Doris and Professor Schuster  
**An Honor Council Trial**  
Released April 2007

**Introduction:**
Doris was a student in Professor Schuster’s class. After turning in a paper that borrowed heavily from a JSTOR\(^1\) article, Doris decided to turn herself in. Professor Schuster served as the confronting party even though he had not yet read the paper in question when Doris came forward. After submitting statements to Honor Council, Council decided to send the case to an academic trial.

**Fact Finding:**

*Professor Schuster’s Statement*

Shortly after break, Doris notified Professor Schuster that she thought she had violated the Honor Code. Doris and Professor Schuster looked through the Honor Code together in order to see how they should proceed. From reading the code it looked like Doris had an obligation to contact Honor Council, but they decided that Professor Schuster would call a Dean, and without mentioning Doris’s name, verify that that was indeed how they should proceed. The Dean confirmed that taking the matter before Honor Council was the correct action, and Doris proceeded to contact the Co-Chairs.

Professor Schuster noted that he had not read Doris’ paper before she contacted him and that he had no plans to do so.

*Doris’s Statement*

Doris began by agreeing with what Professor Schuster had said. She said she had written the paper just before break. She had been having a hard time coming up with a good essay. She had lots of ideas but no good way to tie them all together and “had a thread but just couldn’t articulate it”. Looking through JSTOR (originally with the intent of citing not plagiarizing), she found an essay that she said “she wished she could have written” and ended up stealing not the article’s words, but its ideas. She incorporated the article into her essay, which she said made her feel more comfortable than just stealing it outright. Over break she felt increasingly guilty, and after talking to her boyfriend and spending some time thinking she realized that she needed to turn herself in, which she did after returning from break.

Doris agreed with Professor Schuster’s description of the course of events and added that she was very embarrassed about what had happened and thus reluctant to bring it to trial. However, experiencing the trial process she was feeling much more comfortable.

*Questions from the Jury:*

The jury asked about the extent of plagiarism and Doris replied that there was no direct word for word copying, what she had stolen was the ideas in the article. It was also noted that she had not cited the JSTOR article at all. The jury asked if they could see a copy of the essay and Doris replied that she had actually deleted it from her computer. A question to both parties about

\(^1\) An internet journal database.
their level of trust in one another indicated that due to Doris’s responsibility in coming forward, that there was not a breach of trust between Doris and Professor Schuster. There was also a question as to why Doris had not come forward earlier and she said that she had hoped her conscience would be muted, but realized once she came back on campus that it wasn’t going away. It was also clarified that she had not talked to Professor Schuster before the essay was due to get help with the essay.

Deliberations:

After the jury had finished their questions for both Doris and Professor Schuster they left the room and the jury began deliberations on a statement of violation. The jury fairly quickly came to consensus that Doris’s actions, despite her exemplary actions in taking responsibility, still constituted a violation of the Honor Code. After some discussion of wording, the jury came to consensus on the following statement of violation:

The student committed an act of plagiarism by representing another person's scholarship as her own and thus violated the Honor Code and the academic standards of the community.

Circumstantial Portion:

During the circumstantial portion of the trial, Doris reiterated the feelings of guilt that had been strongly apparent in her statement as well as in her comments throughout the trial. She made it very clear that she was placing herself “in the hands of” the jury, who could propose whatever it deemed necessary in order for her to repair the breach of trust.

Questions from the Jury:

The jury inquired into the events leading up to the violation. Doris told the jury that since it was midterm week, she had a few other papers due in addition to the one she submitted to Professor Schuster. She also stated that while it was a busy week, she felt she could handle it; the other papers did not factor into her decision to plagiarize. Jury members then asked Doris to talk about what she thought had led her to plagiarize her paper. Doris’s response was the same as in her statement and during the fact-finding portion of the trial. The ideas she came across in the scholarly article were so similar to the ones she’d been having trouble articulating before when preparing to write the paper, so she felt “entitled” in using them as her own.

A juror asked Doris how she was doing in her other classes. Doris explained that while she was doing well, she was still a bit frustrated. She felt as though she had done a lot better in her classes the previous semester. During the previous semester, Doris said she had enjoyed her status as an excellent student in all of her classes. She felt energized and excited by it. She said she missed that feeling now that things were a little different. She had been having the most trouble in Professor Schuster’s class. Doris mentioned that she had really wanted to impress Professor Schuster with her paper. The ideas she stole were of the academic level she had wanted to achieve.

Lastly, the jury asked about Doris’s well-being outside of academics. At first, Doris answered that everything was fine. The jury wanted to know if she thought there was anything in her private life that may have been causing her stress. Doris said she was dealing with some difficult problems within her family life, but Doris did not feel these issues were circumstances of her violation. Doris seemed to feel fully responsible for what she had done.
The jury wondered if Doris had any suggestions as to how she should repair the breach of trust. Doris replied that she had no prior experience with this sort of thing and did not know what suggestions to give. She wished to leave the decision of what was necessary to the jury.

**Deliberations:**

The jury used two main concerns to shape the tentative resolutions: Doris seemed to have lost her sense of the intrinsic value in scholarship and had become focused very much on grades instead; and although Doris had asserted that her problems at home had nothing to do with her academics, the jury suspected that they had.

The jury wanted Doris to enjoy learning more for its own sake and less for rewards or special attention. To address this issue, the jury planned to recommend that Doris receive a 0.0 for the paper and be required to write another paper for no credit. Although most jurors agreed that a rewrite was in order, there was much debate about the appropriate topic for the rewrite.

Also, the jury planned to recommend that Doris’s papers for the remainder of the semester be returned without grades and with comments only. This was met with concerns that it would be a bit condescending and ineffective.

In order to help Doris regain her love for scholarship, the jury considered several options including a position as an unpaid grader, a tutor for a local high school, or any other position in which she would also be helping others to value scholarship. These turned out to be slightly impractical and difficult to execute, given the fact that, for instance, the academic department involved had little or no student grader positions open at the time. The jurors all agreed that Doris should write a letter to the community. It seemed that throughout the trial, Doris had been very cooperative and open to the process. Given how much new perspective she had gained from the trial, the jurors felt they could anticipate a thoughtful letter to the community. The jury agreed that the letter to the community should be focused. Several jurors worried Doris might be too hard on herself in a letter, and wanted to make sure the letter shared her experiences and expressed her thoughts in a more positive light.

Considering Doris’s emotional well-being, the jury wanted to recommend that Doris give more serious thought to how the difficulties of her private life may have been affecting or may affect her academic life. The jury concluded the meeting without coming to consensus on tentative resolutions.

When they reconvened, the jury revisited many of the same topics that had been under debate. There was still no general consensus on how the rewrite of the paper should be assigned in order to help Doris rediscover the intrinsic value of scholarship. Eventually, the jury rested on recommending that Doris and Professor Schuster agree on the topic together. They realized they could not adequately assess the issue without proper knowledge of what Doris formerly held to be the intrinsic value of scholarship and also without familiarity with the subject matter of Professor Schuster’s course.

The jury also recommended that papers for the remainder of the semester be returned without grades, but they wanted to know Doris and Professor Schuster’s feelings about it.

The jury came to consensus on the following tentative resolutions and recommendations, with no one standing outside:

1. *The student will receive a 0.0 on the plagiarized paper.*
2. *The student will write a new paper for no credit on a topic to be agreed upon with the professor.*
3. *The student will not be informed of her grades on any remaining papers for the course.*
4. The student will write a letter to the community that focuses on what she has gained from the experience.

Presentation of Resolutions:

The tentative resolutions and recommendations were emailed to Doris and Professor Schuster, before the parties and the jury discussed them together.

The jury started off by stating the main concerns they were attempting to address in forming the resolutions. Doris then explained that the jury had misconstrued her in thinking she was in it for the grades rather than for the intrinsic value of scholarship.

Both parties agreed that the resolutions were fair and not too heavy-handed, with the exception of Resolution #3. Professor Schuster explained that, given the amount of time left in the semester, Doris probably would not receive the remainder of her papers until after the semester had ended anyway. Doris agreed that Resolution #3 was unnecessary since she looked forward more to the comments than the grade on her papers.

Both parties were asked for additional suggestions. Doris offered that she had been considering keeping an academic journal for the class. This way, she could help herself prepare for coming assignments by processing class material on a regular basis. The journal would be reviewed by Professor Schuster. The jurors agreed this sounded like a good idea.

Soon after, the group came to consensus on the final resolutions:

1. The student will receive a 0.0 on the plagiarized paper.
2. The student will write a new paper for no credit on a topic to be agreed upon with the professor. The paper will be due by the last day of the semester.
3. The student will keep a journal to address the class material, to be reviewed by the professor, for the rest of the semester.
4. The student will write a letter to the community that focuses on what she’s gained from the experience to be released with the abstract.

The trial ended at that point, with everyone in the room feeling very positive about the overall experience. Several members of the community expressed their gratitude for the chance to be there and to share the positive experience. Shortly after the trial had ended, Doris requested the email addresses of the jurors and took it upon herself to compose a note of thanks to the members of the jury.

Discussion Questions

1. Is there a difference between turning yourself in and being brought to Honor Council by your professor? If so, should this make much of a difference in the trial?
2. How much should family issues be taken into account when thinking about potential resolutions?
3. To what extent can a jury try to change how a student relates to scholarship? Is this an appropriate realm for the jury?
To the community,

There are some things I need to tell you. I plagiarized a set of ideas and observations, paraphrased them, and carefully kneaded them into my own writing, source un-cited. You were sitting next to me when I did this, and I was hoping you weren’t looking at my computer screen. Or, if you weren’t sitting next to me, you asked me how the paper was going, and I lied to you about it. I might have even brought it up.

In fact, you were standing by the professor’s mailbox when I turned the paper in. You smiled at me, and I had serious second thoughts about doing this. Because you smiled, I actually came back a few minutes later, withdrew the paper, went back to my room, changed a few sentences, added a paragraph, and tried to dilute the not-me parts. I came back to the mailbox to turn it in again, and this time you weren’t there, but I passed you on the walk, I saw you in the campus center, and in the library, we chatted. I told you I had just turned in this paper and was glad to be done with it. As it turned out, I was not done with it. I had dreams about it. I couldn’t hold eye contact with you. A week later, right back from fall break, I turned myself in.

I have been reluctant to write this. A few months have passed since my trial, and this letter is overdue. I still feel grief and regret about my breach of your trust, despite having been assured by my professor, members of Honor Council, my jurors and peers that the breach has been restored. I've been confronting my guilt with the continued sensation that the trial is not yet over, with still unsolved problems on my conscience. Part of my reluctance comes from a fear that I will be recognized, and exposed, through this letter. Part of the fear I have of that exposure is that the thoughtfulness and forgiveness with which I was treated in my trial will have been some kind of fluke, and that I will ultimately be as unable to resolve the breach between you and me, as I am so far unable to resolve the breach within myself.

The abstract of the trial mentions that jurors were concerned that my “heavy overtones of complete remorse” would make this letter a downer, or even diffuse its focus. I think, though, that there is a positive message in the melancholia. During the trial, I was careful to talk about "What I did" rather than "What happened." I felt guilty, and ashamed, and it was important to me to take responsibility for what was undoubtedly conscious, deliberate plagiarism. I tried not to make excuses. At one point, a juror stopped me mid-sentence, and told me it was not my place to decide what had or had not been a factor behind this mistake: that was the jurors' task. She told me that it was a symptom of my guilt that I insisted on being solely to blame for this happening, and that the aim of the trial was to take a more comprehensive view. I was surprised, and awakened, and grateful, and from that point to now I have tried to take a more comprehensive view. I am able to talk about both "What I did" and "What happened," and that may be the great thing that the trial gave to me: not absolution, but the assurance that I was not as small as that small-minded, small-hearted act, that I had in a way been dwarfed by circumstance, or had one small part of me seized and gruesomely distorted as in a curved mirror.

So this is now a public secret. I do not feel very good about that, about pseudonymity. What I want is to tell you about this myself, face to face, but I’m not that brave. Instead, as I write this, with you next to me, I’m hoping that you aren’t looking at my computer screen.

What would I say if I told you myself? This, and something more: I am so, so sorry.
Doris