



# United States Naval Academy

## NEWS RELEASE

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

### **USNA COMPLETES PHYSICS EXAM INVESTIGATION, 18 MIDSHIPMEN SEPARATED**

ANNAPOLIS, Md. - The U.S. Naval Academy has completed the adjudications of honor violations that occurred during the SP211 General Physics I exam taken primarily by second year (sophomore) midshipmen in December 2020. Ultimately, 18 midshipmen were separated from the Naval Academy.

“Character development is an ongoing process and midshipmen must make the choice to live honorably each day and earn the trust that comes with a commission in the Navy or Marine Corps. This incident demonstrates that we must place an increased focus on character and integrity within the entire brigade,” said Superintendent Vice Adm. Sean Buck.

In December 2020, 653 midshipmen took the final exam for General Physics I, administered through the website myopenmath.com. Midshipmen were given written and verbal instructions stating they could not use outside sources to complete the exam, including other websites.

USNA became aware of potential improper use of outside sources in exam submissions through various sources, including post-exam midshipman discussions on an anonymous chat platform. The superintendent immediately directed an investigation.

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## **PHYSICS 2-2-2**

The multi-disciplinary investigation team (headed by a post-major command Navy Captain and comprised of six judge advocates, an officer from the Brigade Honor program, and an officer who is also an academic Department Chair in a highly technical discipline) reviewed thousands of pages of information and technological data with assistance from multiple experts, including NCIS. The investigation team reviewed website browsing history during the exam timeframe for all midshipmen who took the exam. The investigative team determined that violation of the exam rules was primarily carried out by individuals visiting websites independently and without any coordinated effort.

The investigation found that the COVID-19 pandemic mitigation requirements forced a position of flexibility in exam administration. The Physics Department employed safeguards to prevent cheating, such as requiring midshipmen to complete calculations on scratch paper that was turned in with the exam. Instructions were clear and explicitly stated that use of outside resources was prohibited. Those instructions were also verbally briefed prior to the commencement of the exam. The biggest vulnerability identified was inadequate proctoring.

One hundred and five midshipmen were identified to have likely accessed unauthorized resources and were processed through the Naval Academy's Honor System for suspected violations of the Honor Concept. Each case was handled in accordance with established procedures contained in USNA Instruction 1610.3L, Brigade Honor Program.

Eighteen midshipmen were separated from the Naval Academy. Eighty-two midshipmen found in violation of the Honor Concept were retained in the Brigade with sanctions and entered into a five-month honor remediation program. Four midshipmen were found not in violation of the Honor Concept by the Brigade Honor Board and one is awaiting adjudication by the Brigade Honor Board.

USNA now strongly advises instructors to use paper-based, in-person exams. In addition, when an electronic device is required for an exam, either a browser security program must be activated for all online examinations or a proctor must be able to view each midshipman's screen throughout the exam. All electronic devices not authorized for exam use must be stowed. USNA will also block access to websites for which there is faculty consensus that their potential misuse as a vehicle for academic dishonesty far outweighs any educational value.

Additionally, midshipmen will now write out and sign an honor pledge at the commencement of each examination.

The Naval Academy's Honor Concept, first formalized in 1951 and slightly modified in subsequent years, is not an honor "code" and specifically does not include words to the effect of, "... nor tolerate any among us who does." This was, and remains, a purposeful choice. The Naval Academy stands firmly behind the Honor Concept as written; the onus for change is not with the Honor Concept, but the responsibility lies with the Brigade of Midshipmen to live up to its principles.

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### **PHYSICS 3-3-3**

As a result of this investigation, the entire Brigade of Midshipmen conducted a day-long “honor conference” with intensive training and discussions on honor in April 2021. There will be a renewed focus on character and professional development throughout this academic year. The Brigade owns the Honor Concept in order for there to be the type of accountability and moral development necessary to move forward and learn from this incident.

The mission of the Naval Academy is to develop midshipmen morally, mentally, and physically and to imbue them with the highest ideals of duty, honor, and loyalty in order to graduate leaders who are dedicated to a career of naval service and have potential for future development in mind and character to assume the highest responsibilities of command, citizenship, and government.

For more information about the Honor Concept, visit <https://www.usna.edu/About/honorconcept.php>.

For details concerning separation procedure and resignation, please refer to the [COMMANDANT OF MIDSHIPMEN INSTRUCTION 1920.IH](#).

For readmission instructions, please refer to our [Admissions Page](#). For more information about the Naval Academy, visit [www.usna.edu](http://www.usna.edu) and our [Facebook](#) page.

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