Carolina and Professor Rabab
An Honor Council Academic Trial

This abstract is late in its release. A student panel was convened, the abstract for which is forthcoming.

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Introduction:

Carolina, a student in Professor Rabab’s class, was confronted by the professor several days after turning in a sizable assignment. Professor Rabab noticed that Carolina’s responses to some questions on the assignment looked very similar to the answers of another student in the class, Georgia. The professor determined that Carolina had copied the answers from Georgia’s assignment. After emailing and confronting Carolina, who confessed to cheating, both parties submitted statements to Honor Council. Honor Council then came to consensus on a suspicion of violation.

Fact Finding:

Professor Rabab’s statement:

Professor Rabab told the jury that her course was a difficult one. Although Carolina had not met one of the prerequisites, she received the professor’s special approval to enroll. Students were allowed to use books and notes (as long as they did not collaborate with others) and were given a number of days to complete the assignment in question. While Professor Rabab was grading Carolina’s assignment and that of another student, Georgia, she noticed three answers that were strikingly similar. Based on the absence of some important details in Carolina’s answer, Professor Rabab deduced that Carolina had copied from Georgia. She emailed both students to arrange a meeting.

Georgia met with the professor first and was bewildered by the situation. Carolina met with the professor later, and after some initial hesitation admitted that she had copied some of the questions from Georgia’s paper without Georgia’s knowledge. Professor Rabab said that she believed Carolina’s account of the facts, and that Carolina’s remorse was genuine. She asked Carolina to contact Honor Council.

Carolina’s statement:

Carolina said that she took time on two consecutive days to do the assignment. On the day before the due date, she worked alone for a significant period of time, then began to panic when she was not done. Carolina took a break and wandered into her common
room looking for Georgia, a friend of hers who happened to be taking the same class. Georgia was not around, but her books and papers were lying out in the common room. Carolina then explained that she looked at Georgia’s paper, and copied 3 or 4 questions (ones which Carolina had not yet worked on). After turning in the assignment, she received the professor’s email, and learned that Georgia received a similar email. Carolina then felt she needed to confess, especially to clear Georgia’s name. Carolina told the jury she hesitated but eventually admitted the whole story to Professor Rabab.

Jury Questions:

Although the facts of the case seemed straightforward, the jury asked a few clarifying questions. Carolina was not sure about the exact number of questions she plagiarized. Professor Rabab told the jury that there was evidence of copying on 3 of the questions, no evidence of copying on 4 other questions, and that she could not be sure either way about the rest. Carolina said that the idea of an extension did not occur to her, although the professor said she had granted extensions to other students in the past.

Jury Deliberations:

The jury felt that both parties were forthcoming with their answers. Although Carolina’s breach of trust with a fellow student was worrisome, the jury felt it could not address this issue since Georgia had not brought statements against Carolina. Members of the jury felt that the main problem to be addressed was Carolina’s lack of academic integrity as demonstrated by her direct and serious plagiarism. Thus, consensus was reached on the following statement of violation.

Statement of Violation:

The student violated the Honor Code by representing another student’s work as her own.

Circumstantial Portion:

Carolina explained that the assignment was given at a very bad time for her, with several tests and papers due the same week. She was stressed and concentrating on other things. During the plagiarism, Carolina said she was thinking that copying was the “easiest” way to get the assignment over with. She mentioned that she had learned a lot from meetings with Professor Rabab after the cheating occurred, but she wanted to drop the course because she felt she was lost in it. She said that, even if she had to take a 0.0 because of the withdrawal, she would rather do this than continue in the course.

In an email statement to the jury, Professor Rabab said that she had been impressed by Carolina’s “forthright admission of the facts” and felt that the breach of trust between them was being repaired. The professor wished Carolina to continue, but would not oppose a drop. However, she mentioned that the usual grade recorded for a dropped course, a W (withdrawal), did not seem appropriate and a 0.0 seemed too harsh.
Jury Deliberations:

The jury discussed separation, to address accountability as well as education. The jury felt that Carolina’s actions constituted “gross plagiarism” but it was difficult to reach a decision on whether separation was warranted. Separation as a possible way to break out of the “stress mentality” of Haverford was mentioned. However, some jury members felt that separation was too severe given the professor’s recommendations and Carolina’s willingness to admit her plagiarism once confronted.

The jury was concerned about Carolina’s decision to drop the class, feeling that it represented a way to “forget about” the plagiarism and move on. There was a question as to whether the jury’s role would be redundant by recommending a 0.0 if Carolina was also mandated by the administration to receive a 0.0. Additionally, there was confusion about whether dropping the class would be allowed in these circumstances. After consultation with a dean, the jury was informed that Carolina could not drop the class and receive a W.

Eventually, the jury reasoned that Carolina could be better educated about the seriousness of her actions by staying within the Haverford community. An extensive project was designed to promote Carolina’s understanding of plagiarism in a larger context, as well as alternatives to plagiarism. Carolina would be held accountable by a reduction in grade corresponding to the gravity of her plagiarism. The jury came to consensus on the following tentative resolutions with no members standing outside:

1. The student will receive a 0.0 for the assignment.
2. The student will receive a 0.0 for the class, but will complete all assignments, and will meet regularly with the professor to discuss her work.
3. The student will complete a comprehensive project according to guidelines provided by the jury. This project will address issues relevant to the breach of trust. Three members of the jury will serve as advisors.
4. The student will meet with the time management counselor once a week until the project is completed and approved.
5. The student will write a letter to the community addressing the importance of academic integrity.
6. If the student is brought to trial for academic reasons in the future, that jury will be informed of this abstract after coming to a statement of violation.

Presentation of Resolutions:

After hearing the resolutions, Professor Rabab argued strongly against the idea that Carolina should receive a 0.0 in the class. The professor said she was not unfamiliar with trial procedure, and had been involved in cases where she thought a confronted party was blatantly lying and received resolutions that were seemingly less severe. Professor Rabab
also noted that finishing the coursework in her class was not a minor undertaking, and thought that the failing grade would de-motivate Carolina. When asked about a different grade limitation, the professor felt a 1.0, the minimum passing grade, would sufficiently address accountability.

Carolina surprised the jury by saying that she had changed her mind, and was not going to drop the course. She saw the project as a reasonable resolution. However, she felt the jury was being unnecessarily harsh in giving her a 0.0.

**Final Consensus on Resolutions:**

The jury discussed the tentative resolutions. Members were concerned that Carolina did not realize how much separation had been discussed, and that she still did not understand the seriousness of her transgression. Several members of the jury saw the professor’s viewpoint that the resolutions were unnecessarily harsh, but agreed that there was also enough rationale for the failing grade not to oppose it. A strong argument for the 0.0 for the class was that, by failing only the assignment, Carolina might profit from her plagiarism by doing better in the class than others who did not break the Honor Code. A grade reduction to 1.0 was also briefly considered, but the jury decided it would have approximately the same effect as a grade of 0.0, and a failing grade was important to address accountability to the larger community.

The jury also felt that two members were sufficient to supervise the assigned project, as one had to decline due to personal reasons. They amended Resolution 3 to reflect this and came to consensus on the following resolutions, with no one standing outside:

1. **The student will receive a 0.0 for the assignment.**
2. **The student will receive a 0.0 for the class, but will complete all assignments, and will meet regularly with the professor to discuss her work.**
3. **The student will complete a comprehensive project according to guidelines provided by the jury. This project will address issues relevant to the breach of trust. Two members of the jury will serve as advisors.**
4. **The student will meet with the time management counselor once a week until the project is completed and approved.**
5. **The student will write a letter to the community addressing the importance of academic integrity.**
6. **If the student is brought to trial for academic reasons in the future, that jury will be informed of this abstract after coming to a statement of violation.**
**Discussion Questions:**

1. Is plagiarism of a fellow student a more serious offense than using sources from the Internet?

2. Do you feel that the jury should have considered Carolina’s breach of trust with her friend Georgia?

3. How much weight should a jury give to the wishes of a professor when creating resolutions?

4. Would it have been fair to the other students in the class if Carolina had only received a 0.0 for the assignment and not the class? How much should the grades of other students be taken into account?

5. Does Haverford need more resources for stressed students?
Dear Haverford Community,

I want to apologize for my lack of academic integrity during my sophomore year here at Haverford. I was ignorant and stupid for cheating/plagiarizing. The last thing I wanted to do was screw up and hurt my friends and the community. My own stupidity and lack of integrity led me to cause pain to my professor and my fellow friend/classmate. I didn’t realize I needed help until it was too late. Having academic integrity is an important characteristic that everyone on this campus should have. I lost my sense of academic integrity when I decided to take a fellow classmate’s test and pass her work as mine. It was probably the dumbest thing I have ever done and one of the biggest mistakes I’ve made. I ended up injuring my professor and my friend’s feelings which was not what I wanted. I lost their trust in the process, and honestly, there is not a day when I don’t think about what I’ve done.

An important aspect of academic integrity is knowing when to seek help and actually seeking that help. I knew I was in need of help, but I was too cowardly to actually do it. Being cowardly is not an aspect of academic integrity. Instead of seeking the honorable route by seeking the guidance I needed, I took the cowardly route by cheating/plagiarizing. Guidance was easily accessible to me, but I didn’t have the integrity to actually go seek it. I really do hope everyone in the Haverford community has that integrity.

To me, plagiarism in any form is a serious offense. By taking someone else’s work and passing it on as yours is just plain wrong and stupid, no matter if the source is your classmate/friend or sources on the Internet. What I did was wrong and dumb, and I am sorry for doing it. There is never ever a good reason for plagiarizing and cheating because help is so easy to get here. When in need of help/guidance, go to your professor. The professor can be a wonderful resource, and if that doesn’t work out, there are other resources such as getting a tutor or talking to your dean.

Academic integrity is important to all our successes here at Haverford. I lost that when I decided to cheat, and I want to apologize to the community once again for the trouble I caused. I never meant any harm, and I am currently now slowly regaining the integrity I lost. I hope everyone has it in their hearts to forgive me.

Sincerely,

Carolina