Honor Council Abstract

Missy and Xavier

Richie, the homework grader in French 107, suspected that Missy and Xavier might have cheated on their homework. He spoke to a member of Honor Council, who in turn approached Missy and Xavier and asked them to come to an inquiry.

The inquiry began with the Chairperson reading the relevant portions of the Code. Then Richie spoke. He said that early in the semester, when he had been grading papers, he noted many similarities between Missy’s and Xavier’s work. He mentioned this to the professor, Dr. Napoleon. The professor told Richie that he would clarify to the class that they would be able to work together on their homework, but could not copy one another’s answers.

On a following assignment, the grader noted similar mistakes on each paper which seemed too unusual to be coincidental. Richie, the grader, thought that the two students had done more than the allowed “working together,” so he wrote a note on the top of their homework papers explaining his suspicions and asking them to speak to a member of Honor Council. He did not want to continue the confrontation process at this time.

A few weeks later, Richie noticed that there was a note on the back of Missy’s homework which was crossed out and asked Xavier to “feel free to make any revisions necessary.” Richie felt that this note was referring to the French assignment. He did not confront the two students at that time, because he did not want to lose his anonymity as a grader. Richie then spoke to a member of Honor Council about the issue, and eventually Xavier and Missy were contacted by this member.

Missy spoke next. She said that Prof. Napoleon had not made any further explanations concerning how students could work together on their homework. Missy was under the impression that students were able to work together as long as both students understood their collective answers. She added that she had not received a homework with the grader’s note. Missy then explained the note which she had left on the back of her homework and which was crossed out.

She said that the note was written to Xavier in reference to an English paper. Missy’s English professor, Dr. Cromwell, encouraged his students to have their friends proof-read and critique their writing. Xavier often helped Missy with her papers, recommending changes. The note on the back of the French assignment was telling Xavier that it would be all right for him to edit her English paper. Missy was leaving early for break and would be missing the French class in which she was supposed to turn in her homework. She gave her homework to Xavier to hand in for her, and hurriedly left a note concerning the English paper.

Xavier spoke next and affirmed Missy’s explanation. He added that the two of them worked together on their
homework, verbally, and made sure that both of them understood the correct answers.

The jury had two questions for Missy and Xavier at this point. First, they wanted to know why Missy and Xavier had not received the homework with the note from Richie. They explained that after the first few weeks, many of their assignments were not returned. Second, the jury wondered why Xavier had crossed out the note on back of Missy’s homework. Xavier explained that he crossed it out because it did not pertain to the French homework, and that it was not anyone else’s business. The jury then passed around the homework with Missy’s crossed-out note to Xavier.

At this point in the inquiry, the jury decided to break so that Missy and Xavier could go to their dorm rooms and look for the missing homework assignments with Richie’s notes. While Missy and Xavier were searching their rooms, the jury examined other examples of Missy’s and Xavier’s homeworks to see whether the assignments were always similar to each other. They found examples where Missy made a certain mistake and Xavier did not, and when Xavier wrote something markedly different from Missy’s response. Even on the homework with Missy’s note, their responses were not exactly the same.

Missy and Xavier returned, having found a few more homeworks but not the homeworks with Richie’s notes. The jury again compared these homeworks and drew similar conclusions to those that they had decided during the break.

The French professor, Dr. Napoleon, was called so that the jury could hear what he believed was his policy on collaboration on the homeworks. After describing his view, the professor added that he had returned all the homeworks, because there were none left in the box where he kept the old ones.

After deliberating for a short while, the jury decided that no violation had occurred. They decided that in the professor’s ground rules for student cooperation, there was a line between working together and cheating, but the two students had not improperly crossed it. They also discussed the problem that arose because the grader had not confronted the students initially, which he should have done. Had he done so, he could have heard their explanations.

Questions for community discussion:

1) When should the grader have confronted the students?
2) Which is more important, that a grader’s identity be kept secret, or that possible violations of the Code be addressed in a direct confrontation?
3) The Code (Section 1C) states: "We must follow a professor’s instructions as to the completion of tests, homework, and laboratory reports, and must ask for clarification if the instructions are not clear." In light of that requirement, did Missy and Xavier fulfill their responsibilities as Haverford students?