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64 Dartmouth College students face discipline over cheating

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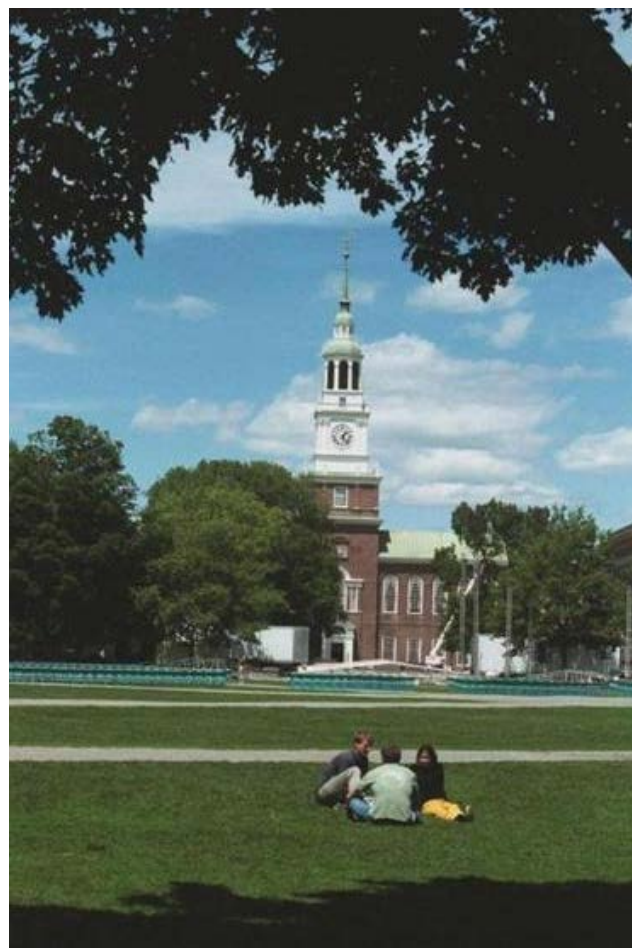
By **Matt Rocheleau**

GLOBE CORRESPONDENT JANUARY 08, 2015

Up to 64 Dartmouth College students — including some athletes — could face suspension or other disciplinary action for cheating in an ethics class this past fall.

Dartmouth officials said students implicated in the cheating scandal misrepresented their attendance and participation in the undergraduate course, “Sports, Ethics & Religion.”

The class used electronic handheld “clickers,” registered to



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Dartmouth College's campus in Hanover, N.H.

individual students, to answer in-class questions. Officials at the Hanover, N.H., college said the students charged with cheating either gave their clickers to classmates instead of attending class themselves, or helped others cheat by using the clickers to answer questions on their behalf.

Some of the students have been found in violation of the school's honor code and have been told they will be suspended for one term, a college official with knowledge of the proceedings said.

Administrators were alerted to the possible cheating after the professor, Randall Balmer, chairman of the religion department, noticed that the electronic system was receiving a significantly higher number of responses than the number of students he could see sitting in front of him in the lecture hall.

Balmer said the irony of the situation — alleged cheating in an ethics-related course — is inescapable, and he called the matter “very sad and regrettable on many levels.”

“A lot of the students will probably come away with a stain on their transcripts,” Balmer said by phone Thursday. “And, a level of trust that is so necessary for students and teachers has been betrayed, and I feel sad about that.”

Balmer said he initially suspected 43 of the class's 280-some students of cheating. The matter was taken up by Dartmouth's judicial affairs office, which launched an investigation. More students came forward to say they had

participated in the practice, he said, and the number of students facing judicial hearings grew to 64.

College spokeswoman Diana Lawrence declined to say how many of the 64 formally have been found in violation of the honor code or what punishment they might face, because not all of the students have had an initial hearing and those who have could still appeal their ruling.

“The academic honor principle is a foundational element of a Dartmouth education,” Lawrence said in a statement. “The integrity and excellence of that experience require trust between our faculty and students. For this reason we treat all academic honor code violations as major misconduct.

Balmer said he developed the course in part to appeal to the interest of student-athletes, who made up a sizable portion of the class. He said he did not know the number of athletes accused of cheating, and a spokesman for the school’s athletics department declined to comment Thursday.

News of students being found responsible in connection with the scandal was first reported this week by The Dartmouth, the campus newspaper.

Balmer said he considered failing students who he believed had cheated, but decided instead to lower their final grade by one letter.

About half of the implicated students have approached him and “expressed abject apology,” he said. Only a few students have complained, telling him they feel his decision to lower their final grade was unfair, he said.

For his part, Balmer says he believes honor was once “very much a part of our society,” but that notion has faded over the decades. “I think honor no longer is something that has a lot of resonance in society, and I suppose in some ways it’s not surprising that students would want to trade the nebulous notion of honor with what they perceive as some sort of advantage in professional advancement,” he said.

Cheating scandals have hit local colleges, including Ivy League schools, in recent years.

In 2012, 125 Harvard University students were accused of collaborating on some answers on a take-home final exam.

In 2000, 78 Dartmouth students were accused of cheating in a basic computer science course, but all were later absolved after an extensive investigation by the college was unable to pinpoint which students had cheated.

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