Abstract Discussions will be held Wednesday, December 1st and Thursday, December 2nd, at 6 p.m. in Ryan Gym

Tom Sawyer and Professor Finn
An Honor Council Academic Trial
Released Fall 2010

This abstract was not released in accordance with the timeline in the Constitution.
The confronting and confronted parties were given the opportunity to review this abstract prior to its release.
(The addition of this disclaimer began Fall 2010).

Introduction
Tom Sawyer was a student in Professor Huckleberry Finn’s Advanced White-washing class. Professor Finn confronted Tom about suspected plagiarism on an article summary and asked that Tom report himself to Honor Council. Honor Council reviewed the case and sent it to an academic trial.

Fact-Finding
At the beginning of the meeting, one of the jurors had not been reached and the fact-finding portion proceeded without him with unanimous approval from the present jurors.

The meeting began with Professor Finn explaining the questioned assignment to the jury. Students were to first summarize an article assigned by Professor Finn and then critically evaluate it. Professor Finn said that he had explicitly gone over the terms of the assignment and the analysis in class. Later, Professor Finn noticed that Tom’s paper contained passages very similar to the source article. After identifying many passages that were either outright copied or minimally changed and without citation or any sign of quotation, Professor Finn suspected plagiarism and was inclined to give Tom an F. Tom discussed the paper with the jury. Tom stated that he felt that he didn’t need to cite the article because it was part of the assignment. Students were neither encouraged nor discouraged from quoting the article in the assignment.

Tom then said that he had begun working on the assignment two days prior to the due date. He remarked that he hesitated at points, sensing that he was following the text too closely. According to him, Professor Finn had originally decided to give him an F but gave him a D- since there was some original content worth noting in the paper. A juror asked if Professor Finn had mentioned citation styles. Tom replied that citations had not been mentioned at all.

Tom mentioned that he had done a similar assignment for a lower level class in the same department, but couldn’t remember much about it aside from it being much less complicated. He went on to say that he had written summaries, like the one submitted for a job outside of Haverford, without citation that seemed acceptable. Tom was then asked if there was any other part of the assignment that he was unclear about. He replied that he had felt that he understood the assignment completely.

Statement of Violation
The jury consented that although Tom had not intended to violate the Honor Code, he did directly and improperly quote the article without proper citation. The jury felt it was Tom’s responsibility to seek clarification from Professor Finn, especially at the times when he doubted what he was doing. But they also agreed that Tom had summarized to the best of his ability, and that the problem was a misunderstanding over how to summarize and credit an assigned source. Eventually the jury agreed that Tom had plagiarized and failed to use proper citation.

At this point, however, one of the jurors noted that without the missing juror, the jury did not fulfill the multicultural juror requirement. After some discussion, the jury consented that this had to be fixed in order to reflect the Plenary resolution about multicultural jurors. The juror was contacted and brought back in, and the rest of the jury summarized the events and findings of the fact-finding portion of the trial. The juror came to the same conclusions that the rest of the jury had and, given the consistency and the direction of the discussion thus far, the jury felt comfortable coming to a statement of violation.

The trial chair informed Tom and Professor Finn via e-mail about the inclusion of the final juror after the fact-finding portion had occurred. While it is not unprecedented for a trial chair to make decisions regarding the administration of a trial without advance consent of the confronted and confronting parties, the chair asked for input from said parties. Both Tom and Professor Finn were fine with the decision.

The jury unanimously consented on the following statement of violation:

*Tom violated the Honor Code by representing another person’s scholarship as his own, which constitutes an act of plagiarism. In addition, Tom violated the Honor Code by failing to use proper citation.*

**Circumstantial Portion**

Tom was asked to share any outside influences that may have led him to violate the Honor Code. He reiterated that he had not been pressed for time while writing his assignment and that he had planned out the days he was going to write the assignment. He said it was not stressful for him.

He was not confused, and at the time he felt that he was doing what the assignment asked of him. But he acknowledged that in retrospect it seemed unwise to have proceeded the way he did. He had at times hesitated while writing the paper because he felt that he was following the text closely, so he went back to change some words, which he considered to be adequate paraphrasing. Overall, he felt that he understood the article fairly well.

He commented that he had other things going on in his life, but he felt that they didn’t have anything to do with writing the paper and didn’t contribute to the way he wrote it.

When Professor Finn initially brought him in to discuss the paper, Tom understood Professor Finn’s concerns and was upset. He regretted writing the paper the way he did, but he said that if he were to go back and rewrite it given his understanding of the assignment, he would not have done it differently. He understood the assignment as a summary of the article and he felt that he was doing what he was supposed to be doing. He mentioned that he was not as familiar with this kind of essay as with other kinds of essays.

When asked about his reaction to the initial confrontation e-mail from his professor, he said that his first thought was that from the way the e-mail was worded it must be about
plagiarism, but that it couldn’t be since he didn’t think he had plagiarized. When he went back to
the paper, he realized that it was very close to the text but, without the e-mail from Professor
Finn, he would not have noticed that there was anything wrong with it.

When asked about his current relationship with Professor Finn, Tom said that they had
not had much correspondence beyond simple greetings but that his relationship with Professor
Finn was fine and that they got along well. They had spoken one-on-one a number of times
since; it had not been about the paper but about the trial, which Tom found to be unobjectionable
and straightforward.

Tom described the kinds of papers written for his other classes. He explained that he also
used scholarly articles for papers in his major but that the papers were different. He also
mentioned that he had wanted to give the subject of white-washing another try after not liking
the introductory class that he took previously, but that this incident has turned him off from it
even though he knew that it was irrational.

In terms of future plans for the class, Tom explained that he planned to meet with
Professor Finn before the next paper, and that he would be willing to rewrite the current
assignment if Professor Finn were willing to re-grade it. He reiterated that he was not trying to
claim another’s work as his own, and that he thought he was doing as Professor Finn wanted him
to do. He also mentioned that if he had been planning to publish the work, he would have cited
the material, but that he understood the assignment as an informal summary and that it was only
later that Professor Finn explained it was more like a review.

The jury members had no further questions.

Tentative Resolutions

Tom was asked if he had any resolutions that he felt would be conducive to repairing the
breach of trust with Professor Finn. Tom had no explicit proposed resolutions for the jury but
expressed some concerns about what he felt would be inappropriate resolutions for his trial. He
explained that he did not feel he deserved to be separated, or have his grade lowered any more
than it had been saying such measures would be punitive rather than restorative. He also did not
feel that he would gain anything from writing an essay about community values or plagiarism.
Beyond that, he had no further suggestions. Professor Huck Finn had no proposed resolutions for
the jury.

Tom explained that he did not usually care about grades but that he was concerned about
getting a bad grade for completely unintentional wrongdoing. He explained that he regretted his
mistake, but that grades matter for summer jobs and other things. He suggested that things would
be different had he had more introductory white-washing papers to write in the past and if
Professor Finn had been more clear on what it meant to summarize. He explained that if
Professor Finn had asked for citations, he would have put them in; he was not looking for a
shortcut and had not expected Professor Finn not to notice that most of the paper had been
copied from the original text.

When Tom was asked how he could help others avoid his mistakes, he said that he did
not think it was fair to him, but that he would be willing to do so.

The jury had no further questions and Tom was asked to leave the room.

Jury Deliberations
The jury first agreed that separation was not necessary.
One juror suggested that Tom go to the Writing Center, but another juror was concerned that such a resolution could not be mandated and that it could become an issue of confidentiality. Another juror did not believe that such a resolution would be a problem.

The jury played with the idea of having Tom write a letter to the community or an essay explaining the difference between plagiarism and paraphrasing. A juror commented that such a letter could also be reflective. Other jurors were concerned that Tom did not seem to understand plagiarism, and that it seemed different in different contexts. One juror mentioned that the confusion might have come from calling the assignment a “summary”, versus the response it might have received had it been called a “review.” It was quite possible that his introductory white-washing class would not have prepared him for that kind of assignment.

The jury agreed that it was unnecessary to rewrite the assignment because there was another paper in the class, and that it was a good idea to encourage Tom to meet with Professor Finn before the next paper.

The jury discussed the D- on the assignment. One juror felt that it was necessary to make clear within the resolutions the stance that the jury had on the grade. Many felt uncomfortable second-guessing Professor Finn, and while some jurors felt that the issue was in some ways the fault of the department for inconsistent and unclear wording used in assignments, it was Tom’s fault that he plagiarized. A juror explained that Tom received a specific grade for a specific reason, but another countered that misunderstanding was a large part of the problem. Ultimately, the jury decided that they wanted to leave the grade as it was.

The jury then returned to the idea of the reflective letter, which could be used to help other students to avoid Tom’s mistake. They imagined that the letter could include points about not being afraid to ask questions, and that Tom could address any possible hesitations that he had had during the writing process. Overall, the jury felt his letter should be applicable to the Haverford community, especially in reference to what students could do to be clear about a professor’s expectations for citations. The reflective portion could possibly address his feelings throughout the trial process and why he realized what he did was wrong.

The jury also suggested that Honor Council work with the department to address issues such as the confusion between the terms “summary” and “review” and discuss similar points of possible misunderstanding and standardized language with all department chairs. One juror was a white-washing major and commented that the assignment did not seem unclear or vague. Eventually the jury agreed on a set of points that Honor Council should discuss with department chairs, including encouraging professors to remind students of the importance of citations for all assignments, outline their specific expectations for citations and standardize intradepartmental guidelines in language. The jury wanted to emphasize that it was still a student’s responsibility to ask questions but that having standardized guidelines in place would help students become familiar with departmental expectations.

The reflective essay would be included with the abstract, and the portion written in conjunction with Professor Finn would address ways in which other students could avoid the problems that Tom had. The reflective portion would explain his experience with and feelings about the trial process.
Finally, the jury decided that it would support Tom’s decision to talk to Professor Finn before the next essay and to encourage him to go to the Writing Center for a different perspective.

The jury consented to the following tentative resolutions:

1. Tom will write a reflective letter to the community to be released with the abstract explaining his experiences with and feelings about the trial process. He will also work with Professor Finn on a section of the letter addressing ways in which students can avoid unintentional plagiarism in the future.

2. The jury supports Professor Finn’s decision regarding Tom’s grade on the assignment.

3. The jury supports Tom’s decision to consult Professor Finn regarding the next assignment and encourages him to work with the Writing Center.

4. The jury recommends that Honor Council contact department chairs to suggest that they clarify academic policies, which may include, but are not limited to, citations within different kinds of assignments and terminology used (e.g., “summary”, “review”, “critical essay”, etc.), and that they encourage professors to specify expectations regarding assignments and citations. (The jury would like to note that it is still the students’ responsibility to ask for clarification.)

Presentation of Tentative Resolutions

Tom and Professor Finn were presented with the proposed resolutions via email.

Revising Resolutions

The jury discussed the resolutions as they stood, affirming that they were comfortable with the resolutions. Minor changes were made to the resolutions to make the wording clearer. The jury consented on the following resolutions:

1. Tom will write a reflective letter to the community to be released with the abstract explaining his experiences with and feelings about the trial process. He will also work with Professor Finn on a section of the letter addressing ways in which students can avoid unintentional plagiarism in the future.

2. The jury supports Professor Finn’s decision regarding Tom’s grade on the assignment.

3. The jury supports Tom’s decision to consult Professor Finn regarding the next assignment and encourages him to work with the Writing Center.

4. The jury recommends that Honor Council contact department chairs to suggest that they clarify academic policies, which may include citations within different kinds of assignments and terminology used (e.g., “summary”, “review”, “critical essay”, etc.), and that they encourage professors to specify expectations regarding assignments and citations. (The jury would like to note that it is still the students’ responsibility to ask for clarification.)

Discussion of Resolutions

The chair called Tom into the room. The chair read the resolutions and asked Tom if he had any specific questions or concerns with them. Tom questioned the reflective part of the letter,
wondering if it was just a resolution for resolutions’ sake. A juror explained that it was helpful for the community to have that first-person voice when reading the abstract and coming to understand the situation. The reflective portion would include his thoughts about the trial process, and that the thoughts that emerged for him specifically in regards to his academic violation were unique to him and would be best communicated by him. Tom expressed that he then understood the jury’s decision. In regards to the portion in which he would collaborate with his professor, he was comfortable with helping others avoid the issues that he had to face.

Tom stated that he understood the rest of the resolutions and found them reasonable. A juror suggested adding some clause to the fourth tentative resolution about Honor Council’s collaboration with department chairs to indicate the repetitive nature of solidifying resolutions. The jury and Tom all agreed that such a clause would be a good addition.

There were no further questions or comments, so Tom left the room.

Finalizing Resolutions

The jury felt comfortable with Tom’s response to the resolutions and saw no further need to revise the resolutions except to add a clause to the fourth resolution to emphasize the continuous nature of the Honor Council collaboration with department chairs. The final resolutions were:

1. Tom will write a reflective letter to the community to be released with the abstract explaining his experiences with and feelings about the trial process. He will also work with Professor Finn on a section of the letter addressing ways in which students can avoid unintentional plagiarism in the future.
2. The jury supports Professor Finn’s decision regarding Tom’s grade on the assignment.
3. The jury supports Tom’s decision to consult Professor Finn regarding the next assignment and encourages him to work with the Writing Center.
4. The jury recommends that Honor Council contact department chairs annually to suggest that they clarify academic policies, which may include citations within different kinds of assignments and terminology used (e.g., “summary”, “review”, “critical essay”, etc.), and that they encourage professors to specify expectations regarding assignments and citations. (The jury would like to note that it is still the students’ responsibility to ask for clarification.)

Discussion Questions:

1. Was it appropriate for the jury to recap the fact-finding portion for the absent juror?
2. Does it make a difference that the juror was multicultural?
3. Do different types of essays, such as summaries or reviews, call for different definitions of plagiarism?
4. Should professors assign grades based on the assumption that a student has cheated before it has been determined in an Honor Council proceeding?
5. In this situation, is it more necessary for a professor to clarify directions or for a student to ask for clarification?
Letter to the Community

Going through an honor council trial calls for reflection upon the circumstances, the what-ifs, the actions that resulted in a breach of the honor code and responsibility. It is a scary process. During the trial I felt isolated from the community. I had broken the honor code and it had yet to be determined what I needed to do to make it right.

I plagiarized. This was surprising to me because during my time at Haverford I have always felt that I had a strong grasp of what plagiarism is and how to avoid it. I did not buy an essay off the internet or willfully attempt to pass another’s work off as my own. Nonetheless, I was careless, maybe stupid, and definitely irresponsible. I wrote an essay that followed the text too closely, that used another author’s words outside of quotations, without crediting them.

When I was first told that I had plagiarized and asked to take myself to honor council I was surprised and angry. I had been told to write a summary of a paper. In my mind, a summary is simply a shorter, condensed version of that original paper. I had included the author’s name and the title of their paper in the first paragraph of my essay and I assumed that was enough. Most of the paper was my own writing but when I became lazy or felt that the original vocabulary was too complex to paraphrase, I included full sentences from the paper I was summarizing. Upon completing my summary I looked over it and was happy with my work. I had conveyed all the important points of the paper and had fit it all into a shorter format.

While explaining to me how I had plagiarized, the professor mentioned that I could not publish a paper like this. I was taken aback as I had never before thought of being able to publish a paper I had written; especially not a short paper written in my second course in a department that I am neither majoring nor minoring in. This comment enabled me to understand much more about the intellectual environment of a college. It was both frustrating and somewhat inspiring to think that my professors expected me to do work comparable to that of a publishing author.

After more than enough ranting against the system, I came to understand that whether or not I had actually written a summary, by putting my name at the top right corner of the first page and using another’s words in the body, I had represented another author’s work as my own. It is my responsibility, as a student acting within the honor code, to understand the rules. Even if I have to ask every one of my professors what they believe constitutes plagiarism before I turn in work in their classes, it is still up to me.

Although it has been frustrating having to go through an honor council trial for what amounts to be a mistake, I am lucky. The consequences could have been much more severe and hopefully this was the wake up call that I needed. In the future, not only will I be careful to credit others whether or not a professor specifically calls for it, I have learned to take more pride in my work.

How to avoid unintentional plagiarism:
-Ask, don’t assume.
  -If your professor does not specifically state what type of bibliographical information should be included, ask.
  -Although a summary is a condensed version of a paper, it is plagiarism to simply pick and choose key phrases from the paper. When presenting a summary as your own
work, all of the writing within that summary (unless cited) must be written in your
own words, whether or not the ideas are your own.
-Treat all written assignments seriously. Your professors are academics who publish their
own papers. They will approach your writing the same way they do their own.
-If you have any questions about your writing, ask your professor before turning in the
assignment. Most professors will be happy to look at your work before the due
date to give feedback on the writing.
-It is always safer to cite passages if you are unsure. The academic honor code does not
include a clause about not taking enough credit for your own work.

– Tom Sawyer