

Reflection on new Honor Code Pledge  
Friday, May 8th, 2026

To whom it may concern,

It gives me great pleasure to share this amendment to one of our community's most important traditions, i.e., the honor code pledge. During my time on the Honor Council these past four years, I have served as a class representative, Vice President and now as President, and in that time, I have given a great deal of thought to the honor code, which I see as first and foremost a promise. That promise is the honor code pledge, signed at the very beginning of one's time at Rhodes, to ourselves and to one another: "As a member of the Rhodes College community, I pledge I will not lie, cheat, or steal, and that I will report any such violation that I may witness." Together with the Commitment to Diversity and Community Standards agreement, this promise unifies us all under one purpose, and in recognition of the value of two things: the education we pursue and the community of people who have committed to pursuing that education with us. Simply, it affirms that the things we learn and the people we learn them with matter. And that is why we promise to protect them. It is this promise that makes up the foundation upon which our identities as students and community members at Rhodes College have been built.

However, as I reflected on this pledge over the years, I was struck by a certain lacking in the pledge as it stands, a semantic negativity that reflects a larger philosophical absence. Don't get me wrong; lying, cheating, and stealing are wrong, and these are the violations which both the Honor Council and Community Standards Council investigate. But it seemed strange to me that my time as a student should be defined more by the actions I have not taken than the ones I have; that the core of the promise I make at the inception of my Rhodes career be characterized solely by *not* lying or *not* cheating or *not* stealing. This dissonance, for me, lies in the important fact that Rhodes students are and do so much more than not lying, cheating, and stealing. They are artists, leaders, advocates, investigators of truth, lovers of beauty, and doers of good—our honor code should reflect that. So, I decided to go about changing it.

Then came the difficult part. The new code should employ active language to better reflect the life of the Rhodes community; but how can we describe succinctly, in concrete words, the actions that Rhodes students *do* take? For this project, I enlisted the help of pretty much anyone who would talk to me, including President Collins, Dr. Steve Haynes, and the closest thing we have to a Rhodes Historian, Mr. Bill Short himself. Most importantly, I spent many hours talking with Dr. Lori Garner who grounded my mind in the history, traditions, and mission of the college. It was during these conversations that she reminded me of the virtues "Truth, Loyalty, and Service" inscribed on the college's shield. They are the values which have guided the intellectual, social, and moral undertakings of Rhodes students since the college first moved to Memphis exactly 100 years ago, and they are the values which continue to guide the actions of students today, both on campus and beyond the gates. These are also the qualities I have witnessed firsthand in my peers, in our faculty and staff, and in our alumni, and truly, it is difficult to think of a better representation of what it means to be a member of the Rhodes community. And so, it became clear to me that I had found the language which ought to be included in the pledge.

The new code will be inaugurally signed this Fall during the class of 2030's Honor Code Signing ceremony. It reads as follows:

“As a member of the Rhodes College community, I pledge I will not lie, cheat, or steal, that I will report any such violation I may witness, and that I will uphold the values of Truth, Loyalty, and Service.”

It is my hope that current Rhodes students, faculty, staff, and alumni will see this change for what it is: not a rejection of our history and traditions, but in fact, a way of realigning ourselves in word, as well as deed, with the values which already make Rhodes a place like no other and have for so long. I have loved this place, my education, and these people for four years now. Rhodes has made me a better and truer version of myself, and I hope that through this amendment, I was able to do a bit of the same.

Faithfully and with Gratitude,  
Laurel Phillips | Honor Council President 2025-2026