Aaron, Sarah, Tom, and Professor DuVall

An Honor Council Academic Trial
Abstract Released Spring 2002

Abstract Discussions:
Wednesday, February 20th at 10pm in the Sunken Lounge
Thursday, February 21st at 1pm in the Smith Room of the DC

Introduction:
Aaron, Sarah, and Tom were students in Professor DuVall's class. Professor DuVall's homework assignments were given as a two-part process; the homework assignment was graded and handed back, and then the students were allowed to rewrite the assignment and submit the revised homework. Students were allowed to collaborate on both parts of the process, but were told not to share the final papers that would be handed into the professor. In Aaron, Sarah, and Tom's individual rewrites, Professor DuVall found a similarity in the wording of one of their responses and asked them to contact Honor Council.

Fact Finding I:
Professor DuVall's statement:
Professor DuVall stated that as he was grading the rewritten responses handed in separately by Aaron, Sarah, and Tom, he noticed that one passage was the same among the three papers. He further rationalized that due to all his years of teaching experience, he could tell when wording of a response is too similar for it to have happened by chance. In this situation, he felt that the similar responses provided by the three students must have been due to excessive collaboration. He told the jury that in his class, students were allowed to work with each other but they were not allowed to share final papers (the ones that would be handed in). After Professor DuVall noticed the similarities, he told the three students to contact Honor Council.

Aaron's statement:
Aaron said that he and the other two students had spoken with each other about the same question on the homework rewrite that they were all struggling with. Sarah went to Professor DuVall for help on the assignment and afterwards Sarah explained the assignment to Aaron without showing him her paper. Sarah then gave Aaron her assignment to hand in after class so that she could hurry off to a meeting. Aaron looked at Sarah's final paper and from that wrote up his response. Aaron also said that he worked on the response aloud with Tom after class on the day the assignment was due (the assignment was due later that afternoon).
Sarah’s statement:
Sarah told the jury that she showed the rewritten assignment to Tom while working together in the library the night before the assignment was due. She also said that she gave her paper to Aaron, the day the assignment was due, to hand in after class.

Tom’s statement:
Tom did not have anything new to add about the events that had taken place. He explained that the way the three of them worked together on their assignments for class reflected how they responded to the assignments so similarly on the rewritten assignment.

Jury Questions:
The jury asked a number of clarifying questions in order to better understand the sequence of events.

Jury Deliberation I:
Members of the jury found the facts in all three students’ statements confusing and did not understand the order of events and the extent of the possible plagiarism. Therefore, the jury concluded that they needed to further clarify the sequence of events before coming to a statement of violation. They decided to hold a second fact finding session. The jury also decided that the students (with their consent) should be questioned separately in order to give the confronted parties a chance to have their voices heard without the other parties present. The students gave their consent to have a second, individual fact finding.

Fact Finding II:
Fact finding II was used to get an idea of an exact timeline of the events that took place. It came out that not all three students had seen the paper at the same time. Tom also claimed to have not seen Sarah’s paper the day that the homework was due.

Jury Deliberation II:
The jury decided to treat the students as three separate parties due to the information found in the second fact finding session. The jury also discussed the distinction between the three different cases and how looking at another person’s paper without their knowledge is a violation of the Social Honor Code. The jury came to the following statements of violation with one juror standing outside of consensus on the three statements as a whole:

Statements of Violation:
Statement #1:
Aaron violated the Honor Code in three separate ways.
1. Aaron violated the Honor Code by not following Professor DuVall’s instructions regarding the sharing of completed homework.
2. By looking at Sarah’s paper without her consent, Aaron acted with a lack of integrity, thus violating the Honor Code.
3. Since Aaron represented another student(s)' scholarship as his own, he committed an act of plagiarism and broke the Honor Code.

Statement #2:
Sarah violated the Honor Code by not following Professor DuVall's instructions regarding the sharing of completed homework.

Statement #3:
Tom violated the Honor Code in two separate ways.
1. Tom violated the Honor Code by not following Professor DuVall’s instructions regarding excessive collaboration.
2. Since Tom represented another student(s)' scholarship as his own, he committed an act of plagiarism and broke the Honor Code.

Circumstantial:
Tom said that he did not know that he and the other students were excessively collaborating at the time. Aaron said the excessive collaboration was absent-minded and not intentional.

Resolution Discussion:
The jury debated whether or not the trial process itself was enough for Sarah, and if so, what resolutions were necessary. The jury also debated about making the distinction between failing the re-write versus failing the entire two-part assignment. It was further decided that the breach of trust was not in need of repair between the students and the professor. The following resolutions were consented upon with one juror standing outside of consensus for Sarah’s resolution and the same juror standing outside of consensus for the five resolutions as a whole.

Resolutions:
1. Aaron will write a letter to the community addressing how, by looking at Sarah’s paper, he violated the trust that exists between students in this community.

2. Sarah will write a letter to Professor DuVall about what she and/or the professor could have done to avoid this situation.

3. Tom and Aaron will receive a 0.0 for the assignment (this resolution was later changed).

4. Tom and Aaron will meet with Professor DuVall individually to discuss how their collaboration with other students in the past detracted from their learning. During this meeting, Tom and Aaron will each create a plan with Professor DuVall for how future collaboration can contribute to their learning.

5. After the meeting with Professor DuVall, Tom and Aaron will each write a letter to the community addressing the distinction between sharing ideas and excessive collaboration.
Presentation of Resolutions:
Tom expressed unhappiness at the idea of failing the entire assignment since most of the course’s grade comes out of homework assignments. He felt that it was unfair to fail the entire assignment since the re-write was the only part that contained plagiarism.

Jury Deliberations:
Taking Tom’s concerns into consideration, the jury decided that the original resolution number two was unfair and they came to final consensus on the revision of the second resolution. They changed it to: “Tom and Aaron will receive a 0.0 on the rewrite.”

After a short discussion, the jury came to final consensus on the resolutions with the modification to resolution number two. One juror stood outside of consensus for both resolution number one and for the five resolutions as a whole.

Questions:
1. Was it appropriate, in this situation, for the jury to separate the confronted parties for the second fact finding process?
2. Was the original resolution of “Tom and Aaron receiving a 0.0 for the assignment” fair or unfair. Even though only part of the assignment was plagiarized, should Tom and Aaron have received a 0.0 for the entire assignment as the jury originally decided?
3. Should a resolution be less lenient because a party was unaware of violating the honor code?
Dear Community:

I am writing this letter to give you a better understanding of the distinction between sharing ideas and excessive collaboration. Sharing ideas is similar to working together, with limitations and boundaries. Excessive collaboration however is when these boundaries are crossed. Excessive collaboration can be linked to plagiarism of other peoples’ work. Sharing ideas, on the other hand is different because it requires equal contributions from all the members of the group working together.

Sincerely
Tom

Dear Community:

I would like to address the issue of sharing ideas and excessive collaboration. In a class I have come across this dilemma of what the differences are between them and I will discuss the distinctions between the two. Sharing ideas expands your knowledge or when one converses with their peers and discusses issues. An example would be in a class if there were homework that is due students would get together and discuss the homework and what is required to do the homework and how to go about solving the questions or problems given. After this the students would hopefully have a better understanding of the homework and can finish the task at hand. Excessive collaboration is when others are using one person’s ideas, views or answers in the group. It would be that one person is working and the others are taking advantage of that work. This in not fair to the student that is doing the work, and the teacher and goes against the whole process of education. Because the student who is taking advantage is not learning anything they are just abusing another student’s knowledge. So in short sharing ideas is when you bring something into the group and hopefully leave with a better understanding and excessive collaboration is taking advantage of another student.

Aaron

To the community:

In a class I had taken I had looked at another student’s assignment when she had asked me to just turn it in for her. I made a grave mistake, which I truly regret. This is because not only did I lose trust between me and other student but also between myself and every other student. Due to my mistake others cannot rely on me or trust me to just turn in an assignment for them. In our community we do have a trust among one another that when one student asks the other to hand in an assignment the first student expects that they would do just so and not take advantage of the situation. But I violated that trust and I am deeply sorry. I now understand how important trust is between two students. Without trusting one another it would be extremely difficult for us to form a united community. I know now the error in my ways and I know what my peers expect from me.

Aaron