1991 Honor Council Abstract

Olivia

SUMMARY

Professor Sumner confronted Olivia, claiming that Olivia had used someone else’s data for her music lab without identifying her source. Olivia admitted that she had forgotten to include a cover sheet identifying her source for her lab report and her subsequent actions further complicated the matter. Because the situation involved possible academic dishonesty, Honor Council met and came to consensus that a trial must be held.

FACT-FINDING

The trial began with a moment of silence. In attendance were Professor Sumner, Professor Dever, who co-taught the course, Olivia and her support person.

Professor Sumner began with his account. He explained that all students who take his music class must complete a lab requirement in order to pass the course. Professor Sumner noted that Olivia had often missed lab. After Olivia handed in her Chord Analysis lab, Professor Sumner became suspicious and asked Professor Dever whether or not Olivia had attended lab. When Professor Sumner discovered that she had not, he consulted Professor Porter, another professor in the music department, for advice. When Professor Sumner unintentionally mentioned Olivia’s name, Professor Porter was surprised because he knew Olivia well. Despite this, Professors Sumner and Porter decided to confront Olivia.

At the confrontation, Olivia admitted that she had not attended the lab. She added that she had seen the materials set up for the lab a few days later, and decided to try the lab then. When she yielded unsuccessful results, she asked a friend if she could use his raw data. [Professor Sumner emphasized to the jury that, in this class, using a friend’s data is perfectly acceptable, as long as the student footnotes her friend somewhere on the lab.]

Olivia then told Professor Sumner that she had created a cover sheet for her lab that cited her source, but had forgotten to attach it. She and Professor Sumner went to Olivia’s dorm, but when they got there, Olivia was unable to locate the appropriate disk.

Later that day, Olivia called Professor Sumner and told him that she had found the disk. The two met in the computer center and Olivia brought up the file; however, when Professor Sumner checked the information about the file, he discovered that Olivia had created the cover sheet just before calling him back. At this point Professor
Sumner suggested that Olivia contact the Honor Council Chairperson. Offering his opinion to the jury, Professor Sumner said that Olivia had made a series of "several foolish mistakes."

Professor Dever added to Professor Sumner's account that she had seen Olivia attempting the music lab, and was perplexed that Olivia had not asked her for help.

Olivia then began her account. She explained that students in Professor Sumner's music class are only required to hand in a certain number of lab reports, and that this lab meant very little to her grade. On the morning in which she was supposed to do the Chord Analysis lab, she had gotten bad news from home and decided to skip all of her classes. A few days later she went to the music lab, found that the lab was still set up, and attempted to do it. She worked on the lab for fifteen minutes, but was not getting good results. She was very far behind in all her classes, and the grade meant so little that she did not care about the lab.

Olivia then asked her friend if she could use his data. The friend agreed and explained the lab. Olivia said she had planned to cite her friend on the cover sheet, but had forgotten to include the cover sheet altogether. She realized this the day after she handed in the lab. She told the jury that she had planned to tell the professor about the cover sheet, but was confronted before she had the chance.

Olivia told the jury that she had been very intimidated by the confrontation. Four professors, Sumner, Dever, Porter and another professor from the music department, were present, and Olivia felt they would never believe that she had meant to include a cover sheet. Olivia said that her fear caused her to invite Professor Sumner to her dorm to look for the disk. When she was unable to find the disk, she told the professor that she would look for it. Later Olivia called Professor Sumner and told him that she had found the file, when actually she had just created the cover sheet. Olivia admitted that she "was actually trying to deceive him...[I thought], 'I don't believe that I'm doing what I'm doing.'"

The jury then began asking questions. One juror wanted to know when Olivia realized that she had forgotten to include a cover sheet. Olivia said she remembered "right after," but the full implications (forgetting to footnote her friend) did not sink in until later. She also said that she had been very confused and her sense of time surrounding the incident was unclear. In addition, Olivia did not seem to have a grasp on some of Professor Sumner's academic policies—for example, she did not know that she needed permission to make up music labs.
At this point, the jury felt they had enough information to determine if a violation had occurred.

**JURY DELIBERATION**

The jurors agreed that Olivia had violated the Honor Code by not citing her friend, although she did not do it intentionally. Someone noted that by omitting the cover sheet Olivia had even forgotten to include her own name on the lab report. The jurors agreed that when a student hands in work, she must be held responsible for its contents. The jurors also felt that a separate and more serious violation had occurred when Olivia attempted to deceive her professor by manufacturing a cover sheet. They wrote the following statement of violation:

Olivia dishonestly represented her work on two occasions: First, she unintentionally plagiarized her lab report by forgetting to cite her friend. Second, she deceived her professor by presenting the cover sheet as having been written before it was.

**CIRCUMSTANTIAL**

Olivia, her support person and Professor Sumner returned to the trial. Olivia tried to explain the reasons why she was confused about time. She said that she was experiencing family problems and that it had "been affecting everything in general" in her life. She also told the jury that she had been sick for the past two weeks, and that her poor health had interfered with her ability to attend classes and do her work.

One juror asked Olivia if she actually thought she had created the cover sheet before the confrontation. Olivia said she was unsure, but she might have convinced herself that she had made it since that had been her original intention. She said she had been so confused that she was uncertain of what she had been thinking.

Olivia told the jury that she felt she had learned a lot throughout the trial process. She said she was relieved to be facing everything, and that the next time it seemed as though the world was falling on top of her, she would know she "has someone to turn to" in the community. The circumstantial portion of the trial came to a close, and Olivia and Professor Sumner decided to work on possible resolutions together while the jury discussed resolutions in another room.
SUGGESTED RESOLUTIONS

Olivia and Professor Sumner returned and offered their resolutions to the jury. They felt that an "incomplete" for the lab would give Olivia a chance to redo the work. Professor Sumner volunteered to help Olivia redo the lab, giving them the opportunity to work together and repair the breach of trust between them. They also suggested that Olivia write a letter to the community about her trial experience.

Professor Sumner felt that he and Olivia had already begun repairing their relationship. He said that he wasn't "personally hurt...I saw it only as a stupid move."

Jurors asked Olivia how her resolutions addressed the breach of trust with the community. Although Olivia did not initially understand how her actions affected the community, she later said, "Everyone...trusts each other to do the right thing...I clearly see where I faltered."

DISCUSSION OF RESOLUTIONS

Most jurors felt that a grade change was necessary. One idea was to fail Olivia on the plagiarized lab and allow her to do a second lab for an additional grade. However, some jurors felt this would give Olivia an unfair advantage in that she would have an extra lab grade that others in the class did not have. Another idea was to give Olivia a zero on the initial lab and allow her to do the lab over again for credit but no grade. This way she could "learn the material, produce something she'd be proud of, and fulfill her lab requirement." One juror thought Olivia might not work hard on an ungraded lab, but most believed that she would redo the lab, regardless of the grading issue. Some jurors were concerned that an "incomplete" on the lab would make it seem as though the plagiarism had never occurred. To allow Olivia to redo the lab would make no distinction between an uncited lab and a lab that was badly done.

The jury then discussed how Olivia's actions affected the community. Most felt that because the community invests so much trust in the system, mistakes such as Olivia's could not be disregarded. One juror pointed out that if Olivia had left off the last page of her lab as opposed to the cover page, her forgetfulness would have been much less important. The citation on the cover sheet was simply too important to forget. Many jurors expressed their feelings that a violation like Olivia's could happen to anyone.

In an attempt to address the relationship between Olivia and Professor Sumner, the jurors agreed that a letter to the community would be appropriate. The suggestion was made that Olivia write
two letters- one immediately following the trial, describing her reactions, and one with Professor Sumner a few weeks later. The jury felt this second letter would be especially constructive because of Professor Sumner's enthusiasm about the Code. All jurors felt that the two had already worked out some of their misunderstandings. The jurors came to tentative consensus on the writing of two letters.

After further discussion, the jurors agreed that Olivia should fail her music lab. Most felt that Olivia's plagiarism alone warranted a failing grade. One juror felt strongly, however, that only the combination of unintentional plagiarism and deceit of Professor Sumner was worthy of a failing grade. This juror felt that unintentional plagiarism alone did not merit a failing grade. After some discussion the jury reached consensus with one member standing outside on the resolution that Olivia should fail the lab solely for her plagiarism. The jury reached tentative consensus on all of the resolutions and recessed for twenty-four hours to think over their decisions. During this recess, the resolutions were presented to Olivia and Professor Sumner.

PRESENTATION OF THE RESOLUTIONS

After re-reaching consensus on the statement of resolution, the jury called back Olivia and Professor Sumner. The Chairperson read the following statements:

Statement of Violation:

Olivia dishonestly represented her work on two occasions: First, she unintentionally plagiarized her lab report by forgetting to cite her friend. Second, she deceived her professor by presenting the cover sheet as having been written before it was.

Tentative Statement of Resolution:

1. The jury suggests that Olivia fail her lab report. To give this report a passing grade would be to validate plagiarism, albeit unintentional. The jury feels that Olivia must be held responsible for turning in this uncited work. One juror stood outside of consensus with regard to this part of the resolution.

In addition, the jury supports the suggestion that Olivia redo the lab and lab report. This new work will be ungraded, but will allow Olivia to complete the
requirements for the course. Professor Sumner has indicated that he would like to work with Olivia in completing this lab.

2. Immediately after the trial, Olivia will write a letter based on her experience. We suggest that, after a month of reflection, Olivia discuss this letter with Professor Sumner and use it as the basis for a joint letter to the community. Part of this letter should address Olivia's deception of Professor Sumner and its effect on the community.

* The jury feels that Olivia's deception of Professor Sumner was very serious. Professor Sumner feels, however, that the personal tension between him and Olivia has been fully resolved. Therefore, the jury does not feel that an additional resolution addressing their relationship would be productive or necessary.

After reading the resolutions, jurors explained their feelings to Olivia and Professor Sumner. Most jurors said that they were pleased with Olivia's honesty throughout the trial, and felt that the resolutions would help to repair Olivia's relationship with the community.

Do you feel that the resolutions were fair? Why or why not?

How can resolutions address lying to a professor?
Dear Community,

Last semester was truly at trying time for me physically and emotionally. The idea of being confronted and going to trial was a nightmare come true. However, thanks to the support I received from my dean, my close friends and my professor who confronted me, I pulled out with a better understanding of both our Honor Code and myself.

After this experience, I've realized how fortunate we are to have something like the Honor Code. This system allowed me to learn from my mistakes instead of punishing me for them. Even the act of writing this letter to you is making me realize that I've come a far way.

Looking back, I am glad that I had experienced going to trial. Instead of being a process which I initially thought would destroy my integrity, it turned out to be one which strengthened me and boosted my dignity. I realize how much this community cares for me. I care for this community and I'm glad that through a great learning experience, you have allowed me back into a community where I can keep growing. Thank you for putting your trust back in me.

I would like to stress that I never thought that getting confronted would ever happen to me- but it did. Next time I know that whenever I have problems, instead of trying to take the World on my shoulders, I will seek help and let my professors know. If I had gone to my professor when I was experiencing problems, I'm sure that life would have been a lot better for me. This was definitely an experience that I'll never regret nor forget, but will never find myself in again.

Olivia
Responses to “Olivia”

Do you feel that the resolutions were fair?

- I feel that Olivia's lying to her professor and presenting her classmate's work as her own, as violations of the code, merit more lasting consequences than failing the plagiarized report and writing a letter under a pseudonym.

- Yes- failing the lab was necessary to show that plagiarism is seriously “wrong.” Letter to community seems to have helped her sort out her relation to community + the necessity of getting help rather than “going it alone.” Redoing lab together with prof [is a] great way to rebuild trust. First abstract in 4 years I agree with 100%.

- In my opinion, the unintentional plagiarism alone would not ever be cause for failing the lab- perhaps a redo would be in order. But when Olivia lied to her professor, she thus transmuted the entire affair into a much more serious violation. I feel that the breach of trust represented by that action can only be healed by Olivia's failure of the whole course - the deception committed was equivalent to a major incident of plagiarism.

- I feel that the resolutions were much too lenient. Olivia's initial plagiarism could have been a mistake, but she deliberately tried to deceive her professor. This kind of dishonesty is inexcusable. It breaches trust not only with the professor but with the community. You have given Olivia a slap on the wrist for a serious violation of the Code, and I am very disappointed and angry.

- It is my opinion that the blatant deception was not addressed in the resolutions, and that it should have been. I believe that confrontation is an integral part of the Code, and when I confronted someone about an academic violation which I believed to have occurred, I expected that the person would be honest with me (and was honest) when they said that I had misperceived the incident. I am deeply disturbed that the breach of the very principles upon which the system is based was not addressed in the form of a resolution. What is confrontation if there is not trust. I also am concerned as to why the professor did not feel that this was necessary or that Olivia did not seem to see how her actions affected the community. Lying is an obvious violation,
and when lying concerns academic matters, I hope that it will be treated in the serious manner it requires.

How can resolutions address lying to a professor?

- I'm not sure. I'm surprised Olivia and the professor are getting along so well.
  It is unrealistic to assume students will not lie to professors.
  This is weird, but the confronted party should talk with the professor face-to-face and maybe write a paper on trust and honesty.

- [Response by a faculty member.] I'm a little surprised that Prof. Sumner was able to accept the egregious dishonesty displayed as resolvable without sanctions. I guess knowing Olivia may have made an important difference.
  In general, Intentional, premeditated dishonesty should result in a grade penalty in the course concerned, I think. Again, since Prof. Sumner was satisfied, I am too, but, I depend in my courses on a considerable degree of honesty in meeting due dates, doing labs, etc., and evidence of lack thereof would have a strong negative effect on how I organize my courses.

- If the professor feels breach of trust is repaired already, don't make resolutions. If trust is still lacking, letter of apology, working together... I'm not really sure.

Other comments:

- Please tell Prof. Sumner 1) In future: try to maintain confidentiality of student name- not fair to her to tell suspicions to others. 2) 4 on 1 confrontation isn't fair either- too intimidating! Other than these Prof. Sumner seems to have been supportive + understanding- Good job!
  Good job HC too!

- I don't understand how one can accidentally violate the code. This makes no sense at all. If she thought she turned in her cover sheet, meant to turn it in, & believed that she really did she Did Not Lie or Cheat. I hate the constant references to The Community. This sounds more like some totalitarian state than a group of responsible individuals. This way of writing reminds me of Stalin accusing
people of crimes against the state. Violations are a matter of one's loss of individual, personal integrity. Olivia did not offend me, she damaged her integrity, and that only affects her and her peers (professors included). Furthermore, I cannot believe that while you accuse people of accidental violations, you let seniors who plagiarize theses, and lie like dogs about it, graduate with Haverford degrees. This is ridiculous. I wouldn't mind the new ratio if [there] were some guidelines or precedents to set parameters. But such is not the case. Now, I imagine, decisions will be even more chaotic, inconsistent, and ridiculous.

Regarding the second half of the violation, this sounds like more Stalinism. She & the professor repaired the breach of trust between them. Yet you insist upon interposing in the name of The Community. Again, this is absurd.

- [Regarding Olivia's letter.] She sounds as if she's brainwashed, like a forced confession. It reminds me of the time when Stalin's enemies openly confessed that they were traitors. Later we discovered that they had undergone psychological torture. I just thought it was interesting to note the comparison.