Abstract Discussions: Tuesday, March 18 & Wednesday, March 19 at 8:00 PM in Zubrow

Eric
An Honor Council Combined Trial
Released March 2008

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

Introduction:

Honor Council received a letter from Eric, a Haverford alumnus, in which Eric confessed to extensively plagiarizing his senior thesis and repeatedly stealing meals from the Dining Center. Along with his letter, he sent his diploma and a check for $1,000, which he believed would cover the cost of the stolen meals. In his letter, Eric explained to Council that he had been motivated to contact them. He wrote: “since I recently offered my life to Jesus Christ, He has produced in me the conviction to right the wrongs of my past in accordance with His Word and the empowerment of the Holy Spirit.” Honor Council, not content with letting Eric address the issues of accountability, education, and rebuilding trust without a voice from the community, asked Eric if he would be able or willing to participate in a trial. Eric was eager to oblige.

Due to both the difficulties of scheduling around a participant who could not easily get to campus and the desire on Honor Council’s part to deal with both the academic issue and social issue in the same trial, Honor Council consented on a Summer Trial. However, due to further scheduling issues, both on Eric’s and Honor Council’s ends, this trial never occurred. When the new Council was elected the following semester, since a summer trial was no longer possible, it consented on having a combined trial, rather than an Academic trial or a Social trial, so that the jury would be able to deal with any issues that arose.

Fact Finding

Eric’s statement

Eric told the jury much of what he had already stated in his letter. During his senior year, Eric plagiarized large portions of his thesis, mostly by representing the ideas of others as his own but also by stealing text from other scholars verbatim. Regarding his stealing from the Dining Center, Eric was on the meal plan for his freshman and sophomore years. It was in his later years when he began stealing meals, a few during his junior year, and then many during his senior year. Eric’s professor and thesis adviser, Professor Ariel, although still a professor at Haverford, did not respond to invitations to attend the Fact Finding portion of the trial. Since Eric was both the confronted and confronting party, Professor Ariel’s attendance was not required.

Jury Questions

To gauge how the loss of his Haverford degree would affect Eric, one member of the jury
asked how Eric was currently employed. Even though this question was more for circumstantial purposes than fact-finding purposes, Eric answered. At the time of the trial, Eric said he was a landscaper but was planning on becoming a minister. This career change would require further schooling. Another juror asked exactly how much of his thesis was plagiarized. Eric estimated that 80% of the thesis consisted of ideas that were not his own, and at least a few pages copied word for word. He plagiarized from articles that he came across during his research in the library. Another juror asked if the thesis was supposed to be grounded in another scholar’s work. Eric said this was true, and also made sure to emphasize that he was supposed to use this grounding to form his own conclusions, which he did not do. A juror asked Eric when he decided to plagiarize. Eric could not remember exactly when, but it was close to the due date of the thesis, due to the encroaching time constraint. In response to further questioning, he explained that he had not yet been able to contact his adviser, Professor Ariel, although he felt he had breached her trust. He could not find a copy of this thesis to show the jury. He had considered turning himself in earlier and could not explain why he did not. When asked, Eric explained that this was the only time he plagiarized. Another juror asked if he had had schooling after Haverford and whether or not he thought he needed his degree to become a minister. Eric said he had received no formal education after Haverford, and he was unsure if his degree would be necessary for Seminary School, and assumed that it was not, although it might help.

Concerning the Dining Center, Eric said he was able to sneak in for meals fairly easily. When asked if this was a common thing among the student body of the time, Eric said that he was unsure but that when he did it, he did it alone. Meal tickets were an option at the time, but he never bought them. Eric stated that he believed there had been a breach of trust between himself and the Dining Center.

Deliberations

The first question the jury wrestled with was whether or not it could or should go by the current Honor Code or if the jury would attempt to use the Honor Code in place when Eric was a student. It was generally agreed on to use the current Honor Code, both for practicality and because this trial had already begun using current procedures and the current constitution. Jurors quickly reached consensus that Eric had violated the academic honor code. It was less clear if stealing from the Dining Center constituted a social violation. One juror expressed the sentiment that most students sneak into the Dining Center at least once before they graduate, and therefore it might not actually be violating community standards. However, the frequency with which Eric stole meals led the jury to again consent that Eric had violated the social honor code.

In drafting a statement of violation, the jury wanted to express that, in its opinion, the academic honor code and social honor code are not two separate codes, but instead two aspects of the same code. To that end, the jury consented on the following statement:

The jury finds that Eric violated the Honor Code academically, by extensively plagiarizing his senior thesis, and socially, by violating community standards in frequently eating in the Dining Center without paying.
Circumstantial Portion

Eric’s former adviser, Professor Ariel, again could not be reached for this portion of the trial. After the statement of violation was read aloud, the jury asked Eric to recount any outside circumstances that may have contributed to his violation. During his junior and senior years at Haverford, Eric struggled emotionally. In fact, these struggles led him to take nine semesters to graduate. During these years, he underwent counseling for mild depression. He had talked with his dean, who advised him to take time off, but Eric was unsure of what he would do if he left school, and he was scared that he might not have the motivation to return. In general, he found it hard to concentrate and stay motivated with his work during this time. He had wanted to write a good piece of original work, but these factors made the effort almost “agonizing.”

He began sneaking into the Dining Center on a regular basis in his senior year continuing into his ninth semester. Eric thought he might have snuck in as many as 100 times, although he also tried to overestimate to make sure that he had paid back all the money he owed. In general he had felt isolated from the rest of the community; although he had a few friends, he did not feel socially connected to the community at large.

When asked why he had decided to come forward now, Eric discussed his life after Haverford. Immediately after school he became involved with a religious cult. Although he eventually left the cult, the experience left him severely mentally ill. He was then bounced from hospital to hospital for years until, on the verge of death, he miraculously recovered, to the surprise of both himself and his doctors. Reflecting on his experiences, Eric decided to study Zen meditation, which proved unsuccessful. He continued searching for spiritual guidance, eventually discovering the teachings of Jesus Christ. This revelation incited many changes in Eric, including “putting [his] conscience on turbo.” It was at this point that he realized that he was no longer comfortable saying that he was a Haverford graduate.

One juror asked if there were financial concerns related to his stealing from the Dining Center. Eric admitted that he was struggling financially at the time as well as emotionally, but he acknowledged that this was only a rationalization for his stealing. Another juror asked if he was on medication while at Haverford. For the most part, Eric was not, although he took Prozac for a brief period and sometimes felt that he needed marijuana to motivate him to go to class (which he referred to as “self-medication”). When asked if he had the support of his family during this period, he said that he did but also felt a pressure from them to finish school. In general, Eric knew that he would have trouble with the thesis. He found most papers agonizing to write, but had not plagiarized before. However, the length and desired quality of his senior thesis made it particularly difficult. These problems, as well as his depression, led to “inexcusable procrastinating,” until he did not believe he had enough time to write a thesis without plagiarizing. The jury asked if he had considered talking to his adviser, Professor Ariel, about his problems. Eric believed that he must have since he had raised these issues with professors in other classes to get extensions, but that in the end he did not due to his weariness with the thesis writing process and with college in general.

At the time, he felt some relief when he realized he was not going to get caught, but was mostly just glad to be done with everything. However he was also deeply ashamed of himself
Eric concluded by listing his proposed resolutions. In regards to the Dining Center, he felt the $1,000 was probably enough. He would also be willing to address the breach of trust in a letter to either the community or the head of the Dining Center, although he did not feel the latter would mean much if this was a different person from the time Eric attended Haverford. Concerning his thesis, Eric wanted the opportunity to redo it, working with his former adviser, Professor Ariel, and have it graded and marked so that he could legitimately earn his degree. In addition, Eric wanted to write a letter, or even talk face to face to his former adviser, in an attempt to repair the breach of trust between them. Finally, he would be willing to write a letter to the community about his experience, although he felt he might need some guidance on what to focus on. When asked if he thought it might be productive to mail this letter to the class that graduated with Eric, he said that he understood the logic in that.

**Deliberations on Circumstantial and Tentative Resolutions**

The jury agreed that Eric truly wanted to repair the breach of trust with the community, the faculty, and with himself. The jury quickly decided that their resolutions should allow him to do so as fully as possible. Discussions began about the best way to balance his obvious desire for reconciliation with sufficient recognition of the severity of the violations, keeping in mind the unique time circumstances of the violation and the confrontation.

The jury decided that there was a breach of trust between Eric and his senior thesis advisor. In order to repair this violation, the jury decided that Eric and Professor Ariel should establish a conversation geared towards reconciliation, leaving them the freedom to do so on their own terms. The jury decided that a face-to-face meeting would be ideal, though it acknowledged that this might prove impossible given the nature of their schedules.

There was much discussion about to whom Eric should write a letter concerning his violation. It was generally agreed that he should write a letter to the current Haverford student body that should be educational in nature, as there was no breach of trust between Eric and the current student body. Discussion then began about whether or not to require a letter to the alumni with whom there was a breach of trust. Some even suggested that his story was sufficiently educational and inspirational that it should be mailed to all the alumni or be part of the alumni letter. Discussion made it clear that, though the story may be inspirational, it was not the jury’s place to turn it into a public testament to Haverford’s Honor Code or the strength of the human spirit. After discussion with college officials about the possibilities of mass mailing certain alumni, the jury decided that if Eric thought it would be helpful for him, then the college would help him write an anonymous letter to the classes of students whose trust he felt he violated.

The jury also recognized the complicated issues of the legitimacy of his diploma considering Eric’s serious violation of Haverford’s Honor Code on such an integral part of the
Haverford education. Simply revoking his diploma was immediately disregarded as an option considering his obvious remorse and desire to reconcile. The jury instead decided to offer Eric a chance to rewrite his thesis within the framework of the Honor Code. After discussion with professors in the department who expressed approval of this plan and willingness to cooperate, the jury turned to the logistics. Various time frames for the due date were considered, ranging from one semester to a decade. The jury eventually decided that, considering Eric’s enormous strength of character in coming forward and the jury’s trust in his active desire to reconcile and truly earn his degree, along with the complications of living his life outside of college, the jury would simply ask Eric how much time he felt he needed and then double it as a measure of good faith. Should the essay not be completed, Honor Council would meet again to discuss his progress and what further steps need to be taken. It was also agreed that, should his essay be deemed acceptable by the professors, the jury would recommend that Eric receive the lowest passing grade on the assignment and in the class, in an attempt to follow precedent.

The jury agreed that the financial steps already taken in relation to the Dining Center violations were more than adequate and expressed Eric’s acknowledgement of his accountability and desire to reconcile. The jury then discussed where the money should go, and after strenuous debate about the merits of the Dining Center and its payment policies, speculation about where its money comes from and for what they would use Eric’s donation, the jury agreed that the money would be put to its best use if given to the larger Operating Budget rather than to the Dining Center specifically. There was some discussion concerning whether this shift in where the funds were going would take away from the symbolism of Eric returning what he stole, but as the jury knew very little about Haverford budgeting it was thought best to give the money to the larger Operating budget and let the administration decide where to put it. The jury did not believe that the current head of the Dining Center was the same as when Eric had stolen his meals; rather than write a letter to the current head, the jury agreed that Eric could simply discuss the Dining Center in a general letter to the community.

The jury consented on these tentative resolutions:

1. We recommend that Eric write a letter to the current Haverford community concerning his violation of the Honor Code.

2. The steps that Eric has taken to repair the breach of trust with the Haverford community concerning the Dining Center have been more than sufficient. The donated monies will be put into the operating budget.

3. We recommend that Eric contact Professor Ariel to work with her to repair the breach of trust.

4. In cooperation with the department, Eric will write a new thesis. It will be read and evaluated objectively. Should he receive a passing grade on his thesis, he will receive the minimum passing grade for his senior seminar, thusly legitimizing his degree. Upon completing this resolution, his diploma will be returned to him. If in (an undetermined amount of time), Eric has not written a thesis and received a passing grade, Haverford Honor Council will reevaluate the situation.
5. If Eric finds it restorative and/or educational for himself or the community to distribute a letter to past community members, we will support and assist him as much as is logistically possible.

Out of consideration for Eric, who had traveled from out of town to attend the trial, Honor Council granted the Chair of the trial to ability to use her own discretion in how much time need elapse before the jury could reconvene for final resolutions, rather than strictly follow Article VII, Section 2 of the Constitution, which states that, “after the initial consensus, the jury will adjourn for at least one, but not more than two business days to think privately about the issues involved in the trial.” Approximately 14 hours later, the trial reconvened. During the recess, Professor Ariel had contacted the Chair, apologizing for not making contact sooner, with her idea for potential resolutions. Professor Ariel said she wanted to meet with Eric to repair the breach of trust, and that she would be willing to help Eric rewrite his thesis, conveniently aligning with the resolutions that both Eric and the jury were recommending.

Presentation of Resolutions

Eric found the resolutions of the jury in line with his own thoughts, was very appreciative of the jury and the entire process, and proposed no alternative resolutions.

He suggested one semester as a time constraint for his thesis, so the jury allowed a year for completion. He appreciated the extra time but expressed his desire to finish in one semester. Eric accepted the suggestions of writing an open letter to both the present Haverford community and the community whose trust he breached as a student. Finally, he accepted that the money be given to the larger Operating Budget rather than the Dining Center.

When the confronted party left, the jury turned to its final resolutions. They had only to work the time frame of the senior thesis into the tentative resolutions to make them final.

Final Resolutions

1. We recommend that Eric write a letter to the current Haverford community concerning his violation of the Honor Code.

2. The steps that Eric has taken to repair the breach of trust with the Haverford community concerning the Dining Center have been more than sufficient. The donated monies will be put into the operating budget.

3. We recommend that Eric contact his former advisor, Professor Ariel, to work with her to repair the breach of trust.

4. In cooperation with the department, Eric will write a new thesis. It will be read and evaluated objectively. Should he receive a passing grade on his thesis, he will receive the minimum passing grade for his senior seminar, thusly legitimizing his degree. Upon completing this resolution, his diploma will be returned to him. If within a year of the completion of the trial Eric has not written a thesis and received a passing grade, Haverford Honor Council will reevaluate the
situation.

5. If Eric finds it restorative and/or educational for himself or the community to distribute a letter to past community members, we will support and assist him as much as is logistically possible.

The jury consented on these resolutions with no members standing outside.

Discussion Questions

1. How should Honor Council treat alumni who bring themselves to Honor Council?
2. Under what circumstances, if any, should Academic and Social trials be combined?
3. Under what circumstances should a jury recommend revoking a diploma?
To The Haverford Community:

I appreciate the opportunity to express my response to the Honor Council Trial process which occurred two months ago, and to also relate some of my experiences leading up to it.

As a Senior at Haverford, I plagiarized my Senior Thesis. I also helped myself to, i.e. stole, food from the dining hall while living off the meal plan. I had struggled with emotional issues for much of my time at Haverford, and sought counseling from the end of my Freshman year onward. The counseling was never very successful. For fear of not completing my degree, I never took the step of taking time off from school to gain some clarity and direction. I managed to excel in some classes, and merely to slide by in others. Professors kindly noted that I seemed to have good potential, but was falling short of it. Many were very accommodating with sympathy, and sometimes granting extensions for completing coursework. I am grateful to them to this day.

When it came time to fulfill my thesis requirement, I was in poor mental condition. Not seeing any light at the end of the tunnel personally, and having lost all confidence in my own abilities, I opted to plagiarize a portion of my Thesis, in order to try to move on with my life beyond Haverford. I knew that it was wrong to do so, but in my self-preoccupation and self-pity, I somehow justified my actions as “my only option”.

Stealing food from the dining hall I rationalized based on my financial situation. This was no doubt an expression of my frustration with my situation, and was evidence of the fact that I had separated myself from the emotional and spiritual support of the community.

I received my diploma, but with no real sense of satisfaction or achievement. I saw that so many of my classmates had genuinely earned their diplomas, and had appreciated the opportunities for academic work that Haverford had afforded them. A sense of shame came over me regarding my Haverford experience that never departed.

Following graduation I continued to struggle, and fell into difficult times for a period of years. I fell prey to a highly manipulative religious cult which nearly destroyed me. It was only the hand of mighty God which spared my life, and restored me to wholeness of mind and spirit. In the year 2000 I began seeking God in earnest, and after several years of pursuing Zen meditation, it dawned on me that I should start seeking Him through the “local” religion, Christianity. The Lord began working in my heart through the programming of a Christian radio station, and I soon started attending a Bible-believing church. On November 13, 2005 I received the Gospel of Salvation into my heart and offered my life to Jesus Christ, recognizing Him as my Savior.

Jesus has indeed given me a new heart, and renews my mind daily through His Word, the Bible. 2 Corinthians 5:17 reads, “Therefore, if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.” I thank God that He has saved me, by His grace alone, and not through anything I have done to deserve it. I continue to be amazed that God would love me enough to sacrifice His Son for me on the Cross.

While I am yet far from being the man that God wants me to be, He has moved me to examine
my life, and my past, to make amends where necessary. So it was that in March of 2007 I became conscience-stricken about the plagiarism and theft that I committed while at Haverford. I felt compelled to return my Haverford Diploma to the Honor Council, and to include a check for an amount that I was confident would cover the costs of the stolen meals. The letter I enclosed expressed my remorse, as well as my conviction that I did not deserve to consider myself a Haverford Alumnus.

I am so grateful that the Honor Council received these things with a spirit of willingness to hold a trial, with a view to allowing a restoration of the breach of trust if at all possible. Certainly this was and is an unusual event, for an issue to come to light after many years.

The initial questioning of the Honor Council was difficult for me, in that it required me to revisit the wrongs and come face to face with what I had done. It certainly required humility on my part, to submit to a jury of students nearly half my age, and no doubt in many cases students of greater maturity! Nonetheless, it was a relief to simply follow through with the process, and obey my conscience.

The second part of the process, in which Council questioned the reasons for the transgressions, allowed me to share my life testimony, including my salvation, and to share my heart on the matters under consideration. This was a considerable relief, and I owe a debt to the members of the council for the delicacy and sensitivity with which they treated my case. Their questions were very intelligent and thorough, and through the tentative and final resolutions they displayed a great desire to see personal and corporate peace as the chief result.

Again, I am grateful that the Honor Council has allowed me the privilege of re-writing my thesis within a very reasonable time frame, and am grateful that they recognized and honored the change of heart that has taken place within me. Although I know that I did not “give and receive” during my Haverford experience as fully as I might have, I am nonetheless fond of the College, and in particular am grateful for the many wonderful friends I made, a number of whom I am in close touch with today! I believe that the outcome of this Trial for me personally is to draw me closer again to the Community, so that even as an alumnus, I might yet make contributions (not necessarily financial) to the success of Haverford in producing men and women of character.