An Honor Council Abstract

Introduction:

Sydney was a student in Professor Manette's Revolutionary French Art class. Professor Manette believed that Sydney had plagiarized portions of his final paper. Honor Council was contacted and reached consensus that there was a suspicion of violation. An academic trial was convened.

Fact Finding:

Professor Manette's Statement: Professor Manette first described the nature of her class. The class was discussion based with one major paper due. The class is a graduation requirement for majors. Although the grade in the course reflects both class participation and the paper, Professor Manette said that grades on the final paper usually reflect the quality of prior class work. The actual weight of the paper on the final grade is thus variable. Sydney's discussion in the class was excellent. However, when reading Sydney's final paper, Professor Manette had difficulty determining where Sydney's citations of secondary sources ended and where his own thoughts began. Professor Manette looked up one of the sources found in Sydney's bibliography, and found at least three instances where Sydney had quoted the author without quotation marks or citation.

Professor Manette called Sydney into her office. She pointed out the improper quotations, and asked Sydney to review the paper and underline any passages that should have been cited or placed in quotations. Sydney underlined virtually three continuous pages and other short instances. Professor Manette asked Sydney to contact Honor Council, and he immediately did so.

Sydney's Statement: Sydney agreed with almost everything Professor Manette said, but wanted to expand upon it. His paper was divided into three sections, and it was only in the middle one where problems existed. The second section was an analysis of an author's theory on why a particular artistic trend developed. At an earlier date, Sydney
took notes for his paper, typing quotations from an author’s book into his computer. Under a time crunch at the end of exam week, Sydney had copied and pasted the reading notes into his final paper, interjecting some of his own sentences. He had realized that this would make for a weak paper because he was relying so heavily on one source. To show that most of these ideas were not his own, Sydney mentioned the author in his thesis statement and in other sections of his paper. Sydney said that when he reread and underlined sections that were improperly cited, he realized that this was a "sloppy" paper. He also stated that he had no intention to deceive or plagiarize.

**Jury Questions:** The jury asked Professor Manette if she believed that Sydney had plagiarized even though he had written a few phrases such as "the author states . . .". The professor believed plagiarism had occurred, because Sydney had not used quotation marks when directly quoting. It was difficult to tell where Sydney was paraphrasing as opposed to where he was giving his own analysis. The jury then asked Sydney about his note-taking style. Sydney replied that he usually types in reading notes with some quotations into his computer. He would usually analyze his notes, and then write the paper. In this case, he had largely skipped the analysis, resulting in a self-proclaimed "sloppy paper". Sydney reiterated that he had no intention of plagiarizing.

**Jury Deliberations:**

The jury quickly decided that Sydney’s intent was a circumstantial consideration, and would therefore not affect whether or not he had violated the Honor Code. The jury looked at the paper and the book that Sydney had used. The jury found that in the three underlined pages, the book had been basically quoted with minimal or no change in wording. There was little of the student’s own work. There was an occasional phrase such as "As [author] said . . .". The jury reached a consensus that an act of plagiarism had occurred, but was unsure if this plagiarism was gross or, for lack of a better word, "regular" plagiarism. The Honor Code states: "A gross act of plagiarism constitutes a student’s withdrawal from the commitment of the academic honesty required by the Honor Code, and will normally result in separation from the community." (Honor Code III, A, 1) The jury decided that an act of gross plagiarism would be determined by both the amount plagiarized and Sydney’s intent. The jury went back and forth on this issue for a great deal of time. Many jurors felt that three pages was a very serious act of plagiarism. While agreeing, other jurors felt that by citing the author in his thesis, bibliography, and in a few other points in the paper, Sydney was not trying to deceive Professor Manette. Some jurors were unsure about Sydney’s note taking process. The jury decided to bring Sydney back to answer a few more questions.

**Fact Finding II:**
The jury asked Sydney why he would type such huge quotes (up to a page and a half) into his computer during the note taking process. Sydney replied that this was how he always had taken notes, and although he realized it was labor intensive, he was proud of the work he put in. He also showed a handout that Professor Manette had provided that displayed a similar note taking style. The jury asked Sydney if he had read the paper before he had handed it in. He had. The jury asked Sydney why later in the paper he had properly quoted and cited other writers’ work, but not in this section. Sydney said that he had limited time and sleep. He had tried to cite as much of the work of the original author as he could recognize. Sydney admitted that if he had realized so much of the paper was quoted, he would have changed the paper.

Deliberations II:

The jury looked at the professor’s example and noted that while it consisted of almost entirely direct quotations, quotation marks were correctly used. Page numbers, however, were not cited. In light of this, the jury decided that Sydney’s note taking technique was legitimate, and that the jury could only use the paper to determine whether a gross or regular plagiarism had occurred. The jury noted that Sydney’s plagiarism was a result of disorganization and carelessness rather than an act of deception. The jury decided that Sydney’s attempts to offer some citation, however inadequate, negated gross plagiarism. The jury reached a consensus on a statement of violation.

Sydney violated the Honor Code by committing an act of plagiarism.

Circumstantial:

Sydney accepted the statement of violation and began describing the circumstances under which he had written the paper. Sydney’s Art paper was one of three major papers he was writing during exam period. Sydney also had an exam to study for and a personal obligation. Because of his close relationship with Professor Manette, Sydney decided that he would put off this paper in particular. By the time he got to this paper, he had less than a day to finish his work and had slept little in the past few days. Sydney said that he was so tired that he was in delirium, and would not have turned in a paper like this if he had been able to think more clearly. He said he was thinking about the Code and cited anything that he knew wasn't his own work. He reiterated that he had no intention to deceive anyone.

Sydney then suggested some resolutions. He said that he had been struggling with exactly what plagiarism was. As a resolution, he proposed that he would research and write a linguistic study, or "working definition", of plagiarism that could be used by
Honor Council and the community. Sydney believed that he should fail the paper, but because of his previous work and because he needed the course to graduate, receive a 1.0, the minimal passing grade, for the class. Sydney also felt that he should rewrite the original paper.

Professor Manette could not attend this portion of the trial, but essentially agreed with these resolutions through e-mail. She believed, though, that Sydney should fail the course, but be allowed to meet the graduation requirement through an independent study that would consist of rewriting the paper.

**Deliberation**

The jury liked Sydney’s resolutions. The jury decided that because of his close relationship with the professor, Sydney’s prior work in the class, the situation under which the paper was written, and the wishes of the professor, Sydney should not be separated, and also should not have to retake the course. The jury also decided that allowing Sydney to pass with a 2.0 would not be fair to other class members. (Because this course was necessary for Sydney’s major, Sydney needed a 2.0, not a 1.0, for it to count towards graduation.) Some jurors felt uneasy about establishing an independent study course with so few requirements. As the course load might be too light to deserve a full credit, the class should therefore only be valued at half a credit. The jury considered capping the grade that could be received in this new course. The jury also wanted to hear directly from Professor Manette on how the breach of trust between her and Sydney could be repaired.

**Circumstantial II:**

Professor Manette said that a half credit course would not fulfill the graduation requirement, and therefore would not be a good idea. She said that this independent study would be a variation on a procedure for finishing incompletes used years ago at Haverford. In keeping with this old procedure, Professor Manette felt that a simple rewrite of the paper would suffice for course work. Sydney felt that failing the class in addition to capping the grade on the next course would be unfair, because if he had to completely retake the class, the jury would not put a grade cap on this class.

**Deliberation II:**

The jury decided that the independent study was the only feasible solution. Because this new course included minimal class-work, the jury decided that he should not in theory be able to receive a 4.0. The jury felt that a 1.0 grade debit to the grade Sydney received on the paper was a fairer solution than a grade cap. This would address the accountability issue. The repair of the breach of trust and education could be reached
through the rewrite of the paper and the development of a working definition of plagiarism. The jury reached a tentative consensus on the following resolutions. One jury member stood outside because s/he felt that too many concessions had been made to Sydney.

1. Sydney will receive a 0.0 in the class and will have the option of reregistering for the class next semester with an imposed grade deduction of 1.0. The course work for this new class will consist of the rewrite of the paper with consideration of previous completed course work.

2. Sydney will write a paper of no less than five pages, consulting outside sources, that explores a working definition of plagiarism. In addition he will compose a one page synopsis of his exploration for educational use within the community.

Sydney accepted the resolutions, but had two concerns. First he asked why the class, and not the paper, received a 0.0. The jury responded that because of the seriousness of the charge and because his other work would be carrying over to the new class being constructed for him, the jury felt he should fail the first class. Sydney then asked why he was being debited for the second class if he failed the first. The jury replied that in fairness to his classmates, they felt he should not be able to receive a high grade for a class with a minimal amount of work. Sydney accepted these answers. Professor Manette did not attend this portion of the trial, but had previously agreed with these resolutions.

Again with one member standing outside, the jury reached a final consensus on the resolutions.

Questions

1. Do you think that there should be set criteria for determining whether gross plagiarism or regular plagiarism has occurred? If so, what should some of them be? If not, why?

2. During the Circumstantial portion of the trial, both the student and the professor agreed on a set of resolutions. This was a strong factor in the jury’s decision concerning resolutions. Should such an agreement play such a strong role?

3. Other comments?

If you have any further comments or questions about this abstract, Honor Council offers the opportunity for you to discuss this abstract with an actual member of the jury. Please contact the Honor Council, at 642-CODE for more information. If you have
general comments about this or any other abstract, please contact your local Honor Council representative.

Send comments, problems, or suggestions to: code@haverford.edu
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