Honor Code Abstract
Fall 1991

Manuela

SUMMARY

Manuela, a Bryn Mawr student, contacted the Honor Council Chairperson, telling her that she had cheated on one question of her English final exam a few weeks before. The Honor Council Chairperson contacted the members of Honor Council. As it was a case of clear academic dishonesty, a trial was convened.

The trial jury heard Manuela’s account, as well as that of Professor Taylor. They reached consensus that a violation of the Honor Code had occurred. After circumstantial questions, the jury reached consensus that Manuela’s grade on the final exam should be dropped by 1.0, which would drop her final grade in the course by 0.3.

FACT FINDING

Manuela and Professor Taylor met with the jury to give their accounts of what had happened. Manuela did not bring a support person.

Professor Taylor felt it would be better if Manuela spoke before she did, so Manuela gave her account:

She picked up the exam early, to make sure she had a bit of time to do last minute studying before she had to start the exam. In the fluorescent lights of the exam room, she saw one short-answer question through the envelope. There were a few minutes before the exam period started, and other students were doing last-minute studying. She opened her books and looked up the answer to the question that she had seen through the envelope. While taking the exam, she used that information to complete the question.

Manuela said she had been aware all during the exam that she was doing something wrong and almost didn’t answer that question; in the end, however, she chose to answer it.

After she finished all her finals, she knew she had to take responsibility for her actions. A week-and-a-half later, she called Professor Taylor and the Honor Council Chairperson, and told them what she had done, initiating the process that led to the trial.

Professor Taylor gave her account:

Manuela contacted her a week-and-a-half after the end of finals period. She said that she had seen one question through the exam envelope, had looked up the answer before opening the exam, and answered that question with the information she read in the book.
Professor Taylor's first reaction was that Manuela was making this up — Manuela had been an exemplary student in the class and had aced the exam. The professor had been aware that throughout the course Manuela had been very doubtful of her ability to perform well. She added that the problem would not even have occurred if Manuela had not been able to see the exam question through the envelope (which she had brought with her to show the jury). She also expressed concern that students brought books into Stokes to study at the last minute — it seemed to her to be an unnecessary temptation. She said that she saw no need for "punitive resolutions" in the case.

Jurors then asked fact-finding questions. Several jurors asked questions to clarify exactly what Manuela had seen through the envelope. Since Professor Taylor had brought the actual exam in its envelope to the trial, several jurors confirmed for themselves that it was indeed easy to see the questions through the envelope material. One juror asked Manuela to explain just how she had seen the question through the envelope. Manuela explained that she had not just glanced at it but had actually looked at it for a time, enough time to see the question.

In response to another question, Manuela told the jury that she had not known her grade standing in the class. Another juror asked if there had been a choice of questions on the short-answer section, and Manuela said yes, there had been.

The jurors could think of no more questions at this point, so Manuela and Professor Taylor left the room while the jury began to deliberate about whether there had been a violation of the Honor Code.

**JURY DELIBERATION**

The jurors quickly reached consensus that a violation of the Honor Code had occurred.

The situation was somewhat complicated, though, by the circumstances surrounding the violation. The fact that the envelope could be seen through was distressing to many members of the jury. However, as one member pointed out, Manuela had had two chances not to cheat: when she went to check her books, and when she actually wrote the answer to the identification question and handed in the exam.

The jury wrote up a statement of violation:

*Merely seeing the exam question through the envelope did not in itself constitute a violation. However, because Manuela went to her book, looked up the answer, and then chose to use the information on the final exam, she broke the rules of a closed-book exam and violated the Honor Code.*

The jury then invited Professor Taylor and Manuela back in for circumstantial questions.
After the Chairperson read the statement of violation to Professor Taylor and Manuela, the jurors asked circumstantial questions of the two.

One juror asked about the value of the question in relation to the exam and the course. Professor Taylor explained that the question was worth four percent of the exam. The weight of the final, she continued, varied depending on the student. She said that while it was a significant part of the final grade, it had not changed anyone's grade in the class drastically.

Another juror asked Manuela how confident she had been both about the class and about taking the exam. Manuela replied that she had been unable to gauge where she was in the class in general. She had been very reluctant to take the self-scheduled final, and had put it off several times. A juror asked Professor Taylor to comment about Manuela's standing, and the professor said that Manuela was doing very well in the course and was one of the best students in her class. She also said that Manuela knew this. She said that she thought that Manuela was "punishing herself."

Manuela pointed out that she had cheated. She explained that the past year had been very hard for her. She had gone to counseling and had been improving her situation, but was very unsure of herself academically. A juror asked her if she was coming back the following year, and she said that she was planning to. She said that this was far from the beginning of her problem, which had a long history.

When asked to suggest possible resolutions, Manuela proposed a grade change both on the exam and in the class, although no grade was specified. Professor Taylor spoke for a moment about her conversations with Manuela. She said that she had discussed with Manuela ways for her to address her problems of a lack of perspective, as she described it. Academics, said the professor, should not be the be-all and end-all of Manuela's life. One of the things they had talked about was that when Manuela had done some volunteer work, she had gotten a lot out of it—she came back to the college community with greater energy and a fresher outlook. Professor Taylor suggested that something like this could be made part of the resolution of this situation. Manuela agreed with this as well.

The jurors thanked Manuela and Professor Taylor, and the two left the room so that the jury could proceed to deliberations upon resolutions.

The main issue of the deliberations was addressing the violation of the Honor Code while at the same time addressing Manuela's particular situation. A grade change seemed to most jurors to be the most obvious choice for a resolution, but there was a great deal of argument over how much of a grade change should be made.

Should the grade change be only on the final exam, and not enough to make a change in the final grade? Or would such a "symbolic" grade change not address the concerns of the students and faculty in the community? Should the fact that
Manuela was doing so well in the class affect the decision? Or that the question on which she cheated was worth four points out of a hundred? The jurors pretty much agreed that cheating was cheating -- but, on the other hand, Manuela had not plagiarized 85% of a paper either.

One juror felt that a much larger grade change was in order, compared to what the others were discussing. She felt that it was necessary to make a strong response to academic dishonesty, regardless of how likeable or remorseful a confronted party was. Another responded, saying that the jury shouldn't try to make Manuela a "scapegoat."

The jury talked about Manuela's personal psychology and the way it had affected her in her academics. One person pointed out how remorseful and honest Manuela had been with the jury. Another responded that "we shouldn't say you can do anything you want as long as you admit to it." This juror explained that he saw the situation as two problems: the first was the cheating, and the second was Manuela's psychology and personal situation. The second demanded a direct human response -- but an Honor Code jury was convened to address the first.

The jurors spent some time attempting to persuade one juror who was not sure that a grade change was appropriate. A juror explained that the grade change was necessary to address the concerns of the community. Another juror explained that it also might help Manuela, since she would know that she wasn't "getting away" with anything. In addition, she continued, it would also directly address the concerns of the other students in the class, regardless of the "wider community." The jury then was able to reach consensus that a grade change was necessary.

There was a great deal of further discussion over how much the grade should be changed. Some jurors wanted Manuela to fail her final, because she had cheated on the final, and because such a change would be more than merely "symbolic". It would impact her final grade in the class quite significantly. Others said that a lesser change was appropriate, because Manuela had only cheated on one four-point question. Most agreed that any grade change should be large enough to impact her final grade, so that the change would not be invisible. The jury reached consensus that the grade on the final exam should be changed enough to make a significant change in the final grade. They would reduce her exam grade by 1.0, so that the final course grade would be lowered by .3.

The jury decided to talk for a while about Professor Taylor's suggestion of volunteer work for Manuela. One juror brought up the problems inherent in mandating any sort of community work, citing the recent Greg case. The jury agreed fairly easily that mandating such service would not be a good idea, and instead decided to strongly support Professor Taylor's suggestion. They felt that anything stronger would be inappropriate.

In the end, the jury reached tentative consensus on the following resolutions:

1) The jury recommends that Manuela's grade on the final exam be reduced by 1.0 in order that the final grade in the course be changed by 0.3.
2) The jury reaffirms Professor Taylor's suggestion that Manuela perform volunteer work outside of the Bi-College Community with the hope that she will gain self-confidence and the perspective that she feels she needs.

The Chairperson presented these resolutions to Professor Taylor and Manuela that evening, and the jury reconvened the next day.

PRESENTATION OF THE RESOLUTIONS

The jury met the next day and quickly re-reached consensus on the resolutions. Then Manuela joined the jury for discussion of the resolutions.

The jurors explained their reasoning to Manuela. More than one person said that the grade change was meant both to address the concerns of the community and to give Manuela a concrete symbol that the situation had been addressed, so that she could move on.

Manuela responded, saying that she regretted the loss of her original grade, but, on the other hand, this was exactly what she wanted: to take responsibility for what she had done and deal with it.

Manuela then left and the jury almost immediately reached final consensus that the two resolutions would stand.

The jury chose one of its members to be a liaison to the administration, and two members of the jury said that they would talk to the Registrar's Office to make sure the exam envelopes got changed so that no such situation could happen again.

With that, the trial (one of the shortest in recent memory) ended.

QUESTIONS? COMMENTS?? COMPLAINTS??

1) Should people be allowed to bring books into final exam rooms? Does this provide an unnecessary temptation?

2) Do you feel the resolutions were fair? What should the jury have done differently?