

A Content Analysis of Student Conduct Codes

Janice E. Martin

Thesis submitted to the Faculty of the  
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
MASTER OF ARTS IN EDUCATION  
in  
Higher Education and Student Affairs

Thesis Committee Members:

Dr. Steven M. Janosik, Chair

Dr. Gerard J. Kowalski

Dr. D. David Ostroth

April 22, 2004

Blacksburg, Virginia

Keywords: conduct codes, content or document analysis, judicial affairs, student behavior

Copyright 2004, Janice E. Martin

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

# A Content Analysis of Student Conduct Codes

Janice E. Martin

## ABSTRACT

Scholars in the field of student judicial affairs have recommended that institutions remove all legal terminology and references in student conduct codes and create codes based on student development theory and practice (Dannells, 1997; Gehring, 2001; Stoner & Cerminara 1990; Stoner, 2000). The purpose of this study was to analyze student conduct codes to determine the extent to which college and university administrators have adopted Stoner and Cerminara, Gehring, and Pavela's suggestions.

This study is a content analysis of student conduct codes. The data were collected by using a stratified randomly selected group of Carnegie classified institutions and examining the student conduct code for each institution from the respective institution's website. Descriptive statements were used to code and analyze the data. The study results show that only 20% of the institutions in the study had taken the advice of the judicial scholars and removed all legalistic language. Therefore, the majority of the institutions in this study, regardless of institutional type or size, need to reexamine and modify their student conduct codes.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge individuals who have helped me make my thesis undertaking much easier and more importantly, successfully completed. First, I thank my thesis chairperson Dr. Steven Janosik for his time, guidance, knowledge and support throughout this process. In addition, I owe my thanks to my committee members Dr. Gerry Kowalski and Dr. David Ostroth for their time and insights into this study. All three gentlemen have contributed their thoughts, perspectives, insights, and experiences, which have positively impacted the quality of my thesis.

I extend my unending thanks and utmost appreciation to my fiancé Jonathan who has not only been my biggest fan but has been by my side through all my struggles and successes during my graduate program and with this research project. I could never have reached this milestone without you believing in me and giving me all the love I could ever need.

I must offer thanks to my parents for their undying love and support. Both have been a constant source of encouragement and praise. I am the person I am today because both of you have given me unconditional love and afforded me all the opportunities I've ever asked for. I love you both very much! Additionally, my Grandmother Martin has been not only the best grandmother anyone could ask for but also a source of unconditional love, encouragement, support and faith. She may not have ever understood what I was working on other than a 'really big paper,' but her encouragement was a constant motivation. Finally, my sister Lin and brother Dwayne have given me both encouraging words and support throughout this process.

Last but not least, I need to offer my thanks to four friends and colleagues, Chris, Therese, Brian, and Pam, who have been a constant support system and cheering section. Each of you has been a positive impact on my life.

To all who have supported me during this process, I owe you my deepest thanks and gratitude. The following words are from the song “You Raise Me Up” by Josh Groban, which put words to my feelings for each of you!

You raise me up, so I can stand on mountains; You raise me up, to walk on stormy seas;  
I am strong, when I am on your shoulders; You raise me up... To more than I can be!

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF STUDENT CONDUCT CODES .....	i
ABSTRACT.....	i
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iii
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	v
LIST OF TABLES.....	viii
CHAPTER ONE.....	1
Introduction.....	1
Purpose.....	5
Research Questions.....	5
Significance of the Study.....	5
Limitations.....	6
Definitions.....	7
Organization of the Study.....	7
CHAPTER TWO.....	9
Literature Review.....	9
Judicial Affairs in Transition: From <i>In Loco Parentis</i> to Student Conduct Codes.....	9
Student Conduct Codes.....	11
Components of Student Conduct Codes.....	12
Review of Student Conduct Codes.....	12
Research on Student Conduct Codes.....	13
Gaps in the Literature.....	24
Stoner and Cerminara: Model Code of Student Conduct.....	25

Conclusion .....	30
CHAPTER THREE .....	31
Methods.....	31
Sample.....	31
Data Collection Procedure .....	33
Data Analysis Procedure.....	34
Coding.....	39
Determining Document Classification.....	39
Trustworthiness and Authenticity .....	39
Test of Methods .....	40
CHAPTER FOUR.....	42
Results.....	42
Data Collection Process .....	42
Type of Language Used in College and University Student Conduct Codes.....	43
Public Sample .....	44
Private Sample .....	77
Does Type of Language Vary by Institution Type?.....	103
Small Institutions .....	104
Large Sample .....	123
Does Type of Language Vary by Institution Size?.....	150
Summary .....	151
CHAPTER FIVE .....	154
Discussion.....	154

Study Overview .....	154
Major Findings.....	155
Implications For Practice .....	156
Limitations and Implications for Future Research.....	163
Conclusion .....	166
REFERENCES .....	168

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 1:	Language Used in Legalistic and Non-Legalistic Preamble.....	37
Table 2:	Language Used in Legalistic and Non-Legalistic Judicial Procedures.....	38
Table 3:	Document Classification of Each Institution in the Sample.....	152
Table 4:	Number of Times Each Legalistic Term Was Found in the Student Conduct Codes.....	157
Table 5:	Legalistic Language and Suggested Non-Legalistic Language to Replace the Legalistic Terms.....	159
Table 6:	Additional Legalistic Language and Suggested Non-Legalistic Language to Replace the Legalistic Terms.....	162