

UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA  
HONOR COMMITTEE



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A Statement on Race and Honor's Role in Recent Events

*Over the past few weeks, Honor has been silent on the racial unrest in our nation and our own community. We made a conscious decision to remain silent on the murders of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor and the protests that followed. As an impartial adjudicatory body and an agency organization at the University of Virginia, it is so important that we remain cautious when it comes to issues outside of our direct purview. We chose not to comment on the issues that have been occurring in our nation, as we typically do not release statements unrelated to Honor. We were wrong. Staying silent was a mistake and we are truly sorry for that. Because we recognize these shortcomings at their most basic levels, we have taken time to reflect on what is truly important to the Community of Trust and how we can lead this organization in the appropriate direction.*

*As an organization that relies heavily on procedure and the law, we often come to conclusions and make decisions that are extremely nuanced, robustly reviewed, and highly technical. In the pursuit of upholding certain responsibilities, it is easy to forget that Honor exists not only to examine and uphold honorable academic behavior, but much, much more. Honor is bigger than the classroom. There is a reason that the Honor Code applies far beyond Grounds—it applies everywhere we represent ourselves as UVA students. To be an Honorable student means to hold ourselves to a higher standard—a standard that not only expects students to hold one another accountable, but one that requires us to examine and reflect on our personal behaviors. Self-examination is difficult. Reflection is difficult. Holding ourselves accountable is difficult. But that is what we need to do. To be silent at a moment like this is to accept things for the way they are. We refuse to do that.*

*As an organization that rests at the center of UVA students' academic and personal lives, it is of utmost importance that we are willing and ready to enact positive changes for the future. We recognize that Honor—and UVA as a whole—are institutions with histories of prejudice. We cannot change the past, but, in 2020, we must do everything we can to combat racism and ensure our home at UVA is safe, welcoming, and fair.*

*You have elected us to represent your interests as students and expect us to uphold the values of Honor. We cannot do that unless we are fully committed to fighting racism. Isabelle Edwards will continue to serve as the main point of contact as our Vice Chair for Community Relations and be leading these efforts. That being said, we are all fully committed and will continue this work both as individuals and as an organization as a whole. Reversing systemic issues that have existed for many years is no easy task, but it is an issue that demands our full attention and efforts. With this we're taking the first step, and I hope you'll join us and help us as we move forward.*

Sincerely,

Ryan Keane

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To the Community of Trust:

The Community of Trust is elastic. New students and faculty come and go each year, developing new expectations and setting new standards. Each individual Hearing Panel—a group of students randomly selected to determine if an Honor Offense has occurred in a singular case—decides whether a student accused of violating the Community of Trust has done so. The thoughts and ideals of this small group are different every single time a new panel is convened at each Hearing, and each student in that group holds a separate opinion regarding an accused student's guilt on the basis of Act, Knowledge, and Significance. In that moment, these students' decision-making processes embody the elasticity of the Community of Trust.

What is not elastic about the Community of Trust is the conscious decision we all make when we arrive at the University of Virginia: that we will conduct ourselves with integrity and uphold principles of honor in our lives as students. This means not only being honest about our academic work, but also taking full responsibility for our actions and doing the right thing in our day-to-day lives outside of the classroom. To follow through with this commitment to honesty and integrity, we must be actively anti-racist in this nation, at this University, and within the Honor System itself. All three of these bodies have contributed in one way or another to the systemic racism that continues to marginalize our peers, professors, and staff members of color, and we cannot apologize deeply enough for our own contributions to institutional racism.

The Honor System relies on the fact that students, faculty, and administrators are not passive recipients of culture, but active agents in creating and maintaining the ideals of our Community of Trust. Below, you will find an initial set of actionable items we will begin to enforce this fall to better uphold and support this Community:

1. **Common Read and Related Programming.** All Executive Committee members, Honor Committee representatives, and Support Officers will be reading *So You Want to Talk About Race* by Ijeoma Oluo. This common read will serve as an opportunity for valuable internal discussion and for conversations with the broader University community regarding systemic racism. While working within COVID-19 gathering guidelines, we plan to host round-table

dialogues, guest speaker events, and interactive panels related to Honor's role in racism, equity, and justice at UVA.

2. **Public access to basic case demographics.** To balance both our high confidentiality standards with the demand for transparency, we will be launching a new page on the official Honor Committee website to show live demographic case data. Evidenced by our Bicentennial Report, Black and Asian students are overrepresented, relative to their representation at the University, among students reported to Honor. We hope that this measure will hold faculty, teaching assistants, and other reporters accountable for their contributions to the continued racial biases in the Honor System.
3. **Connecting more closely with CIOs.** Honor's Co-Sponsorship Guidelines will change to reflect our interest in supporting students from all backgrounds. We will encourage organizations receiving co-sponsorship funding to briefly speak at an Honor Committee meeting, join us in a conversation on the mission of their organization, and collaborate to develop a method by which Honor can support them outside of the co-sponsorship.
4. **Continued communication with endorsing organizations.** Honor Committee members who received endorsements during the February elections will be required to meet with senior members of those organizations at least twice per semester during their term. Just as senior members of endorsing organizations took valuable time to interview incoming Committee members and learn more about Honor, Committee members must likewise engage in the work they discussed during those interviews. Committee members will briefly discuss these conversations at Sunday night Committee meetings, share any important notes with the Vice Chair for Community Relations, and actively form a relationship between Honor and said organization throughout their term.

As a prominent and well-funded organization at a Predominantly-White institution, we recognize that these preliminary actions are not enough. We know that Honor is far from the most diverse organization on Grounds, and we acknowledge that this lack of diversity will not reverse with four anti-racist actions and general conversations. We will encourage the Community of Trust to hold itself to a high standard this year—the standard of being actively anti-racist in all aspects of our lives as students, faculty, and administrators.

This is not a fully comprehensive list of our plans for the fall, and we will release additional plans and further details of the above-mentioned plans as they are decided. The Honor Committee humbly asks for your help as we navigate the future of the Honor System. We want to hear your continued comments and opinions but understand that the spaces provided during CRDAC meetings and community input sections of Committee meetings may not be accessible for some students. We encourage any student, faculty member, administrator, or community member to reach out to Committee members to have one-on-one conversations. We recognize that the actions we are beginning to take this summer and upcoming academic year are not nearly enough to dismantle the systemic and institutionalized racism found here at the University; however, we are committed to putting in the work it will take to build a better Community of Trust.

We sincerely value and look forward to your honest input, constructive criticism, and tough conversations, as we create impactful change through hearing diverse perspectives and taking collective action. Please feel free to contact Ryan or Isabelle at the emails listed below.

In reverence and thankfulness,

The Honor Committee

Ryan Keane, Chair: [rmk6rf@virginia.edu](mailto:rmk6rf@virginia.edu)

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