Adam and Professor Zoe
Joint Student-Administrative Panel
Abstract Released Fall 2001

Introduction: Adam contacted Honor Council about an assignment that he had submitted to Professor Zoe. In this assignment, he made remarks that were perceived by Professor Zoe to be disrespectful and threatening. He thought Professor Zoe was never going to read this part of the assignment. Honor Council came to consensus on a suspicion of violation, and after lengthy debate about the social versus academic nature of this situation, decided to convene a Joint Student-Administrative Panel.

Fact-Finding/Circumstantial: Note: The Joint Panel procedure requires all information, both factual and circumstantial, to be given at the same time.

Professor Zoe presented her statement first.

Professor Zoe’s Statement: The assignment given to the students included a segment where they jot down their ideas about the assignment on scratch paper, with the goal of not censoring themselves. This scratch paper was to be handed in with the final assignment. She said in class that she would probably not read this work, but check it for completion.

Upon skimming through Adam’s idea sheet, she noticed a series of sentences that struck her as very offensive, and proceeded to read the entire thing. The statements made by Adam in his freewriting were both threatening and disrespectful. In the past, she’s encouraged students to complain about the assignment to get their ideas flowing, but she had never received work with hateful comments directed at her. What she found problematic (and the reason she brought this to Honor Council) was not that Adam had these thoughts or even wrote them down, but that he turned them in. Professor Zoe felt that, essentially, those things had been said to her face. She also discussed how these events impacted what she referred to as her intellectual intimacy with Adam. She felt that this work had injured the close academic relationship that she sees as necessary for the two of them to collaborate constructively on his coursework. She expressed her desire for the Panel to somehow address and facilitate the repair of this intellectual intimacy.

The Panel then asked several questions of the professor, which resulted in the promulgation of the following tidbits of knowledge.

Professor Zoe sometimes receives work that has profanity, but never directed at her. She expects the students to complain about the assignment to an extent, but felt that this crossed a line. Since the incident, having Adam in class has only presented minor
problems for her, and most of her fears were alleviated by talking to him and understanding that he had not meant for her to read what he wrote. However, she described some sort of apprehension or fear at the prospect of reading his subsequent work, due to the fact that on some level she was scared of what she might find within. Ultimately, at the time of the hearing she felt their relationship to be improved.

**Adam’s Statement:** Adam began by stating he had submitted “vicious, cruel, crude and greatly unmerited attacks” to Professor Zoe. When jotting down his ideas, he wasn’t thinking about what he was writing and merely doing it to get it done. He misunderstood what she had said in class about the freewrite, and thought it would never be read by anyone else. He did not try and excuse his actions, and told the Panel that he could not believe he had written such things.

He contextualized the events for the Panel to try and give a glimpse of his circumstances while he was doing the work. He had recently found that he could no longer take part in an activity that was a very important part of his life (and for controlling his stress and emotions), and work from his other classes was overwhelming him. Certain aspects of the way Haverford works frustrated him, and dealing with that was giving him trouble. He used the assignment to vent his frustrations and hurt someone else. He ended by expressing his shame and sorrow at what had happened, offered sincere apologies to the professor and asked for the chance to rebuild their relationship.

Again, the Panel procured pieces of knowledge with insightful questioning.

Since he arrived at Haverford, Adam has had to deal with censorship of his speech, and found himself inadvertently offending others due to his background. This has been increasingly difficult for him to deal with. Unable to effectively blow off steam, his frustration came out in the freewriting. He forgot about what he wrote after completing the idea sheet due to the fact that he hadn’t actually invested himself in that part of the assignment. Since the incident, he has been both motivated and shamed by the personal interest that Professor Zoe has taken in him. He has been a participant member of the class and enjoys the material much more than before. He hadn’t thought about what he did in the context of the Code until confronted by the professor, and stated that he had indeed violated the Code. He said that having those thoughts and writing them down were not intrinsically wrong yet he did not act responsibly in handing them in.

The Panel then asked for recommendations from both parties for resolutions that would address accountability, education and the rebuilding of the trust infrastructure.

Professor Zoe had two major concerns that she wanted addressed in the resolutions: the rebuilding of their intellectual intimacy and some structure in which Adam could reflect upon the power of words and how they can affect others (without brainwashing him into a “right” way of thinking and speaking i.e. without telling him to censor himself).
Adam did not have specific suggestions, and indicated his willingness to do whatever the jury and Professor Zoe felt necessary to make reparations for the damage he had done.

**Panel Deliberations:** The Panel then set out to decide if Adam had broken the Honor Code and if so, how.

The Panel felt that Adam had indeed violated the Honor Code, but they were cautious in clarifying that he did not violate the Code by having the thoughts, but rather in submitting them to the Professor. The Panel discussed the problems of speech when two people interpret the same word differently, and the effects that that differential understanding can have on a person. Because Adam did not attach the meaning to the ideas he wrote that the professor gave them, the Panel decided that the more pressing issue was the submission of work that was taken to be disrespectful. The other issue that the Panel addressed was how the submission had affected the professor and her sense of acceptance in the community as well as her teacher-student relationship with Adam. The Panel came to consensus on the following statement of violation:

- **The student violated the Honor Code by showing a lack of respect for the professor in submitting work that served to undermine the “sense of acceptance [that is] essential to [her] participation in the community.”**

The Panel then turned to the task of education, accountability and repairing the breach of trust in resolutions.

There was strong agreement that holding the student accountable through a resolution would not be very effective or productive at this point, since he had already gone through the process of realizing Professor Zoe had read what he wrote as well as the trial process. It was the belief of the Panel that the other resolutions would take care of holding him accountable.

Being careful and conscious of what is contained in work submitted to professors or to the public in general ensures that a person is not treated disrespectfully, especially if the disrespect is unintentional. The Panel wanted Adam to discuss the responsibility of knowing and being aware of what one is handing in and how it might affect another person. The Panel decided that a letter released with the abstract would be a good way to inform the rest of the community about this issue.

The Panel was immediately concerned that it did not cross the line between trying to help Adam reflect on what he’s done in a constructive way and telling him what was appropriate to think or say. It seemed that Adam hadn’t fully understood how much he had affected Professor Zoe with his words. The Panel decided that some sort of reading or writing would help him get to this issue. As the issue of academic intimacy was largely at hand as well, the Panel felt it appropriate to combine the two, and have both the professor and Adam read something (i.e. an article) before a mediated dialogue on the nature of speech.
The dialogue would use the article as a starting point, a way to generate ideas and give the parties something else to talk about other than what Adam actually handed in. The Panel discussed many issues that it felt were important in choosing the article, and decided that it wanted something that would discuss the limits of free speech and the responsibility that having free speech entails. The validity of the source was an important consideration. Since the Panel could not get an article before the end of the trial, it was given to the parties after.

After discussing the above issues, the Panel came to consensus on the following resolutions:

- The student will write a letter to the community which should address the responsibility entailed in submitting work to the academic and public realm. This letter will be released with the abstract.

- The professor and student will engage in a mediated dialogue addressing the issues raised in the hearing including, but not limited to, the power of words in relation to freedom of speech. As a starting point for the dialogue, the parties will read a piece of writing provided by the panel.

The Panel met with the parties again and presented the statement of violation and the resolutions together. Both parties agreed with the statement of violation and were ready to engage in the resolutions.

Questions

1.) Did the nature of this case warrent a Joint Panel, or should it have gone to an academic trial?

2.) Was the nature of the violation social or academic?

3.) Is the submission of disrespectful work a problem in terms of the Code?

4.) What are the limits of free speech in academic and social considerations? Do we have a responsibility to censor ourselves when we will knowingly or inadvertently hurt someone? What does it mean to censor one's self? Is it a censorship merely of speech, or of though also?
Dear fellow Haverfordians,

One of the many marks of a good writer is one who is aware of their audience. One writes differently considering who will be reading their writing. It is common for teachers to instruct their students to write with such attentiveness. This awareness can be applied everyday outside the classroom as well. In fact, everybody applies this technique without even realizing it; one acts and speaks differently around their parents than around their friends than around their professors. It is necessary to conduct yourself appropriately in certain situations, but it is also good to have an environment in which to relax and act immaturely, to quote Jimmy Buffet: “If we couldn’t laugh we would all go insane.”

As important as it is to conduct yourself appropriately to the situation, it is equally important to express emotions that perhaps cannot be expressed in that situation. It is necessary to find an appropriate forum to express yourself, whether it is a close confident, a journal, or just to be left alone with your thoughts. We cannot help the emotions we feel, but it is how we react to them that defines who we are.