Abstract discussions will be held Wednesday, March 21 and Thursday, March 22 at 7:00 PM in Ryan Gym

Ariel and Professor Sebastian
An Honor Council Academic Trial
Released Spring 2012

This abstract was not 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

Ariel was a student in Professor Sebastian’s seashell classification class. After reviewing her final exam and paper, Professor Sebastian became suspicious that Ariel had violated the Honor Code. Both parties submitted statements to Honor Council. The statements were reviewed, resulting in a suspicion of violation and sent to trial. Ariel brought a support fish, Flounder, with her throughout the trial process.

Fact Finding

Professor Sebastian spoke first. He began by explaining that there were two parts to the final exam: a self-scheduled part, which was timed and closed-book, and a take-home part, which was untimed and open-book. In the open-book section, Ariel was allowed to use a shell classification guide, but no other sources. The instructions did not explicitly state that she was not allowed to use any online guides. In addition to the two-part exam, there was a final paper and presentation. In the paper, Ariel was not required to use outside sources, but it was allowed as long as they were properly cited. The final exam was 25% of the overall class grade; the paper and presentation were another 25%.

Professor Sebastian found that the take-home portion was significantly better than the self-scheduled closed-part. Some specific shell classifications in the take home part seemed odd—they were similar to rarer shell types, but nothing that Professor Sebastian would expect a modern student to recognize. He googled the shell types and found matches in books, but it was not enough to be sure that Ariel had cheated.

After becoming suspicious, Professor Sebastian looked at Ariel’s final paper. He found passages in the paper that did not seem to follow the ones that came before them. He again googled
the phrases and found that they were copied from a book available online. Professor Sebastian asserted that the problem was not Ariel’s heavy reliance on outside sources, but that she copied large chunks of the text.

Ariel spoke next. She stated that she had used an online guide and a classification book in the take-home portion of the exam. She had also seen the same shells in high school and had memorized their types then, and still vaguely remembered how they were classified. The shell names that Professor Sebastian had noticed were names Google had given her combined with something she had remembered from high school. She says that she spent a lot of time using the online classification guides and used an online guide for one complete shell series, but other than that, only to look up single names that were not in her book.

For the final paper, Ariel typed some key words into Google and used a source she found in this way. She did copy text from this source into her paper meaning to cite it, but forgot to. She did not realize that she had forgotten to cite her sources until she received a letter from Professor Sebastian. She did not mean to violate the Honor Code, but can see how she might have done so, especially on the final paper.

**Deliberations**

The jury was clear that the use of passages from another source without attribution in Ariel’s essay was unacceptable. It was less clear, however, whether her use of online guides in her final exam was acceptable. After considering the issue, the jury decided that regardless of whether Ariel’s use of online guides was acceptable, it was certainly not okay for her to use classifications that she had seen in high school without saying that she had done so, even if she could not remember exactly what she had seen. Some jury members also suspected that Ariel was lying about whether she had intended to insert quotation marks.

The confronting and confronted parties left and the jury came to the following statement of violation:

*Ariel violated the Honor Code on her final paper by representing another person's words and scholarship as her own (HC sec. 3.04a) and on her final exam by violating the professor's exam instructions by misusing online resources (HC sec. 3.04a).*

**Circumstantial Portion**

Ariel started by pointing out that the final exam instructions didn't specifically forbid complex online classification guides, and that they were allowed to use simple online classification guides. Ariel thinks that the complex classification guide she used simply lets you look up more than one shell at once, rather than taking all the shells next to each other into account.

Ariel knew that she studied very similar shells in high school although she couldn’t remember if she studied these particular shells. Throughout high school, her shell identification teacher was also more lenient when it came to using complex classification guides, providing hints on tests or students forgetting to properly quote others’ words in essays.

That week, Ariel was particularly stressed due to all the exams she was taking and an illness, even getting an extension on one of her final exams in another class. Some of that stress came from her family, who Ariel felt put immense pressure on her to not fail.

When writing the paper, Ariel felt crunched for time. She found a source through Google, and she said she thought when she did it that it would not be considered plagiarism. Ariel said she
used her source to improve her argument, not get the paper to the required length. Ariel wrote the paper the night it was due, and emailed it right before the deadline.

Ariel had similar incidents in high school with forgetting quotations, but citations weren’t a focus in her high school. She had been taking her writing seminar at the same time as this class, and learning about citations there. She had also mis-cited something by forgetting quotation marks for her writing seminar, and her professor pointed it out to her. It was similar to this, in that she forgot to use quotation marks. Ariel feels her writing seminar prepared her for writing this paper. Ariel thought that this instance also taught her about properly citing sources and proofreading her work.

Ariel believed that she unintentionally plagiarized on the essay, but not on the shell identification.

**Tentative Resolutions**

Ariel suggested that she receive a 0.0 on her final paper, that Professor Sebastian should determine her grade on the final exam, that Professor Sebastian should clarify his exam instructions in the future so that it is clear that complex shell identification software is not allowed, and that Ariel should write a letter to the community.

Professor Sebastian felt Ariel should receive a failing grade for the open book part of the exam and the paper. But given that she was a first-semester freshman, he was willing to average these failing grades in with the rest of her work, which means she would pass the course. He also left open the option for Ariel to fail the course. For restoration, he suggested that she read Maud McInerney’s write-up on plagiarism.

The jury liked Ariel’s suggestions, but felt that they didn't address education. The jury wanted Ariel to learn two things: how to avoid plagiarism, and why plagiarism is bad. To teach Ariel how to avoid plagiarism, the jury thought of having her go to the Shell Help Center.

In order to clarify why plagiarism is against the Honor Code, the jury thought that she could read Maud McInerney’s essay about plagiarism. It thought of asking that her letter to the community be about why plagiarism negatively affects an academic community. It also considered asking her and Professor Sebastian to have a series of conversations on the subject. The jury hoped that Ariel would learn the gravity of plagiarism from these conversations, and also that they would help restore the breach of trust.

The jury considered whether it should separate Ariel for plagiarism, because the Honor Code says this should normally be done, but decided against it. The jury did, however, think that Ariel should fail the open-book portion of the exam. It wasn't changing the rules by saying that Ariel shouldn't have used complex shell identification software, just clarifying them.

The jury came to the following tentative resolutions:

1. Ariel will receive a 0.0 on her paper and the open-book portion of her final exam.
2. The jury recommends that Professor Sebastian clarify guidelines regarding the use of online resources for her future classes.
3. Ariel will meet with a tutor from the Shell Help Center once a week for the rest of the semester to talk about paper-writing, time management, and citation.
4. Ariel will read Maud McInerney’s essay "Plagiarism and How to Avoid It" and the book "Writing With Sources" by Gordon Harvey, which Honor Council will provide for her.
5. Ariel will meet with Professor Sebastian to discuss plagiarism until Professor Sebastian is satisfied with Ariel’s understanding of plagiarism.
6. At the end of the semester, Ariel will write a letter to the community about what she learned
about plagiarism and her experience with the trial process.

Finalizing Resolutions

Professor Sebastian was not at the meeting, but sent an email with reactions to the resolutions. He was happy to change clarify exam instructions, but wanted to point out that the rules of plagiarism should be understood by students. He also suggested just one meeting with Ariel after they had each read the works by McInerney and Harvey.

Ariel was worried that time constraints would make her unavailable to meet with a tutor. She said she might be able to meet for 20 minutes a week, but also suggested meeting every other week instead of every week. After some discussion with jury, Ariel agreed with the peer mentor resolution as written.

Ariel asked why she would meet with Professor Sebastian, so the jury explained to Ariel that meeting with Professor Sebastian would help restore the breach of trust, and standardize her understanding of plagiarism.

All jurors consented to the proposed resolutions. The jury came to the following final resolutions:

1. Ariel will receive a 0.0 on her paper and the open-book portion of her final exam.
2. We recommend that Professor Sebastian clarify guidelines regarding the use of online resources for her classes to prevent future misunderstandings.
3. Ariel will meet with a tutor from the Shell Help Center once a week for the rest of the semester to talk about paper-writing, time management, and citation.
4. Ariel will read Maud McInerney's essay "Plagiarism and How to Avoid It" and the book "Writing With Sources" by Gordon Harvey.
5. After reading Maud McInerney's essay and Gordon Harvey's book, Ariel will meet with Professor Sebastian to discuss plagiarism until he is satisfied with her understanding of plagiarism.
6. At the end of the semester, Ariel will write a letter to the community about what she learned about plagiarism and her experience with the trial process.

Post-Trial

Both the chair and the abstract writers were late in writing the chair’s report and the abstract respectively. Ariel never received "Writing With Sources" by Gordon Harvey. However, when contacting her for the letter, the chair provided her with a link to the Tripod entry for the book. Both parties chose not to appeal the resolutions.

Ariel’s Letter to the Community

Dear Community,

I was placed before the Honor Council in the first semester of my freshman year.

I was taking a class that was completely different from all the similar classes that I had ever taken before and I was unaware of that. This made me very confused and made the class
hard for most of the year. Then by the time finals came, I was a mess due to all the stress I had from other classes and my family issues and my “disability”. This I caused me to get very, very sick on the same day that I had to type and email my final paper and the second part of my final exam for this language class into the professor. While writing the paper, I couldn’t remember some things that we had talked about in class so I looked it up on Google. I found an excerpt from a book that talked exactly about what I had forgotten. However, since I was panicking and hurrying to get it in on time, I didn’t realize how closely I was reading the text and ended up writing down more of the book’s words than my own. I also forgot to quote and site many of the times that I had copied down a sentence verbatim. I was so scared to meet with the honor council, but it’s a lot better to just meet as soon as possible and be totally honest and get it over with quickly. I was found guilty and given a zero on my paper and a poor grade on the second part of my exam. I also had to read a section of a Gordon Harvey book about writing styles, focusing on plagiarism. Then I had to meet with a tutor in the Writing Center twice a week until the end of the spring semester and I had to meet with my professor, if she wanted to. It felt harsh to me, but now that I think about it, I can see that it was a fair punishment.

It was a horribly, terrifying experience and I felt awful and embarrassed about the whole situation. My advice to everyone in a confusing and difficult class is to calm down and actually seek advice from the professor, or Peer Mentors, etc. Students should make sure to take some time every week to relax and recharge and sleep. I advise students to take care of themselves as soon as they get sick and to seek out psych services if they are constantly stressed. All of this, combined with closely proofreading your papers, will prevent accidental plagiarism and many other stress-related mistakes.

Sincerely,

Ariel

Questions for Discussion

1. How should students deal with the challenges of using information learned in high school? What is the appropriate course of action when a student knows information is true, but does not recall its source?

2. Do you think online classification guides such as the one Ariel used should be allowed? Is it the responsibility of the professor to be sure to mention whether they can or cannot be used?

3. Is it necessary for students to check in with professors about resources that professors do not specifically mention? What about resources that professors may not know exist, such as online guides, or friends or family members who are experts in the field?

4. There was a great deal of discussion about whether Honor Council should have provided the Harvey book for Ariel. In the end, they determined that it was not Council’s responsibility to do so. Do you think they should have? How much of a role should Council have in overseeing the completion of such resolutions?