Wyclef and Lauryn
An Honor Council Academic Trial
Abstract Released Fall 2001
Abstract Discussion: Tuesday, Oct. 23, 1:30 p.m. in the Bryn Mawr Room (DC)
Tuesday, Oct. 23, 10:15 p.m. in Founders Common Room

Note: Two abstract discussions are being held to allow faculty to attend. Both discussions are open to the entire community.

Introduction:
Wyclef was a student in Professor Lauryn Hill’s class. Professor Hill’s final exam required short essay responses. When Wyclef turned in the final exam the professor noticed that answers to two of the response questions were written in a style and with diction very dissimilar to Wyclef’s previous work. Professor Hill thought she recognized the source and proceeded to find it on the Internet. She then contacted Wyclef and told him that he should contact Honor Council. When Wyclef received this note he realized that what he had originally turned in to the professor was not the correct document, which he then sent to Professor Hill.

Fact Finding I:
Professor Hill’s statement:
Professor Hill explained that she had given a take-home final exam with a number of response questions from which to choose. The students were permitted to consult any source desired in preparation for the exam. When they were to take the exam they were given a specific time period in which to take the exam and also told that they were not allowed to consult any source while actually completing the exam.

Professor Hill noted that two of Wyclef’s responses, while very good arguments, did not address the question nor did they sound like Wyclef’s usual writing style. She thought that she recognized the piece and then did an Internet search and found two documents, sections of which were identical to paragraphs in Wyclef’s exam.

Professor Hill then contacted Wyclef and expressed concern about the two responses. A few days later she received a new version of both answers and an explanation stating that he had mistakenly handed in the wrong document and that these responses were the ones he had actually written for the exam. Professor Hill said that these two answers were written in Wyclef’s typical style.

Wyclef’s statement:
Wyclef explained that he had spent a lot of time preparing for the exam by consulting many different sources including the Internet. His study technique included rewriting notes based on the sources to help his understanding of the material. He saved these written notes, and eventually the final, on his computer, a disk, and a friend’s computer.

Wyclef took the exam on his computer then went to sleep. The next morning Wyclef went to his friend’s computer and printed out the answers to the exam. The answers to the exam were in a folder with the notes that he had taken in preparation for the exam. Wyclef looked at a number of the documents to find which ones he needed to
print to turn in. After printing he did not look over his answers, but turned them in to Professor Hill anyway.

A few days later Professor Hill contacted Wyclef. Wyclef explained that he had not printed out the correct responses and that he would send the original answers to Professor Hill.

Jury Questions:

The jury asked a number of clarifying questions in order to better understand the sequence of events and some of the specific computer details. These did not differ from the parties’ statements. The jury did learn that the exam Wyclef turned in originally and the one that he intended to turn in responded to different questions.

Jury Deliberation:

Members of the jury found the facts in Wyclef’s statement confusing. This led some members to question Wyclef’s explanation of the situation. The jury then discussed whether they had the ability and responsibility to judge Wyclef’s honesty. The jury concluded that they needed to further clarify the sequence of events in order to come to a statement of violation. They decided to hold another fact-finding session.

Fact Finding II

Fact finding II was used to further clarify the details of the first fact finding session. The jury learned under what names Wyclef saved his documents, in what folders, and on which computer.

Jury Deliberation II:

The jury discussed three major issues that it felt were central to determining a statement of violation. First, the jury considered the complexity of the sequence of events. This was clarified in the second fact finding and the jury became comfortable with Wyclef’s explanation. They also recognized that it was not within their capabilities nor was it their role to determine whether Wyclef was being dishonest, because he was still bound by the Code.

The jury agreed that Wyclef’s situation was unusual because the paper in question was not intended to be the final document, rather Wyclef had been careless in his preparation for turning in the paper. Nonetheless, the jury felt that this constituted a breach of the section of the Honor Code stating: “As students we are responsible for proper conduct and integrity in all of our scholastic work.”

The jury also discussed in depth where on the spectrum of plagiarism Wyclef’s paper should be placed. Some jurors felt that because he did not intend to grossly plagiarize and had actually written an original paper, his act was quite different from other acts of gross plagiarism in which an original paper is never written. Other jurors felt, however, that because the paper that was handed in was grossly plagiarized (as none of it was Wyclef’s own work) that it constituted an act of gross plagiarism. After much discussion, the jury concluded that while the act was not gross plagiarism the paper was “grossly plagiarized.” The jury then came to this statement of violation:
The student violated the Honor Code because he failed to be “responsible for proper conduct and integrity in ... [his] scholastic work,” resulting in the submission of a grossly plagiarized final exam.

Circumstantial:

Wyclef mentioned that he was under a heavy amount of stress and had not been sleeping much over the week that he was studying for the exam. Wyclef felt that he needed to do particularly well on this exam and had been studying until the point of exhaustion and extreme stress.

Wyclef assumed an enormous amount of responsibility for his actions. He explained that his stress and exhaustion was not an excuse for the violation he committed. He recognized that he was careless in printing his paper and that his organization and study habits in relation to the exam were irresponsible.

Wyclef explained that he had looked through past abstracts in order to get a better sense of what resolutions he might suggest to the jury. He felt that separation would be harsh because he had made a mistake rather than plagiarized with intent. Wyclef did feel, however, that failing the class would be appropriate, that he should write a letter to Professor Hill, and see a learning specialist. Wyclef said that he trusted the jury to construct appropriate resolutions and would agree to what was set forth. Wyclef talked to the jury about how a large part of his decision to attend Haverford was based on the Honor Code and he felt disbelief and disappointment in himself in the fact that he had broken the Honor Code.

Resolutions Discussions:

The jury easily agreed on the first four resolutions, which are written at the end of this section. Some members of the jury felt that the resolutions did not thoroughly hold Wyclef accountable. The jury brainstormed ideas for other resolutions that could hold Wyclef accountable. First, they considered putting him on academic probation. In the end, the jury decided that they were not concerned with Wyclef’s academic performance and that this resolution held little relevance to the issues at hand.

Next, the jury considered including a resolution that would notify the jury if Wyclef were ever a confronted party in an academic trial again. The jury debated this resolution for an extended period of time. They tried modifying it several ways, but several jury members still had issues with it. Some members of the jury were concerned that the Honor Code did not allow for resolutions that didn’t let the confronted party reenter the community as a full and trusted member. Other members of the jury were concerned that this potential resolution did not address the essence of the violation. Wyclef had proved himself trustworthy and regretful in the circumstantial portion of the trial and these members of the jury felt that there was no reason to suspect that he would break the Honor Code again. Furthermore, they felt that a resolution such as this would send the message that the jury did not trust Wyclef. The remaining members of the jury felt there was no reason not to include a “future trial clause” in the resolutions and thought it would make Wyclef more accountable.
At this point, it was difficult to come to consensus on the resolutions. One jury member suggested that instead of including a “future trial clause” the resolutions ask Wyclef to write a letter of reflection about how this trial affected the rest of his time at Haverford. Much of the jury liked this resolution because it would require that Wyclef continue to reflect on his violation. Other members of the jury felt that this resolution still did not address the accountability they felt was lacking in the resolutions. Finally, the jury agreed to a combination of this resolution and the “future trial clause” resolution. The jurors who had previously disagreed with the “future trial clause” felt that considering its presence as a reflection, rather than a threat made the resolution more relevant. One juror stood outside of consensus on resolution five. The jury came to consensus on the following resolutions as a whole with nobody standing outside (despite the fact that one juror had stood outside earlier on one resolution):

1. The student will receive a 0.0 for the class.
2. The student will write a letter to the Professor in an attempt to repair the breach of trust between them.
3. The student will write a letter to the community emphasizing proactive measures he could have taken to avoid the situation and steps others could take to avoid similar situations in the future. (This resolution was later changed.)
4. The student will meet with a learning specialist to help him build his organizational skills. The meeting will be followed by meetings with his dean during the semester to reinforce his progress.
5. The student will write a letter of reflection discussing his involvement in this trial, its effects, and his current relationships with the Honor Code. Upon graduation, this letter will be written and presented to the community, or if he is a confronted party in another academic trial, he will write the letter to the new jury to be presented during the circumstantial portion of the trial.

Presentation of Resolutions:

Wyclef thought the resolutions were appropriate and expressed his willingness to comply with them. The jury clarified a number of the resolutions, particularly number five. They stressed that in his reflection Wyclef could share as much as he wanted about the trial. They also explained that one person stood outside consensus on resolution five and why it was so controversial.

Professor Hill wrote an email expressing her concern that the resolutions were too mild considering that the paper was grossly plagiarized. She asked the jury to consider the effects of resolutions such as these on the academic integrity of the community.

Jury Deliberations:

The jury decided that resolution three was too vague, because it did not give a time-line for Wyclef’s letter. They changed it to:

"The student will write a letter to the community, to be released with the abstract, emphasizing proactive measures he could have taken to avoid the situation and steps others could take to avoid similar situations in the future."

After a short discussion the jury came to consensus on the resolutions with the modification to number three, with one person standing outside. This jury member asked
that he not have to explain his reasoning to the jury, but that he would do so in his juror statement.

**Juror Statements:**

Juror 1: This was a difficult situation for all involved and I can now see why consensus can pose such a formidable problem, but is such a strength, to the trial process. Wyclef handed in a grossly plagiarized final, but after some long discussions we decided that his intentions were not malicious; because he had not contrived to hand in the plagiarized exam, I felt we should not hold him responsible to the same degree. I will admit that some doubt will always exist about the chronology of the events, but it’s not fair to anyone involved to let the trial process run astray due to purely unconfirmed doubt. Throughout the process, Wyclef took a great deal of responsibility for his conduct and as a result, I felt that he understood the severity of his actions and was therefore in a responsive position to start repairing the breach of trust between himself and the code, the community, and the professor involved. The resolutions were designed to support him in these endeavors while educating the community. The jury did not initially agree on the best ways to implement these intentions, but I think we were eventually able to find common ground while maintaining the tradition and integrity of the code.

Juror 2: I am the juror who stood outside the final consensus. During the entire trial I felt somewhat railroaded by the rest of the jury. I thought about the resolutions we came up with over the night off we had and really felt that they were a joke. I still feel that Wyclef committed an act of gross plagiarism despite his intent. I don’t feel that Wyclef was totally honest, but I couldn’t let that impact my decisions in the trial. But in the end I couldn’t just overlook that feeling. Also after receiving the e-mail from Professor Hill I did not feel that what we did would repair the breach of trust between Wyclef and Professor Hill at all. I feel that separating Wyclef would have helped repair the breach of trust with Professor Hill, not that I can speak for Professor Hill. I don’t think that needing separation to repair the breach of trust is a good thing though. I did not feel that I could express any of these concerns during the trial though because of how the jury reacted to the e-mail, which was less than positive, in fact I even think that some members laughed at it. I left this trial with a very bad feeling about it, but I am a Quaker and one thing that Quakers believe in is sense of the meeting instead of consensus, and although I did not agree with the resolutions I did feel that they were the sense of the meeting and hoped that I would be able to just come to terms with them eventually, hence standing outside of consensus but not blocking it. I still don’t feel quite right about them. I think that it is trials like this that cause honor council to be thought of as a joke by the faculty.

Juror 3: The resolution that we had the most trouble coming to consensus on was resolution number 5. For me, having a resolution that would affect later trials is against the spirit of the Honor Code. No one should be considered more or less likely to break the code. Furthermore, behind the idea of confidentiality is the idea that after the trial is over and a person has spent time away from campus or completed whatever resolutions are given, that person is supposed to be able to be a regular member of Haverford’s campus. No stigma should follow them in their daily lives or into a trial situation should another one occur. I pushed for the resolution to be more than a condition for a trial. I stood
outside of consensus on the fifth resolution because I felt it was fundamentally distrustful to have a stipulation for another trial and against the idea of equality and new beginnings that I feel the Code supports.

Questions:
1. Do resolutions involving "future trial consideration" contradict the ideas of the Honor Code?
2. Do resolutions involving "future trial consideration" imply that the jury does not trust the confronted party?
3. How do students' and the faculty's ideas concerning appropriate resolutions differ? Is this difference important for juries to consider?
Letter to the Community

Writing this letter is very difficult for me. I was somewhat unaware of the selfish act of gross plagiarism at the time I was committing it. However, when my professor and peers contacted me afterwards, I realized that I had made a huge mistake and needed to be responsible for what I had done. I admitted to the Jury what I believe to had happen that night and was willing to take the full blame for my actions. I was careless with my work and didn't put much effort into my academics, as I should have. I ask the community to forgive me as I have already met with the Time Management Counselor and I have begun to take my studies a lot more seriously. As for the act of gross plagiarism itself, I never meant to commit it. I understand what I did but it was never what I wanted to do. As I explained to the jury, cheating and telling lies was never a part of my life. I chose to attend Haverford College because of its honor code and wanted to be a part of this type of community, one where people took pride in their work and had the dignity to never plagiarize.

Thank you,
Wyclef