Tommy and Professor Zordon
An Honor Council Academic Trial

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Introduction

During the first semester of Tommy’s freshman year, he was enrolled in Introduction to Megazords 101, in the Robotics department at Haverford. In the latter half of the semester, Tommy emailed Honor Council stating that Professor Zordon had asked him to bring himself to Honor Council regarding a robotics test. Honor Council requested statements from both parties, and upon reviewing them, consented on sending the issue to an Academic Trial. Due to various delays Council decided to schedule the start of the trial for the beginning of the following semester.

Fact Finding

The jury questioned Professor Zordon and Tommy about the incident. Professor Zordon became suspicious of an Honor Code violation when grading Tommy’s test, about a week after it was due. Tommy explained that Professor Zordon had expressed concern about his exam, in particular some similarities between his test and another student’s. In describing this initial confrontation, Professor Zordon said the conversation was brief. He first asked Tommy if he wanted to tell him anything, and then he explained the evidence to Tommy. Tommy admitted copying from another student’s exam. Tommy said he considered going to Honor Council before Professor Zordon confronted him, but he did not actually do so.

The jury asked Tommy about the particularities of the exam incident. Tommy said he used the other student’s exam for half of the questions, and said that it confirmed his thoughts on the questions. He did not use the other exam for every question, and Professor Zordon confirmed this. Tommy said he did not have the other student’s permission to take the exam, and did not think about whose exam he was taking; he simply took one. Tommy estimated he did not go over time on the test, but he did not keep track, and did not include the time he spent copying from the other exam.

Professor Zordon had handed the exam out one day after class, and it was due after two more classes had elapsed. The exam was worth approximately 1/5 of the overall grade. This was the second test of the semester for the class. On both the tests, Professor Zordon gave students the optional opportunity to do an unlimited time open-book correction for partial credit. Tommy was not given this option for credit, and received a
zero for the rewrite portion. Tommy did complete a rewrite without his test for zero credit.

Professor Zordon determined that Tommy had copied from the other student (not the other way around) because the other student had more detailed explanations on Megazord piloting in his/her answers. There were no significant similarities in the exact ways answers were presented. Tommy did not really copy on the more “straightforward” questions. Professor Zordon called these questions “straightforward,” and mentioned that the students may not feel the same way.

Tommy started the exam in his room and found it to be very difficult. He had studied, but had no idea what to do on one of the questions. He did not use his instruction manual or any other materials on the test, besides the other student’s test. He left his room, and walked to the Command Center, where he took a test from the designated envelope left by Professor Zordon’s office. The tests were not in individual envelopes, and were all located together in one giant envelope. He took the test on the top and went back to his room. He then completed his own test while referring to the other student’s. He says he tried to consider the content on the answers instead of straight-up copying. He went back to the Command Center and put both tests in the envelope to turn them in.

From comparing the tests, about 2/3 of the more straightforward questions looked similar. Professor Zordon said about 65% of the questions on the test looked similar enough to raise suspicion. Some of these may have been coincidence, but the layout was strikingly similar. Tommy remembered copying from four questions. Given the discrepancies in answers, the chair reminded the jury that the incident had happened a few months prior to the trial, and Tommy had not seen the test since.

**Jury Deliberations**

The members of the jury looked over their notes and the statements. A juror noted that Tommy had admitted to violating the Honor Code in his statement. The jury discussed the possibility that Tommy had taken too much time on the test, but felt satisfied by what Tommy and Professor Zordon had said and did not pursue this possibility any further. The jury came to consensus on the following statement of violation:

*By using a fellow student’s exam, Tommy represented another person’s work as his own. This act constitutes a violation of the Honor Code.*

**Circumstantial Portion**

As is allowed by the Constitution, Professor Zordon elected not to be present for this meeting of the trial.

Tommy completed the course, and received a 2.7 despite receiving a zero on the test in question. This test was during his second midterm week at Haverford. He had a Nutrition test the two days preceding the due date of the Megazords test, and a six to
seven page Falconry paper due just before the test as well. Tommy said that he originally had a planned schedule, but that it didn’t work out and he felt “stress overload.” He did not have any family or emotional issues at the time. Tommy was taking four courses during the semester.

While taking the test, Tommy didn’t know how to do some of the problems, and thought it went horribly. He said he had no idea what to do. Tommy had never done anything like this before at Haverford or in high school. He didn’t feel like he could ask for an extension as the deadline for completing it was so close. Tommy didn’t feel a particular amount of pressure to get good grades, however, he could not internally accept that he wasn’t going to pass a course. When asked, Tommy said he didn’t really consider all of his options. In retrospect, Tommy said he could have used the piloting manual, and then noted that then he probably wouldn’t have been caught and therefore wouldn’t have had the opportunity to reflect on the process. Tommy did not mention the possibility of turning himself in.

During the finals period in December, after this incident occurred, he managed his time better. Tommy had gone to the Megazords review sessions during the semester and said that the final at the end of the semester went pretty well. He didn’t feel like he found the aeronautics calculations on the final more difficult than any other student, and was not too concerned about the test before taking it, because he thought he had studied sufficiently.

Tommy felt that his relationship with Professor Zordon was fine, and that he would feel comfortable taking another class with Professor Zordon in the future. Tommy said he had thought about the Honor Code more since the incident. He said he now takes the Honor Code as something that really needs to be respected. He knew that what he did was against the Code as he was doing it. Tommy has considered majoring or minoring in Robotics, and is still undecided.

**Tentative Resolutions**

The chair reminded the jury that resolutions should address accountability, education, and restoration, including repairing any breaches of trust. Tommy proposed the following resolutions: receiving a 0.0 on the test, writing a letter to the community, re-signing the Honor Code, and writing another letter to Professor Zordon (he had already written one after the confrontation). In the letter to the community, he would like to apologize and address what he learned from the process. Professor Zordon was not present for this meeting, as is allowed in the Constitution.

Tommy left, and the jury deliberated. One juror expressed that this is a very serious violation because Tommy specifically took another student’s test. The jury discussed the severity of the violation. Everyone acknowledged that what Tommy did was significant and that cheating has ramifications for the entire community. The jury discussed separation, and decided it would be too harsh given Tommy’s remorse and his
status as a first semester freshman when he committed the violation. Some jurors also did not feel that the violation merited separation.

The jury discussed asking Tommy to come to Honor Council public portions for the duration of the school year, but decided this had confidentiality issues and was not appropriate for the case. A juror proposed having Tommy serve as an unpaid TA or grader for the Robotics department as a sort of community service. However, this could be a burden for the department. Other forms of community service were discussed, including tutoring at the college and/or the Haverford School, and organizing speakers. The jury decided not to use any of these ideas, because they did not seem appropriate for the case. The jury also wanted to make sure that the community saw Tommy as being held accountable. A juror proposed having Tommy meet with his dean about time management, but this was not considered an effective idea.

To address education, the jury discussed having Tommy write a letter to himself that would be mailed to him every year until he graduates, to serve as a reminder. However, there were logistical problems with this. The jury decided that some sort of letter to the community would be appropriate. A juror proposed an essay instead, and this was agreed upon.

The jury consented to the following resolution:

1. Tommy’s final grade will be lowered to a 2.0 for the course.

One person stood outside for the following reason (direct quote from juror):

“I stand outside since I don’t believe juries should hand out grades. I do believe that the lowest passing grade is a fair mark for a student who violated the Honor Code in such a serious way.” The jury consented to the following resolutions without anyone standing outside:

2. Tommy will receive a 0.0 for the exam in question.

3. Tommy will work to repair his relationship with Professor Zordon as he sees fit.

4. Tommy will write a reflective essay of appropriate length relating his freshman year experience with time management and the Honor Code.
5. Tommy will re-sign the Honor Code to reaffirm his membership as part of our community.

These resolutions were emailed to Professor Zordon and Tommy after the meeting.

Finalizing Resolutions

The jury met and decided to switch the order of the resolutions. The jury talked about resolution #2, and decided it was best as written. The jury changed the resolution about the essay to include a due date and clearer language. No one stood outside:

In order to educate the community, especially incoming freshmen, Tommy will write a reflective essay of appropriate length relating his freshman year experience with time management and the Honor Code. He will complete this essay within 4 weeks of the trial’s conclusion.

The changes to the resolutions were presented to Tommy. Professor Zordon elected not to attend the meeting, as is permitted by the Constitution. Tommy was given the opportunity to ask questions, and the jury explained the reasoning behind the resolution about the grade. He was generally comfortable with the resolutions. Tommy left, and the jury consented to the following set of resolutions:

1. Tommy’s final grade will be lowered to a 2.0 for the course.

2. Tommy will receive a 0.0 for the exam in question.

3. Tommy will work to repair his relationship with Professor Zordon as he sees fit.

4. In order to educate the community, especially incoming freshmen, Tommy will write a reflective essay of appropriate length relating his freshman year experience with time management and the Honor Code. He will complete this essay within 4 weeks of the trial’s conclusion.

5. Tommy will re-sign the Honor Code to reaffirm his membership as part of our community.

Post-Trial

Professor Zordon changed Tommy’s grade to a 2.0, as the jury suggested.
Tommy’s Reflective Essay

Every teenager that applies to Haverford knows that they are applying to a top ten liberal arts school in the country. However, some of these students may not realize where this reputation has come from, and how the college is able to maintain this high rank. It seems that I am one of the students that fell into this category. Obviously I knew I would have to work hard at Haverford, but I did not anticipate the constant struggle I faced during the first semester of my freshman year. The other component of Haverford’s uniqueness is the Honor Code. The Honor Code is a document that allows an extraordinary amount of trust amongst the community, and everyone is responsible for doing their part in following the Code. Under the tremendous pressure I was facing in the middle of my first semester, I cracked, and made a terrible mistake in judgment. I had been used to a high level of success in my previous years of education, and when I came to the realization a grade of mine may have been in jeopardy, I did the worst thing I possibly could: violate the Honor Code.

The week of the incident was one in which I found myself extremely overwhelmed by my situation. I started the week knowing that I would be busy. I had two tests and a paper due just before my Megazords test. I planned out my work for the week and it seemed like I would be able to accomplish all of my tasks. I had dealt with numerous busy weeks in high school, and at the time, this one seemed no different. However, this did not turn out to be the case. On the afternoon that my assignments were due, all that I had left to complete was my Megazords exam. I had put in time preparing for the test, perhaps I needed some more, but the test was due, and I thought I would still be able to do a satisfactory job. Unfortunately, I was mistaken. As I began to take the test I realized that I was not fully prepared and crumbled. I had been working extremely hard on all of my assignments (which included several very late nights), and I cracked under the pressure of realizing there was a very strong possibility I would fail the test. This is when I made the terrible and impulsive decision to seek out help on the exam and used another student’s in the class for aid. I am very regretful of the choice I made, and this process of reflection has created an even greater appreciation for the Honor Code than I ever had before.

Obviously I was not thinking clearly when I made this decision. Simply failing the exam and discussing the situation with my professor undoubtedly would have ended in a better result than the one I was left with. The truth of the matter is that I had never failed a test before, and the idea of it was what caused this impulsive decision. I understand that at Haverford, students are not supposed to govern themselves by worrying about grades but instead the learning process. I have never committed an action like this before and certainly will not in the future. I am very sorry for what I have done, and have had a long time to reflect on the situation. I am glad to finally be reaching closure on the issue and put it in the past. I am confident that I have learned a lot from my mistake, and will be able to better myself in the future.

While I understand that I am responsible for my actions, and this is not an excuse, but this incident occurred only a few months into my freshman year at Haverford. Obviously this does not justify cheating of any manner, but now I feel I have a much
better understanding of what it means to be a part of the Haverford community. When I faced similar circumstances during finals week, I already was able to take better steps to alleviate this stress and made much better decisions.

I am hopeful that my experience and this reflection will be able to help others who find themselves in a stressful situation similar to mine. I know many, if not all, of the members of this community probably have already dealt with issues like this one, but if there is one person that I can help, I will feel like I made a considerable contribution. I am also hopeful that incoming freshman will read this and understand how seriously the Honor Code needs to be taken. Time management is a very important skill to have, and prior to this incident, I felt I did have this skill. However, something I can improve on is not pressuring myself so much. While hindsight is always 20-20, I better realize that asking for an extension would not have hurt anyone. The worst my professor could have said was no. Almost anything I could have done would have been better than cheating.

While this process has been a long one, I am thankful that it has come to an end. I have learned a lot about Haverford, the community, and myself. I now understand that pressure is unnecessary to put on oneself. I was able to have a very productive conversation with my parents and come to an understanding that a GPA is not what is most important. I now find myself enjoying the learning process much more, and overall have been less stressed and happier. I am thankful that the members of the Haverford community have been willing to allow me to remain a part of the school, and I will be sure to take advantage of this second chance. The Honor Code is something that needs to be taken very seriously; it is not just a set of suggestions. And no matter how hard a situation may seem, there is always a better alternative than cheating. Because in the end, all you have is your integrity.

Discussion Questions

1. Should Honor Council juries have the power to recommend changes in overall course grades?

2. How much should a student’s status as a first-semester freshman be taken into account in a trial?

3. Was Tommy’s reflective essay a sufficient means of restoring the breach of trust within the community?