Abstract Discussion: Monday, October 2nd, at 10:15 P.M, in Founders Common Room

Supergirl
Abstract Released Fall 2000
A Joint Honor Council-Administrative Panel
Cast of Main Characters:
Supergirl, a Haverford student, is the confronted party.
Ethan, a Counselor in Psychological Services, is the confronting party.
Selena is a friend of Supergirl’s.
Some Bryn Mawr Professors

Introduction:

Ethan, a Counselor in Psychological Services, contacted the Dean of the College regarding a series of fraudulent e-mails sent by Supergirl from a Yahoo account that Supergirl, a Haverford student, had created under Ethan’s name. The Dean of the College confronted Supergirl immediately, who confessed to sending the e-mails. He then contacted Honor Council, which reached consensus that the matter should be sent to a Joint Panel. Honor Council felt that there was suspicion of a violation of the Honor Code, as well as a possible infraction of college policy.

The Panel Convenes:

One of the Honor Council Co-Chairs and one of the Deans led the panel. In accordance with the guidelines set forth in the Honor Code, the panel consisted of four Honor Council representatives and two Deans. Because the panel took place prior to the 2000-2001 academic year, the panel followed the procedural and philosophical guidelines of the previous Honor Code, not of the restructured version that took effect as of the 2000-2001 school year.
First Meeting:

Copies of the Confronting and Confronted parties’ statements were read aloud. Below they are summarized and paraphrased:

Ethan’s statement: Ethan was e-mailed one afternoon by a Haverford student, Selena, who claimed to have received an e-mail from a Yahoo account in his name. Selena also explained that she noticed the e-mail had been sent to another Haverford student’s account, that of Supergirl. Ethan was immediately concerned that someone had fraudulently set up an account under his name. After contacting Yahoo, from which Ethan received little help, he e-mailed the Yahoo account. A reply came from that address, explaining in extensive detail that Ethan and this Yahoo account holder apparently had the same name, and providing a viable explanation as to why Selena received an e-mail from the Yahoo account.

Ethan was somewhat hesitant to accept this explanation, but simply did not want to believe that someone could “steal” his identity. The idea was so unsettling to him that he was willing to accept any other credible story. At this point, Ethan assumed that this confusing matter was resolved.

However, one month later, Ethan received an e-mail from a Bryn Mawr Professor who wanted to discuss the e-mail that Ethan had written on behalf of Supergirl. The e-mail, signed “Ethan, Psychological Counselor,” asked some Bryn Mawr Professors to grant Supergirl extended time
on her exams because Supergirl suffered from a learning disability. Ethan informed the Bryn Mawr Professor that he had never written such an e-mail. The Professor suspected that this was the case after she was urged by a colleague to inquire about the e-mail’s very unprofessional nature. Ethan told the panel that this Professor was new to Bryn Mawr’s faculty and was unaware that Haverford’s Psychological Services Center would never act in such a fashion on a student’s behalf. Later that same day, Ethan received a similar e-mail from another Bryn Mawr Professor, explaining that he had also received the same e-mail from “Ethan, Psychological Counselor”.

Ethan obtained from the Bryn Mawr Professors the IP address on the e-mails. With the help of the Director of Academic Computing, Ethan was able to confirm that the IP address on the e-mails belonged to Supergirl’s computer. Finally, Ethan brought the matter to the Dean of the College, who immediately confronted Supergirl.

After being confronted, Supergirl paid a visit to Ethan’s office to apologize and explain her behavior. Ethan expressed that he was surprised at how much of the blame Supergirl placed on the pressure from her parents. Supergirl told Ethan that she had acted impulsively, an explanation that Ethan could not accept due to the evidently calculated chain of events.

For Ethan, this was an extremely disturbing matter, one which was obviously a breach of the Honor Code as well as a personally damaging issue: “This is fraud for personal gain, an egregious violation of [the] Honor Code and I imagine any other Haverford policy…I was filled with a sense of personal violation and chilled to think about how calculating the letters were.” Ethan felt that Supergirl’s behavior was a breach of trust with the community, one that could not be tolerated. He suggested that separation from the college would probably enable Supergirl and her parents to deal with their relationship
Questions for and Additional Comments from Ethan: Ethan felt that Supergirl’s actions had jeopardized both his reputation and professional integrity. He also explained that Psychological Services would never write the type of e-mail that Supergirl sent to her Professors. Rather, Psychological Services requires an outside evaluation of the student, which, if the student is found to have a learning disability, would be reported to the Committee on Student Standing and Progress (CSSP). In turn, CSSP could choose to recommend to a professor that a student be granted extended time on an exam.

Ethan reemphasized the seriousness of this Honor Code infraction and again recommended separation as the best means for Supergirl to deal with her problems.

Supergirl’s statement: Supergirl corroborated the chain of events that Ethan described in his statement. Furthermore, she informed the panel that a physician had previously unofficially diagnosed her as having a learning disability. She also explained that the first e-mail sent from the Yahoo account – the one that Selena received – was meant to test if the account worked and was sent only accidentally to Selena. Supergirl intended to send the e-mail only to her own Haverford account, but inadvertently sent it to her friend, Selena, as well.

Supergirl emphasized that she acted impulsively and under pressure. She was performing poorly in her Bryn Mawr classes, which worried Supergirl because her parents had previously threatened to take her out of college if she did not succeed academically. Therefore, she would not be able to return to Haverford because of a lack of financial resources from her parents. Supergirl felt that she could do well if she simply had more time on her exams. On the Friday evening that she sent the fraudulent e-mails, she was scared and desperate and thought this was her only solution to performing well on her exams that upcoming Monday. Supergirl felt that if she were to fail these classes at Bryn Mawr, her parents would undoubtedly follow through on their threat.
She apologized in her statement and said that she wished to take responsibility for her actions. Supergirl said that she recognized the seriousness of what she had done—both as an Honor Code violation and attack on Ethan’s professional reputation. Supergirl had not intended to harm Ethan in any way.

Questions for and clarifying comments from Supergirl: The panel asked Supergirl to explain why she didn’t simply explain to her professors her concerns about the time constraint. Supergirl responded that at Bryn Mawr, the professors would not grant an extension without any type of professional or medical note. Because she had never been officially diagnosed with a learning disability, her receiving such a note would not be possible. The panel then questioned why Supergirl had not pursued being medically diagnosed. She answered by explaining that her mother had told her that a learning disability would mean Supergirl was disabled, something that would humiliate her parents.

Supergirl did not agree with Ethan’s suggestion that she be separated from the community. Such a measure would only aggravate the situation with her parents, not help resolve it. Her parents might even disown her if she were to be separated. Instead, she proposed that she possibly fail the classes, write letters of apology to all of the parties involved and be placed on strict academic probation for the following academic year.
Recapitulation of Events:

Due to the intricate and confusing chain of events, printed below is a chronological summary of what transpired:

One Friday evening…

Supergirl creates the Yahoo account. She then tests the account, sending the e-mail to her Haverford account and accidentally to Selena. Afterwards, she sends the fraudulent e-mails to her Bryn Mawr Professors.

The Following Week…

Ethan receives an e-mail from Selena questioning why she received an odd e-mail from Ethan’s Yahoo account, which simply said, “hi.” Ethan, concerned that someone was fraudulently using his name, e-mails the Yahoo account, from which a detailed reply comes explaining that Ethan and the Yahoo account holder had the same name. The real Ethan, somewhat satisfied with this explanation, assumes the confusion is resolved.

One Month later…

Ethan receives e-mails from Bryn Mawr Professors who want to confirm that he sent e-mails a month earlier asking for Supergirl to have extended time on exams. Ethan, finally realizing that Supergirl was using his name through e-mail, traces the IP address to Supergirl’s computer. Ethan then contacts the Dean of the College, who confronts Supergirl.
Shortly afterwards…

The Joint Panel convenes.

Deliberations:

The panel closely considered Supergirl’s behavior. (IMPORTANT NOTE: Honor Council and the Administration agreed that the Panel should focus solely on her “social” misconduct involving the fraudulent e-mails, not her “academic” misconduct. The Bryn Mawr Honor Board was to handle the academic side of this entanglement.) The panel agreed that her actions lacked any type of respect or concern for Ethan and his professional well being. It also was very concerned with the calculated, pre-meditated and extensive nature of Supergirl’s e-mails, which the panel read at this time. The e-mails to the Bryn Mawr Professors contained quotations from professionals on learning disabilities, clearly reflecting that Supergirl had researched information for her fraudulent e-mails. Finally, the panel was shocked by the two-page e-mail that Supergirl had sent to Ethan, lying about why there was a Yahoo account in his name.

It also investigated the possibility of Supergirl’s behavior violating Academic Computing guidelines. After closely examining the guidelines for computing on Haverford’s website (see “Responsible Use of Computers and the Network at Haverford,” http://www2.haverford.edu/acc/news/acc/responsible_use.html), the Panel decided that she had flagrantly disregarded these regulations in three ways. First, she failed to act responsibly while using the Internet through the Haverford server: “Irresponsible use of the Internet may jeopardize Haverford’s Internet Connection.” Second, she did not act in accordance with the Honor Code: “[The Code’s] principles govern honesty and fairness in computer use as well.” Finally, she sent an e-mail to which she signed someone else’s name, something that ACC guidelines explicitly prohibit. With all of these considerations in mind, the Panel reached consensus on the following statement of violation:
Statement of Violation:

The Student Violated the Honor Code by:

n Fraudulently misrepresenting herself as someone else for self gain, thereby jeopardizing the professional integrity of the violated party.1

n Engaging in an intricate and designed cover-up after being confronted by the violated party.

The student compromised the trust of the entire community by failing to conduct herself in a manner “based on mutual respect and concern” for the violated party and the community at large. (Honor Code, III, B)

1She did not “consider how [her] words and actions may affect the sense of acceptance essential to an individual’s or group’s participation in the community” (Honor Code, III, B).

The student violated Haverford College Policy outlined in Academic Computing Center regulations through:

n An irresponsible use of the Haverford College server, thus jeopardizing the college’s Internet connection.
A failure to act in accordance with the Honor Code while using the Haverford College server.

The sending of several e-mails, via the Haverford College server, to which she signed someone else’s name.

Both parties accepted the statement of violation.

Deliberations:

As the Panel worked to construct a set of resolutions, it was concerned with a number of issues. First, it felt that the seriousness of the infraction warranted holding Supergirl to the highest level of accountability. A few members of the panel were concerned with the extensive cover-up story she told—a two page detail-by-detail lie explaining how Ethan and the Yahoo account owner had the same name, and how Selena received an e-mail from the Yahoo account only accidentally. While the panel recognized the familial and financial problems that separation might cause, it agreed that separation was the only means of holding her sufficiently accountable and felt that she needed to take more responsibility for her behavior rather than placing the blame on her parents. The jury viewed two semesters of separation as adequate, though there were some sentiments expressed that felt one year was too lenient. Regardless of the length of the separation, the Panel hoped that such a period would be used as time for Supergirl to work out her problems. The panel also wanted to make sure that Supergirl would use the time to contemplate the potential implications of her actions on Ethan and Haverford’s Internet access, as well as the severe breach of trust that her behavior had caused with the community. These were the key points that the panel considered as it drafted and reached consensus on the following preliminary set of resolutions:
1) The student will be separated for the next two consecutive semesters.

2) The joint-panel recommends that the student participate in a counseling process to help her resolve her personal and family concerns.

3) Prior to her return, the student must present to the Dean of the College a letter from a professional counselor verifying the students’ readiness to return, and will re-sign her Honor Code pledge card.

4) Upon her return, the student will compose an in-depth paper addressing Academic Computing guidelines and Internet safety to be submitted to the Dean of the College and the Honor Council Chair(s). This essay will ultimately be available to the community.

5) The student will write a letter, to be published and sent to the entire community with a brief summary of the abstract upon her return, explaining the severity of her actions and their implications on the community, what she learned during her separation, and her relationship with the Honor Code.

6) A copy of these resolutions will be kept in the student’s file until she graduates. In the event of any future violations of the Honor Code, or of College Policy, these resolutions may be taken into consideration.

Presentation of the Resolutions:

Ethan was not present for this final meeting. However, he notified the panel through e-mail that he approved of the resolutions.
Supergirl agreed with all of the resolutions, with the exception of the first one. She said that she thought that the resolution would be strictly punitive, as it would only worsen her relationship with her parents and create financial difficulties for her. She suggested that the first resolution be replaced with one that would place her for a year on strict academic probation. She reiterated that she understood how her actions affected all the parties involved, and even the community. Therefore, she did not need time away to reach that understanding. She said separation raised the issue of her welfare—was holding her accountable a valid reason to jeopardize her well being? Although she didn’t think so, she said that she would understand the panel’s decision if it did decide to separate her.

She also explained that she did not intend to violate the Honor Code or college policy; she acted only out of desperation. Supergirl told the panel that she has a lot of respect for the code and would never do anything like this again. During this time of despair and frenzy, it simply didn’t occur to her that she had other options, as her parents had made her feel like a failure for having a learning disability.

Deliberations:

The jury sympathized with Supergirl’s circumstances, but felt they did not warrant a change in the resolutions. After a moment of silence, the panel reached final consensus on the aforementioned set of resolutions.
Supergirl appealed the decision to the President of the College, who upheld the Panel’s decision.

Juror Statements

Juror #1:

I feel that Supergirl never quite understood what she had done. One of the things I said again and again during the trial is that this is a real crime, and she could be doing time. What I meant by that is that Supergirl had not just committed a “havercrime,” she didn’t just break the honor code or something. She committed computer fraud. I mean that is a real crime, so since Ethan was not going to press charges in the real courts, any resolutions we came up with would let off Supergirl with much less than she could have. I felt that she didn’t really want to understand either, she just wanted to blame everyone else, and tell those of us on the panel that we were destroying her chances of a relationship with her parents and making it impossible for her to come back to Haverford. I felt that a two semester separation was too lenient. It is now [much later] and I’m still trying to figure this whole situation out. I felt sorry for Supergirl, very sorry, but I did not understand how she could not realize the true implications of what she did.

Juror #2:
I felt that because Supergirl’s actions were potentially harmful to another person, there was no excuse for what she did. She didn’t just grossly plagiarize a paper: she jeopardized damaging someone else’s career and reputation. Furthermore, there are plenty of people at this college who are under all different types of pressure, be it pressure from their parents, their friends, their peers, or even themselves. And somehow, those people manage to deal with their pressures without sending fraudulent e-mails. Supergirl did have other options, namely, consulting her dean. In my mind, as sorry as I did feel for Supergirl because of the pressure she was under from her parents, I felt it did not excuse potentially hurting someone else.

Questions:

1. To what extent does the pressure from Supergirl’s parents excuse her misconduct?

2. Should separation be considered even if it might jeopardize the confronted parties’ personal welfare?

3. Should Honor Council have limited its scope to her “social misconduct?” Should Supergirl’s academic misconduct have been considered here at Haverford?

4. What do you think of the Panel’s interpretation of the social section of the Honor Code? Was it pertinent in this case? Or did the Panel stretch its interpretation of the Code too far?

Honor Council would be interested in hearing your thoughts on this Joint Panel. Please consider answering the above questions and sending your response to code@haverford.edu. Also, if you have any other thoughts to share or questions that you would like clarified, please attend the abstract discussion or e-mail Honor Council.