Abstract discussion will be held on Wednesday, 2/25 at 8PM in the MCC (Stokes).

The Princess Bride:  
An Honor Council Academic Trial  
Released Spring 2015

This abstract was not 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:
Westley - Confronted party 
Professor Inigo Montoya - Confronting party 
Swordfighting Strategies 202 - Class

Summary/Pre-Trial:
Toward the end of the Spring Semester, [Westley] brought himself to Honor Council concerning an issue with his fourth response paper in [Professor Inigo Montoya’s] [Swordfighting Strategies 202] class. Professor Montoya had confronted him a few days prior concerning uncited passages that bore direct resemblances to an outside source. He feared Westley had tried to pass off this work as his own. Westley had turned in his fourth response paper after working on it until 4AM, and, in doing so, he had forgotten to cite his sources. He noticed this the following morning and began to work on a revised copy with citations, though, due to his very busy schedule he never got around to finishing his copy or informing Professor Montoya. When confronted, he was shocked and apologetic about his mistake and brought himself to Honor Council. Both Westley and Professor Montoya submitted statements for Honor Council to review. Honor Council consented to a suspicion of violation and sent the case to trial. Due to summer coming up, the trial was delayed until the Fall semester. Throughout the trial, questions of miscommunication between the two parties, stress and anxiety affecting Westley, and his time management habits came up. In the end, the resolutions reflected the jury’s hope to restore the trust between Professor Montoya and Westley, and heavily addressed education.

Fact Finding Part I:
The confronted party and all jurors were present for this meeting; the confronting party
was not present due to scheduling difficulties. Westley opened fact-finding portion by explaining what had happened. In Swordfighting Strategies 202 with Professor Montoya, the class had four reading response papers due throughout the semester, which were intended to be a chance to engage with the authors of various assigned readings. Westley wrote the last of these papers starting on Saturday at midnight. Based on previous feedback, he wanted to strengthen his arguments; using a secondary source to back them up. In retrospect, he realized that this was probably a failure to understand the purpose of the reading response paper.

Westley was in the habit of reserving citations and bibliographies until the end. By the time he had completed the paper, it was very late at night and he had not yet added the citations. Upon submitting the paper online, he realized his mistake. He planned on adding the citations and then emailing it to Professor Montoya before class, when the assignment was officially due. He attempted to add citations Monday morning before class, only getting about three quarters of the way through the paper before he had to leave for class. He had initially planned to stay after class to tell Professor Montoya and ask to resubmit a response paper for the next week instead, but was unable to do so due to a previous commitment. By the time of the trial, he realized that he ought to have contacted Professor Montoya immediately upon realizing the citations were missing.

It then slipped Westley's mind to talk to the professor until he was emailed and asked to meet. At that point he did not know what the meeting would be about; he thought it would be about his writing style and previous work. He brought in the most recent versions of all his response papers to discuss. Professor Montoya then explained some of the similarities between Westley’s response paper and a published work. Westley was very taken aback, almost had an anxiety attack, and was unable to articulate his thoughts. He attempted to show the professor his updated version with some of the citations, but Professor Montoya seemed suspicious of Westley’s intentions in showing a different version of the paper. By this point, he had forgotten that this was a different version than what he had submitted online. He then went to his Dean, who helped calm him down and then compile everything for the case.

The floor was then opened to jury questions. Several jurors expressed concern about the lack of understanding between Westley and Professor Montoya, especially considering they were not present for the same fact finding. Westley stated a desire to restore the trust between himself and Professor Montoya.

**Fact Finding Part II:**

For this meeting, Westley was not present and Professor Montoya Skyped in. He began by giving his account of what had occurred. As part of the course, students are asked to submit four “response papers” corresponding with four course themes. These papers are supposed to represent the students’ initial reaction or response to the readings and are graded on a credit/no credit basis. Upon Westley submitting his final paper to moodle, some technical error lead to the paper not being printed with the others from the class. Because of this, Westley’s graded paper
was not returned with the others during class. Westley inquired about this, and Professor Montoya said he would look for it.

Professor Montoya located the paper, which was generally consistent with Westley’s previous work in the course. However, one section towards the end of the paper stood out as beyond the level expected of an undergraduate, and the argument seemed familiar. Professor Montoya quickly located a source from which the section in question had been copied. At different points throughout the paper, Westley had used the source verbatim and in others he had changed the phrasing slightly. Professor Montoya felt this was a troubling indication that Westley was attempting to pass the ideas off as his own.

Professor Montoya then contacted Westley and asked him to meet. During the meeting Westley professed not to understand why he was there. When Professor Montoya explained the problem, Westley pulled out his revised copy and explained why he had sought outside sources. The new draft, however, still contained uncited portions. Professor Montoya asked Westley to bring himself to Honor Council. Westley later contacted Professor Montoya via email and explained the situation and order of events further.

Once Professor Montoya had finished giving his statement, the floor was opened to the jury’s questions. One juror asked what he felt Westley’s grade in the course should be. He responded that it was unfortunate this had happened on a low stakes, credit/no credit assignment. He was unsure if just a zero on the assignment would be an appropriate grade decrease when plagiarism is such a serious issue. He felt it depended heavily on Westley’s past behavior and attitude throughout the trial.

In response to another juror’s question, Professor Montoya stated that he felt Westley was deliberately trying to represent the ideas as his own, as there was no attempt at citation and Westley had not brought himself forward. He took the other draft that Westley brought to their meeting as a sort of prepared defense on Westley’s part, changed after the request for a meeting was made. Most of this speculation as to motive, Professor Montoya said, was due not Westley’s conduct in the course, but rather due to previous experience teaching both at Haverford and at other institutions. Westley seemed more insecure than malicious in Professor Montoya’s previous dealings with him. The professor stated that he would feel differently about the case if Westley could prove that he had attempted to add citations prior to the paper being due.

Professor Montoya felt strongly that separation would not be appropriate, as expressed during the meeting and in an email afterwards to the trial chair.

**Jury Deliberations/Statement of Violation:**

Once Professor Montoya had signed off Skype, the jurors began their deliberations. The initial feeling was that a violation had occurred. Many jurors believed that there were still some things to elucidate, but the bare minimum was that he submitted work that was not cited properly. Not having Westley and Professor Montoya present for the same fact finding meeting meant that there was some misunderstanding of events on the part of both parties. There was
some debate as to the intentionality of the plagiarism. Several jurors expressed confusion as to how Westley never mentioned to Professor Montoya that the paper he submitted did not include citations, and felt that him having a different, partially cited copy of it at the meeting might suggest he had prepared a defense. On the other hand, Westley had been dealing with a lot of anxiety and stress, was extremely busy, and it also seemed very likely that this was an unfortunate mistake. Thus, the jury had clarification questions for Westley and certainly wanted to assure a dialogue between him and Professor Montoya would occur. Either way, the jury agreed that a violation had occurred, whether it was intentional or not.

Some jurors felt that it was most likely an internal issue of striving to improve, rather than a move in search of improved grades. The jury felt that the wording of the statement of violation should not come off too accusatory. The jury consented to the following statement of violation:

*Westley violated the Honor Code by failing to properly cite all sources thereby “representing another person's ideas or scholarship as his own” (Sec 3.04.1) (All Jurors Consent)*

**Circumstantial Portion:**

All jurors and the confronted party were present for circumstantial; Professor Montoya was unavailable due to scheduling. Westley began by explaining the circumstances surrounding the violations. Westley was feeling very stressed; he had a lot of deadlines approaching, including class assignments and internship applications.

Westley told the jury that he had dealt with anxiety and panic attacks when he first arrived at Haverford, and that he was feeling very anxious during his meeting with Professor Montoya. He had also had some previous counseling for this anxiety, as well as for time management. Although he was insecure about his writing ability, he did not feel that he was struggling in the class.

The jury then asked several clarification questions in order to help them come to proper resolutions, wanting a fuller picture of what happened. To this end, many questions were more fact based than is typical for a circumstantial portion.

Westley explained that the reason he did not inform Professor Montoya about the missing citations was that, due to the sheer number of things going on that week, he put it out of his mind as soon as the class was over, as he needed to focus on other things. He did not contact Professor Montoya initially because he planned to resubmit a fixed draft before the deadline. He was able to provide timestamped proof that he had added some citations prior to the deadline. When Professor Montoya handed back the rest of the papers, his was not included, and he talked to Professor Montoya to see if he had received it. Westley said that at the time he was not aware that outside sources were not supposed to be used for the response papers.

Westley clarified that he only brought the revised copies of the response paper to the meeting with Professor Montoya because he figured he wanted to discuss his writing style. On
his first response paper of the semester, Professor Montoya had commented expressing the desire to meet up and discuss his writing style and possibly other aspects of the paper. When Professor Montoya emailed Westley about meeting, Westley assumed it was to discuss his writing and so he brought copies of his response papers. He told Professor Montoya that he did not know what the meeting was about because the question surprised him.

The chair then asked Westley for proposed resolutions. He suggested he receive a 0 on the assignment, talk to the OAR, work with the writing center to improve his citation habits, visit CAPS to discuss stress management, and restore trust with Professor Montoya. He also stated that he was very open to anything the jury might have in mind.

**Jury Deliberations and Tentative Resolutions:**

Once Westley left the room, the jury began to discuss resolutions. Most of the jury agreed that Westley had not committed the plagiarism intentionally, and that it was very important that he and Professor Montoya meet to clarify the nature of the violation and Westley’s subsequent actions. The jury decided that a mediated discussion would be most appropriate.

The jury then discussed potential grade changes. There was discussion on how broad of a grade change was appropriate. Professor Montoya had stated that he thought a grade change on more than just the assignment was warranted, however the jury also noted that this was a recommendation made under the assumption that the plagiarism was intentional, which the jury did not feel was the case. Some jurors still thought that the grade change should be more than just a zero on the paper, since it was such a small portion of the class grade and would not be reflected very strongly in the overall grade for the course. Others felt it was inappropriate to change anything other than the assignment grade since the violation was unintentional and did not affect the integrity of Westley’s other assignments. The idea of accountability was brought up. Some jurors felt that the trial itself acted towards accountability, since it is such a drawn out process for what seemed to be an unfortunate but unintentional mistake. Some jurors also felt that the root causes were not a misunderstanding or disregard for the Honor Code, but rather problems with time management and stress. The jury agreed to move forward with a suggestion of a zero on the response paper, pending Professor Montoya’s approval.

The jury then moved on to discuss various options for helping Westley with his stress and time management skills. Various options including meeting with CAPS, OAR, his Dean, and the writing center were discussed. One juror felt that regular meetings with the OAR and CAPS would be helpful, while others were worried that mandating several regular meetings each week would just increase the pressure on Westley’s time. The jury felt that reducing stress was very important, but were unsure what the most appropriate avenue would be to do so. Some felt that improving time management through meeting with the OAR would help to reduce his stress, while others felt that CAPS was the best way to accomplish this.

The jury felt that although Westley’s anxiety played a significant role in the violation and the case, it would be better to suggest CAPS face-to-face during Finalizing resolutions, rather
than include as a written resolution. One juror commented that even if it was put in the resolutions as only a recommendation, Westley seemed likely to take it as an obligation.

Generally, the jury felt that the resolutions should focus mainly on education and restoration. They wanted to help Westley with his writing habits and help him restore trust with Professor Montoya.

The jury then disbanded for the night, and reconvened the next day. All jurors were present for this second meeting.

Discussion, on what meetings were appropriate for Westley, taking into account the time requirements and benefits of each, continued. The jury decided that neither separation nor reporting to graduate schools was appropriate given the accidental nature of the case. The jury also wanted to have Westley write a letter to the community. Additionally, several other options were discussed, including working with the OAR to make a section of the Honor Council guide\(^1\), working with the writing center to address his writing style, and working with a writing partner.

The jury decided not to have Westley write a section of the guide since it did not seem to have a specific purpose in this case and would just be added work. They also decided that one meeting with the OAR to lay out a schedule and plan for time management would be appropriate, along with weekly meetings with a writing partner. The jury felt that the writing partner would help with several issues, such as insecurity about writing, citation habits, and time management, as he would need to have a draft prepared ahead of time before meeting with the writing partner.

There was some concern that Professor Montoya would not be satisfied with these resolutions, since he still believed that the plagiarism was intentional. However, they felt that since Professor Montoya would have the opportunity to comment prior to finalizing, it was okay to move forward.

The jury consented to the following tentative resolutions:

1) **Westley, Professor Montoya, and a member of the jury will meet in person with the goal of restoring the trust between the two parties. This meeting will take place by the end of the semester. (10 jurors consent)**

2) **The jury recommends that Westley receive a zero on his response paper (i.e. a 5% reduction in his overall grade). (10 jurors consent)**

3) **Westley will meet with a writing partner from the Writing Center for at least 6 weeks with the goal of improving his writing habits. (10 jurors consent)**

4) **Westley will meet with Lionel Anderson from the Office of Academic Resources at least once per semester to discuss time management skills. (10 jurors consent)**

5) **Westley will write a letter to the community reflecting upon this incident and the restoration process. (10 jurors consent)**

\(^1\) The guide referenced is an idea proposed in which confronted parties would write sections of one guide related to their trial experiences (e.g. guide to inappropriate collaboration, dealing with academic stress, etc.)
6) *The jury recommends that this incident not be reported to institutions of higher learning.*  
(10 consent)  
*Resolutions as a whole: (10 jurors consent)*

**Finalizing Resolutions:**

All jurors and the confronted party were present for this meeting. The confronting party had not responded to the Chair’s email asking for comments on the tentative resolutions. 

Westley expressed that he agreed with all the resolutions proposed. He was particularly looking forward to the first resolution, as he felt it was important that he and Professor Montoya see each other and clear the air. He had a few questions about the logistics of some of the resolutions, but no substantive problems with them.

He suggested that he could also talk to people associated with Customs about his experiences, however the jury was not comfortable including any resolutions that would require him to break his confidentiality. The jury did recognize the value of such communication, and offered their support. They offered to help put him in contact with the appropriate people if wished to go forward with the idea.

The jury then told Westley that, although they did not include it in the official resolutions, they wanted to recommend CAPS as a valuable resource that he might find helpful.

After giving Westley further logistical information and deciding on a deadline for the letter to the community, Westley left the room.

The jury wanted to express their support for Westley working with the Customs program, but did not feel that it should be included as a formal resolution. The jury decided to include a note supporting this idea in the email when the final resolutions were sent to Westley.

The jury consented to the following Final resolutions.

1) *Westley, Professor Montoya, and a member of the jury will meet in person with the goal of restoring the trust between the two parties. This meeting will take place by the end of the semester.* (10 jurors consent)

2) *The jury recommends that Westley receive a zero on his response paper (i.e. a 5% reduction in his overall grade).* (10 jurors consent)

3) *Westley will meet with a writing partner from the Writing Center for at least 6 weeks with the goal of improving his writing habits.* (10 jurors consent)

4) *Westley will meet with Lionel Anderson from the Office of Academic Resources at least once per semester to discuss time management skills.* (10 jurors consent)

5) *Westley will write a letter to the community reflecting upon this incident and the restoration process, this should be completed by the end of the semester.* (10 jurors consent)

---

2 Later, Professor Montoya expressed approval of the final resolutions.
Dear Members of the Haverford College Community,

This trial process was the most strenuous yet enlightening experience I’ve ever had. While I am enormously disappointed in my failure to adhere to the values, language, and spirit of the Honor Code, I am grateful to have undergone such a pivotal educational process. Prior to this trial, I had a grave misconception of the trial process as punitive and as a system that chastises one for making a mistake. However, I was humbled with the level of professionalism and benevolence exuded by both the jury and the confronting party. The willingness to listen and comprehend the nature of my circumstances demonstrated that the spirit of the Code is present even in the most difficult of times. The supportive and respectful attitudes of each jury member in understanding my intentions and circumstances were a reminder that I was not alone and that the best course of action was to be open and honest.

I’ve had a significant amount of time to consider and contemplate the implications of this incident and process. I realized that my mistake not only resulted in a breach of trust with the community and my professor, but also in a breach of confidence in myself. I’ve realized that it is very easy to lose oneself in trying to fulfill deadlines and passing exams. This is not to suggest that we should not prioritize our studies. I am saying that in being one of the most rigorous schools in the nation, Haverford has cultivated a culture where our health is often sacrificed for our studies. What I failed to realize is just how vulnerable this makes me to making a careless mistake. Had I, for instance, went to bed earlier or managed my time more efficiently, I would have never been so susceptible towards making the careless mistake I made. Had I gone to CAPS to discuss my anxiety and stress, I could have worked on impeding it from taking a toll on my studies. Had I talked to my professors about a possible extension for an assignment to ease the workload, I could have maintained the integrity and quality of my work. Rather than internalizing my stress, anxieties, and depression, I could have reached out for help.

I learned that it was easy to dwell on the different courses of actions I could have taken. However, what is important is the ability to extract lessons from every mistake to move forward. What matters more is the active steps I am taking to assure that a mistake like this never happens again. More importantly, I feel morally obligated to help other Haverfordians develop the time/stress management skills to improve their health while maximizing their academic performance.

6) The jury recommends that this incident not be reported to institutions of higher learning.
   (10 consent)

Resolutions as a whole: (10 jurors consent)

Post-Trial:

The trial resolutions were not appealed.

Letter to the Community
When this incident happened, I promised myself not to disclose this to any of my family members out of pure embarrassment and disappointment in myself. However, I have learned that I have no reason to be ashamed because I’ve learned and grown throughout this process in a way I would have never foreseen. I would like to thank you for your time in reading this letter. Lastly, I would like to thank each member of the jury, Honor Council, and Professor [Montoya] for restoring me back into the community and restoring me back to myself.

**Discussion Questions:**

1. How much does intention matter in determining whether the Honor Code was violated? How much does intention matter in determining resolutions?
2. How can resolutions address accountability when the violation occurs on an assignment that is not worth a lot of points, perhaps when the magnitude of the breach of trust may be worth a lot more than the magnitude of the assignment?