Abstract discussion will be held on Wednesday 2/18 at 8:00PM in the MCC (Multicultural Center - Stokes 106).

The Great Gatsby:  
An Honor Council Academic Trial  
Released Spring 2015

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Key:  
Confronted Party: Jay Gatsby  
Confronting Party: Professor Tom Buchanan  
Course: 1920s Entertainment 300

Summary/Pre-Trial:  
[Jay Gatsby] contacted Honor Council after [Professor Buchanan] returned his take-home midterm exam for [1920s Entertainment 300] with a note on one question stating that he could not grade that question because the response was too similar to an answer found on an online site. Gatsby admitted to having turned to the internet, a prohibited resource, after being unable to answer the question using acceptable sources. Upon reviewing the statements, Honor Council consented to send the issue to an academic trial. Both Gatsby and Professor Buchanan Skyped into the trial meetings. Throughout the trial, Gatsby accepted responsibility for his lapse in academic integrity and Gatsby and Professor Buchanan held consistent views of the violation.

Fact Finding:  
At the fact finding meeting, Gatsby began by summarizing his initial statement to Honor Council. After working for several hours on a question on his midterm exam, he felt that he still didn’t understand the question. He said that after consulting permitted sources - class notes and the course textbook - he still could not figure out the question. He also noted that he had missed the class in which [party decorations], the subject of the question, had been covered. Feeling stuck on the question, he decided to look up the definition of party decorations on the internet as a last resort. When he did so, he saw a search result comprising a very similar question and its answer. Gatsby initially decided not to look at this source, but after working on the problem some more with no further progress, he copied down the solution from the website. He first tried
to see if he could understand this solution, originally looking at the beginning only, but he could not. He handed in his exam with the copied solution.

Professor Buchanan began by reiterating his initial statement to Honor Council. While grading Gatsby’s exam, he noticed that one of his answers contained notation that had not been used in class as well as a term that was not included in the exam question. Finding this unusual, Professor Buchanan found a webpage through an internet search with a solution that was very similar to the answer that Gatsby had written. In his statement, the professor also listed several reasons why he believed it to be unlikely that Gatsby had arrived at his solution independently of this website. He also attached the exam instructions to his statement, which made it clear that use of the internet was not allowed. Professor Buchanan emphasized that all of Gatsby’s previous work had been original and that he had not seen anything similar from Gatsby before. Even on this exam, he believed that the issue was limited to the question being discussed.

The jury proceeded to ask questions of both parties. One juror asked whether Professor Buchanan had confronted Gatsby beyond the initial note to ask him to take himself to Council, or whether Gatsby had done so independently. Professor Buchanan responded that he had been planning on contacting Gatsby after returning the exams, but was happy to find that Gatsby had already brought himself to Council. When asked who initiated their in-person conversation, Professor Buchanan said that Gatsby had approached him and that it had been a short conversation since Gatsby immediately admitted the violation and had already contacted Honor Council.

Another juror asked whether Gatsby saw the initial googling of “party decorations” as a violation of the Honor Code, to which he responded that at the time he thought that simply searching the phrase to find its definition was acceptable, but now realizes differently. When asked why he thought his opinion had changed, Gatsby said that he hadn’t been thinking clearly at the time and had only wanted to find out the definition of the question’s subject.

When asked why he did not leave the question blank instead of copying the answer, Gatsby responded that he did not really have an excuse for his actions.

**Jury Deliberations/Statement of Violation:**

After the fact-finding meeting, the parties left the room and the jury crafted a statement of violation. The jury quickly agreed that a violation had occurred both in Gatsby’s consulting of a disallowed source as well as in his direct copying from it:

[Jay Gatsby] violated the Honor Code by failing to comply with exam instructions by utilizing disallowed sources and by representing one of the sources’ work as his own.
(all 10 jurors consented)

**Circumstantial Portion:**

Professor Buchanan did not feel that it was necessary for him to attend the circumstantial
meeting. When the trial chair asked Gatsby about the circumstances surrounding his violation, Gatsby recalled that it was very late at night when the violation occurred and that he had felt a lot of pressure to do well in this class since it was a requirement for his major. He also recognized that these considerations were not excuses for his actions.

The jury then asked questions of Gatsby regarding the circumstances surrounding his violation. One juror asked whether Gatsby was experiencing other academic stress at the time, to which he responded that he had several midterm assignments to complete in a short period of time. Another juror asked whether Gatsby thought the violation would have occurred had the midterm been closed book. Gatsby thought that it wouldn’t have and that the ability to consult allowed sources made it easier for him to make the leap to prohibited sources.

When asked whether he thought he would have come to Honor Council had Professor Buchanan not confronted him, he said that he wanted to say yes, but that he really couldn’t be sure.

A juror then asked Gatsby what his current relationship with Professor Buchanan was like, specifically regarding whether he would feel comfortable taking another class with Professor Buchanan. Gatsby responded that he would like to talk more with Professor Buchanan because he hadn’t yet had the opportunity to have a long conversation with him. He added that he would take a class with him again.

Many questions focused on how Gatsby’s view of his academic integrity and the Honor Code had changed as a result of his violation. He responded that before the violation, he thought of the Code as a part of Haverford, as something that we all did. Now he thought of the Code as something that binds students and professors. He now saw the Code as a key part of Haverford, rather than just one of many parts. Another juror asked Gatsby if he thought he could commit a violation such as this in the future. He responded that he now had a better understanding of what the Code means. He said that he was ashamed of what he had done and had a hard time talking to other students in the class because he felt that he had hurt them.

When asked what he thought he would do if a similar situation were to arise, he said he thought that he would leave the question blank rather than using prohibited sources. Another juror asked why Gatsby thought he would now hold his academic integrity over the pressures of grades. He responded that we all worry about grades, but that there is a lot more to college than grades. He felt that the Code helps us to be better learners and creates a fair environment in which we strive to understand, rather than just care about grades.

One juror brought up the fact that the Honor Code states that cases of plagiarism normally result in separation. Gatsby thought that separation would not be productive, since he thought that he had been able to successfully reflect on his actions without it. Another juror asked Gatsby if he planned to attend graduate school, to which Gatsby responded that he did not have definite plans.

Finally, Gatsby was given the opportunity to share with the jury any recommended resolutions he had in mind. He suggested that the professor decide on the exam grade and that he
talk more with Professor Buchanan. He also suggested that he write a letter to the community or to his class and that he talk with a dean or someone at the OAR about academic integrity.

**Jury Deliberations:**

The trial chair began by reading the email response from Professor Buchanan regarding his proposed resolutions. He suggested that Gatsby receive a 0.0 on the exam in question. He additionally stated that he felt that the rest of the resolutions should be left up to the jury because he felt the jury was best equipped to do this.

The jury began the process of crafting tentative resolutions by discussing the professor’s recommendation about grade change. The jury initially worried that a zero grade on the exam, which constituted 20% of the course grade, might affect Gatsby’s passing of the course and therefore the completion of his major. The jury eventually decided that in the specific event that this grade change would have such a severe effect, the professor would use his discretion appropriately.

After making a list of possible resolutions to discuss that could fulfill the trial goals of education, restoration, and accountability, the jury proceeded to consider each potential resolution in more depth. They first discussed the possibility of requiring Gatsby to write a letter to the community. They wanted to ensure that the resolution would be specific enough to have the letter be beneficial, but open enough to allow it to be genuine.

The jury then discussed whether the grade change should apply to the whole test or be limited to the specific question. One juror pointed out that it seemed unfair for Gatsby to receive the same grade as he would have if he had simply left the question blank. Some jurors questioned whether Gatsby’s proposed resolutions showed a lack of understanding of his violation. One juror said he might feel more comfortable if Gatsby instead received half credit on the exam. In the end, the weight of the room was in favor of recommending a grade of 0.0 for the exam as a whole.

The jury then moved on to discuss the possibility of separation. One juror began by stating that he thought that Gatsby had already had time since the violation for reflection. Another juror said that she was initially thinking that separation might be beneficial for any student who plagiarizes, as well as for the community, but that after hearing multiple jurors express their impression that Gatsby seemed contrite and understood what he had done, she questioned whether separation would be productive. Still, she wasn’t sure if Gatsby’s apparent contrition and transformation were genuine, and so she personally recommended separation. Another juror said that she initially thought that separation was too harsh for such an incident, but that she felt that Gatsby didn’t fully understand the plagiarism aspect of his violation.

At this point, the jury embarked on a lengthy discussion regarding what plagiarism means in an [entertainment] course context because it wasn’t clear to all jurors whether this was a case of obvious plagiarism. The jury felt that this was important to address, considering that the Honor Code states that plagiarism normally results in separation. One juror stated that one key
reason that she considered this to be a case of plagiarism was because Gatsby did not understand the material that he had put down as his own work. Another juror also pointed out that the online solution that Gatsby copied was a synthesis of different [dances] and was thus a complete application rather than separate [dance moves]. After this discussion of whether or not Gatsby had plagiarized had gone on for a long time, the jury ultimately came to the conclusion that even if Gatsby had plagiarized, they did not feel that separation would be appropriate.

At this point, one juror had to leave, but agreed to let the discussion continue in his absence to avoid future scheduling complications. The discussion then turned towards the issue of whether or not to recommend reporting this violation to institutions of higher learning. One juror said that since Haverford prides itself on its reputation and integrity, she felt it was necessary to report. Another juror added that she thought that not reporting should be reserved for cases that would not be dealt with as issues of academic misconduct at other schools. Another juror said that reporting to graduate schools would potentially provide Gatsby with an opportunity to explain the situation and what he learned from it. All jurors felt that the jury should recommend reporting the violation.

Discussion then moved on to address education. The jury ultimately decided that a productive way to address Gatsby’s seeming lack of understanding of the plagiarism aspect of the case was to have Gatsby read an existing guide on academic integrity published by the [Entertainment] Department and discuss this with Professor Buchanan at their meeting. The jury also wanted Gatsby to gain a better understanding of how to deal with similar “weak moments” of feeling the need to cheat in the future, should they ever arise. For this purpose, the jury included in the tentative resolutions Gatsby’s suggested resolution of a meeting with his dean. Many jurors also thought it would be important for the community to discuss what to do in similar situations, and ultimately decided that the abstract writers should include a discussion question in the abstract to encourage this. With that, the jury consented on the following set of tentative resolutions:

**Tentative Resolutions:**

1. *The jury recommends that [Jay Gatsby] receive a 0.0 on the exam in question.* (9 jurors consent, 1 stands outside due to absence)

2. *[Jay Gatsby] will write a letter to the community to be released with the abstract addressing the factors that lead to his lapse in academic integrity and how his experience has informed his view of the Honor Code.* (9 jurors consent, 1 stands outside due to absence)

3. *The jury recommends that [Jay Gatsby] have a conversation with [Professor Buchanan] for the purpose of restoring trust between them. This meeting should take place before [date].* (9 jurors consent, 1 stands outside due to absence)

4. *Before this meeting, [Jay Gatsby] will read the academic integrity guidelines for the [Entertainment] Department for the purpose of discussing these with a focus on*
5. The jury recommends that [Jay Gatsby] meet with his dean to discuss how to deal with similar situations of uncertainty should they arise. This meeting should take place before [date]. (9 jurors consent, 1 stands outside due to absence)
6. Because it constitutes a conscious breach of the academic Honor Code, the jury recommends that this incident will be reported on applications to institutions of higher learning. (9 jurors consent, 1 stands outside due to absence)

Resolutions as a whole - 9 jurors consent, 1 stands outside due to absence

Finalizing Resolutions:
Due to unusual scheduling constraints, the jury exceeded the constitutional maximum 48 hour waiting period between tentative and finalizing resolutions (amended at Fall Plenary 2014). At the finalizing meeting, the jury first re-consented on the tentative resolutions. One juror was late to this meeting, so 9 jurors consented with 1 standing outside due to absence.

Gatsby then joined the meeting and was asked for his opinions on the resolutions. He thought that the resolutions were relatively fair and straightforward, and did not need the jury to explain its reasoning behind any of the resolutions. After Gatsby left, the chair then read Professor Buchanan’s email response to the resolutions, in which he stated that the resolutions seemed fair, and he did not feel the need to be present for the finalizing meeting.

At this point, the last juror arrived, and the trial chair explained to him what he had missed. The chair then asked the jury if there were any changes that should be made to the resolutions. Since no jurors had changes to propose, the jury re-consented on the tentative resolutions as its final set of resolutions.

Finalized Resolutions:
1. The jury recommends that [Jay Gatsby] receive a 0.0 on the exam in question. (all 10 jurors consent)
2. [Jay Gatsby] will write a letter to the community to be released with the abstract addressing the factors that lead to his lapse in academic integrity and how his experience has informed his view of the Honor Code. (all 10 jurors consent)
3. The jury recommends that [Jay Gatsby] have a conversation with [Professor Buchanan] for the purpose of restoring trust between them. This meeting should take place before [date]. (all 10 jurors consent)
4. Before this meeting, [Jay Gatsby] will read the academic integrity guidelines for the [Entertainment] Department for the purpose of discussing these with a focus on plagiarism. (all 10 jurors consent)
5. The jury recommends that [Jay Gatsby] meet with his dean to discuss how to deal with similar situations of uncertainty should they arise. This meeting should take place before
Because it constitutes a conscious breach of the academic Honor Code, the jury recommends that this incident will be reported on applications to institutions of higher learning. (all 10 jurors consent)

Resolutions as a whole - all 10 jurors consent

Post-Trial:
  The resolutions were not appealed by either party.

Gatsby’s letter to the community:

I would like to both apologize and thank the Haverford community at large for this whole experience and the resulting consequences. While the two words are generally conflicting, both seem to fit this scenario equally well. On the one hand, while I certainly regret my actions and would act differently given another opportunity, this whole process, I believe, has gotten me more in touch with the Honor Code and has made me cherish Haverford even more. I am confident that now, if ever faced with a similar situation that I would act differently.

I don’t have any excuse for doing what I did, sure I was tired and wanted to get good grades, but don’t we all. In fact I’m confident that most, if not all of us have been in a similar situation and again I’m confident that most, if not all of us abide by the Honor Code in these situation. I had never denied breaking the Honor Code, I reported myself and had known that I had broken it since the beginning. What did change over the course of the trial were my views on the Honor Code and its effect on making Haverford what it is. Of course that didn’t all happen overnight, it was a slow process that involved multiple people and a lot of personal reflection to fully realize.

My first step was the realization of what happens when the honor code is broken. I initially felt ashamed of myself and had some trouble talking to my fellow classmates let alone my professor. I thought that I had failed them and that they would never be able to forgive me. However, in my conversation with my professor I received only support and care for my well-being, at that time those few words of comfort did a lot to calm me down and helped me get a grip on myself. By the time the time came to hold the, all I had already come to terms with my actions, however I was still initially a little afraid of how the jurors would react. Certainly I had broken the Honor Code, there was no question about that, but would the jurors scold and scorn me for my mistakes or think less of me because of my actions? All of five minutes in all of my fears had melted away; I was relieved that the environment was warm and welcoming, full of support and understanding. Perhaps I should not have been scared in the first place, the goal of an Honor Code trial is, after all, to educate and restore, not to punish.
Everyone here certainly knows about the Honor Code and has interacted with it in some form or another, but not everyone fully realizes how important it is in making Haverford the place we all know and cherish. Mutual trust between people is a rare thing, even more so with a group of this size, and that is what allowed everyone to react with such kindness and support to my mistake. Looking back, I’m a little overwhelmed at the people’s understanding and compassion; it really had a drastic effect on me and showed me a completely different side of the Honor Code. If I’m ever in the same situation, I now know how to react. I understand the importance and fragility of the Honor Code and how one small action can break apart a whole system, one based on individual Integrity and honesty. The Honor Code relies on every member of the community holding up their part of the agreement, and when one person doesn’t, it affects the whole system. No test no grade, no advantage is worth that.

Before I finish, I would like to thank all those involved in the trial for indirectly helping me through a tough situation via for being caring and understanding. I would also like to thank Prof. [Buchanan] for his support and kind words which meant a lot to me. Finally, again I apologize to everybody for my mistake, especially Prof. [Buchanan] and the [1920s Entertainment] class as a whole.

Thank you, [Jay Gatsby]

Discussion Questions:

1. What can we do as students (individually and collectively) to preserve academic integrity in situations of academic desperation?
2. In general, when should grade changes in cases of academic dishonesty be limited to the specific section(s) of the assignment or course in question, and when should they be broader?