Maria and Professor Clouseau

An Honor Council Academic Trial

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This abstract was not released in accordance with the abstract timeline in the Constitution

Introduction:

Maria was enrolled in Professor Clouseau’s Crime Statistics 101 course. While grading the finals, Professor Clouseau noticed several similarities between the final exams of Maria and another student. He was not entirely sure if cheating had occurred, but he decided to contact both students. After meeting with both students, Professor Clouseau was only suspicious of Maria, and decided to involve Honor Council. Maria denied that any cheating had occurred, but contacted Honor Council to resolve the matter, as per Professor Clouseau’s request. Both Maria and Professor Clouseau submitted formal statements and were present for the fact-finding portion of the trial.

Fact-Finding:

Maria’s Statement:

Maria explained to Honor Council that she had not cheated on the exam. She had finished under the time limit and spent the rest of the time re-writing the exam for the sake of neatness, without changing the content. She believed that some of the irregularities noted by the professor were a result of mistakes in the copying process. She did not include time spent copying her work within the time she reported on the test. She turned in the final before the due date, and emphasized that she knew the material and how to answer the questions on the test.

Professor Clouseau’s Statement:

Professor Clouseau did not know for sure if there was cheating, but some similarities between Maria’s and another student’s test made him suspicious. He said that there were multiple ways to approach problems in Crime Statistics 101. Sometimes students’ solutions look similar, but only quirky things will stand out when he is grading. Two of Maria’s final questions were similar to another student’s. The methodologies in these questions were fairly unusual approaches to solving the problems. Additionally, one strange line break suggested Maria may have copied without fully understanding the content. When Professor Clouseau emailed the students asking them to explain their approaches, he found Maria’s explanation unsatisfactory. Professor Clouseau said there was no evidence of verbatim copying. To use the other student’s test to get her solutions, Maria would have had to rewrite the problem and understand the unique method the other student had used. Supporting the idea that Maria had not cheated, Professor Clouseau noted that she had used a clever approach to answer another question on the test.
Professor Clouseau explained that he was in no way certain Maria had cheated, but he felt obliged to bring it to Honor Council. He said that although the similarities were suspicious, it was possible that they could have used the same approach by coincidence. He reiterated that he was not suspicious of the other student because that student had been able to better explain her approach to the problems when they had discussed it. He stated that Maria’s performance on the test was consistent with her past performance, and saw no problem with her choice not to include copying time in her reported start and end time for the test.

**Deliberations:**

Jurors noted that Professor Clouseau was very unsure whether cheating had occurred. One juror thought that cheating was likely based on the written statements, but hearing testimony from Maria had changed his mind. Other questions on Maria’s test indicated that she understood the material, and she had satisfied the jury with her explanation of some of her unusual methodologies.

The Jury noticed that the alleged cheating did not seem logical, and that if she had wanted to cheat, she could have found more effective ways to do so. Because the copying was not verbatim, she would have had to understand the material very well to have cheated this way.

The Jury was concerned that Maria had not included her copying time on her test. Some jurors felt that she should have included it, but noted that Professor Clouseau was not concerned. Some jurors felt uncomfortable because there seemed to be some evidence of suspicious activity, but not enough to come to a statement of violation. However, after further discussion the jury consented to a statement of non-violation.

**Maria did not violate the Honor Code.**

**Resolutions:**

The jury took this trial as an opportunity to educate the community about whether re-copying time should be included in test-taking time. The jury consented to the following resolution:

**Honor Council will release a statement to the faculty and to the student body reminding them to clarify or obtain clarification on whether re-copying, spellchecking, and/or grammar checking is included in the allotted exam time.**

**Discussion Questions:**

1. Do you think that re-writing your work for neatness should be included in your reported time for a test?

2. Should professors be clear about their expectations for test-taking at the beginning of the semester, or should students be more proactive in clarifying these expectations?

3. To what extent should Honor Council trust statements from confronted or confronting parties when deliberating?