher insurance premium, the group (reasonably) argues that this is evidence for increased honesty.

Dr. Doe believes that the data in this study were fabricated. She notes the following peculiarities in the Excel file submitted with the paper:

1) The data file contains 13,488 lines of data. The first 6744 appear in Calibri font; the second 6744 in Cambria font.

2) Numbers in the second half of the data set are not an exact duplicate of the first half. However, the differences appear to be a random number between 1 and 1000.

3) Dr. Doe contends that when asked about miles driven in a car, people will tend to respond in round numbers, resulting in data that (mostly) end in “0.” However, in the submitted data set, final digits between 0 and 9 are roughly equally common.

4) Reported annual mileages are roughly equally common, between 0 and 50,000 miles. Dr. Doe contends that real data would tend to cluster around some common or typical value, rather than be evenly distributed.

The students involved were interviewed separately. All indicated that the group divided up responsibility for the work. Bazerman, Gino, and Shu stated that they did the work on the existing published literature. Bazerman did the original literature search, while Gino and Shu each read one published paper and summarized it for the group’s report. Mazar said that she was responsible for the final edits of the group paper. As such she saw the car data but had no role in acquiring or analyzing them. Ariely reports that he was the only one who dealt with the data directly. He says he found the data “on the internet” but was unable to find the source again. He says the data must have been faked before he saw them.