Abstract Discussions: Tuesday, April 1 & Wednesday, April 2 at 8:00 PM in Zubrow

Dory and Professor Nemo
An Honor Council Academic Trial
Released Spring 2008

This abstract was released in accordance with the abstract timeline in the Constitution.

Confronted Party: Dory, Confronting Party: Professor Nemo

Introduction:

Professor Nemo gave his Oceanography 103: Navigating the Ocean Floor class an assignment that required students to use five articles from academic journals as sources. Upon reading Dory’s paper, Professor Nemo noticed that she included a source in her works cited page that she did not seem to have read. Professor Nemo asked Dory to contact Honor Council. Dory contacted Honor Council and admitted that she had not read the source in question. She said she was intimidated by the trial process and preferred to settle the issue through mediation. Professor Nemo was not interested in this, preferring more official channels. After some debate, Honor Council consented that there was a suspicion of violation and sent the matter to an Academic Trial.

Fact Finding:

Professor Nemo’s Statement:

Professor Nemo gave the class over a month to work on the assignment in question. For two to three weeks prior to the assignment’s due date, Professor Nemo allotted a portion of each class for Q&A regarding the assignment. He also arranged for a class trip to Magill Library to meet with the reference librarian and learn how to use the library’s reference materials, including electronic resources. The assignment called for the use of five articles from journals, as well as a bibliography and footnotes. Dory’s paper lacked footnotes, and included an incorrect citation of one of the articles. This made Professor Nemo suspicious that Dory had intentionally misrepresented the number of articles she had actually read by not including footnotes to distinguish between original articles she read and articles whose information she learned of through other sources. Professor Nemo confronted Dory about the possibility of her not reading all five articles as her works cited list implied. Dory admitted that she had only read four of the five articles. Professor Nemo gave Dory an “F” on the paper for not fulfilling the requirements of the assignment. Professor Nemo asked Dory to contact Honor Council.

Dory’s Statement:

Dory prepared for writing her paper by selecting the five articles she would use. Before sitting down to write the paper, she had physically collected only a few of the articles, and had
reference information for the rest of them so she could retrieve the actual articles through JSTOR. Dory sat down to write her paper during a single ten-hour chunk of time. During this time she was unable to find the last of her five articles to use for her paper. Dory decided to use block quotations from this fifth article that were embedded in one of the other of her five articles. On her works cited page, Dory listed all five articles, including the one she couldn’t find in its entirety. Dory felt she gave the authors credit for their work by listing all of them on her works cited page.

**Jury Questions:**

The jury asked Professor Nemo to explain what form of citation he expected for the assignment; Professor Nemo explained that multiple forms of citations would have been sufficient, as long as there was both a works cited page and the use of footnotes. The jury followed up by asking Professor Nemo to explain the difference between footnotes, a bibliography, and a works cited page. He explained that a bibliography lists all sources that are used in completing a task, no matter if the sources are only partially or completely read. Footnotes are used throughout a paper to denote the source of a certain piece of information; the source does not have to be completely read. A works cited page lists all sources that were entirely read for any purpose in writing a work. The jury also asked Professor Nemo why he considered Dory to have plagiarized. Professor Nemo said that Dory had falsely presented the ideas of the author of the fifth article as though she had read the article, when in fact the ideas she used were taken through “the lens” of another author’s ideas.

The jury asked Dory if upon turning the assignment in, she felt she had made a mistake in her method of citation. Dory said she felt the citations were adequate, as she had listed her sources similarly in her midterm for Professor Nemo, which he had not marked incorrect. The jury then asked her why she hadn’t approached Professor Nemo to clarify the correct method for citing, or to ask for an extension so she could retrieve the fifth article. First Dory said that she didn’t ask questions about citations because, in her mind, she felt she understood the correct way to cite. Dory later changed her explanation, and said she was not sure of the difference between a works cited page and footnotes. Dory said she was uncomfortable asking Professor Nemo for clarification or for an extension to give her time to locate the complete text of the fifth article. Earlier in the semester, Dory had missed several classes due to sports conflicts, and Dory was intimidated by Professor Nemo after an earlier conversation when he told her she was missing too much class time. The jury asked Dory if she had purposely misrepresented the number of articles she read for the assignment. Dory said that she had not purposely done so, though she understood how a reader could misinterpret her citation as implying that she had read the entire fifth article. She pointed to the fact that she had also cited a 60-page book, which she clearly had not read in its entirety, as further evidence that her actions were not malicious.

The jury asked Dory if she felt she had plagiarized. Dory explained that what she did was not plagiarism; she had used both her own ideas and actual text, in the form of block quotes, from the fifth article when writing her paper.

**Deliberations:**
The jury set out three questions they would use to frame their discussion over whether or not Dory had violated the Honor Code:

1. Had Dory misled Professor Nemo, and if so, had she intended to do so?
2. Did Dory plagiarize?
3. Did Dory violate the Honor Code by not seeking clarification from her professor when she clearly did not understand his expectations?

The jury first noted that Dory’s testimony had been confusing and contradictory. The jury was concerned about the reliability of Dory’s statements, especially regarding the intent behind her actions. The jury came to the conclusion that the manner in which she cited her work was misleading, making it seem like she read more articles than she actually had. The jury did not feel they could be sure whether or not Dory had intended to mislead Professor Nemo.

The jury decided to define “plagiarism” to help address the second question. The Honor Code refers to the faculty handbook when describing plagiarism, so the jury consulted the faculty handbook in hopes of clarifying the definition of plagiarism. The handbook proved useless in that regard. Ultimately the jury, guided by the Code, defined plagiarism as “representing another person’s ideas or scholarship as his/her own.” Using this definition, the jury determined that Dory did not plagiarize, as she had referred to the sources of relevant quotes and paraphrases in the text of her paper.

The jury next attempted to address the third question: did Dory violate the Honor Code by not asking assistance from her professor? The prevailing opinion among the jury was that Dory had not thought that she was doing anything wrong. Did Dory’s apparent ignorance excuse her actions? Some believed that the very intent of the clause in question (“It is each student’s responsibility to find out exactly what each of his/her professors expects in terms of acknowledging sources of information on papers, exams, and assignments”) was to prevent ignorance from being an excuse in ambiguous cases like this. Other jurors pointed to the fact that Dory had used the same improper citation method in her midterm without penalty, and therefore had reason to believe that her method of citing sources was acceptable. Also, Dory was a freshman who was used to her high school’s citation standards, and she seemed unaware of the different standards at Haverford. Ultimately, the jury decided that Dory had not violated the Honor Code by neglecting to ask for assistance from her professor.

Regarding the question of whether Dory had misled Professor Nemo, the weight of the jury felt that Dory had definitely given the impression of having read five articles when she had not. Some jurors felt that this violated the clause in the Code stating, “students must act with proper conduct and integrity.” Even if Dory’s actions had not been intentional, she had been unfair to the rest of the class by turning in an assignment that did not meet the requirements but appeared to do so. If Professor Nemo had not noticed the incorrect citation, Dory would have been graded as if she had used the full number of sources even though she had not, which would have been unfair to her classmates.

This raised the concern that Haverford is an academic community, and that students must be academically fair. Some jury members felt that Dory’s actions were an honest mistake, and
therefore not a violation of community standards. Others felt that Dory’s actions were unfair to
the community and therefore a violation of the Honor Code. Some jury members felt that
although Dory’s actions were not done with malicious intent, it would be a disservice to the
community not to hold her responsible. On the weight of this argument, the jury believed that
there was a violation of the Honor Code. The jury drew up a tentative statement of violation, but
could not precisely identify exactly how the Honor Code had been violated. The jury adjourned
for the night.

The next day the jury reconvened. The Chair started by asking jury members to individually
share their current thoughts and feelings regarding the case. It became clear that most jury
members were now much less willing to say that Dory had violated the Honor Code. One juror
remarked that maybe the fact that four hours of debate failed to produce a reasonable statement
of violation suggested that there was no violation. Some jurors felt that it would be unfair to
hold Dory to a higher academic standard just because she had been caught.

At one point, three jurors felt as though Dory may have violated the Code, but could not
explicitly say how. When pressed, one of these jurors explained that he felt there was a violation
of the Honor Code when only the actions were considered separate from Dory’s state of mind
when she wrote and submitted the paper. But when the “human aspect” was added, he felt that
she had not violated the Code. The sense of the group was that the human element should be
considered, and eventually this reasoning swayed every jury member. The jury consented that
there was no violation of the Honor Code, and consented to this statement:

By including a source in her works cited page that she had not used, Dory
misrepresented her work. Although Dory’s work was not of the highest
academic integrity, she did not violate the Honor Code.

Questions:

1. Do you believe Dory violated the Honor Code?
2. What exactly is plagiarism?
3. Does unknowingly submitting work that does not meet the requirements of the
assignment constitute an act of academic dishonesty?