Gwen

Summary

Gwen, a Haverford graduate, wrote a letter to the deans admitting to academic violations of the Honor Code. This letter was forwarded to Honor Council. In the ensuing trial, the jury devised a four-part resolution. Due to circumstances that emerged during the trial, the Dean of the college later modified the resolutions.

Since the matter appeared to be purely academic, Honor Council quickly agreed that a trial was necessary. As Gwen lived far away, she was not able to be present for the proceedings. Thus contact with her was limited to the letter and to phone calls with the chairperson of the trial. This situation gave the jury some difficulties in assessing the case.

Fact-Finding

The trial began with the chairperson presenting known information: contents both of the letter and of a phone conversation which she had had with her. In the letter, Gwen stated that she had committed academic violations three times. During the course of the trial, the jury gained a progressively greater understanding of the situation from phone calls between Gwen and the chairperson. Over the phone she explained that there were exactly three incidents, each regarding a closed-book examination. The first two were during her junior year: one was using notes during a history exam, and the other was plagiarizing sentences from her text for a science final. The third occasion was during her last year when she consulted notes, this time during an exam in a course for her major.

Circumstantial

Over a talk on the phone with the chairperson before the jury first gathered, Gwen said that she was a recovering bulimic, and that when she was at Haverford her condition had been at its worst. She said that bulimia was "kind of like being drugged out" so that "mentally and emotionally [she] wasn’t there." She said that she did a lot of things she wouldn’t normally do. At the time she "didn’t really think of it as cheating. I just kind of looked there."

Since leaving Haverford, Gwen spent several months in a hospital for bulimia and has been "trying to clean up" her life. She said that, although the letter was hard for her to write, it was something she had to do. Twice Gwen said she felt she had earned her degree.

Jury Discussion
The jury quickly reached consensus that Gwen had violated the Honor Code. In an early conversation with the chairperson, Gwen implied that she was unsure as to when she was cheating and when she wasn't while at Haverford. Individuals were concerned that she might have violated the Honor Code more than the three times mentioned in the letter. Some jury members felt that, under our system, Gwen should be trusted and that her motives and words should be accepted as truthful. Others concurred and the trial proceeded.

Statement of Violation

The jury reached consensus that Gwen violated the Honor Code on three closed book examinations, referring twice to her notes, and once to her text.

The chairperson told the jury Gwen’s suggestions for a resolution: a letter to the community and community service. The jury liked the community-letter idea, but it also thought of inviting Gwen to write to Council afterwards, "just to work anything else out." The jury also favored Gwen’s doing community service, but stressed that she should decide where. There was also a suggestion that she write something about her bulimia for Her Story that would be made available at the Haverford health services. The idea seemed particularly relevant, since Gwen had wanted to stress bulimia in her letter to the community.

The next resolution topic discussed by the jury was the possibility of a grade change. One juror felt that a grade change would provide a sense of closure to Gwen’s academic violation. The juror also stated that it seemed from Gwen’s letter that she wanted to get this resolved, and that changing the grades for the courses would help to do so. But the jury doubted whether a grade change was possible due to three factors: (1) Gwen had graduated, (2) some of the professors were inaccessible, (3) the jury did not know how her degree would be affected.

The jury discussed whether a grade-change is the only way to deal with an academic violation. Some members of the jury thought that the grade was not the real issue. Instead they maintained that it was an issue of trust. One jury member felt that lowering a grade would do nothing to help Gwen in her current condition. Another juror expressed concern that if Gwen had still been at Haverford she would have almost definitely received a grade change. She didn’t want to treat a graduated student so differently from an enrolled student. All agreed that Gwen should be held responsible for her actions. Eventually, the jury decided that a grade change was the best way to address the academic nature of the violation. The jury adjourned the meeting until the next day.

Day II of the Trial:
The chairperson reviewed what had been covered previously and what lay ahead. Next, jurors shared related conversations which they had had since the last meeting. Two jurors had talked about their thoughts on treating Gwen differently from an enrolled student feeling that it would be unfair to do so. Another juror talked about the meaning of grades in the larger academic community. The chairperson also discussed a conversation she had had with Gwen the night before, which clarified the three incidents (i.e. what exactly had occurred and in which courses).

Discussion returned to current thoughts on Gwen’s grade. One juror said that he previously felt that a grade change was inappropriate for Gwen but now he was confused.

The jury then spent some time talking about its own role and the notion of punishment. One juror noted that they were "not supposed to be dishing out punishment" but were supposed to be as educational as possible. Several people argued that a grade change was appropriate and not vindictive. Yet there was a feeling by some that a grade change should not be too drastic. Others argued that, while "a grade change allows her to move forward," a drastic grade change would interfere with such progress; and "taking [away] her degree would not be constructive." The jury reached consensus that a grade change was in fact necessary.

An idea emerged which covered the several concerns of the jury. The idea was to have Gwen write papers in lieu of the works on which she had cheated. Having Gwen write such papers might help her achieve a feeling of closure. Furthermore, there would be no question about her having earned her degree.

The jury then discussed what the grade change should be. Although they felt that Gwen should fail the exams on which she had cheated, they did not want her to fail the courses. Thus, the jury decided it would be best to ask the professors to consider using her extra work to supplement her grades if necessary. The jury then drew up the following resolutions:

**Resolutions**

1. The jury suggests that Gwen receive failing grades for the three exams on which she cheated. In addition, we ask that Gwen complete three supplementary assignments. She should consult with each of her professors to determine the nature of this work. If any of these grade changes results in a failing semester grade, we ask that the professor generously consider the supplementary assignment as an opportunity to pass the course.

2. Gwen’s letter expressed a sense of isolation from the Haverford community. Her Story, a forum inviting women to anonymously share their experiences, would provide Gwen an
opportunity to voice her feelings of estrangement. We would benefit as a community by recognizing these sentiments and working together to be more responsive to individual needs.

3. The jury suggests that Gwen write a letter to the News discussing her academic infractions. Such a public statement would allow Gwen a sense of closure and help to heal the breach of trust between her and the community.

4. The jury invites Gwen to maintain a correspondence with Honor Council. This dialogue would provide Gwen with a unique outlet for her continued reflection.

Day III of the Trial:

The jury met again two days later. First, they reestablished consensus on their resolutions. Then the chairperson shared with the jury Gwen's feedback and the latest situation.

The chairperson contacted Gwen after the tentative resolutions had been drawn up, and read them to her over the phone. Gwen stated she was not happy with the tentative resolutions. She said that she hadn't used her class notes enough to make an impact on her grade. She also asked that the jury refrain from making a recommendation about her grade change but instead, let her talk to her professors independently.

The chairperson tried her best to explain all the jury’s reasoning. She told Gwen that the jury tried to find a way to create a sense of closure for her. Most importantly, the jury believed that grades, by nature, should reflect a student’s work, and that hers currently did not. Gwen felt that the jury was too idealistic.

Shortly after, Gwen called the chairperson and said that she had checked herself back into the hospital so that she wouldn’t do anything harmful to herself. They talked more about the resolutions. Before hanging up, the chairperson said she would Federal Express the tentative resolutions to her, and they agreed to speak again the following day.

The chairperson sent the tentative resolutions along with a copy of the Honor Code. At this point the chairperson wondered if Honor Council was the appropriate body to be handling this case. She tried contacting the Deans and called Gwen at the hospital to tell her about her new doubts. Gwen then made another response to the resolution. She was quite willing to do work, yet she felt that because of her circumstances (that it happened some time ago, that she turned herself in, and that she had been going through difficult circumstances when the violations occurred), that she shouldn’t fail her assignments. She talked a lot about how she really felt that she was being punished, and that she had already suffered enough. Because of her absence from the trial, she felt that no one at
Haverford represented her. She said that she felt like getting a lawyer. She wanted to know if her dean would get involved. The chairperson told her that her dean or the president could overturn the resolutions. They hung up with an agreement to talk again before the jury’s next meeting.

By their next phone call, the express package had not yet arrived, so the chairperson read Gwen the resolutions once more. Gwen was still concerned about the possible failing grades.

Gwen’s reentry into the hospital created great concern among the jury. People felt that the issue was different now that her health could be seriously affected by their decision. One juror suggested that the deans handle it entirely. Another person thought that, while the jury was not equipped to deal with psychological matters, it should still make a decision that it felt was just. One person thought that the jury was ignoring the individual but all concurred that Gwen’s Bulimia did not excuse her actions. The chairperson then stated that the deans would handle the psychological aspect of the decision.

It became clear that the jury felt they had made a fair decision; however, they still were uncomfortable with the potential effects on Gwen. The jury then talked about the potential effects of any decision. Several individuals wanted Gwen to know that the jurors were really concerned about her.

The jury moved towards consensus. Each member felt confident, not only that the decisions were fair, but also that the jury had addressed the issues to the best of its ability.

After the last meeting, the chairperson called Gwen and presented the jury’s final statement of the resolution (see Resolutions above). Gwen was still not happy with it. She thought the jury had lost sight of her. She was worried about her future, and anxious to speak with the Dean of the college. In response, the chairperson reviewed the jury’s thoughts on grades, especially in the context of applying to graduate school. She told Gwen of the jury’s difficulty in making a decision in light of her condition, but that they felt their decision was fair.

Addendum

After reviewing the case and consulting with Gwen’s doctors, the Deans made one alteration in the resolutions. They removed the first resolution (regarding supplementary work) and replaced it with the following: Gwen’s grades, (from the exams through to her transcript) are to remain unchanged and her degree is to remain intact, provided that she take three courses within the next year and a half. Two of the courses are to be in the Humanities and one in the sciences. The school she attends must be acceptable to the deans.