Abstract discussions will be held Wednesday, February 15 and
and Thursday, February 16 at 7 PM in Ryan Gym

Fox Mulder &

Professor Walter Skinner

An Honor Council Academic Trial

Released Spring 2012

This abstract was completed in accordance with the timeline in the Constitution. The confronting and confronted
parties were given the opportunity to review this abstract prior to its release.
(The addition of this disclaimer began Fall 2010.)

Pre-Trial

Near the end of the academic year, Professor Walter Skinner, a professor in the Alien Studies
department, emailed one of the Honor Council Co-chairs for advice regarding a student, Fox Mulder, he
suspected of plagiarizing in his class, Little Green Men 200. As the Co-chair was in Little Green Men
200, he knew the background of the assignment and material in question. Professor Skinner said Mulder
had copied passages from an assigned article into his paper almost verbatim without citing as a direct
quote. Professor Skinner said he was unsure if Mulder plagiarized, however, because the student did cite
the article as if he were paraphrasing. The Co-chair ultimately felt that this did, in fact, constitute
plagiarism and requested that Professor Skinner have the Mulder turn himself into Honor Council.

Days later, Mulder contacted Honor Council and said that he had been confronted by Professor
Skinner about a suspicion of plagiarism. As the academic year was at an end, a new Co-chair met with
five other members of Honor Council, as per Summer Trial procedures, to review Mulder and Professor
Skinner’s statements. Honor Council came to a suspicion of violation and sent it to an academic trial.
They then discussed how to carry out a summer trial with only a limited number of Honor Council
members remaining on campus. One outgoing Co-chair could not serve because he had a conflict of
interest and other Honor Council members removed themselves for personal reasons. Therefore they
proposed to the parties that the jury be composed of four, instead of the usual five, members of Honor
Council and six members of the community. The parties consented and the trial proceeded.

Fact-Finding

The jury and both parties gathered for the fact-finding portion of the trial. Fox Mulder spoke first
as the confronted party.
Mulder’s Statement:
Mulder said that the assignment was to discuss an academic article about a topic covered in class. Mulder said he quickly realized that the article he had to discuss was complicated, so he decided to go through it point-by-point in order to be thorough. He said he used academic research terms from the article, but thought that including citations at the ends of his sentences was enough. He didn’t realize that he had been following the article’s wording so closely and said he, “never intended to plagiarize, but guess[ed] that [he] crossed the line.”

Professor Skinner’s Statement:
Professor Skinner said that the point of the paper was to summarize and discuss an assigned article. He said that this article was “technical-ish” and designed to be difficult. Professor Skinner said he became suspicious of plagiarism almost immediately because the language in Mulder’s paper closely matched the language of the article. In fact, he found that whole passages were copied verbatim or that a few words were simply replaced with synonyms without being quoted. The problem, however, was that these copied but unquoted passages were cited. Nevertheless, Professor Skinner believed that the similarity between passages in the essay and the article warranted quotations. Thus, even though Mulder cited the article in his paper, the unquoted passages constituted plagiarism, whether intentional or not. Skinner explained that he would have understood if technical language had been copied a few times unintentionally, but that the paper had too many copied passages and that non-technical passages were copied as well.

Jury Questions and Discussion
The jury started by asking Professor Skinner why he thought Mulder’s essay constituted an act of plagiarism. He responded that Mulder had not only used similar terms but that “large bits of sentences and phrasing...were similar.” Since these sentences were not placed in quotation marks and, therefore, cited incorrectly, they constituted plagiarism. Furthermore, since Mulder was an Alien Studies major, Professor Skinner thought he should have been familiar enough with this type of assignment to avoid making this sort of error.

A member of the jury then asked Mulder how he wrote this paper. He explained that he read the article, without taking notes, and wrote the paper. A juror asked if this is how he normally writes papers, and Mulder responded that he had not changed his writing style or procedure. He was surprised that he plagiarized because this is how he normally goes about writing papers and said it must have been the difficulty of the article that caused him to unintentionally plagiarize.

A juror then asked both parties whether they thought intent to plagiarize affected the violation in any way. Mulder responded that he thought intent was important but that he wanted to take full responsibility for his actions. Professor Skinner felt that intent should be taken into account for the resolutions but that intention has no effect on whether or not a violation occurred.

Another juror then asked Professor Skinner if he intended for students to use direct quotes in their papers. He said that the assignment was designed in a way that students should not use quotes but should work closely with the article to analyze it, rather than regurgitate a summary. He said he never explicitly discouraged the use of direct quotes, however. Mulder added that he did not intend to use direct quotes, but thought he added proper citations where they were necessary. He had used direct quotes in other papers before, but not this one.

A juror followed up by asking Professor Skinner how he presented the assignment and his expectations to the class. Professor Skinner said that the assignment had been on the syllabus all semester but that he had only given the article to the class two weeks before the essay was due. The jury then looked at the essay itself. Professor Skinner continued that he had regular office hours for students to come discuss questions they had about the course and the paper and that many students chose to utilize him as a resource. Mulder was not one of those students.
The jury then asked if Professor Skinner had discussed plagiarism with his class prior to the essay. He explained that he had discussed the issue with regards to the midterm and final, but not this essay in particular. He claimed that he did not believe it would have been necessary to go over plagiarism for an upper-level course like Little Green Men 200. He thought Haverford students, particularly those in an upper-level course, should know what plagiarism was and wouldn’t need it explained.

The jury then asked what Professor Skinner would have thought of the paper had Mulder used quotes. He said that the passages would not have constituted plagiarism, but that Mulder would have received a low grade for the lack of analysis. Professor Skinner then added that he had temporarily been given a 50 on the paper since the registrar did not like incompletes.

**Statement of Violation**

The jury very quickly agreed that a violation of the Honor Code had occurred. After reviewing the paper, they agreed it was a very clear case of plagiarism. A few jurors worried that due to Mulder’s habit of writing papers without taking notes that a case like this might have occurred before but had simply gone unnoticed. They decided not to worry about that since Professor Skinner had not noticed before.

The jury then began to discuss the phrasing of the statement of violation. They agreed that they did not think Mulder had plagiarized intentionally, but that he had still done so by not citing or quoting properly. The jury felt that his plagiarism by lacking quotes should be emphasized in the statement. The jury them consented to the following statement of violation:

*Mulder violated the Honor Code by representing another person’s scholarship as his own through improper citation (Honor Code 3.04 a).*

**Circumstantial Portion**

The jury and both parties were present at the circumstantial portion. Professor Skinner spoke first. Professor Skinner said that he believed there were external and internal factors to a situation like this. The external factor was that students were not being educated about plagiarism and proper citation at Haverford. He said that he had no intention of giving long lectures about plagiarism in his classes because they would be “a waste of his time and a waste of students’ time.” He urged the necessity of much more plagiarism education at Haverford, however. Regarding internal factors, he said that, no matter how poor Haverford’s plagiarism education is, it is still ultimately the student’s responsibility to know what plagiarism is and how to cite properly. Nothing absolves the student of that responsibility. Students need to talk with the professor about questions they have and Mulder never came to him for help.

Mulder then followed saying that he did not know enough about plagiarism, that he needed to know more, and “should have looked stuff up.” He said he had very little plagiarism education in high school and had learned most of what he knew from his two writing seminars at Haverford. He thought that he had learned enough from those classes, but in retrospect he realized that he learned a lot about citation methods but not what constituted plagiarism. Mulder said he should have sought help but he did not feel comfortable with others reading his writing. For this same reason he had only used the writing center once before.

A juror asked if Professor Skinner had helped with any difficulties with referencing in other students’ papers. Professor Skinner said that there were difficulties with the methods and how the article laid out these methods because the article did not make the experimental hypothesis clear. He said that this caused general problems with writing and analyzing the paper, not with referencing the article.

The jury then asked Mulder to follow up Professor Skinner’s responses. Mulder said that some of the article’s language was difficult to understand and that he tried to stay as faithful to the article as
possible. But he felt that he had “given credit where credit was due.” The jury asked if Mulder had any form of “prewriting.” He said that he just sits down and writes his papers. The jury asked if Mulder had ever been confronted for plagiarism before, and he responded that he had not. The confrontation was a complete surprise to him. A juror asked Mulder if he considered replacing one word with a synonym plagiarism. He said that he had not thought so, but now he knows better.

The jury then asked Mulder to discuss the timeline of his paper. He said that he started the paper a week before it was due and then continued work on it two or three days before the date it was due. He said that he only really looked over grammatical errors when he was editing, however. A juror then asked how he had changed his writing style since being confronted. Mulder said that he now has friends look over his papers to check for plagiarism.

The jury then asked Professor Skinner to leave the room so they could speak with Mulder alone. The jury asked Mulder if he thought that Professor Skinner was approachable. He said that he thought he was, but that he did not like asking others for help. A juror then asked if Mulder thought that the class prepared him to understand the article. He said that Professor Skinner had gone over the method very early in the class, but that the article was very hard to understand. They had not addressed the method since early in the course.

At this point the jury asked for Mulder to leave and for Professor Skinner to return so they could speak with him alone. A juror then asked Professor Skinner what he thought should happen in a case like this. He said that he was “willing to buy [that] it wasn’t malintent.” He thought that Mulder should receive an F on the assignment. A juror asked for clarification: was an F a zero or some other failing grade? Professor Skinner explained that he had given Mulder a 50 so that he could pass the class since he had worked very hard to improve during the second half of the course. Mulder had really stepped it up and, in Professor Skinner’s opinion, did not deserve to fail the course. He also thought he should be able to receive major credit for the course because he had improved so much.

The jury then asked Mulder to return and to propose resolutions to the jury. He had come very prepared with a full page of resolutions clearly broken into accountability, education, and restoration sections. Mulder wanted to know if a zero or separation were being considered and said that he really did not want to be separated. His suggested resolutions could be summarized as follows:

1) Accept a grade of 50 on the assignment
2) Take a class or be mentored on what constituted plagiarism

Professor Skinner then presented his resolutions. He did not think that Mulder should be separated and would welcome him back in any of his classes in the future as he felt the breach of trust had been restored. His resolutions were essentially:

1) The student body needed to be educated about plagiarism.
2) Giving Mulder a 50 would allow him to take full responsibility for his mistake.

The jury asked Mulder if he felt he deserved major credit. Mulder felt that he did because he had worked so hard to improve and that his GPA was already taking a pretty considerable hit. He explained that although he had not done particularly well on the midterm because he did not read the instructions as well as he should have, he had done all he could after the paper to turn the course around.

**Tentative Resolutions**

The jury first discussed the issue of Mulder's grade for the paper. The first juror expressed concern that not giving him course credit would make completing his major difficult. A second juror
stated that the goal of the body was to mete out the proper response for his conduct, and in this case, a 0.0 was appropriate. The juror went on to explain that Mulder's grade in the course was not a concern of Honor Council; getting involved in matters of major credit was not Honor Council's purpose. Another juror stated that he deserved a zero, viewing a 50 as a grade for someone who did a bad job on a paper, not for someone who plagiarized. Many of the jurors echoed these sentiments. A juror brought up that Professor Skinner had stated he felt that a 50 was the right grade, and asked that Professor Skinner's opinion be taken into consideration. Pursuant to further deliberation the jury consented to the spirit of giving Mulder a zero for the paper.

One juror emphasized that plagiarism was a very serious violation of the Honor Code and that the jury really needed to consider separation. The jury felt that separation was the wrong choice since this was an unintentional case of plagiarism, and neither Professor Skinner nor Mulder felt that separation would be helpful. Many jurors also felt that separation would be needlessly punitive especially considering that Mulder seemed very remorseful for his actions. The jury resolved not to separate Mulder.

The jury then moved on to how to educate Mulder and ensure he got help. One juror suggested he go to the writing center in order to learn about plagiarism prevention as well as paper planning techniques. Another juror felt that the writing center tutor program would be the right fit for Mulder's need. The jury then consented to the spirit of Mulder having a writing tutor for the next year.

The topic of restoration then arose. A juror stated that he felt that restoration of Professor Skinner and Mulder's relationship had already been completed, as Professor Skinner had invited Mulder back into his class. Many of the jurors agreed with this. In terms of community-wide restoration, jurors consented to a letter to the community.

Finally, the jury discussed the need to educate the community about plagiarism. One juror suggested talking to the writing center to suggest incorporating plagiarism education into their program. A juror who was familiar with the writing center said that it was already very difficult to find professors to teach the writing seminars and mandating them to teach plagiarism would be difficult. The jury agreed that it was not its place to mandate education techniques but would nonetheless like to encourage the professors who taught writing seminars to include more about plagiarism and writing processes. The jury consented to the spirit of recommending the writing center director to urge professors to go over plagiarism and writing processes.

The jury drafted the following resolutions:

1) Mulder must have a writing partner in conjunction with the Writing Center for one year.
2) The jury recommends that the director of the writing center urges freshmen writing seminar professors to include education about plagiarism and writing processes in their course content.
3) The jury suggests that Mulder receives a 0.0 on the paper.
4) Mulder will write a letter to the community to be included in the abstract

Finalizing Resolutions

Professor Skinner decided not to attend, but Mulder was present and spoke uninterrupted about the tentative resolutions. He stated that he felt that the resolutions were fair, but was troubled by getting a 0.0. He said that this would cause him to lose credit for the class, which would put pressure to complete his major on time. The jury asked if Mulder felt he should receive credit for the class. He responded that he had done the work and felt he deserved the class credit. He went on to state that he had made a mistake, but felt he was making sufficient amends for it. The jury then asked a series of questions about completing his major. Mulder responded that he had decided on majoring in Alien Studies at a relatively late date, and so was stressed to finish all of the necessary classes. He went on to state that without credit
from Little Green Men 200, he would need to take a fifth class in order to complete his major. Since he had to write his thesis in addition to taking a fifth class this would put a lot of pressure on him. The jury asked some clarifying questions about his schedule and requirements.

**Deliberations**

The jury began to discuss the resolutions, starting with the grade for the paper. One juror felt that the paper should be switched to a 50% as Professor Skinner had wanted. Several other jurors supported this switch. Still other jurors felt that since this was a case of plagiarism, it should result in a 0.0 on the paper, citing the seriousness of the violation as well as precedent. One juror, who was a senior, stated that she could sympathize with the pressure of taking a fifth class while working on a thesis, but felt that her personal emotions weren't important. Another juror reiterated that while 50% was proper for a bad paper, plagiarism had to result in 0.0. The juror went on to state that it was not the jury's concern whether or not Mulder got credit for the class. Another juror stated that giving a zero was symbolic of the Honor Code's zero tolerance stance towards plagiarism. One juror brought up the possibility of having him rewrite the paper to get credit for the class while keeping the 0.0 physical grade.

The jury felt comfortable with leaving the option to give credit up to Professor Skinner, as the grade was up to the professor as well. One juror raised issue with this plan, feeling that a student who plagiarized should not get credit for the course, but offered to stand outside consensus. The jury had no other changes it wanted to make, and consented to the following resolutions:

**Final Resolutions**

1) Mulder must have a writing partner in conjunction with the writing center for one year.
2) The jury recommends that the director of the writing center urges freshmen writing seminar professors to include education about plagiarism and writing processes in their course content.
3) The jury suggests that Mulder receive a 0.0 on the paper.
4) Mulder will write a letter to the community to be included in the abstract.
5) The jury suggests to Professor Skinner that Mulder will only receive major credit for the course on the condition that he rewrites his paper without change to his course grade.

**Fox Mulder's Letter to the Community**

I unintentionally committed an act of plagiarism on a written assignment. At the time of the assignment, I believed I was referencing things on my paper correctly, but the professor pointed out that the problems were not the citations, but instead that "in many passages, since the phrasing in your paper so closely mimicked the phrasing in the article, the words weren't 'your words'." I did not intend to plagiarize and I did not think I was. But the professor informed me that what I had done in my paper sort of fit the definition of plagiarism. As a result, the professor proceeded to talk to the chair of the department and the Honor Council. He did say however "your case was unique (with the inclusion of citations and that you were possibly confused re: the usage of citations). However, they both told me that this is likely an Honor Code violation." As a result, I am writing this letter in order to share my story with the community.

The written assignment required us to read and summarize an article. We needed to say what the researchers did, how they did it, what they found, and how they interpreted it. After reading the article, I realized that it was a hard article to understand, thus I needed to be careful when summarizing it. I went through every part of the article multiple times to make sure I didn’t miss anything and included

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everything that was important in order to give an accurate summary of the article. I knew I had to stay faithful to the article without plagiarizing or taking credit for something that was not mine. For that reason, I went through the article in order and made sure I addressed everything that was said. I knew that there was going to be a thin line between summarizing and plagiarizing. I thought I had stayed clear of that, but the professor thought otherwise. He said that my work was too similar to the original article thus they were technically not “my words.” I did not think I was doing anything wrong given the complexity of the article; I just wanted to give an accurate summary. I tried my best to make sure I didn't take credit for anything that wasn’t mine and that's why I made sure to use references and mention the authors’ names and what they thought and such. I made sure to say what they did; it was never my intention to take credit for what they said. I thought I avoided that by using phrases like "they found.. the researchers thought.. the experimenters found." I didn't think that that could be thought of as plagiarizing. Some things were hard to paraphrase, so I knew I had to be careful and make sure I let it be known that it was what the experimenters said, not me. Nothing like that has ever happened to me before. I truly believed I wasn't plagiarizing. I tried to make sure I accurately explained what they did and how they did it. I never meant to plagiarized. I have written many papers and I had never, ever had any issues. I truly apologize, but I did not think I was taking credit for their work at the time. That is the one thing I tried to avoid, but I over stepped some boundaries that I did not mean to and seemed to have misunderstood.

The jury decided that I committed plagiarism by not citing things the proper way, I failed the assignment which is completely reasonable seeing as I did plagiarize even though it was not intentional. I am accountable for my actions and will make sure to never commit a violation like this again. Since I clearly overstepped some boundaries, I have been reviewing and talking to other people about what plagiarism is and how I can avoid it in the future. At the time I did not know I was committing an act of plagiarism, so I am trying to be more informed on the subject. It was never my intention to violate the honor code or the community's trust. I am very sorry for my actions and if I could do the assignment over I will definitely seek help and make sure I follow the rules. I never meant to hurt my relationship with the professor or take advantage of his trust in me as his student. I am truly sorry for what I did and I plan to make it up to the community any way I can. I do appreciate all the trust the community puts on me as a student and I am very sorry it seems that I took it for granted. I will definitely work really hard from now on to make sure I never, ever violate the honor code again. I made a mistake which I am paying for and will make sure I never repeat.

It was never my intention to take credit for someone else’s work. I have never done anything like that nor would I ever purposely and consciously do that. I always try to do the best I can in every assignment and do my best to make sure I follow the rules. In this case, I misunderstood some guidelines in terms of summarizing what the researchers did in their study. I have learned many things since I have been at HC, one of which, is making sure never to take credit for something I did not do and give the credit to the person who deserves it. Unfortunately, I did not do this in this assignment, and for that I truly apologize. I take full responsibility for my actions even though it was never my intention to do such a thing.
Questions for Discussion

1. Would it have been appropriate for Honor Council to recommend a 50% grade for the paper? Should a student ever receive credit for an assignment containing plagiarism?
2. Should they have allowed Mulder to receive major credit for the class? Or should they have recommended that he not receive major credit at all?
3. How strongly should a confronted party's ignorance of citation techniques play into the decisions of the jury?
4. Does Haverford provide adequate citation and plagiarism education for its students? What could the school do better?
5. Do you think it is the responsibility of Haverford to educate its students about citation and plagiarism? Or is it the responsibility of the student?