Abstract discussions will be held Wednesday, October 26 and Thursday, October 27 at 7 PM in Ryan Gym

Finch and Professor Sparrow
An Honor Council Academic Trial
Released Fall 2011

This abstract was completed in accordance with the timeline in the Constitution.
The confronting and confronted parties were given the opportunity to review this abstract prior to its release.
(The addition of this disclaimer began Fall 2010).

Introduction

Finch was a student in Professor Sparrow’s 300-level Advanced Chirping Techniques class. In Finch’s final essay for the class, Professor Sparrow identified several passages that appeared to have been taken almost verbatim from primary sources. Professor Sparrow told Honor Council that he had asked Finch to report himself to Honor Council for a potential violation in the essay. The incident was identified at the end of the semester. When classes resumed, Honor Council reviewed the statements from Professor Sparrow and Finch and consented to send the case to an Academic Trial.

Fact-Finding

Professor Sparrow explained that he also had Finch in Nest Building 300, which was a prerequisite for Advanced Chirping Techniques 300. The final project in Advanced Chirping Techniques asked students to choose a topic regarding chirping and write a paper that contained an overview of existing chirps and a research proposal. Students were allowed to submit drafts. Professor Sparrow also said that he talked specifically about styles and methods of citation. He told the class he would Google anything that didn’t sound like a student’s own writing. Professor Sparrow told the jury he didn’t check for plagiarism in students’ rough drafts but rather focused on the research proposal of the paper. Professor Sparrow explained that some of the material in Finch’s review section had been cited but was too similar to the source’s wording to be an adequate paraphrase.

Finch said that he knew the importance of the essay, and had handed in outlines, reference lists, and drafts in accordance with Professor Sparrow’s suggested timeline. He said that for the rough draft he took notes on the sources as he read, but that he wasn’t really comfortable with the information. If specific details were vital to the paper, he would write the details down, word for word from the source. He said he received feedback from Professor Sparrow on the rough draft that he should narrow the focus of his chirping overview.

The jury then moved into a question-asking period. A juror began by asking Finch to talk about his note-taking process from the sources. Finch said that he would write these important
points of each piece in a place separate from the original source, and sometimes it was unclear whether something was factual information or the author’s own phrasing. When asked, Finch also said that he had not indicated in his notes whether his wording was his own or the author’s.

A juror asked about one section of Finch’s essay that appeared to have been taken almost verbatim from a source with no parenthetical citation at the end of the passage. Finch explained that he had been concerned with proper citation technique and described looking up how to cite online. One of the first online sources he found said that a paragraph from a source should be prefaced and then a parenthetical citation should be added at the end. A juror asked Professor Sparrow whether he viewed this as a legitimate technique. Professor Sparrow said the words should be a student’s own words, and the synthesis of different sources should be their own. He said it was one thing to take information and ideas from a source and cite it, but, in this case, the language used was almost identical to the original published sources’.

A juror asked Finch and Professor Sparrow if they thought a violation of the Honor Code occurred. Professor Sparrow said he believed there had been a violation. He said that Finch’s phrasing was very similar to the original sources. He said it wasn’t always close enough to merit quotations, but was too similar to be acceptable paraphrasing. Professor Sparrow said that it would have been different had Finch taken it exactly from the sources with quotes. However, Finch had not changed it enough from the original. Finch said that when he incorporated the sources, he tried to express them in his own words. Finch said he did not feel he had violated the Honor Code.

Statement of Violation

The jury deliberated about Finch’s intent to plagiarize. Some jurors recognized that, although Finch had failed to adequately paraphrase and synthesize the primary source information, his citations were properly formatted had he been paraphrasing. Other jurors argued that, regardless of Finch’s opinion that he had properly cited his sources and Professor Sparrow’s admission that he had used proper format, his citations were improper because his wording closely matched the original source but was not quoted. The jury agreed that there had been a violation of the Honor Code and consented to the following statement of violation with no one standing outside:

**Finch violated the Honor Code by representing others’ words as his own. Although he included a bibliography and parenthetical citations, he failed to quote or adequately put in his own words many phrases taken directly from his sources. This constitutes plagiarism as defined in Section 3.04, Subsection A of the Honor Code.**

Circumstantial Portion

Finch began by saying that he didn’t feel comfortable putting the chirping techniques into his own words. He said he didn’t think to look back on the phrasing he had included. Professor Sparrow said that he wished Finch had come to him earlier if he’d been struggling to understand
the topic. Professor Sparrow said that he had helped many other students in the class. Professor Sparrow noted that Finch was absent the day Professor Sparrow had spoken about plagiarism in class, but that Finch said he thought he clearly understood how to cite and quote properly.

A juror asked Finch about his knowledge of citations. Finch said that it wasn’t that he misunderstood what was proper; he would have rewritten it if he’d realized his notes had been so similar to the original sources. A juror asked Professor Sparrow whether Finch’s paper had seemed acceptable when Professor Sparrow had read through the draft. Professor Sparrow said that Finch’s citation style was fine, but that at the time he wasn’t looking for plagiarism and didn’t read the overview of chirps in great detail.

A juror asked Finch if he had written papers for Professor Sparrow’s other class, Nest Building 300. He acknowledged that exercises in Professor Sparrow’s other class had given him some practice with the primary sources and citation, but that this was the first paper like this that he had written for the Avian Studies Department.

Professor Sparrow pointed out that while most people had a week to finish the paper, Finch was sick when the paper was handed back and got his paper back later than the rest of the class. Finch also said that he had a test for another class the same week, but he felt that he still had sufficient time. A juror asked whether Finch had changed a lot from the rough draft to the final draft, and Finch said that Professor Sparrow had told him that his draft wasn’t focused enough.

A juror noted that in the fact-finding, Finch said he felt that there was no violation of the Honor Code, and wondered how he felt about this now. Finch said that although he had gone back and forth on the issue, he recognized the evidence suggesting that he had been in violation.

For his tentative resolutions, Finch proposed the following:

1. That he re-write the first portion in his own words for some percentage of the credit (he said this was intended to address the goal of accountability).

2. That he write to the community regarding unintentional plagiarism (to address the goals of education and restoration).

For his tentative resolutions, Professor Sparrow recommended the following:

1. To have Finch receive a zero on the paper, which Professor Sparrow said would not result in a zero in the course.

2. To have Finch read Maud McInerney’s essay and sign or write some statement showing that he read it.
Deliberations Part I

Though the jury would be unable to reconvene within the 24-48 hour period mandated in the Constitution, and would therefore need to meet at another time to consent to tentative resolutions, the trial chair asked the jury to talk about their impressions coming out of the Circumstantial Portion while it was still fresh. The Chair told the jury that they wouldn’t be coming up with concrete resolutions that night, however.

A juror commented that it seemed Finch had only recently figured out that this was an Honor Code violation and accepted it as plagiarism. Another said that he still wasn’t sure that Finch understood. Some jurors disagreed, saying Finch had said he “expected” the jury to find a violation and that he acknowledged that the ideas weren’t his. Another juror commented that she knew that Finch wasn’t trying to violate the Code, and acknowledged that it wasn’t a premeditated violation in the same vein as buying a paper online. The juror pointed out that these are both plagiarism, but differ in their severity. A juror commented that she thought that education about plagiarism without malintent was needed.

A juror commented that he liked the idea of Finch reading Maud McInerney’s plagiarism essay, as Professor Sparrow had suggested and thought it might be more effective than a zero. Another juror suggested that Finch could get a zero on the review portion and get a grade for the research proposal, the second half of the paper that Professor Sparrow said was Finch’s own work. However, many jurors thought that the paper had to be regarded as a whole, not by its separate parts. The jury also discussed having Finch receive a zero on the paper as Professor Sparrow had proposed, and some jurors were in favor of this.

A juror asked whether the lowered grade would still count toward Finch’s People Watching Concentration. A juror suggested that perhaps they could give him a zero if it didn’t hurt the concentration. A juror suggested that they find out from Professor Sparrow the grading breakdown for the paper.

In terms of education, a juror suggested having Finch rewrite the paper, but perhaps not for a grade. Some jurors found this problematic, however, saying that this would be too much added stress for Finch. A juror suggested that Finch could rewrite sections of the paper Professor Sparrow had highlighted, since the point was just to get him to understand how to properly cite. A juror commented that she was worried that Finch still didn’t get the seriousness of what he’d done. She pointed out that the accountability part of his resolution was to rewrite the paper for partial credit. The juror thought that this reflected Finch’s concern over his grades more than him taking responsibility for or understanding his actions.

The jury determined their primary concerns were Finch’s understanding of plagiarism and paraphrasing, addressing the breach with the class, and the greater community, and preventing a similar incident from happening again. A juror also suggested that a professor in the same division write a division-specific essay on plagiarism, similar to Maud McInerney’s.

Interim

Shortly after the Circumstantial, Professor Sparrow sent the Chair an email with two comments. He noted that Finch said that he struggled to understand the material, but his research proposal, which relied on a foundational understanding of the material, was his independent
work and quite well-done. He also noted that Finch had not come to his office hours with any regularity. This email was received after the jury’s post-Circumstantial discussion but was read to the jury when they met for Tentative Resolutions.

Deliberations Part II: Tentative Resolutions

The meeting began with the Chair reading the email from Professor Sparrow. A juror commented that his first point was a good one as the jury had been operating under the idea that Finch hadn’t understood the material. Another juror was concerned that Professor Sparrow had emailed the jury instead of saying this during Circumstantial. Some jurors felt that it wasn’t fair for them to get this information after the Circumstantial when Finch didn’t have a chance to respond, and that if they were going to use it, they would need to give Finch a chance to respond. A juror commented that this wasn’t related to Finch’s violation. After another juror said he thought it was wrong for the jury to sit there trying to interpret Professor Sparrow’s words, the jury decided not to consider the email further.

The jury largely seemed to be in agreement with the idea that Finch should not get partial credit but a zero.

The jury then discussed the ramifications for Finch’s People Watching concentration. A juror said that she was uncomfortable with the idea of Finch getting a zero, especially if it affected his concentration. Another juror said that if it affected his concentration status that would just be one of the consequences. Another juror wondered whether they could recommend that his grade not affect his concentration status. Another juror argued that the reason that the jury decided Finch should get a zero was that he had plagiarized, and the reason he plagiarized was that he didn’t understand the material well enough to put it in his own words. Therefore, it seemed funny to make special accommodations for his continuing in the concentration when he hadn’t shown that he had the expected understanding everyone else was required to have before proceeding. Several other jurors found this argument compelling. Overall, the jury seemed to shift toward not making any accommodations for the concentration.

The jury then turned to the idea of Finch’s understanding of plagiarism. They brought up the idea of Finch reading Maud McInerney’s essay. A juror suggested that Finch discuss proper paraphrasing with Professor Sparrow. Another juror added that this would potentially also restore Finch’s relationship with Professor Sparrow. The jury decided to specify that Finch and Professor Sparrow would meet at least twice to reflect and that this should be more than a brief discussion. The jury decided that Finch shouldn’t rewrite the whole paper, but instead should rewrite the sections Professor Sparrow had included in his statement as especially problematic examples. This would not be for credit. The jury recommended that Professor Sparrow and Finch use Maud McInerney’s essay as the starting point of their conversation.

The jury then talked about Finch writing a letter to the community, which was one of his proposed resolutions, and quickly agreed that this should be done.

The jury revisited the idea of a professor in the division drafting an essay about plagiarism, which had been discussed during earlier deliberations. A juror noted that this wasn’t related to Finch and therefore thought it didn’t need to be part of the resolutions for this trial. Another juror commented that he though it would carry more weight coming out of a trial,
because it would be seen as a real issue. The Chair clarified that sometimes juries did choose to include resolutions that addressed broader community issues/education that were related to a case, but not necessarily to the specific confronted party. The jury felt that more education could never hurt, and that this could be a good resource, so they decided to include a fourth resolution about creating a document about plagiarism and paraphrasing in the division in which the Avian Studies Department is housed.

The jury consented to the following set of tentative resolutions. No one stood outside of consensus:

1. The jury recommends that Finch receive a 0.0 on the paper.
2. Finch and Professor Sparrow will meet at least twice to rework the sections of Finch's paper included in Professor Sparrow's appendix, focusing on proper paraphrasing. Before the first meeting, Finch should read Maud McInerney's essay so they can use this as a starting point.
3. Finch will write a letter to the community reflecting on his experience with plagiarism to be included with the abstract.
4. Honor Council will work with the division in which the Avian Studies department is housed to produce an essay on avoiding plagiarism in this division that is comparable to Maud McInerney's essay "Plagiarism and How to Avoid It."

Finalizing Resolutions

Professor Sparrow did not attend the meeting, but emailed the Chair his response to the tentative resolutions.

Finch said he thought the first resolution, receiving a zero on the paper, was a little harsh. He said that he should get partial credit because the research proposal of the paper was his own work, and he did not intend to plagiarize. A juror explained that the jury had talked about that and recognized that there was no malintent, but it was still plagiarism. The jury spent a long time talking with Finch about its reasoning for the resolution and tried to help him see why the jury thought this was the right resolution. Jurors pointed out that it was unfair to the rest of the class for Finch to get credit for plagiarized work. Thus, the resolution to get a zero was an important step in restoration with the class. Finch said he understood the jury’s sentiments, but that there are different levels of plagiarism, and he felt like the jury didn’t take the circumstances into account. A juror responded that they had taken the circumstances into account, and that there would have been different consequences if the plagiarism had been intentional.

Finch was still resistant to the idea of getting a zero and began to question Honor Council procedures. He expressed that he thought each juror should have had to come to his or her own conclusion about what was right and perhaps even write those opinions down before discussing them with each other. Some jurors felt very strongly about this comment, and many explained the process of consensus. They also assured Finch that many viewpoints and possible solutions were considered, and that no one’s concerns were suppressed or ignored. They also explained the option of standing outside, and explained that no jurors stood outside on the tentative resolutions.
A juror told Finch that she didn’t think jurors writing down their own ideas would have changed anything in this case, but that she thought it was an interesting idea. She suggested that Honor Council consider it. There was some contention regarding this issue, with some jurors liking this idea and some jurors disagreeing. Finch also suggested another reflection period between Circumstantial and Tentative Resolutions in which jurors could reflect on their own ideas for resolutions before discussing them with the group. This issue was also contentious, and the Chair suggested that they move on to the second resolution.

Finch agreed that the second resolution of re-writing sections of the paper with Professor Sparrow for no credit seemed reasonable.

After Finch left, the jury returned to the discussion about a reflection period before coming up with resolutions. A juror thought that this was a legitimate idea, and that it would improve juries a lot. She thought it would help jurors form their own opinions. Other jurors were more hesitant on the matter, saying that it wouldn’t be good for the parties involved, and that it could lead to people defending their own idea instead of working together to come up with a solution in a more open-minded state. The jury talked about the idea of having an extended moment of silence to allow for more reflection.

In regards to the resolutions, most of the jurors were still okay with the grade change. It was expressed that some jurors still didn’t feel like Finch understood the seriousness of plagiarism. Other jurors argued that Finch was entitled to not agree with the resolution. While some were frustrated about Finch’s disagreement over the first resolution, others argued that it was understandable for Finch to be upset. A juror expressed that she thought that Finch was doing his part in that he had agreed with the other resolutions.

A juror wondered whether the idea of an extended moment of silence before tentative resolutions was something that should be considered in the resolutions. Several jurors felt strongly that this issue merited greater community discussion. Ultimately, the jury did not include this in the final resolutions. The jury then returned to consenting on final resolutions. The jury consented to the final resolutions as a whole with no jurors standing outside. The final resolutions were:

1. The jury recommends that Finch receive a 0.0 on the paper (no jurors stood outside).
2. Finch and Professor Sparrow will meet at least twice to rework the sections of Finch's paper included in Professor Sparrow's appendix, focusing on proper paraphrasing.
3. Before the first meeting, Finch should read Maud McInerney's essay, "Plagiarism and How to Avoid It," so they can use this as a starting point (no jurors stood outside).
4. Finch will write a letter to the community reflecting on his experience with plagiarism. It will be included with the abstract (no jurors stood outside).
5. Honor Council will work with the division in which the Avian Studies department is housed to produce an essay on avoiding plagiarism in this division that is comparable to Maud McInerney's essay, "Plagiarism and How to Avoid It" (no jurors stood outside).
Post-Trial

Finch appealed the resolution that changed his paper grade to a zero. The Chair and a member of the jury serving as the Liaison to the President met with the President to explain the jury’s reasoning. The President endorsed the jury’s resolution.

Letter to the Community from Finch

To the Haverford College Community —

I came to this college, with somewhat of a naïve idealism about the school’s traditions, systems, and my own capabilities as a “good student”. While this experience has somewhat refuted my complete faith in the deliberation system, I have to say that it has been a good learning experience. It has made me all the more careful in my work, and despite my disagreements with the prescribed resolutions and my frustration with the system, it has encouraged me to work harder not for a “good student” reputation, but simply a “better student” reputation. It has also raised my standards of what it means exactly to be a “good student”. A “good student” not only gets his homework done in a timely fashion by devoting enough time thinkable to every aspect, but a good student takes responsibility for his actions, the words he calls his own, and the ultimate result of a course of action, regardless of the original intent. A good student does not give himself too much credit, which he has not deserved. For example, I remember going to freshmen talks and looking at plagiarism papers thinking, “Duh.” Well, I wish I had been more careful in assessing what I could be capable of. We are blessed with great opportunity here and great responsibility. So I wish I was always careful, and I wish I didn’t take anything as a given. I sincerely regret what’s been done. Because once mistakes are made, there is little that can be done to assert your innocence. You are at the mercy of a jury that is part of an inconsistent system. The outcome that is yours is based on luck. At that point, you question the school, the system of self-government, and your own integrity as a student. The jury can be forgiving, but it doesn’t have to care about your individual circumstances. So please look out for yourself, and please always aim to not only be a good student, but a better student that’s on the way to the best you can become. Take responsibility for what’s done, and move forward. Despite my disagreement with the degree of punishment I was dealt, I take full responsibility for everything that has happened. All unpleasantness could have been avoided if I had been a better student. I believe that someday, I’ll look back and be thankful that this happened as part of my time and education here. While my trust in the system and myself has been reduced, I remain positive that this is for the better, and I am working hard to reenter this community with a greater and renewed sense of responsibility.

Finch
Discussion Questions

1. Should there be an additional reflection period between the Circumstantial Portion and Tentative Resolutions? Should it be 10 minutes or 24 hours? Should jurors be asked to write down their thoughts on proposed resolutions before discussion with the rest of the group?

2. Should assignments be viewed as a whole? When part of an essay is plagiarized, is it appropriate for a student to get credit for non-plagiarized portions?

3. Should resolutions be affected by the degree to which the confronted party acknowledges the statement of violation?