Abstract discussion will be held Fall 2015.

Bob the Builder:
An Honor Council Academic Case
Released Spring 2015

This abstract was released in accordance to the timeline specified by the Students' Association Constitution. The confronting party consented to the release of the abstract. The confronted party consented to the release of the abstract. (The addition of this disclaimer began in Spring 2010).

Key:
Bob the Builder: Confronted party
Professor Dizzy: Confronting party
Professor Scoop: Another professor in the department
Cement Mixing 101: Class taken by Bob the Builder

Summary:
Honour Council reviewed statements from Professor [Dizzy] and [Bob the Builder] concerning Bob’s accidental use of his [toolbox], which was prohibited, on an in-class exam. Honour Council consented to a suspicion of violation, but consented to drop the case since they believed that the trial goals of education, restoration, and accountability had already been met in the interaction between Professor Dizzy and Bob.

Bob’s Statement:
Bob the Builder contacted Honor Council after being confronted by Professor Dizzy over his use of his toolbox on a midterm exam for [Cement Mixing 101]. In his statement, Bob described the manner in which he had accidentally used the toolbox in one [construction challenge] on the test. He explained that when taking the in-class exam, he had mistakenly skipped over reading part of the instructions and so had been unaware that the toolbox was prohibited, although this was clearly stated in the instructions. He further explained that because that part of the challenge would be difficult to complete precisely without using the toolbox, he thought that it was reasonable to believe that it would have been allowed.

Bob additionally explained that at the time of taking the exam, he was stressed because he had had a project for another class due that afternoon. Finally, Bob expressed that he had taken responsibility for his actions in his meeting with Professor Dizzy as well as that he had learned from his mistake and would be sure to read all exam instructions in the future.
Professor Dizzy’s Statement:

In her statement, Professor Dizzy explained that she had contacted Bob after it became clear that he had used his toolbox (a disallowed item) in one construction challenge on his midterm exam. Bob had apologized and explained that he had not taken the time to read the exam instructions prohibiting the use of the toolbox. The toolbox had not in fact helped him to complete the challenge more precisely (since Professor Dizzy would have accepted the version from before Bob had used his toolbox on it), and Bob had been absent from classes in which the exam instructions were explained.

Initially, after speaking with Bob and Professor Scoop (another professor in the department), Professor Dizzy did not feel that it was necessary to contact Honor Council. However, she decided to speak with Bob about the importance of reading exam instructions carefully, and to discuss the seriousness of what he had done. After the meeting, she felt that Bob had taken the incident seriously and seemed very receptive to what she had said. Professor Dizzy also reduced the grade for the construction challenge in question (which was worth only a small percentage of the total exam grade) despite the fact that Bob had the correct answer, stating that she believed this was important in terms of Bob experiencing consequences as a result of his mistake. She also informed Bob that she had decided to contact Honor Council, but that she didn’t believe the matter needed to go forward. She later asked Bob to submit a statement when she was informed by the Honor Council Co-Chairs that it was necessary for Honor Council to review the case since it involved a potential breach of the academic Honor Code.

Council Deliberations:

Honor Council was in general agreement that they were suspicious that a violation had occurred, and their discussion centered on whether it was necessary to send the case to an Academic Trial. According to the Students’ Association Constitution, “[c]ases of suspected academic dishonesty can only be resolved outside of a trial if Honor Council believes that the trial goals of education, accountability, and restoration have already been addressed...” (Article VII Section 1(a)).

Council generally agreed that these goals had already been accomplished to some degree via Bob’s meeting with Professor Dizzy, but some members pointed out that this didn’t necessarily mean that they couldn’t be further accomplished through a trial. With that in mind, Council discussed whether sending this case to trial would do more harm than good. Some members were worried that convening a jury would alienate Bob and make him feel humiliated for his mistake. There was sentiment that accountability had been fully accomplished by Professor Dizzy’s lowering of Bob’s grade on the challenge for which he had used his toolbox and that restoration had been achieved through Bob’s conversation with Professor Dizzy, represented by the sense of common understanding expressed in both statements. Most of all, they felt that education had been fully addressed since they believed it to be unlikely that Bob
would make a similar mistake in the future.

Council then considered whether or not any breach of trust between Bob and the community had been resolved, or whether a trial was necessary for that reason. Most people felt that there was no lingering breach of trust with the community.

During the discussion, the question of intent was raised, with Council largely feeling that Bob had not intended to violate the Code. One member of Council pointed out that Honor Council takes even accidental cases of plagiarism very seriously, and wondered why accidental violation of exam instructions should be treated differently. Another suggested that this violation of exam instructions might be analogous to a case of a student forgetting one citation in a paper, which probably wouldn’t go to a trial. Others brought up the view that plagiarism is viewed by many professors as the “ultimate academic crime” since their work is about producing ideas, and that it therefore is treated with more gravity. Council also expressed the concern that while the situation in this case was not plagiarism and seemed unintentional, it is still our responsibility, as students under the Honor Code, to be conscious of professors’ instructions and ask questions if we feel that instructions are unclear.

In discussing how to proceed, the majority of Council members felt that the case should be dropped. One person brought up that the circumstances under which a case may be dropped are different in the Honor Code (which says that a case can be dropped if it can be better resolved through means other than a trial), and in the Students’ Association Constitution, Article VII (which says that a case can be dropped if the trial goals have already been met).

At this point, Council unanimously consented to a suspicion of violation. Council then decided to drop the case on the grounds that the trial goals had already been met, with 13 members consenting and 2 standing outside. The two members who stood outside did so in part because they were uncomfortable in principle with the provisions in the Code and the Constitution for dropping academic cases, and partly because they felt that the goals of education, accountability and restoration, though addressed in part, could be further met and expanded on through a trial process.

After consenting to drop the case, many members of Honor Council felt that it would be beneficial to give Bob the option of writing a letter to the community to be released with the abstract. Council discussed the importance of giving Bob a chance to include his voice in the abstract, while at the same time not wanting him to feel as though he was being punished, particularly when the case was not being sent to a trial. Council came to the conclusion that in their email to Bob, one of the Co-Chairs would include a few lines suggesting (but not requiring) a letter from Bob, and explaining that the process of writing this letter could be very beneficial to him as well as to the community.

**Bob’s Letter:**
Honors Council has yet to receive a letter from Bob. This abstract will be re-released if such a letter is received.
Discussion Questions:
1. How do the implications of accidental violation of exam instructions differ from those of accidental plagiarism?
2. How can Honor Council find a balance, in a case like this, between the potential for a trial to restore a confronted party more completely to the community, and the potential it has to impact the party negatively?
3. How can Honor Council determine whether or not the goals of education, accountability and restoration have been met when they are only presented with written statements?