MAY
Honor Council Abstract Fall 1993

Introduction:
May, a Bryn Mawr student, approached the Chair of Honor Council because, two years ago, she had taken extra time and used disallowed sources on two final exams for her Haverford classes, Gnosticism with Professor Macnab and Suburban Politics with Professor Kihara. Honor Council consensed that a trial was necessary and a jury was convened. Neither professor was present, because one was not in the area at the time, and the other felt that since May was confronting herself his presence would not be necessary. During the course of the trial, with May's consent, two jurors left for personal reasons and were thereafter recorded as standing outside of consensus in jury decisions.

Fact-Finding
May, May's support person, and the jury were present. May began with the facts. Two years ago, May had been taking four classes. On the night before the last day of exams, just as she was leaving to take her second to last self-scheduled exam, she received a call informing her a family member had died. She had not been particularly close to him but she had been feeling very stressed out by academic pressures, and, though her presence was not required at the funeral, she said that she had felt that the death was an "excuse to get away." She asked for and received extensions from her professors and Dean for her two remaining exams: Suburban Politics and Gnosticism. The professors and Deans immediately gave the extensions when told of the family member's death.

May brought her exams home, and put them off until the day they were to be mailed in. Both exams were three-hour, closed book exams, with no additional sources allowed. May told the jury that she had used the whole day to take both exams. She wasn't sure exactly how much extra time she had used, but estimated that it was about an hour extra for each exam. She also opened her books half-way through the first exam and used them for "most" of both exams. She looked things up that she didn't know, and double checked answers which she had already written.

Deliberations
The jury quickly consensed on a statement of violation which read as follows:

May violated the Honor Code by using disallowed sources and extra time to complete both her Suburban Politics and Gnosticism exams.

During the discussion of this violation some jurors asked whether May further violated the Honor Code by lying to her professors and Dean to get the extensions. The jury felt they needed to talk to May again. She had told the jury that the death in the family was "an excuse" and the jury was unsure if not being clear about that to the Deans constituted a second violation.

Fact-Finding II
May came back and told the jury that the main reason she wanted the extension was because she didn't want to take her exams, but that, at the time, she had wanted to go home and help other members of her family. In response to a juror's question, May said that an honest explanation of her need for the extensions would have been that she didn't want to take the exams; she would not have included the part about a death in the family. She said, referring to her conversations with her professors and Dean, "In the spirit of the Honor Code, I do think I violated it." However, May also told the jury that her family situation and the other stresses in her life were so intertwined in her mind that she could not accurately weigh the effects of each individually.
Deliberations II

The jury had a long discussion over whether or not May had lied to get the extension. It seemed that there were two reasons that May had wanted an extension: a) she was stressed out because of academic pressure, and b) there was a death in the family. During the course of the deliberations the jury attempted to answer two questions: 1) if one told a jury they felt they violated the Code, could the jury then say “No, you didn’t”, and 2) if the death in the family was a secondary reason for the extension, then did May lie to her dean and professors by omitting the main reason for her request, academic stress. This discussion lasted seven hours, during which time the jury took two breaks. During the second break, one juror left for personal reasons and, with May’s permission, the trial continued. This juror was recorded as standing outside future decisions.

1) May had said that she felt she had violated the Code by the manner in which she obtained the extension. The jury was split on the question of whether or not they had to agree with May by saying that her action was a violation. Some jurors felt that if a jury could find that people had violated the code when they felt they hadn’t, then certainly it should work the other way around. Others felt that May was in a better position to judge her reasons for getting the extension than the jury could ever be. After further discussion of question 2 (did May lie to get the extension?) the jury decided that it could disagree with May as to whether or not she had violated the Honor Code.

2) Some jurors felt that by not giving the main reason for her need for an extension May had lied to her Dean and professors. Others felt that May had given a valid excuse, and that one should not be compelled to give all of the reasons for one’s actions all of the time. Also, it was not necessarily an intentional omission, considering that May was upset at the time. Furthermore, May had said that the death alone would have affected her performance on the exams.

After the second break, it seemed that most jurors felt that the issue under discussion was not a violation, but the feelings of some jurors were strong enough that the jury was not yet ready to move on.

At this point one juror introduced the question, "When is it okay not to give all the reasons for something?" This helped the jury think clearly about the issue. The jury decided that one does not need to give all one’s reasons when one reason is good enough and the other reason(s) does not somehow invalidate the reason given (for example, if one were to drink all night, and then say the next day that one was too sick to take an exam without mentioning the drinking, then the legitimacy of saying one was too sick to take an exam could be called into question because a hangover isn’t a valid excuse for needing an extension). The jury agreed that, in this case, the death in May’s family was a valid reason for an extension. Therefore, the jury consensed (with the non-present juror recorded as standing outside) that May did not further violate the Honor Code by lying to the professors or the Dean. The jury broke until the next day, during which time another juror left for personal reasons, and again, with May’s consent, was recorded as standing outside consensus in following decisions.

Circumstantial

May told the jury about her personal situation both at the time of the violation, and from the point of violation to the present. Two years ago May had been feeling a lot of academic pressure. She felt that she had been studying very hard, with very poor results. This was incredibly frustrating, and her self-confidence was very low. She liked Professors Macnab and Kihara, and wanted to do well in their classes, but was unable to overcome her problems with writing and test-taking. When it came time to take the exams all of these pressures and problems led to her violation of the Honor Code.

In the following semester May wanted to make sure that she would never have to cheat again. She went to her dean and various specialists about her writing problems and study methods, as well as doing a lot of research on her own about learning disabilities. With these new skills May’s academic performance improved greatly over the next few years, and her confidence level rose. For a while she was too scared to come forward about her violation, but
eventually May felt that it was necessary to turn herself in. At this point May informed the Chair of Honor Council, as well as her family, Dean, and Professors of her violation.

The jury had few questions. May ended by suggesting possible resolutions, which included: failing the classes and finding a way to help others with possible learning disabilities.

Deliberations on Resolutions

During these deliberations the jury kept in mind the three guidelines for formulating resolutions: education, accountability, and repairing the breach of trust.

After a brief discussion the jurors agreed, for various reasons, that May should fail both classes. The reasons discussed were as follows: 1) the final is representative of all of a student's work in a class, and by cheating on a final, one taints the integrity of all other work in that class, 2) if one who cheats simply fails the piece of work involved, it is unfair to others who failed honestly, 3) failing the courses would help to make up the breach of trust between May and her professors. The jury consensed on the following resolution with the two absent jurors recorded as standing outside:

1) The jury recommends that May fail both classes.

The jury was very impressed with the work May had done at identifying and dealing with her learning disability. The jury felt that May's suggestion of doing something to help others in this situation was a good one, and in this spirit, consensed on the following second resolution (with the two absent jurors recorded as outside).

2) May will create a resource packet for students who feel that they may have a learning disability. This packet will be kept on file in both the Bryn Mawr and Haverford dean's offices.

Finally, the jury felt that May should have an opportunity to express her feelings about her experience to the community. The jury felt that this could be educational for May and the community as well. The jury felt, however, that this should not be mandated. With this in mind the jury consensed on the last resolution (absent jurors outside):

3) The jury recommends that May write a letter to the Community describing her experiences.

The jury then took the prescribed 24-48 hour break before presentation of resolutions, during which time May was informed of the resolutions.

Presentation of Resolutions

May agreed with the resolutions, and asked a few questions to clarify the form of the packet mentioned in the second resolution. The jury commended May for her honesty and congratulated her on the progress she had made in her own life. Everyone went home. The end.

Do you agree with the outcome of this trial? Why?

Under what circumstances must one give all of the reasons for his/her actions?