Honor Council Abstract: Bridget

Introduction: Bridget, a Bryn Mawr student, contacted the Honor Council Chair about having taken extra time on a midterm exam for Professor Grant's history class. Honor Council reached consensus that a trial was necessary.

Fact-finding: Professor Grant explained to the jury that she had assigned a one-hour, closed-book, midterm. She gave her class the option of taking the exam home or taking it in class; Bridget was among the half of the class who chose to take the exam home. With the exam Professor Grant received from Bridget was a note explaining that Bridget had written for an additional hour because she had planned her time badly. A class or two afterwards Bridget approached Professor Grant, who then had Bridget mark on her essay where she thought her time had run out. At a subsequent class Bridget told Professor Grant that her mark showed the end of two hours' work, and not one hour's work, as she had claimed before. Professor Grant told the jury that at this point she had asked Bridget if she had consulted her notes while taking the exam; Bridget said she had not. After this conversation Professor Grant asked Bridget to contact Honor Council. Bridget again approached Professor Grant some days later and admitted that she had used both her notes and some books during the exam.

Bridget spoke next. She explained that she had written for two hours, then had taken a break for about three hours, then wrote for about two hours more. She had opened her notes to check on two different points she wasn't positive about. She said she hadn't felt remorse at the time about consulting her notes, since she had memorized most of her notes and only wanted to be sure she had them right. She found that she did know them; looking them up had been futile and nonsensical since the notes hadn't helped her. The Chair asked Bridget to underline in her exam the points she had looked up in books. She did so and showed the exam to the jury and Professor Grant.

Bridget was asked to clarify some points. One juror asked if she had kept a list in her head of the ideas she wanted to write about -- and then had looked up some of these before writing them down. Bridget said yes: she'd "wanted more time to consider difficult issues." Professor Grant said "Bridget's answer [to the exam question] was terrific"; Professor Grant had asked herself after reading it, "Does she have a photographic mind?" On the second midterm for the class, which she had given the class since, Professor Grant had found Bridget's essay to be good, but more what one would expect from a good student under a time constraint. After further questions from the jury, some new facts about Bridget's test-taking were discovered. The jury finally arrived at this sequence of events:
B worked took 3 hour worked for took 3 hour finished exam, for 2 hours break 2 more hours break copied it into blue book

Bridget wasn’t sure how long she took to finish the exam after her second break; she said it took time to get back into the essay mentally, but she wasn’t actually writing for more than an hour.

There were more questions about consulting notes. Bridget used her notes after the first break, but she said she did not change her exam in any way after reading her notes. When Bridget had completely finished her exam, she transferred her essay from scratch paper (which she turned in as well) into a blue book. She said she had changed some phrasing in the process of recopying.

Jury Deliberations I: Some jurors wondered if Bridget had plagiarized from the books she consulted by failing to cite her use of them. It was decided that borrowing specialized terms from a text on a midterm is not necessarily plagiarism. The jury was then able to consensus on two violations pretty quickly:

2. Bridget violated the Honor Code by taking more than the allotted time on her exam.

The jury discussed whether taking two breaks was an additional violation; they came to agree that this was a part of the time limit violation. Next the jury discussed whether another violation occurred when Bridget altered her exam while recopying it. The Chair brought into the discussion the abstracts of two other trials where this kind of recopying was deemed a violation. In "Henry" a student turned himself in for rearranging points in an essay while recopying; the jury "officially censured" him with no grade change. In "Franklin", released in 1984, the same act was deemed a violation. The Chair suggested that these precedents, while not binding, could provide the jury with guidelines for their decision. Some jurors thought these last changes to Bridget's exam were essentially part of her time violation, since they prolonged the completion of the exam. Others wondered what Professor Grant would think of the issue. After some discussion the jury decided it was best to spell each of Bridget's wrong steps. They reached consensus on another statement of violation:

3. Although Bridget was allowed to recopy the exam in order to make it legible, in the process of doing so she changed the text of her exam. This constitutes another violation of the Honor Code.
There was some disagreement as to whether Bridget had lied either to her professor or to the Honor Code jury. One juror summed up the feeling of many, saying, "All through this process, Bridget has said one thing, then added another, then another ..." Many jurors felt uneasy about how long it took to get the whole truth. Several jurors responded that she wasn't trying to be dishonest -- she was just having problems in getting the full story out. Some jurors suggested that Bridget had lied to her professor at several points: 1) when she said she had completed the exam in two hours 2) when she said she took more than two hours but didn't say how much more 3) when she said she had not used her notes. Other jurors responded that she had never presented her work as honestly done, that she had put herself under great pressure but had soon volunteered the whole truth. There was less of a sense that Bridget had lied to the jury. Many wondered whether the jury's difficulty in understanding everything she was saying (English is Bridget's second language) was part of the problem. Since few jurors felt Bridget had maliciously lied, and most were reluctant to censure a student for lying when she herself had come forward to Honor Council, the jury decided to drop the matter.

Circumstantial: At the circumstantial part of the trial Bridget talked about how badly she had wanted to succeed in Professor Grant's course -- the more so because of her language barrier. She had studied hard for the exam and wanted to demonstrate all she had learned. During the exam she was thinking only about writing down everything that was in her head. She had originally said two hours to Professor Grant because she thought what she had written could have been completed in that time. Afterwards she hadn't felt right about the exam and had felt so guilty she had to tell her professor the truth. She felt she was slowly realizing the seriousness of her violations. Professor Grant said she thought Bridget's problems stemmed from an acute perfectionism, which might lead her to commit the same violations in the future. She suggested that Bridget take steps to change this attitude towards her work; perhaps Psychological Services would be useful in this effort.

Jury Deliberations II: After some discussion of precedent and of ERA (an acronym for Education, Repair the breach of trust, Accountability -- the three goals of resolutions), the jury discussed initial ideas for resolutions. Nearly everyone said that separation was inappropriate for Bridget, since she was already coming to terms with her actions and had willingly volunteered the truth. The jury quickly consensed that she must fail the exam. They discussed having her fail the course, but decided that doing so would ignore the honest work she had done already as well as the work she had not yet done in the course. The jury then discussed Professor Grant's suggestion that Bridget should see Psychological Services. Some jurors felt strongly that the jury should formally
recommend Psychological Services; others were uncomfortable making this sort of
judgement about Bridget and didn't want to see this kind of resolution become precedent.
The jury decided that this was a suggestion that individual jurors could make to Bridget if they wished.

The jury agreed that a resolution meant to help Bridget understand her violations was important in this case. Several jurors thought that in particular Bridget should address in writing the problem that Bryn Mawr students such as herself take classes at Haverford without understanding Haverford's Honor Code, and vice versa. After some hashing out of ideas, the jury reached consensus on a resolution.

**Resolutions:**

1) The Honor Code Jury recommends that Bridget fail her midterm. (Note: juries can only recommend grade changes, which are ultimately up to the professor)

2) Bridget will write a comparison of the Bryn Mawr and Haverford Honor Codes to help educate students who take classes at both colleges. This essay will be incorporated into the Student's Guide as well as the Bryn Mawr course guide.

**Presentation of Resolutions:** The jury explained the resolutions to Bridget, adding that in her comparison she should pay special attention to the parts of each code relevant to her violations. Bridget and Professor Grant accepted the resolutions, and the trial came to an end.

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**Responses:**

1) Do you agree with the jury's statements of violation?

2) Do you think Bridget's resolutions were appropriate to her actions? Did they adequately address responsibilities both to her and to the community?

3) How should juries treat the issue of lying?