Abstract Discussion: 10pm, Wednesday, May 2nd, in Campus Center Rm. 205A

Robert and Professor William
Honor Council Academic Trial
Abstract Released Spring 2001

Introduction

Professor William contacted Robert concerning a suspicion of plagiarism on a draft of a paper he recently submitted. The two parties met and Robert admitted to plagiarizing the paper. Professor William then asked Robert to contact Honor Council concerning the plagiarism. Council reached consensus on a suspicion of violation.

Fact Finding

The jury was first read Professor William and Robert's email statements to Council, then proceeded to hear their personal statements.

Professor William's Statement — Professor William stated that he read over a draft of a paper submitted to him by Robert. While reading through it, Professor William noticed that the work was not Robert's own, but was presented as such. Professor William then contacted Robert concerning the suspected plagiarism. Upon their meeting, Robert readily admitted that he had plagiarized the paper and that he felt bad for having done so. Professor William wanted to deal with the plagiarism but also wanted to continue working with Robert and proceed in the class.

Robert's Statement — Robert admitted to submitting work to Professor William that he had knowingly plagiarized. Robert told the jury that he plagiarized the paper because he felt rushed to meet a deadline. When Professor William contacted him concerning the plagiarism, he immediately contacted Honor Council.

Q and A — The jury had questions for both Robert and Professor William, and uncovered the following information:

The draft of the paper Robert submitted to Professor William was not a graded draft, nor was the deadline for the draft a formal deadline. The draft Robert submitted was one of several drafts of an ongoing project. Robert stated that he had written the draft a few days before it was due, then he proceeded to work on the next step of his project using the plagiarized draft.

Robert told the jury that he had essentially transcribed the work verbatim when he wrote the paper. He had found a source, and printed out that work, then copied from the printout into his paper, and mixed in some of his own words. Robert stated that he did not fully understand the content of the source he was using, and felt as though he were plagiarizing the source's ideas as well as its words. The source was dealing with a very specific topic. When commenting on the extent of the plagiarism, Robert said that he had copied the footnotes in the source. Robert stated that he had consciously plagiarized the paper, and would have continued working with the plagiarized draft had Professor William not caught it.

Professor William stated that he did not read the draft through in its entirety. He informed the jury that the first part of the paper was Robert's own work, but midway through the work, he noticed a dramatic change in the writing style. Professor William also stated that there were concepts contained in that section that he would not expect an undergraduate student to understand. Professor William also noted that there were terms used in the plagiarized portion of the paper that were not defined anywhere in Robert's paper. This was because the source had not been copied from the beginning where those terms had been defined.
Professor William and Robert also told the jury that they were still working together closely, and that Robert had already begun working on a new paper.

Jury Deliberations: Part 1

Because the paper was a draft and not a final product, the jury considered the possibility that perhaps Robert had not yet properly cited his paper, but was planning to do so, and that the draft he submitted was a work in progress, with proper citations pending. However, the jury concluded that this was not the case, as Robert had written this draft a few days before the deadline and continued to work on the paper, even though he knowingly plagiarized the paper and admitted to doing so.

Largely due to his admittance of plagiarizing the paper, the jury agreed that Robert had violated the Honor Code by committing an act of plagiarism. The jury then discussed whether or not Robert’s actions constituted an act of plagiarism or a gross act of plagiarism.

The jury read the section of the Honor Code dealing with plagiarism, in search of a definition as to what constitutes an act of plagiarism and a gross act of plagiarism. The Code states that, “If a student represents ‘another person’s ideas or scholarship as his/her own’ (p. 53 Faculty Handbook), that student is committing an act of plagiarism.”

The Code also states that “A gross act of plagiarism constitutes a student’s withdrawal from the commitment to the academic honesty required by the Honor Code, and will normally result in separation form the community.”

To determine whether Robert’s actions were an act of plagiarism or a gross act of plagiarism, the jury formulated a few questions to help examine the situation:

Was there intent to plagiarize? Sometimes it is difficult to see when a work has been plagiarized. Perhaps there were extenuating circumstances that clouded the author’s frame of mind, and they did not know that they were plagiarizing. Did the author make an attempt to deceive their readers, and pass off the plagiarized work as their own ideas and words? If so, to what extent? What was the author’s frame of mind while writing the paper? To what extent was the paper plagiarized?

The jury considered Robert’s act in light of these questions. Ultimately, the jury recalled Robert specifically stating that he had plagiarized the paper to a great extent, and with no members standing outside, came to consensus on the following statement of violation:

The student violated The Honor Code by committing a gross act of plagiarism.

Circumstantial Portion

Robert told the jury that he was expecting the statement of violation they presented him with and accepted it. He also told the jury that he felt guilty that he had plagiarized the paper.

Q and A –

The jury first asked Robert if he had any suggestions for tentative resolutions concerning his violation of the Code. Robert suggested a grade reduction, a letter of apology, and community service as possible resolutions.

Robert stated that he knew his plagiarism was wrong, and had known it was wrong while he was writing the paper. He stated that he regretted plagiarizing the paper even before he handed it in. Robert thought that Professor William would notice the plagiarized portion of the paper, and knew that his actions might eventually result in an academic

1 Honor Code, Part III, Sec A, Plagiarism
2 Honor Code, Part III, Sec A, Plagiarism
Robert also stated that he did not consider changing the draft in the few days when he had the draft written, but not submitted.

Robert mentioned that the Honor Code had played a role in his academic life in the past, and that he felt as though the ideals contained in the Code reflect his personal beliefs. However, Robert stated that he cracked under pressure while working on this project, as he felt compelled to submit something to Professor William. Robert regretted not speaking to Professor William from the start. When making the decision to plagiarize, he did not consider the potential consequences of his actions, including the effects it might have on his relationship with Professor William. Robert also said that he did not really know what kinds of consequences could result from his plagiarism. When asked about separation, Robert did not know exactly what it was or that it was a possible consequence to his actions.

Robert said that his relationship with Professor William has not really changed in light of his recent actions. Robert maintains contact with Professor William, and that they have already begun to work through this situation. Robert noted that his relationship with Professor William was not harmed by his act of plagiarism. Instead, they were working together on a new paper and Professor William wanted to help Robert write a new paper, and learn from his mistakes. Robert expressed his desire to do well on the new paper, and told the jury that he was already using what he had learned from plagiarizing the first paper, i.e., Robert examines his sources and how he uses them much more critically than before. Robert also stated that he wanted the community to learn from his mistake, and to learn about the importance of communicating with professors, and about how vital it is to be informed about the Honor Code and Honor Council.

Jury Deliberations: Part 2

The jury then discussed possible resolutions to address the issues of educating the student concerning his violation, repairing the breach of trust with the community and the professor, and holding the student accountable for his actions (ERA).

The jury was greatly impressed with the way Robert acted after having been confronted by Professor William. Robert readily admitted to his plagiarism, had already learned from his mistakes and seemed intent on wanting to do what he could to remedy this situation. The jury also noticed and was impressed by Robert’s communication with Professor William throughout the trial, and how honest he was to both Professor William and the jury throughout the trial. Robert and Professor William were working together closely and had already begun to repair the breach of trust that had occurred between them. It seemed to much of the jury as though Professor William and Robert had already begun to repair their breach of trust. They were working closely together now than they had been before, and both of them expressed their desire to work through this situation together and move on. Sometimes in cases of gross plagiarism, the jury drafts a resolution calling for a mediated dialogue between the professor and the student. The jury noted that Professor William and Robert had already begun to repair their breach of trust and were working together incredibly well. Thus, the jury did not write a resolution concerning a mediated dialogue between Professor William and Robert, as there was no need for a mediated dialogue between them.

The jury considered separating Robert from the community for one semester, as the Honor Code says that a gross act of plagiarism “will normally result in separation from the community.” Not all members of the jury were

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3 Honor Code, Part III, Sec A, Plagiarism
comfortable with this resolution to hold Robert accountable at first. However, after discussing the question at length, the jury concluded that there were no extenuating circumstances in this situation that should relieve Robert from this form of accountability.

The jury also felt that there should be accountability in terms of Robert’s grade on his work. They discussed various ways of holding him academically accountable, because separation only addressed one part of accountability. The jury decided that a grade reduction seemed the best way to hold Robert accountable for his plagiarism, so long as the reduction did not cause Robert to fail the assignment and/or class. Furthermore, the jury felt that Robert should continue working with Professor William, as their relationship was greatly helping Robert to work through and learn from his violation.

When discussing the issues of education and repairing the breach of trust, the jury discussed a few ideas. Throughout the trial, the jury felt that Robert had been eager to repair his breach of trust and learn from his experience. Robert did not seem to truly understand the gravity of his actions or what the implications of them were, from a purely academic standpoint, as well as in the context of the Honor Code. The jury thought that a letter to the community would be a good way to address these two concerns. However, they did not feel as though a letter to the community would achieve the education aimed for. The jury thought of perhaps having Robert examine his actions with the help of a clearness committee, or to work with HCOC in educating freshmen about plagiarism in general, and plagiarism in the context of the Code. However, the jury was worried that such a resolution would breach Robert’s confidentiality, so they discussed the idea of Robert giving a presentation to the Honor Council Chair(s), the Dean of the College and Professor William concerning his actions.

After discussion, they jury came to preliminary consensus, with no members standing outside on the following resolutions:

1. The student will be separated from the community for the next consecutive semester.

2. The student’s final grade in the class will be reduced by 1.3. This reduction should not cause the grade to fall below passing standards.

3. The student will meet with the Dean of the College and the Honor Council Chair(s), prepared to discuss the Honor Code. At this meeting the student will work towards coming to clearness on his actions and draft/outline a letter to the community.

4. The student will write a letter to the community addressing:
   - plagiarism.
   - reparation of the breach of trust with the community.
   - the importance of being familiar with the Honor Code.

This letter will be published with the abstract and the jury recommends that the letter be read during Customs week.

Presentation of Resolutions/ Final Consensus

Robert had a few concerns and questions about the resolutions upon hearing them. However, he understood the jury’s reasoning behind the resolutions and agreed with them.

After presenting the resolutions to Robert, the jury came to final consensus, with no members standing outside on the resolutions as they were drafted.
Questions

1. What distinguishes an act of plagiarism from a gross act of plagiarism?

2. How important is the Honor Code?

3. What is the relationship between the Honor Code and personal moral belief?

4. How does this relationship affect our view of the Code and how we examine and consider it?

5. Under what conditions does plagiarism merit separation?

6. Is it right for Robert to be separated for his actions when other students have not been held as severely accountable for gross acts of plagiarism?

(See other side of this sheet for Robert’s letter to the community)
**Honor Council has released this letter so that Robert can comply with the resolutions of this trial. The views expressed here do not necessarily represent those of Honor Council, which is the case with all letters of confronted parties that are printed with Council abstracts.**

Dear Haverford Community,

I have made a mistake and would like to take this opportunity to inform you about it. I will also address plagiarism, reparation of the breach of trust with the community, and the importance of being familiar with the Honor Code.

My mistake is that I plagiarized on my research paper. This is in clear violation of our Honor Code. Plagiarism to me means taking someone else’s work and submitting it as your own and this is exactly what I did. Honor Code or no Honor Code, plagiarism is wrong and is not to be done at any level of education or professional work. It is both wrong in practice and on a moral level. Like most of us and hopefully like all of us in this community, I have been raised to respect other people’s ideas and opinions. And by plagiarizing, I have gone against my up-bringing and moral beliefs. As a result, I feel ashamed and angry. I am ashamed that I have left myself and my parents, and the entire Haverford Community and I am angry with myself for committing such a foolish act.

This is a self-inflicted wound that I wish had never happen. If I could just turn back the hands of time and change everything... but life does not work that way. We can not go back in time and change our mistakes. But what we can do and what I’m attempting to do is to deal with my mistake, accept and deal with the consequences of my mistake and move on with life. But before I can move on with my life, I must take responsibility for my actions and try to make amends with my community.

I apologize deeply to the entire Haverford Community. It was never my intentions to hurt anyone when I committed plagiarism, but unfortunately I did. I have hurt the student body and members of faculty. I have tried my hardest to repair the breach the trust with the faculty member overseeing my research paper by keeping the flow of dialogue and communication free as possible. Communication is key to amending differences between parties and to repair the breach of trust with the community. I have continued to communicate and meet face to face with the faculty member in hopes of repairing the breach of trust. It is my dream that I will be able to do this. And it is my fear and nightmare that I will not. Furthermore, It is my deep concern that due to my actions, the faculty member will scrutinized harder future research papers handed in by students. I’m sorry to the students of Haverford for this added pressure and scrutiny that I might have placed on them. It was never my intentions to do this, but because of my mistake I have. I feel simply terrible for doing this to people I care about. For the last few days I have had nothing but mental anguish and feelings of regret and remorse. Let me tell you that what I’m feeling right now, I would not even wish it on my worse enemy. I’m telling you how I feel because I don’t want anyone feeling like this ever and so please don’t make the mistake I did.

The Honor Council trial has helped me to learn and understand the Honor Code much better. Of course I knew that plagiarism is wrong, but before the trial I was not sure what the Honor Code said about it. I did not know about the functions of Honor Council and its members within. I ask you, how familiar are you with the Honor Code? I hope that you have the read the code thoroughly and have understood it. During the trial proceedings, I was asked if I understood that “separation from the community” was one of the consequences for committing plagiarism and I said No. It is important to know the code and if questions arise, then ask someone for an explanation. If I knew beforehand about the “separation from the community” clause and the other provisions of the Honor Code, I would have never plagiarized.

I would like to conclude by once again extending my sincerest apologies to the Haverford Community. I hope everyone will take something with them after reading this letter and that everyone will learn from my mistake and not repeat it.

Thank you for your time and for listening to me.

Robert