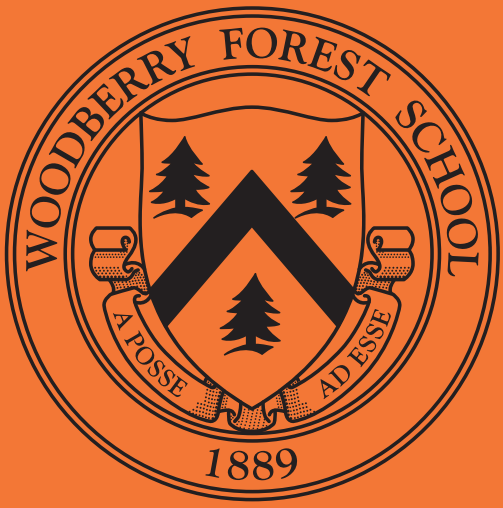
WOODBERRY FOREST SCHOOL



The

HONOR SYSTEM

2017-18

The HEADMASTER'S STATEMENT *on the* HONOR SYSTEM

The honor system at Woodberry Forest is the school's most sacred tradition. It is a moral force that binds us together as equals in a community of trust in which we are expected to complete our own work, respect what belongs to others, and tell the truth. For well over 100 years, the honor system has created a culture of integrity that is the foundation for lifelong relationships that shape us into the men we aspire to be. Ultimately, your adherence to the honor system will mold your character and build your integrity so that you leave this place poised to lead a moral life in service to others.

Abiding by the tenets of the honor system is often not natural for new boys learning to embrace the responsibility that comes with the freedom to choose the hard right over the easy wrong. I hope that each of you will take some comfort in the fact that every alumnus and every old boy has been through the rigorous intensity of the Woodberry experience. Despite our capacity for character and integrity, we are not born with these traits. Instead, we build character day-by-day in the seemingly mundane choices we make about how we wish to live and who we wish to be. Over time you will find that the honor system has become second nature to you, and you are willing and able to face the moral dilemmas you encounter, not only during your time at Woodberry, but also in the world beyond.

Very few schools live out a commitment to integrity as fully and unapologetically as we do at Woodberry Forest. In fact, leaders at other schools often look askance at our no-second-chance policy for boys who violate our community of trust. As headmaster, I acknowledge that our practice can feel severe for boys who compromise their integrity through intentional acts of cheating, stealing, and lying and therefore lose their place in the school. While these moments are invariably difficult and always disappointing, we benefit greatly from the clarity of high expectations, the belief that every boy here is worthy of trust, and the overriding commitment to protect this place for boys who are building their character piece-by-piece through their years at the school.

The trust you enjoy at Woodberry is a gift from every alumnus who cherishes his experience here as the most formative of his life. I urge each of you to cultivate and nurture this gift as one of the most precious you will likely ever receive. While very few students describe themselves

as "free" at Woodberry, the honor system grants every boy the freedom to become who he is meant to be. It is, then, an extraordinary gift, one that comes with the hope that you will take your place in the generations of Woodberry alumni who know that it was here we were shaped and formed into young men of character and integrity, poised to make meaningful contributions to our families, communities, the nation, and the world.

Byron C. Hulsey '86
Headmaster

The WOODBERRY FOREST SCHOOL HONOR SYSTEM

The honor system is a significant part of a student's experience at Woodberry Forest. It is the school's most cherished tradition, and it lies at the core of life within the school community. Every boy is expected to develop a thorough understanding of the honor system and a full awareness of its wide range of applicability.

Woodberry Forest School is a community of trust. The principle of honor rests on the belief that each boy, and every member of the Woodberry Forest community, can be trusted. It is the responsibility of every student to tell the truth and to make sure that the truth is known. One of the central goals of the honor system is to encourage the boys to take responsibility for their actions. In the event that a boy has compromised his honor through a single, impulsive, and isolated mistake, the school will likely look favorably upon him should he take initiative and step forward voluntarily, before he is confronted, to explain the actions that diminished his honor. By taking initiative in this manner, a boy can recover his integrity.

The honor system applies to every area of life in the community: academic, personal, and social. While the honor system encompasses three main areas — lying, cheating, and stealing — it is not limited to these. It is understood that plagiarism and evasiveness fall within these categories.

Plagiarism is the using of and taking credit for the distinctive ideas, words, or unique organization of facts of another. If a student gives the impression that an idea is his when it is gleaned from another source, then he has plagiarized — a breach of the honor system.

The following must be footnoted, and failure to do so is plagiarism: quotations, summaries of a borrowed idea or ideas, interpretations of events, facts not commonly printed and not commonly known, and any unique word, phrase, or term. Thus, whenever a student goes to a book, article, or internet site (secondary sources) for ideas and information, that source must be footnoted. If some of the ideas for a paper derive from a class lecture, discussion, or conference with a faculty member, then the teacher and class must be footnoted. Particular care should be given to avoid inappropriate use of internet research. Direct quotations from internet sources must be acknowledged, and downloading of materials must be done with care and fully documented.

The honor system implicitly requires that a student's identity not be misrepresented. It thus applies to any situation in which a student signs

or marks his name to indicate compliance with a rule, acceptance of responsibility for a bill, attendance at a meeting, or any other similar situation. In addition, taking or using someone's personal property or failure to comply with library and audiovisual center checkout procedures will cause a student's honor to be questioned and may fall into the category of an honor violation.

In addition to the prohibition against lying, cheating, and stealing, the honor system requires that each student sign the honor pledge on the completion of any quiz, test, or examination. The honor pledge — "I have neither given nor received help on this examination" — is followed by the individual's signature and serves as a teaching device because it helps new students to comprehend the honor system with respect to their classwork and as a written restatement of each student's personal honor.

Every member of the school community must take an active role in adhering to, upholding, and promoting the honor system. For the honor system to function, all students and faculty must be willing to report honor violations.

Although faculty members play an important role in encouraging honorable conduct by guiding students toward a fuller understanding of how the honor system works and reporting honor violations, primary responsibility for maintaining the honor system lies with the students.

Whereas the school's disciplinary system tends to fall more under the jurisdiction of the faculty, the honor system (which insofar as possible is kept separate from school discipline) belongs to the students. It is their responsibility to promote a sense of honor within the school community by reporting violations, setting an example for others through their own honorable conduct, and counseling others to support the honor system fully.

All students at Woodberry Forest School must understand that a violation of the honor system is a serious offense and may result in dismissal.

The Woodberry Forest honor system applies to a student when he is under school jurisdiction. A student is under school jurisdiction when he is on the school property, in transit to or from the school property, and during off-campus trips or activities sponsored by the school. A student is under parental jurisdiction during vacations and when he is on overnight leaves of absence granted with parental permission. If any overnight leave of absence coincides with any school-sponsored trip or activity, a student remains under school jurisdiction until the trip or

activity is over and the student has left the destination of the trip or activity. Woodberry Forest School strongly encourages the parents of its students to support the principles of the honor system when a student is under parental jurisdiction.

The intention of the Woodberry Forest honor system is to instill in all members of the community a lifelong commitment to the school's ethical principles, including absolute moral integrity in all aspects of life and work. This tradition is central to the reputation of Woodberry Forest School.

The PREFECT BOARD

The first prefect board was appointed in February 1899, because it was thought advisable to organize a group of boys in the sixth form to be responsible for the protection of the honor system.

To be chosen a prefect at Woodberry Forest School is one of the highest honors attainable. To serve is a significant responsibility and, at times, an unwanted burden of leadership. After being nominated by student and faculty vote, candidates are interviewed by the headmaster, the dean of students, and one or two members of the faculty. After interviews, the headmaster makes individual prefect appointments.

An individual who is chosen to be a prefect assumes a great responsibility and position of leadership within the school. He is a student who has demonstrated high standards of personal integrity and judgment. The prefect is expected to take a very strong role in orienting new students to the honor system, to act as the primary senior leader in his assigned dormitory, and to articulate continually the principles of honor to students.

The prefect board hears all cases involving possible honor violations and recommends a course of action to the headmaster. The responsibility given to the board exemplifies the school's belief that the students should regulate and maintain the honor system.

When a student has reason to believe an honor violation has occurred, he should report it to a prefect or to the headmaster, who informs the prefect board. The board then takes an active role in investigating the possibility of an honor violation. When an honor case arises, the board holds a hearing at which all persons directly involved in the case are interviewed. The senior prefect or a member of the administration will attempt to notify the adviser of any student about to attend a prefect board hearing in which that student's honor is in question. In an honor case a student's adviser is available to discuss matters with his advisee before the prefect board hearing, but he does not attend the hearing unless the board requires information from him. If the student does not wish to discuss matters with his adviser, or if his adviser is away from school, then he is free to request any other member of the faculty as a substitute. A member of the administration is present at the prefect board hearing during the interviews. The prefect board then holds private discussions in order to decide upon a recommendation for the final consideration of the headmaster. The board may consider three possible recommendations:

Honor warning indicates that the prefect board believes that the spirit of the honor system has been violated but the area in question is not sufficiently clear.

Honor probation indicates that a student has caused the prefect board to question seriously his position in the community. This may result from a case involving circumstantial evidence, suspicious activity, conflicting reports, or any matter that in the judgment of the board merits such action. A further breach would subject the student to dismissal.

Honor dismissal indicates that evidence of the student's intentional breach of the honor system is clear and convincing, showing conclusively that the student has failed to conduct himself in an honorable way.

It must be noted that the prefect board's position is advisory, not absolute. The final decision in all cases remains in the hands of the headmaster.

J. CARTER WALKER'S STATEMENT *on the* HONOR SYSTEM

In 1951, three years after he completed fifty-one years as headmaster of Woodberry Forest, J. Carter Walker reflected upon the school's honor system. Mr. Walker's insight, suggestions, and words of caution continue to serve as constant reminders that this part of our school heritage requires support and understanding.

The Honor System is the most precious heritage of Woodberry Forest boys from those who have preceded them in other years. It is by far the most potent and most far-reaching influence in the building of character, in the making of boys and men who speak the truth and who will not swerve from integrity. And yet it is most difficult for people who have had no experience with any similar system in school or college to understand the principles and practices of the Woodberry Forest Honor System. By such persons it is thought of as a system that encourages tale-bearing, something that both Masters and boys at Woodberry Forest dislike and condemn. For us who have lived with the Honor System in both school and college it is hard to understand how other people can so misconstrue it. Some think of it as a part of the discipline of the School. To make this mistake is a fundamental injustice to the Honor System. The discipline of the School is a responsibility that rests squarely upon the Masters with such assistance as the Prefects are willing to give. It is conduct prescribed and dictated, enforced, we may say, by a higher authority outside of oneself. The Honor System, by contrast, is a system of self-discipline. This distinction is fundamental. To disregard it will inevitably lead to gross misunderstanding.

The Honor System rests upon the conviction that boys want to be honorable and want to be trusted. It is a fundamental right of every boy to demand that he be trusted and that his word be accepted at all times and by all persons, fellow students, Masters, everyone. A boy at Woodberry Forest is perfectly in his right to resent a charge of falsehood, regardless of who makes the charge. The boys realize that to be so trusted, they must prove themselves worthy of trust. Their Honor System is their acceptance of this individual and corporate responsibility. They unite to condemn dishonesty wherever it may raise its head in their School. As the discipline of the School is a responsibility that rests upon the Masters, so the Honor System is a trust reposed in the boys themselves. The System is administered by the Prefects, of course with the cooperation and support of every

boy in the School. By distinct implication no Woodberry Forest boy will tolerate dishonesty in a fellow student any more than he would be guilty of dishonesty himself.

If a boy should be so unfortunate in his daily contacts as to detect dishonesty in a fellow student, what should be his procedure? My advice to the boys was somewhat as follows: Any boy who might learn of untruthfulness or dishonesty in one of his fellow students should make known what he learned to two of his classmates in whom he has confidence. These three should then inform the offender that they have reason to think he has violated the Honor Code of the School. They should do their very best to persuade him to report the facts to some member of the Prefect Board. If he should deny the charge or refuse to make this report, then his three fellow students would have no other alternative than to make the report themselves. The primary purpose of having three boys rather than one make such a report is that so grave a responsibility should be shared and not devolve upon a single boy. The next step in the procedure would be an investigation by the Prefects. If they should find the facts as reported to them well-founded and should agree that the violation of the Honor Code has been established, they should communicate their findings to the Headmaster. This communication would normally be accompanied by a recommendation that the offending boy be dropped from the School.

In making this recommendation the Prefects should always bear in mind that responsibility for dismissal of a boy rests squarely upon the Headmaster, and, therefore, that the Headmaster must be convinced of the guilt of the student under investigation and of the necessity of removing him from the student body in order to preserve the integrity of the Honor System.

The administration of the Honor System is always a delicate task and often a difficult task. It has its seamy side. It is a deeply distressing experience for any Headmaster and his associates and also for the Prefects to find themselves under obligation to unite in demanding the dismissal of a boy for violating the Honor Code. It should never be forgotten, however, that a reluctance to enforce the penalties of the Honor System may work out as a gross injustice to other boys in the School. The Headmaster and his associates owe it to all their boys, not just the Prefects only, to prove that they have the courage to mete out an even-handed justice. The wish to forgive is always very strong, and there are cases in which the circumstances would seem to make possible the retention of a boy guilty of an honor offense without endangering the

integrity of the Honor System. But everyone should bear in mind that the Honor System is a great tradition that, more than any other thing, has made Woodberry Forest the School it is, and that it is justly a sense of pride to every Old Boy, and therefore, that the obligation should never be shirked because of weakness in those who administer it to pass this precious system on to future generations of Woodberry Forest boys with its integrity unimpaired. The great value of the system through the years has rested not upon the distressing penalties it inflicts, but upon the powerful influence it exerts to prevent wrongdoing. Many a boy has been saved by the Honor System from straying, as otherwise he might have done, from the path of rectitude, and has left the School as a graduate with a feeling of strong loyalty to a System of self-discipline under which he may have chafed as a youngster.

I hardly suppose that anyone believes that the Honor System or any other system of human conduct is perfect. No Honor System, not even the Honor System at Woodberry Forest, is absolutely airtight. This admission, however, affords no slightest ground for laxity in the administration of a System that has served a great purpose through many years. It should not be regarded as laxity in the administration of the System for the Headmaster in consultation with the Prefects to take into the most serious consideration every circumstance that bears on each case. In all fairness it ought to be possible that there is some difference between the violation of the Honor Code of the School by a young new boy and the same offense committed by an older second- or third-year boy. And just here emphasis should be placed upon the duty of the Headmaster and of every other Master and of the Prefects and the Monitors to leave nothing undone in the early weeks of the session to instruct new boys in the principles and practices of a System with which only a few have had any previous experience. This instruction should be given not only in earnest and impressive talks to the new boys in large groups, but also in more intimate talks with groups that do not exceed a dozen boys. No one at Woodberry Forest should forget that most of our boys come from schools in which petty cheating in their work is an all too common practice and often is regarded as something less than a severe offense. Boys who themselves with no feeling of committing a grievous wrong have been guilty of such dishonesty in their school work should be brought to realize that they are in a new environment in which cheating in their school work is just about an unpardonable sin.

Many years ago I tried in cooperation with a very able and sympathetic Senior Prefect to work out some redemptive procedure that could be stated in writing that would soften the apparent

harshness of the usual Honor System procedure. The Senior Prefect and I discussed this whole subject on at least one occasion with a very large group of Alumni. The Alumni were quickly up in arms in condemning without a single exception, so far as I recall, any procedure that would give a boy good reason to think that he would be entitled to a warning for the first offense, and, therefore, that he could cheat at least once without risk of being dismissed. It is my mature opinion that our Alumni were right. If, let us say, the boys in the lower forms or perhaps only the new boys would have reason to believe that a first offense would not render a boy liable to dismissal, I am confident the School would soon be shot through with the cheating of first offenders and the Honor System would be leaking at every seam. I warn solemnly against any such compromise with the strict standards of our most treasured tradition. This warning, however, is not meant to militate against the weighing of every circumstance that surrounds an individual case. One such circumstance, for instance, might be inadequate instruction to the new boys during the early weeks of the session. It is the responsibility of the Headmaster, a responsibility he must not shirk, that every boy shall be instructed in the obligations and penalties of the Honor System, so that this mitigating consideration can never be invoked.

The Masters have also a very definite responsibility to support the Honor System by never subjecting the system to any unnecessary strain. I think it is unwise for a Master to leave a test room or examination room during the progress of the test or examination. As soon as he steps out of the room, the boys may begin talking among themselves, and any such talk is dangerous. A room full of boys taking an examination or test may include one boy who may be tempted to take advantage of an unsolicited opportunity to get help urgently needed. Again the same question paper should not be used for two sections of a Form unless the two sections follow each other immediately. Every Master in the School owes to the Honor System his loyal support. The System is not designed to relieve a Master of scrupulous supervision of every section of every Form he teaches. Such supervision implies no distrust of any boy. The Master who stays in the classroom during a test or examination or who makes out a separate question paper for two sections of the same course is doing simply what it is his business to do.

I cannot close these general comments without adding that the Honor System is also a potent influence to promote good understanding between boys and Masters and to cultivate good will and cooperation, both of estimable value in all the relations of school life.

ADDENDA

I venture to suggest the cautious consideration of a procedure that I have greatly desired to see tried out at Woodberry Forest, a procedure designed to prevent rather than to punish violations of the Honor Code of the School. In substance what I have in mind is somewhat as follows. The Prefects should be brought to recognize it as a special obligation, or rather as a special privilege, to warn sympathetically, but impressively, any boy whom they have reason to think is in danger of yielding to the temptation to use dishonest help in his school work in time to prevent any actual wrongdoing. I think I have had reason to fear that the Prefects have been too intent upon detecting and punishing a wrongdoer rather than in warning a boy who is thought to be treading too near the edge of the abyss. If the violation of the Honor Code of this School has been definitely established by convincing evidence, such a warning may guide a boy under temptation back into the path from which he should not have strayed. In case of such a warning I would advise strongly against asking any questions that might tempt the boy to make an untruthful denial. It is enough to tell him that among his associates, even his friends, boys or masters, there are persons who think they have reason to be uneasy about his integrity.

I am reasonably confident that such a practice would powerfully reinforce the warning to which a boy has listened in the early days of the session and be a service for which a boy might be grateful for the rest of his life. I have rendered such a service myself, in utmost confidence, to many boys, and I know that I have saved at least some from disaster.

I am well aware that in making these suggestions I am treading on dangerous ground. Scrupulous care is necessary to prevent such warnings from undermining the Honor System. No such warning should be a substitute for the punishment a boy has clearly deserved. It should be used only when guilt has not been definitely established. It should not be forgotten that every boy in the School has already received a warning as solemn and impressive as could be made, and, therefore, that no boy should reasonably feel that he is entitled to a later individual warning.

I should add that I know of at least one other school in which a sympathetic warning against wrongdoing before wrong has been done, or at least has been established, has for many years worked admirably.

J. Carter Walker
December 1951