Professor Sánchez and Jimmy

An Academic Trial

Abstract Discussions:

Wednesday, 10/2  12:30 PM and 6 PM
DC Sunken Lounge

Introduction:

After reading an assignment, Professor Sánchez became concerned that several paragraphs without citations had been lifted from other sources. She spoke to Jimmy about the parts in question, and asked to meet with him the next day. She wanted Jimmy to bring a copy of all the sources he used to formulate his ideas and she asked him to underline and footnote the sections of his paper that he quoted directly or integrated from other materials. At the meeting the next day, Professor Sánchez looked over the newly underlined and footnoted paper. She found that parts of the paper which Jimmy had not underlined or footnoted were copied directly from an internet website. Council discussed the statements, and came to consensus on a suspicion of violation.

Fact Finding:

Both the professor and the student were present in the same room at the same time. Professor Sánchez gave her statement first, followed by Jimmy.

Professor's Statement:

The Professor reiterated the manner in which she became concerned about Jimmy's acts of plagiarism. She stated that at one point, when reading the paper, she noticed a dramatic shift in writing style. Because nothing in that paragraph was cited, she believed Jimmy committed an act of plagiarism.

The professor stated that when she approached Jimmy the first time about several sections without footnotes, he told her they were his own work. They continued to speak about the assignment and Jimmy mentioned that some parts of his assignment were not his own work, but he remained adamant that the sections first in question were his own work.

Professor Sánchez asked Jimmy to meet with her the next day and bring copies of all his sources as well as a copy of his assignment with all the parts from outside sources underlined and cited. The professor believed that there was no doubt about her expectations.
The next day when they met, Jimmy brought only a copy of the assignment in question underlined and footnoted, but he did not bring copies of his sources. Professor Sánchez stated that Jimmy underlined the major paragraphs in question as something he had not written, even though the day before he said he had written them. Additionally, Professor Sánchez found sections in the revised assignment that were not Jimmy's own work and did not have citations or underlines. Professor Sánchez stated that Jimmy provided a reference list, but the source of the un-cited material was not on the list. The professor later found the source on the internet. Most of the sources on the reference list were not used in the un-cited assignment.

Professor Sánchez said that she never discussed with Jimmy any particular style to use when citing sources, but that did not mean that she did not expect Jimmy's sources to be cited. The professor was concerned that Jimmy copied entire sections of text word for word and failed to put the source in his bibliography.

The professor understood that an academic trial is a serious thing, so she contacted the student's dean and confronted Jimmy in the dean's office. The dean then contacted Honor Council.

Professor Sánchez stressed that she believed two acts of plagiarism had taken place. The first occurred when Jimmy did not cite any sources in his assignment. The second occurred when, after given the opportunity to cite sources without penalty, Jimmy did not cite all sections in which sources were used. Overall, Professor Sánchez was concerned that the student had repeatedly shown dishonesty and a lack of academic integrity.

Student's Statement:

The student told the jury that as this assignment was part of a work in progress, he was not aware that he needed to use footnotes. He stressed that at no time did Professor Sánchez give him any directions about the format she prefers for footnotes and they never had a conversation about his need to use footnotes in his preliminary, ungraded assignments.

Additionally, Jimmy told the jury that despite what Professor Sánchez stated, he never lied to her about the several sections which were first brought into question. Jimmy said that when Professor Sánchez first asked him about the several sections of his paper, he told her they had been taken from other sources.

Jimmy acknowledged that when he was given the opportunity to go through the assignment to underline and footnote all the parts where outside sources were used, he failed to mark several spots. However, he attributed this to the haste in which he was asked to revise the assignment.

Jury Questions:

Professor Sánchez gave each jury member a copy of the revised assignment in question (the version that included Jimmy's underlines and footnotes). The jury members asked many questions to clarify both the Professor Sánchez's and Jimmy's statements.

Jimmy said that he turned in a short assignment without footnotes earlier and Professor Sánchez had not said anything about his lack of footnotes. Professor Sánchez said that she had
not had time to read that assignment as the assignment in question was turned in several days later. Because both the assignments were working toward the same final product, she did not feel the need to read the first assignment because the assignment in question was a revision of the first assignment.

Additionally, Jimmy said that he told Professor Sánchez he had not used footnotes on the assignment in question and that the professor never gave a response to the lack of citations. Professor Sánchez did not remember having the conversation.

**Jury Deliberation:**

Because the two parties' stories conflicted on certain points, it was hard to sort out the facts. There was some discussion about whether one or the other was lying, but ultimately all the jurors agreed that in order to proceed with the trial without taking sides, they would have to treat the conflicted points as misunderstandings.

Some jury members also thought that possibly Professor Sánchez and Jimmy had different ideas about the nature of the assignment. The jury considered that perhaps Jimmy thought he was merely expected to hand in notes taken from several sources, while Professor Sánchez expected Jimmy to hand in his own work.

Some jury members believed the professor was treating the assignment, a work in progress, as a final polished work. Some jury members expressed uneasiness with the fact that Jimmy put his name on the paper and footnoted nothing. Some of his text was in his own words, but many sections were lifted straight from other texts. One of the jury members said that while Jimmy was taking notes from sources, he should have written the source and page numbers so he could remember where he got the information when he wrote the final assignment.

**Statement of Violation:**

The jury came to consensus on the following statement of violation:

"The student violated the Honor Code by representing other people's work as his own."

**Circumstantial Portion:**

At the request of Professor Sánchez, each party gave its circumstantial statement separately. Jimmy gave his statement first, followed by Professor Sánchez.

**Student's Statement:**

Jimmy had nothing to add to his previous statement. He repeated that he had not added citations to his assignment because he talked with Professor Sánchez beforehand and she said it was not a problem to leave citations out. He also repeated that he failed to cite two sections in question on the underlined/footnoted version because he was in a hurry to turn the paper back in to the professor.
As possible resolutions, Jimmy suggested a mediated dialogue with Professor Sánchez while a dean was present. He stressed that he did not believe he should fail the course because of this assignment.

Professor's Statement:

Professor Sánchez stated that at first she believed Jimmy's lack of citations could have been a misunderstanding about the nature of the assignment. For this reason, she asked Jimmy to go back and underline and footnote all his work on the assignment. When Jimmy turned in the revised assignment with two sections from outside sources still un-cited, Professor Sánchez became concerned.

The professor explained in more detail the nature of the assignment in question. The assignment did not receive a grade, but was simply a way for the professor to help guide the student's research and thinking. Within the overall scope of the class, the one assignment in question would probably give little weight to the final grade because the final assignment is what counts the most.

Professor Sánchez re-emphasized her belief that plagiarism is a big deal and it is the student's responsibility to know how to prevent it from happening.

She mentioned that it was shocking to hear Jimmy change his story. The professor said that the statement Jimmy gave in his dean's office was different than the statement he gave Honor Council.

She believed that if Jimmy had taken full responsibility for his lack of citations, she would have still taken him to Honor Council, but she could have seen a positive outcome to their relationship and a repairing of the breach of trust. She did not think that it is worthwhile or possible to repair the breach of trust.

Professor Sánchez did not think that a mediated dialogue would be productive. She did not believe that Jimmy should pass the course as a manner of making him accountable for his lack of academic integrity. Additionally, Professor Sánchez did not believe the breach of trust could be repaired without Jimmy's separation from the community for one semester or one year.

Jury Deliberation:

The jury continued to talk about the conflicting stories between the two parties and tried to reconcile them. Some jury members thought that it was possible that Jimmy was lying because, since his grade in the course was at stake, he had more motive to lie. All the jury members realized that in order to consider the statements of each party with equal weight, they would have to disregard the Professor's statement that Jimmy had been dishonest with her.

Discussion of separation took place but most jury members believed that separation was too harsh given that the entire situation could have been simply a misunderstanding in the nature of the assignment. Everyone agreed that separation was not the correct way to address the issue.
Some jury members felt that Jimmy should fail the course while others felt that he should only fail the assignment. Discussion of this topic was very long, but no final consensus was reached one way or the other.

The jury came to consensus on the following tentative resolutions.

**Tentative Resolutions:**

1. The student will write an essay addressing the responsibilities of a student, including, but not limited to, taking the initiative to clarify and understand the Professor's instructions and expectations as well as acting with a general sense of academic integrity. Upon completion of the essay, the student will meet with a subcommittee of the jury where he will present and discuss his essay. This essay will be edited for confidentiality and released with the abstract.

2. The student will write a letter to the professor reflecting on the trial process in the interest of repairing the breach of trust. After the professor receives the letter, the two parties will engage in a mediated dialogue to discuss the content of the letter and other relevant issues that might arise.

3. The student will write a letter to the community reflecting on the trial experience to be distributed with the abstract.

4. The student will schedule a meeting with an appropriate tutor approved by the jury to explore ways to improve his research and essay-writing strategies.

**Presentation of Tentative Resolutions:**

Professor Sánchez understood the resolutions, but could see circumstances in which the resolutions might not be effective. Jimmy understood the resolutions and agreed to them.

**Jury Deliberation:**

The jury continued its discussion of whether Jimmy should fail the entire course or simply the assignment. It was finally decided that the student should fail the assignment rather than the entire course because the assignment was a work in progress that itself did not receive a grade. Additionally, the jury felt that the Honor Code did not permit Honor Council to make someone fail a course simply on the point of academic integrity.

**Final Resolutions:**

The following resolutions were agreed upon with one person standing outside of resolution #2, one person standing outside of resolution #5, and one person standing outside of the resolutions as a whole.

1. The student will write an essay addressing the responsibilities of a student, including, but not limited to, taking the initiative to clarify and understand the Professor's instructions and expectations as well as acting with a general sense of academic integrity. Upon completion of the essay, the student will meet with a subcommittee of the jury where he will present and discuss his essay. This essay will be edited for confidentiality and released with the abstract. [i]
2. The student will write a letter to the professor reflecting on the trial process in the interest of repairing the breach of trust. After the professor receives the letter, the two parties will engage in a mediated dialogue to discuss the content of the letter and other relevant issues that might arise.

3. The student will write a letter to the community reflecting on the trial experience to be distributed with the abstract.

4. The student will schedule a meeting with an appropriate tutor approved by the jury to explore ways to improve his research and essay-writing strategies.

5. The student will not receive credit for the assignment in question.

Questions:

1. Should the Honor Code be enforced upon actions that show a lack of academic integrity with the same weight as gross acts of plagiarism?

2. When it is the student's responsibility to cite sources and when is it the professor's responsibility to inform the student about citation format?

3. Can a student be taken to an Honor Council trial for an assignment that is a work in progress which does not receive a grade?

[i] Jimmy's Essay:

The student will write an essay addressing the responsibilities of a student including, but not limited to, taking initiative to clarify and understand the professor's instructions and expectations, as well as acting with a general sense of academic integrity.

My experiences with the Honor Council have led me to realize the importance of communication and proper citation standards. The clear communication between the professor and the student is of vital importance not only in terms of comprehension, civility but also in terms of understanding. This understanding should not be limited to the subject material, assignments, but should also extend to the expectations' of both parties from each other. Any obstruction to this level of communication between the parties can lead to tragic results. The burden of maintaining a high level of understanding falls more prominently on the student due to the fact that the instructors' are responsible for numerous members of the student body and therefore are not able to cater to them in an individual basis. Each party has to understand the other clearly so that there should not be any misunderstanding between them. If there any uncertainty, it is the student's responsibility to take the initiative to clarify it with the professor. This is especially important in less structured courses without a syllabus or for assignments without written directions. The student's commitment to the instructions is as important as the understanding between the parties. It is the student's responsibility to abide by the instructions with outmost integrity and to seek out the directions from the professor if they were not initially provided. Acting upon one's own discretion under the absence of any contravening instructions is not a sufficient or acceptable course of action for a student.
Moreover, the commitment to proper standards of citation is of utmost importance even in the case of ungraded drafts and working papers. This does not only reduce the chance of any inadvertent mistakes or omissions but also emphasizes the practice of proper writing skills. Considering the fact that unintentional plagiarism is a serious offense as intentional and deliberate plagiarism, it is one of the most important responsibilities of a student to ensure that one's work is not compromised by even inadvertent mistakes. Besides the moral downfall of portraying someone else's work as one's own, plagiarism is also unprofessional due to the individual's loss of credibility. There are various resources including one's own instructor to online sources and the Writing Center that can provide assistance and guidance with questions regarding proper citation formats and it is the individual students' responsibility to seek supervision and aid to ensure that he or she is not deliberately or unintentionally committing plagiarism.

[ii] Jimmy's letter to the community:

My personal experience with the Honor Council trial procedure has been unfortunately very disappointing. I am grateful for the consideration and the time of my fellow students on the Council. I think their recommendations were fair and I am appreciative of their considerable efforts to resolve the conflict. They were very considerate and supportive. However, I do not see the purpose of having a student run trial if the professor can dismiss the agreed upon resolutions and arbitrarily pass judgment on his accord. I believe this undermines the Honor Council procedure and defeats the purpose of the Honor Code. If the findings of the Honor Council are only binding with respect to the student and the professors are free to take its "recommendations" or ignore them as they please then its effectiveness is significantly reduced. In my specific case, if the Council had found me guilty of gross plagiarism then they would have formulated resolutions according to that offense. By arbitrarily assigning a 0.0 grade for my course, my professor acted in his personal judgment. The students on the Honor Council did not recommend the failure of the course and its subsequent unwarranted negative consequence as appropriate resolution for my case. In my opinion, the professors' ability to ignore the resolutions of the Honor Council and formulate punishments in his or her own accord goes against the Honor Code and the principles of accountability. I also find it disrespectful to the students of the Honor Council who devote a great deal of their time and effort in hearings and deliberations.

In closing, I would like to thank the students on the Honor Council once again for all their efforts, valuable time, and consideration.