Bobby’s Freshman English Professor confronted him about a possible violation of the academic portion of the Honor Code. An inquiry was convened to address the situation.

After the relevant portions of the Honor Code were read, the factual portion of the inquiry began with the professor explaining that she believed that Bobby had plagiarized on a recent English paper. The paper in question had been the only research paper of the semester, and the professor felt that there had been insufficient footnoting in the paper. She explained that the language used in the paper had been too “rich and metaphorical” to be Bobby’s. She told the jury that she had asked Bobby to bring to her the books that he had used, and upon examining the books found that the paper had been made up of many direct quotations from the books used. The professor explained that no attempt had been made to put these quotations in quotation marks nor had adequate footnoting been done. Finally, the professor added that Bobby had never questioned her previously about the use of footnotes, and footnoted material.

Bobby then began recounting his version of what had occurred. He explained that throughout the semester his professor had never discussed how to write a research paper. The class had had an assignment on how to write an annotated bibliography, but as far as Bobby could remember no specific discussion had been given on the actual method of footnoting. Bobby also explained that he did not feel comfortable talking with his professor, and therefore, he had not approached her about the proper method for footnoting on a research paper, even after receiving an extremely low grade on a similar assignment. Bobby then explained that when writing the paper, he had not realized that some of his actual paragraphs were identical to the sources from which he had taken the information, and that in these instances he had felt that he had been paraphrasing, rather than using direct quotations. The jury then examined both Bobby’s paper and the sources that he used to determine whether or not Bobby had plagiarized. They found that entire paragraphs had been taken directly from the sources.

At this point the jury ended the factual portion of the inquiry. The jury came to consensus that a violation concerning the misuse of quotations had occurred.

The circumstantial portion of the Inquiry began with the jury asking Bobby to explain a paraphrase, a direct quotation, and an indirect quotation. Bobby explained that in his opinion paraphrasing occurred when one took the authors words and ideas and changed them around. He believed that in
paraphrasing some of the same lines could be quoted word for word. He also believed that a direct quotation was used to prove a point, while an indirect quotation was a point in itself. The jury then asked Bobby about his system of notetaking in order to try to determine why Bobby had been unaware that entire paragraphs had been lifted from his sources. The jury found that Bobby's method for notetaking was not too orderly and that he had most likely misread his notes when writing his paper. Bobby told the jury that while he had a copy of a grammar book, he did not have a copy of the MLA Handbook, the guide that professors recommend that freshmen use.

The jury then began discussing resolutions with Bobby and the professor. Bobby felt that if his professor was willing, he should rewrite this paper using the proper form for citations. The professor then expressed the feeling that in her mind the paper would always be regarded as a zero no matter what type of resolution the jury decided upon. She then expressed the idea that she disregard this paper, but that Bobby's final paper, which would otherwise have been a free paper, should be a research paper. The professor also said that she would be willing to work with Bobby on rewriting this paper but that she would not grade it. Bobby and his professor then left the room, and the jury then discussed resolutions among itself. The jury felt that in the resolution it would be necessary to address the fact that Bobby did not understand how to write a research paper, as well as the fact that community trust had been broken and needed to be repaired.

After much discussion the jury decided upon a four-part resolution. First, his paper should be regarded as a failure because of the plagiarism that had occurred. Second, his final paper had to be a research type paper. Third, he and his professor would work together on a regular basis until Bobby had learned the correct form for using citations on a paper, which he would then use on his final paper. By working together the jury hoped that Bobby and his professor would develop a better working relationship. Finally, Bobby would write an unsigned letter to the English Department in which he would explain in detail his problems with plagiarism in the hope that a uniform method could be established for presenting this issue to freshmen. The jury hopes that a uniform presentation on how to cite references will result in fewer cases of freshmen plagiarism next year.

The entire jury consented to this resolution.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION
1) What are the student's responsibilities for finding out about how the professor wishes him/her to cite works?
2) Whose responsibility is it for freshmen to understand the proper technique for footnoting?
3) Do you think that Bobby's freshman status should be reflected in the resolution?