Abstract discussion on Wednesday, April 26th, at 9 P.M. in the Campus Center, room 205

Will and Grace

Honor Council Academic Trial

Spring 2000

Introduction: Grace and Professor Will contacted Honor Council about a suspicion of plagiarism. Both parties had communicated before contacting Honor Council. Honor Council consensed on a suspicion of violation.

Fact-Finding #1:

Grace’s statement: The week before the paper was due, Grace chose her paper topic by browsing through a number of sources in the library. After deciding on a topic, she photocopied the relevant information from one source. The weekend before the paper was due, Grace went home, but left her photocopied material at school. At home she located a similar source on the Internet and printed it out. She returned to school with the printout. The night before the paper was due, Grace began working at 2 A.M. Upon its completion, she printed it out without proofreading it and turned the paper in the next morning.

When Professor Will handed back the papers a week and a half later, Grace did not receive hers. She approached him and Professor Will said that he would look in his office for it. The next day, she e-mailed him a copy of the paper at his request.

Shortly afterwards, Professor Will contacted Grace and asked her to meet with him privately. At this meeting, she read the paper for the first time and saw many similarities between the web source and her paper. They decided to wait a week before meeting again and in the interim, Grace wrote Professor Will a letter telling him how she felt about the situation. They then met again and decided to contact Honor Council.
Professor Will’s statement: The paper was due in a box outside his office at 4 P.M. He always checks-off the names of the students who submit papers, but was unsure at exactly what time he did this. Professor Will stated that he never saw Grace’s paper.

When he returned the papers, Grace asked for hers. Professor Will asked her to submit another copy to him. She sent the paper via e-mail the following day after he reminded her through e-mail, at which point he read the paper. The lack of any documentation, the oddity of the paper topic, and the difference between the writing style of this and Grace’s previous papers suggested to him that she had not written this paper. He did a web search on the paper topic, located the specific document that she had used to write her paper, and compared it with her paper. Professor Will summarized that her paper was fifty- percent direct reproduction and fifty percent a combination of reproduction and paraphrasing. He further noted that there were no quotation marks, citations or bibliography.

Professor Will then asked Grace to meet with him to talk about the paper. He said that she claimed that she submitted the paper on time, but agreed that plagiarism had occurred. They met again one week later, at which time they agreed to contact Honor Council. They discussed possible resolutions, which included her failing the paper, but were open to Honor Council’s decisions.

The Professor closed his statement by noting that he could still not find the paper, but he could not rule out that it might have been misplaced. He does not believe that this was an attempt on Grace’s part to deceive him, as no one could believe that plagiarism to this extent could go undetected.

Jurors’ Questions

The jury then proceeded to ask a number of questions to both Professor Will and Grace. Grace said that she started the paper at 2 A.M and guessed that she finished somewhere around 5 A.M. She didn’t remember how she wrote this paper. Grace noted that she normally cites in her papers and believes that if she had proofread, she would have noticed this huge oversight. Professor Will presented the paper to the jury, her print-out of the web source and the notes that she has used to write the paper, which she had given to Professor Will after he confronted her. He expressed interest in determining whether or not the paper was submitted on time. The jury suggested that Grace return to her room at this time and place the paper on temp storage so that the jury could examine the creation date and time of the paper. Professor Will left the room and Grace returned home.
Jury Deliberation:

The document showed that the paper was written on the date that Grace claimed, however, at 4:55 P.M. Furthermore, the jury noticed that the paper’s total editing time was thirty-five minutes. Because of the discrepancy in both the creation and editing times of the paper, the jury decided to hold another fact-finding session. Professor Will then reentered the room, at which point the jury revealed to him its findings. Grace was notified by the trial’s contact person. Professor Will left for the evening, after which the jury compiled a list of questions to ask Grace in the second fact-finding session.

Fact-Finding #2:

The jury asked Grace its questions. She admitted that she plagiarized, but did not intend to do so. Netscape was not open while she was writing the paper; thus, she did not cut and paste directly from the source to the paper. The paper itself, her notes and the web source that Professor Will gave to the jury in the first fact-finding session were the only materials that she used to write the paper. She doesn’t remember what happened during the period while she was writing and stated that she was in a “fog.” While she was writing the paper, she used only one Microsoft Word file and guessed that she wrote for two and a half to three hours. Grace said that she definitely turned in the paper to the box outside his office before the designated deadline. She was very surprised when Professor Will confronted her, as she had not read the paper after printing it out.

Jury Deliberation:

The jury examined the plagiarized paper. Professor Will had previously marked on the paper what was word-for-word reproduction, what was paraphrased, and what Grace had altered in the midst of word-for-word reproduction. The paper was divided into three sections, each of approximately equal length. In the first and second sections, Grace presented the source verbatim, with some small systematic changes. The third section had less word-for-word reproduction. Instead, Grace paraphrased the author’s ideas and appropriated them as her own through the use of the first person pronoun.

The jury quickly agreed that it was dealing with a case of gross plagiarism. However, the jury felt that the evidence from both the temp storage file and Grace and Professor Will’s statements was insufficient in determining whether or not Grace has actually
submitted the paper in the manner that she stated. Therefore, the jury consensed on
the following statement of violation:

Statement of Violation:

The student violated the Honor Code by committing a gross act of plagiarism.

Both parties accepted the statement of violation.

Circumstantial Portion:

Grace started by reading the letter that she had written to Professor Will weeks ago. In
the letter, Grace stated that she had breached the “letter” of the code, but not the
“spirit.” She said that she did not want to hide behind excuses and that she was ready
to take responsibility for what she had done. This incident had already caused Grace to
think more about the role of the Honor Code in her life.

She then explained the circumstances surrounding the writing of the paper. When she
had gone home prior to writing the paper, it had been for the funeral of a family member.
The night before the paper was due, she learned of another medical emergency
involving a person close to her. She stated that she is not a “night person,” and that the
previous incidents only aggravated her stress level. Grace did not ask for an extension
because she did not want it hanging over her head and she thought that it would be a
good distraction from her worries and sadness.

Grace stated that she sometimes would start papers by copying specific sections and
then going back and changing them. However, in this case, she forgot to proofread and
make these changes.

Professor Will began by saying that our knowledge of what transpired that evening is
vague and that the jury cannot know what takes place in someone’s mind. However,
the quoting does not appear casual because the alterations do not seem to be
accidental; they seem to minimize or obscure the source. In the opinion section, Grace claimed the opinions were her own, but they were actually from the source. He feels that she did not have scholarly investment and that she was not prepared academically to complete the assignment. Professor Will also noted that he believed this act of plagiarism expressed a lack of intellectual seriousness on Grace’s part. He felt that she did understand the seriousness of the potential consequences, but was not convinced that she understands the seriousness of the infraction. Initially, Professor Will believed that she should receive a 0.0 for the assignment. However, at this point, he felt that the jury should follow precedent from previous cases.

Grace suggested possible resolutions. She proposed that she devise a working definition of gross plagiarism. Grace was torn between whether she should fail the class or the paper. Finally, she was concerned with repairing the breach of trust between her and Professor Will. Grace expressed that she considered her violation as an isolated incident, not as one in which a breach of trust with the community had been involved. She stated that any separation would be purely punitive and would lack any educational value. Separation would make her question all that she had accomplished. Also, for financial reasons, Grace said that she would never be able to return to the college after separation.

Jury Deliberation

The jury compiled a list of issues that should be addressed and considered in the resolutions:

1) The extenuating circumstances surrounding the writing of the paper.
2) Her lack of understanding of how her violation affects the community.
3) The severity of the violation.
4) Her lack of understanding of the severity of the violation.
5) The breach of trust between Grace and Professor Will.
6) The proper completion of the assignment.
7) Academic Accountability.

The jury also referred to Section III, Part A1 of the Honor Code, which states: “A gross act of plagiarism constitutes a student’s withdrawal from the commitment to the academic honesty required by the Honor Code, and will normally result in separation from the community.”
With the previous considerations in mind, the jury reached preliminary consensus, without any members standing outside, on the following resolutions:

1) The student will receive a 0.0 on the plagiarized paper.

2) The student will receive a 0.0 for the class.

3) The student will be separated from the community for the next semester.

4) During separation from the community the student will keep a journal, with a minimum of one entry per week, focusing on her evolving reflections on plagiarism, academic integrity, the community and her feelings regarding her separation.

5) Prior to reentry to the community, the student will compose a paper discussing her overall experience away from the community.

6) A selected member of the jury will serve as a contact person during the student's separation to periodically discuss her reflections.

7) The student will rewrite the plagiarized paper for no credit before returning to the community.

8) The professor and the student will participate in weekly mediation during which time the discussion of the rewriting of the plagiarized paper and the rebuilding of their relationship will be the focus of their efforts. Upon returning to the community mediation will continue until both parities feel it is no longer necessary.

9) The student will write a letter to the community which will be published upon her return.

Presentation of the Resolutions:

Grace stressed more strongly that the financial difficulties that she would face as a result of separation would prevent her from returning. She also noted that separation would cause very severe repercussions within her family.

Professor Will emphasized that the jury needed to be clear on what the point of separation should be—i.e. educational vs. punitive consequences. Separation, he said,
should be for the point of keeping one separate from the community, and not for alternative goals such as education.

Jury Deliberations:

The jury was concerned about Grace’s seeming inability to return after separation. It considered and discussed the social portion of the Honor Code—specifically, how the resolutions would reflect a degree of “mutual respect and concern” towards Grace. It considered alternatives to separation that would fulfill academic accountability, which included a comment on her transcript noting her academic misconduct. However, the Dean of the College informed the jury that such a measure could not be carried out. After composing a set of alternate resolutions, the jury reverted nearly to its original set, deciding that separation was appropriate in this situation. The jury more or less felt that it was in no position to consider her financial circumstances.

With two people standing outside of consensus and one juror having removed himself due to extenuating circumstances separate from the trial, the jury consensed on the following final resolutions:

1) The student will receive a 0.0 on the plagiarized paper.

2) The student will receive a 0.0 for the class.

3) The student will be separated from the community for the next semester.

4) During separation from the community the student will keep a journal, with a minimum of one entry per week, focusing on her evolving reflections on plagiarism, academic integrity, the community and her feelings regarding her separation.

5) Prior to reentry to the community, the student will compose a paper discussing her overall experience away from the community.

6) A selected member of the jury will serve as a contact person during the student's separation to periodically discuss her reflections.

7) The student will rewrite the assignment that was plagiarized for no credit before returning to the community.
8) The professor and the student will participate in weekly mediation during which time they will focus on rebuilding their working relationship. Upon the student's return to the community, mediation will continue until both parities feel it is no longer necessary.

9) The student will write a letter to the community which will be published upon her return.

Grace did not appeal the decision to the President of the College.

Juror Statements

Juror #1:

The jury did not take lightly the decision to separate the student. We came to this conclusion after hours and hours of discussing, arguing, and even crying. However, I do believe that we came to the correct final decision. The extent of the plagiarism was truly mind-boggling. I believe that the violation was not done with the intention to deceive, but I also believe that the student did not, and still does not, understand the full ramifications of what she had done. I feel that the student was not willing to take responsibility for her actions. Rather, the student spoke about it as if it was a mistake that had occurred during a haze, almost seeming to imply that it was an unfortunate act that wasn’t her fault. The student knew that the act was wrong and would never do it again, but the student lacked the understanding of how this affected the entire community. This incredibly gross act of plagiarism diminishes the academic integrity of everyone here, both students and faculty. It also seemed to disillusion the professor, and I certainly know that it made me trust the community as a whole a little bit less than I did before. We (the jury) tried to structure the separation as much as possible in order for it to be as much of a learning experience as it possibly could be. That is why we felt that the journal entries and the writing of a paper at the end of the separation were so important. However, it would be naive to think that a separation would be a completely positive experience. There will definitely be negative ramifications of a separation. However, for me, separation is the correct thing to do is because it fulfills the requirement of academic accountability in ERA (Education, Repairing the breach of trust, and Accountability). In my mind, having the student just fail the paper and the class would not have been enough accountability for an act of plagiarism of this magnitude. It just wouldn’t have been fair to everyone else who follows the Code at all times.

Juror #2[1]:

[1] Note: The juror number and name are placeholders. The actual juror number and name should be provided.
Thinking back on a trial like this is not the easiest thing to do because regrets of my decisions often arise. I was one of the members of the jury that stood outside of consensus and for a considerable amount of time, I blocked consensus and I will succinctly give my reasons for doing this. The case presented to us involved a student who grossly plagiarized her paper – over 90% of the paper. This student came before the jury and presented extenuating circumstances where one family member had passed away a few days prior and another close person in her life [had a medical emergency] that day, and she asked us to consider these circumstances while making our decision. Specifically, she said that she was not in a proper state of mind as a result of what else was going on in her life and while writing the paper, or plagiarizing it, she was not thinking clearly and did not consider the wrong nature of her actions, nor their implications. To me, she seemed to have a reasonable understanding of the Code and the principles contained therein, but may have manifested this understanding in a way different than some of us would because of how she put it into words. At any rate, the jury met and decided (including myself with some hesitation, but NOT standing outside) that separation was the best path of action along with other educational resolutions.

At the presentation of the resolutions, the student became upset and reiterated the dreadful nature of our call for separation and told the jury that she would not be able to return to Haverford for a number of reasons. [Should she be separated, her parents would not provide and further financial support]. She also explained the emotional and psychological implications of this separation and stated that she did not think that she would be able to come back because of the effect that this separation would have on her and her commitment to, and faith in, college. Her emotional presentation was extremely important to me because it made me realize that a jury should have a higher standard to apply in situations such as these.

Specifically, a student that has committed a gross act of plagiarism, should be held accountable for the actions, but this "accountability" should NOT be so severe that it compromises the student’s academic career and/or the rest of his/her life. The jury was presented with a very drastic infringement of the code and most people on the jury were pushing for separation, but they were NOT considering the implications of that separation, and they did not realize that our "highest" and most important commitment is to each other as members of a community and then to other principles embodied in the code. The code states the following: "As students of Haverford College, we accept the responsibility of upholding the standards and ideals of the Honor Code, which supports and sustains our community. The Honor Code depends for its effective operation on both our personal concern for each other and our collective concern for the maintenance of the community standards reflected in the Code. Both concerns are central to the functioning of the Code, and both have meaning only as they form the basis for the conduct of our daily lives." These are very strong words if you read them closely, as this concern for one another and the standards of the community form the basis of our daily conduct, but it seems to me that the fundamental objective is our care and concern for one another.
There are no community standards if there is no community and when the implications of a resolution, under the auspices of education through separation, compromise the future of a community member, then it is integral for a jury not to implement that resolution for separation. That was a long sentence so let me state it again more simply. This student's future very well may be ruined by separation given her financial and emotional situation and I think that separation was the wrong action in this situation. The members of the jury, in favor of separation, were so set on holding the student accountable that they lost all sight of this need to keep the student's welfare above all other principles of our community. I blocked consensus for a considerable amount of time because it was against my conscience to separate this student because of the effects of this resolution, but I eventually decided not to block separation and to only stand outside. In the end, I yielded because of my faith in my fellow members of the jury, but it is a decision that I regret whenever I think about it. If this student does not come back to Haverford because of the reasons that she gave us in the trial, then I think we, as a jury, made a terrible mistake. In past times, criminals were drawn and quartered for their crimes because they needed to be held accountable for their actions. In a modern day, civilized community like Haverford, we believe that this type of barbaric accountability is wrong because it is too harsh and it serves no legitimate purpose. However, we do feel that student's who break the Code should still be held accountable. It seems to me that in this instance, the call for accountability is too a considerable extent a more modern and rational derivative of past infliction’s of pain in the name of justice. I guess we'll see...

Juror #3:

I was one of two jurors to stand outside of consensus. I was not comfortable with separation for many reasons. I believe that the purpose of separation is to give a person time away from the community so that she can think about her place at Haverford and the role she will play here upon her return. An eventual return to the community is the goal of the separation. Separation is not intended to be punitive. After listening to the student’s responses to our resolutions it became clear that due to personal, family and financial reasons she would be unable to return to the community after her separation. It also became clear that because of these same reasons her separation would not be a time of reflection and personal growth but would instead potentially put her in a situation that would be too stressful for her to gain any perspective on the Honor Code and her role in the community. Although separation is suggested in the Code for acts of gross plagiarism, I felt that given the circumstances surrounding this case separation was not in the spirit of the Code.

One of the things that bothered me most was that the student seemed to have a very limited understanding of how her act of plagiarism had affected anyone other than herself. She lacked an understanding of how actions affected the community as a whole. For this reason, I felt that she definitely needed to develop a better understanding of the Honor Code. I did not think that cutting her off from the community
would help her develop this. I felt that this understanding could possibly better be
developed at Haverford.

    I want to say to the student and to the rest of the community that this is probably
the most difficult decision I have ever made. It has consumed me these past few
weeks. I struggled between standing outside and blocking consensus and I still
question my decision frequently. I ultimately decided to stand outside rather than block
because I respected the weight of the group. I felt that it would not be right for one
person to prevent everyone in the group from making a decision.

    Juror #4:

I have never wanted to separate somebody from the community. I have trouble
convincing myself that as a student I have the right to separate someone. Yet in this
case I do feel it was the best resolution. First of all, the grossness of the plagiarism is
the worst I've seen at Haverford. Even if she didn't intend to plagiarize she did – in a
bad way. Also, I felt that separation was the best option because I don't think that she
fully understood what consequences an act such as plagiarism has on the entire
community. She needs this semester to think critically on what it means to be a part of
an academic community such as Haverford. And I felt really bad about the financial
issues involved. Separation will not be easy for her but I do feel that it is the best option
for everyone.

    Juror #5:

The decision to separate Grace was one of the hardest decisions I've made. After
hearing Grace's statement and especially after looking at the blatantly plagiarized paper
I began to think seriously about separation for the first time. I thought a lot about
separation for the sake of education in our first deliberations, I honestly thought that
being separated for a semester would give Grace the opportunity to think about why
plagiarism was wrong and reevaluate her priorities. I accept that Grace wrote the
plagiarized paper in a haze and had no intent to deceive, but I couldn't get past the fact
that she had done it to such an extreme degree. Listening to her statement and her
answers to our questions only made me more concerned about Grace's priorities. It
seemed that she was primarily concerned with the consequences of her trial, not the
reason she was there. Even after considerable prodding she never expressed that she
felt dishonest for copying another person's words and ideas. I really thought that some
time away from the pressures of Haverford with some structure through resolutions
would help Grace consider issues of academic integrity and honesty.

    When we presented the resolutions to Grace, however, it became clear that her time
away from Haverford would not be a relaxing time for reflection, but rather a stressful
one in light of her financial situation – it would not necessarily be educational. I found, though, that there was no alternative to separation that I was comfortable with. It took a lot of discussion and thought for me to realize that, while I favored separation for educational reasons, I was also interested in it as a means of academic accountability. I thought about how I would react as a community member, knowing that someone who plagiarized word-for-word eighty percent of a paper was not held academically accountable beyond failing a class she may well have failed anyway. I was very concerned that this reaction was not in the spirit of Haverford or the Code – it seemed almost as if I felt Grace deserved punishment. It may be that there is a point where the Haverford ideals break down and we just have human reactions, liking wanting to hold someone accountable. I finally decided, though, that we weren’t doing Grace any favors by holding her less academically accountable than her fellow Haverford students would be. Part of my concern for Grace throughout the trial is that she did not entirely take responsibility for her actions. In the end I decided that if we, as a jury, didn’t hold Grace to the same standards as other Haverford students we could never expect her to hold herself to those standards – and if we didn’t hold her fully accountable for her actions she couldn’t hold herself fully accountable either.

Juror #6:

Sometimes I think that students at Haverford forget how much power we have. This trial sort of slugged me in the face—it made me realize the extent to which that power goes. I never wanted to separate anyone; in fact, it somehow never occurred to me that I would ever be in a situation in which separation would be an option. Pretty silly, I guess, especially because I am one of the members of the jury on Honor Council.

I was one of the dissenters. As we began to realize that this trial needed to come to an end, three of us wished to stand outside of consensus. I didn’t want to be a part of the decision to separate her, but the trial needed to end, both for our own sake and that of the two parties. As we went around to begin our final consensus, I took a deep breath, looked around the room at the other jurors and thought—thought about the hours of sleep that they probably lost, like I did; thought about the knot in the stomach that they each carried around, like I did; thought about the guilt that they each felt for having to make this decision, much like I did. While I did not consider at the time separation as the best option, I realized that I trusted a lot the judgment of my peers, each of whom felt the near horror of what we were doing.

After some time to reflect on the trial, I feel more confident about our decision, so much more so to the point that I no longer even consider myself a dissenter. Initially, we discussed separation as way in which to educate the confronted party of the seriousness of her violation. For me, separation as a means of education is humiliating to Haverford: if separation is truly the only way to educate someone about an Honor Code infraction, then a decision to separate would have indicated a severe inadequacy on our part as a community. If separation was the only educative tool that would serve
to teach the confronted party about plagiarism, then our community has failed to produce the necessary resources for education. I didn’t then and still don’t believe that this community is in any way a failure.

As we moved through the jury deliberations, we began to realize that our inclination to separate purported more to hold her accountable for her action rather than to provide her with time for reflection and self-evaluation. Separation as an educational method seemed silly to me; as a way to hold someone accountable for his or her actions, it seemed practical. I still was somewhat uncomfortable with the idea of separation. The confronted party indicated that separation would create severe problems within her family—perhaps even near disownment by her parents. It would leave her to fend for herself financially, as her parents would not provide her with any support. And it would prevent her from ever returning, as her financial situation would be severely aggravated by separation. I didn’t want to separate someone if it was going to destroy her life, hamper her education and hinder her from ever returning.

However, the more I have considered the seriousness of her infraction, the more I feel that separation was the only appropriate means of holding her accountable. And while I was concerned greatly about her financial situation, I felt that the jury was in no way qualified to consider or understand its specifics. She would have the option to appeal our decision to the President, who would be better qualified at evaluating such circumstances. I had hoped that she would appeal so that these circumstances would be properly considered. I’m disappointed to learn that she did not do so. Based on the information with which we were provided, which included few details of her financial situation, I feel now that we made the best decision. While I understand that the evening of the violation might have been a difficult and foggy one for the confronted party, it does not excuse the severity of this lack of intellectual seriousness and academic integrity.

My throat still clamps up when I think about the severe implications that this could have upon her life—financial stress, family problems, humiliation, etc. Every member of the jury considered a great deal these implications, which is why this trial extended over a three-week period, with multiple all night deliberations. No one on the jury wanted to screw up another person’s life. Yet, we all need to be held accountable for our actions. As much as it pains me and the other eight people that ‘consensed’ to this decision to think about what this could cause for her, it was our responsibility to uphold community standards and consequences, no matter how severe they might be. And that’s what we did.

Questions:
1. Was separation an appropriate measure in this case?

2. Was there a breach of trust between Grace and the community?

3. Should the jury have taken financial issues into account, even if that could have meant her receiving a more lenient set of resolutions than someone with different financial circumstances would receive?

4. Should either the statement of violation or the resolutions have addressed the issue of the missing paper?

[1] Statements enclosed by brackets have been changed by Honor Council from their original wording in order to protect confidentiality.