1988 HONOR COUNCIL ABSTRACT: EDGAR AND LENORE

Summary: Professor Poe confronted Edgar and Lenore after noticing a similarity between their final exams. At the inquiry, the jury determined that there was insufficient evidence to decide whether an academic violation of the Code had occurred, and the matter was dropped.

I. FACT-FINDING

Confronting party: The exams in question were open book, take-home, three-hour finals. At the inquiry, Professor Poe stated, "I graded Edgar's test first...it wasn't particularly notable (except) it was quite bad." She graded three or four other exams. When she got to the third answer on Lenore's exam Poe noted that "this student had chosen a way to do it that was very strange". Lenore had gone off in a "side direction I (Professor Poe) knew I hadn't covered in class". With the questions that followed, she noticed more "remarkable coincidences" between Lenore's and Edgar's exams. She said, "It didn't take me long to be convinced that something had gone on here".

Professor Poe took the exams to Professor Raven, another member of the sociology department. He too "could see the great similarity Professor Poe had seen". The two took the matter to the Department Chairperson, then to the Dean of the College. As a possible violation of the Honor Code, the matter was brought to Honor Council.

Professor Raven met with Lenore and Edgar. Edgar gave an explanation of how the exams could have been similar. Both students had used Edgar's notes from the course while taking the exam. Edgar gave his notes to the professors to prove his point. The professors "had no problem" with Edgar lending his notes to Lenore, but as they examined the notebook, the "more (they became) convinced that something was wrong." The errors that appeared on the exams "did not seem to follow from the notes".

Confronted Party: Lenore told the jury that since she missed a day of class, she borrowed Edgar's class notes to use on the final, because she knew Edgar took good notes. Lenore took the exam on Sunday in a room with someone else present, so it was clear to the jury that she had not collaborated with Edgar on the exam. After taking the final, Lenore sealed her exam in an envelope and returned the notebook to Edgar. Lenore planned to be away on Monday, the day the exam was due, so she gave Edgar her exam envelope so he could turn it in for her.

Edgar told the jury that he had not spoken to Lenore about the exam. He separated the exam into two parts, and took the first part on Sunday night, and the second part on
Monday morning. While taking the exam, he had referred to an article and had used his own notes from the course. He turned in both his own and Lenore’s exams on Monday.

The jury examined the two exams, as well as exams from other members of the class. There were many similar answers between Lenore’s and Edgar’s exams which could be explained individually. Yet, because there were so many similar answers, Professor Poe believed that cheating had occurred. On the other hand, other members of the department, specifically Professor Raven and Professor Allen, did not agree with Professor Poe’s conclusion. One professor said the evidence was not conclusive; another said there was “no way to tell.”

The confronted and confronting parties left the room. Since, according to Lenore’s account, the only way for Edgar to have cheated was for him to have broken Lenore’s sealed envelope, the jury examined the envelope in which Lenore had sealed her exam for signs of tampering. There was no conclusive sign of this having occurred.

The jury then considered whether it thought that a violation had occurred, given the extraordinary similarities exhibited in the two final exams. However, the jury felt inclined to accept that the answers were similar due to coincidence, as the confronted parties suggested, rather than to believe that Edgar and Lenore had cheated and then denied their actions to the professors and the jury. In addition, the conflicting opinions of the sociology professors (whose deeper knowledge of the subject and their analysis of the exams could not conclusively find evidence of student wrongdoing) persuaded the jury that the exams which seemed similar to Professor Poe did not indicate that either Edgar or Lenore had cheated.

CONCLUSIONS
The jury came to consensus that no violation of the Honor Code had occurred. Although the similarities between the exams were cause for suspicion, there was not enough conclusive evidence to compromise the ideal of trust in the individual. The matter no longer warranted the involvement of the jury.