Night at the Museum:
An Honor Council Social Trial
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 did not consent to the release of the abstract. (The addition of this disclaimer began in Spring 2010).

Key:
Confronting parties: Museum exhibits
Confronted party: American Museum of Natural History
Friend to the confronting parties: Larry Daley
Newspaper read by many exhibits: The Golden Tablet

Summary/Pre-Trial:
The American Museum of Natural History was confronted by a collective body of exhibits over a dispute arising between the parties. The exhibits felt that the Museum had betrayed them by promoting their security guard, Larry Daley, to a senior role, meaning that he would no longer be looking after them at night. The exhibits felt that Larry had been a great friend and leader to them, and were further hurt when a public announcement was published in The Golden Tablet that pointed out the differences in funding for senior museum staff projects versus exhibit maintenance. The exhibits felt that the initial confrontation with the Museum had not been productive, as they were not taken seriously by any of the staff. After deliberation, Honor Council came to a suspicion of violation and decided to send the case to a social trial.

Fact Finding:
Both parties were present for fact finding. The Museum began by giving an account of what had happened from its point of view. The Museum said that it had been friends with Larry Daley for a while, and had recently found him to be a particularly appealing candidate for a promotion it was offering. It said that it had spoken with Larry and that he had seemed interested and excited about the opportunity, but had not wanted to speak to the exhibits about it until he knew for sure what he would be doing since he did not want to alarm them unnecessarily. Eventually, the Museum had formally asked Larry to accept the promotion, which he did. The Museum did not mean for the matter to cause significant distress to anyone. Overjoyed at the good news, the Museum also notified some writers at The Golden Tablet, a newspaper read by many of the exhibits and also available online. Again, the Museum reiterated that it had not
meant to hurt anybody’s feelings with the publication of the *Golden Tablet* article.

The exhibits then explained what they felt had occurred and why they had brought the matter to Honor Council. They said that they too were friends with Larry Daley, although they had only known him for a few years, but that they did not know of his friendship with the Museum. He had never spoken about the Museum to them and this made them feel as though they were special to him. They enjoyed having him around and being able to talk to him, as well as feeling that he looked after them well. When Larry told them about his promotion and the fact that he would no longer be taking care of them at night, the exhibits were hurt and confused. They felt that the Museum had gone behind their backs and stolen their friend from them. Furthermore, they were taken by surprise by the fact that Larry told them about the promotion by sending them an email while they were not on display because it was a holiday. Shortly after receiving this email, the exhibits were dismayed to see that *The Golden Tablet* has posted an article about this promotion, which made them feel inadequate. Nevertheless, the exhibits attempted to confront the Museum, but found that their concerns were brushed aside. They felt that the Museum was not interested in listening to them, and that its physical size was intimidating. The exhibits also felt that the Museum made no secret of the fact that it was much richer than them, something which was also mentioned in the *Golden Tablet* article. Because these things made the exhibits feel uncomfortable and that their confrontation had not achieved anything, they decided to bring the case to Honor Council.

**Jury Deliberations/Statement of Violation:**

The initial feeling of the jury was that a breach of trust had occurred. However, many jurors expressed uncertainty as to whether the breach of trust had been caused by the actions of the Museum in promoting Larry Daley without the exhibits’ knowledge, or by Larry Daley’s email which the exhibits felt did not do justice to their intense friendship. Some jurors also felt that a further breach of trust had occurred during the initial confrontation, when the exhibits felt that their concerns were swept aside by a much larger and more financially intimidating party. The jury eventually came to the following statement of violation:

*The Museum* violated the Honor Code by failing to respect the friendship and attachment that [the exhibits] felt for [Larry Daley], and by not showing concern for [the exhibits] when engaging in confrontation. (All jurors consented)

**Circumstantial Portion:**

The Museum was not present during circumstantial portion. The jury asked the exhibits to explain a little more about their friendship with Larry Daley. The exhibits said that they had not known Larry for as long as some of their previous security guards, but that they felt they had developed a strong bond with him. They said that they had trusted him to always be there for them, and had enjoyed many activities with him, often involving eating sugary foods together.
They explained that before this incident, they had known that the Museum existed but had never thought much about it. They certainly had had no idea of the developing closeness between Larry and the Museum and this is one of the reasons they had felt betrayed. The exhibits also admitted that their initial hurt and feelings of bitterness might have been caused more by the fact that they were sad about Larry leaving, and perhaps less by the conduct of the Museum itself.

The jury also asked how the exhibits felt that they and the Museum could wind up being on good terms after this incident. The exhibits said that they did not need to be on good terms with the Museum, but they wanted to remain on good terms with Larry and to ensure that his path forward would be a happy one.

**Jury Deliberations and Tentative Resolutions:**

After circumstantial portion, members of the jury said that it seemed as though the exhibits were already feeling better about the situation and that resolutions should focus mostly on healing the remaining breach of trust between the exhibits and the Museum, as well as preventing any animosity from developing between Larry and the exhibits. There was also a sense that the way the news of the promotion had been communicated to the exhibits through Larry’s email had been a factor in the hurt that they exhibits had felt. One juror (a librarian who had some experience in resigning from important posts in exhibit governance) in fact had some suggestions for how Larry could be more effective in conveying his intended message to the exhibits, which he shared with the rest of the jury. The jury felt that while this was not directly relevant to the issue, some inclusion of these suggestions in the resolutions could be useful.

The jury then consented to the following tentative resolutions:

1. *The jury recommends that [the Museum] provide equally enjoyable opportunities for [Larry Daley] in his new position as in his previous one. (All jurors consent)*
2. *The jury recommends that [the exhibits] express to [Larry Daley] their sadness at his leaving, but also their understanding that this opportunity is one that he is very excited about and that will be good for him. (All jurors consent)*
3. *The jury recommends that [the exhibits] continue to participate in activities with [Larry Daley] involving the eating of sugary foods. (All jurors consent)*
4. *The jury recommends that [the Museum] not promote any more [security guards] in the near future. (All jurors consent)*
5. *The jury will write a letter to [Larry Daley] with suggestions for how to approach situations like this in the future, to be released with the abstract. (All jurors consent)*

**Finalizing Resolutions:**

The exhibits and the Museum were present during finalizing resolutions. All parties expressed that they felt the resolutions would be helpful in restoring trust between the parties, and in helping the exhibits come to terms with the loss of Larry.
The jury therefore consented to the final resolutions with no changes:

1. The jury recommends that [the Museum] provide equally enjoyable opportunities for [Larry Daley] in his new position as in his previous one. (All jurors consent)
2. The jury recommends that [the exhibits] express to [Larry Daley] their sadness at his leaving, but also their understanding that this opportunity is one that he is very excited about and that will be good for him. (All jurors consent)
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Post-Trial:

Though the resolutions were not appealed, the President of the College mysteriously recused himself from hearing any appeals in advance, stating that he felt strongly connected to all parties involved.

Letter from one juror on behalf of the entire jury:

Dear [Larry Daley],

I thought that it might be helpful to you in your current circumstances to hear some advice from somebody who has had to resign from a position at [a museum]. I know our reasons were different, but the community reaction may be similar. Early resignations cause deep-seated feelings of betrayal, fear, and mistrust that can forever mar future relations between the resignee and the [exhibits]. If done incorrectly, this will have an impact from which you may never be able to recover.

I personally know that you have nothing but the best intentions towards this community. Therefore I thought I might help you frame your resignation in the correct light. There are certain excuses that are particularly poignant given the idiosyncrasies of the [exhibits’] community. You will want to appeal to all of these in your attempts to explain yourself.

1) **This is the community's fault.** [Exhibits at this particular museum] are easily overcome by strong feelings of guilt. It is for this reason that the Honor Code works so well [there]. Blame them for any problems, and they are sure to blame themselves.
2) **The community is better off this way.** [Exhibits at this museum] are idealists and bastions of hope. Play on that desire to believe things will always get better and you can get [the exhibits] eating out of the palm of your hand.

3) **Tell them you are better off this way.** [Exhibits at this museum] have an insane desire to put others' needs before their own. If you can convince them this is the best choice for you, they will be happy for you instead of sad for themselves.

Please let me know if you have any further questions. As I said, I am an expert at quitting.

Sincerely yours,
[A former Co-Chair of the Exhibits’ Integrity Council]

**Discussion Questions:**

1. Should the confronting parties be frustrated with the Museum for promoting Larry Daley?
2. How should the confronting parties show their appreciation for Larry Daley in the time before he leaves for his new position?
3. Should Honor Council be allowed to release April Fools abstracts?