Abstract Discussions will be held Wednesday, February 23 and Thursday, February 24 at 6:30 p.m. in Ryan Gym

**Gilmore Girls**

*An Honor Council Academic Trial*

Released Spring 2011

This abstract was not completed in accordance with the timeline in the Constitution.

The confronting and confronted parties were given the opportunity to review this abstract prior to its release.

(The addition of this disclaimer began Fall 2010).

**Introduction**

Rory Gilmore was a Bryn Mawr student taking an upper-level Witty Banter class at Haverford. Her professor, Max Medina, suspected she copied another student’s work on the final exam. He contacted her and the two agreed that she should take herself to Honor Council.

**Fact-Finding**

From the start, Rory did not feel adequately prepared for her upper-level Witty Banter class. She mentioned that several of her friends from Bryn Mawr advised her against taking a Witty Banter class at Haverford because of the significant difference in difficulty. She said she struggled with the course and frequently sought help from the Witty Banter Question Center (WBQC) and her professor. By finals period, it was clear that she was in danger of failing the course.

Professor Medina assigned a final with a timed and untimed portion. Rory was unsatisfied with her performance on the timed portion. She was struggling to complete the untimed portion on the last day of finals. She went to Professor Medina for help, but he was not able to help her as much as she needed.

At this point, Rory panicked. She needed to pass this class to receive her Witty Banter minor. She noticed a student had turned in his final outside of Professor Medina’s office. She took his exam and copied a question from the untimed portion and two questions from the timed portion.

While grading the final exams, Professor Medina noticed there were odd similarities between Rory’s work and the other student’s. He decided to ask Rory about her thought process on those questions. She admitted to copying one question on the untimed portion, and upon further reflection, admitted to copying all three questions.

**Statement of Violation**

The jury determined that Rory violated the Honor Code by directly copying another student’s final and presenting the work as her own. Moreover, she had worked on the timed
portion of the exam longer than was allowed and had accessed outside materials to complete it. The jury came to the following statement of violation:

*Rory violated the academic Honor Code by representing another person’s ideas as her own, by failing to adhere to a specified time limit, and by accessing outside resources during the exam.*

**Circumstantial Portion**

Professor Medina emphasized that he knew Rory had been extremely stressed over the course of the semester. Though he and Rory had met many times, he did not realize how much she would struggle throughout the course. It was his understanding that Rory was worried about earning a grade that would qualify for minor credit. He went on to explain that the course was challenging, and while he did not know what her previous, relevant course experience had been, she seemed less prepared than other students. Though her mental state did not justify her actions, he believed that it was as she described.

The jury asked Professor Medina about the resources for students in need of help. He explained that the WBQC was a good resource for students, especially for lower-level courses in the Witty Banter department, though the help students received largely depended on who was able to help them and their level of expertise in Witty Banter. He suggested that tutors were better alternatives for students in need of help with higher-level courses. Study groups were another resource for students, though he believed Rory needed more help than a study group could offer her. A juror asked Professor Medina if he felt there were adequate resources for students in the department, and he said yes.

Since the jury had no more questions for Professor Medina, they asked him to leave so that Rory could speak freely.

Rory prefaced her statement by saying that she did not intend to make excuses. She knew that what she had done was wrong and wished she had acted differently. She explained that this class was a struggle from the beginning. She and Professor Medina had met 10-15 times over the course of the semester, and she felt that she occasionally understood the material. She said she took medication for anxiety and had talked to a psychologist about whether or not she should drop the course. But, in the end, she did not want to feel like a failure, so she decided to persevere.

By the last month of the semester, Rory’s compounded lack of understanding made it difficult for her to turn in her homework on time. She cried frequently during the last week and talked to her father, who assured her that everything would be okay.

Prior to this course, she had enjoyed Witty Banter and found it relatively easy, which was why she decided to pursue a minor. She had also never come so close to failing a course, which escalated her stress.

During the course, when she did occasionally meet with study groups, she felt that she could not contribute. She sought help from the Haverford Witty Banter department and considered trying to find other resources outside of the school. She was told to contact the Bryn Mawr Witty Banter department, but no one there helped. She said she tried to go to the WBQC, but she was unable to find anyone to help her. She was confident that if she had received help, she would not have panicked.
A juror asked Rory to talk more about her experience going to the WBQC and, from what she said, the jury determined she had been going to the wrong room.

She confirmed that this was her first Witty Banter course at Haverford, and that when talking to her friends, she had heard that Witty Banter classes at Haverford were harder. She said that she was perhaps not as comfortable as she would have been in a Witty Banter class at Bryn Mawr. She had taken the prerequisite course at Bryn Mawr, but it had been eight months earlier.

When asked whether she had considered seeking out the help of Bryn Mawr graduate students, she explained that she did not know how to get in contact with them. The professor at Bryn Mawr she spoke to said that he would try to get her help from other professors, but he never got back to her, and ultimately she was told to look for help at Haverford. She did not ask for help from the professor of the parallel course at Bryn Mawr.

She explained that she had talked to her dean at least three times over the course of the semester about the difficulty of the course and where she could find tutors.

When asked about her general feelings, she said that she was remorseful. She said, “going to trial sucks,” but this way her conscience was clear and justice was being served. She was talking to a therapist to manage her stress and anxiety.

A juror asked if her anxiety had been a problem in other circumstances, and she said that it had made writing papers difficult in the past. She had been prescribed medication for those instances, but thought she no longer needed it. She said it may have helped with general stress but may not have prevented her from panicking over her exam.

A juror asked her why she did not immediately admit to copying all three questions in the email confrontation. She explained that her memory was fuzzy. Looking back, she knew she had copied all three questions. At the time, however, she wanted to reflect before confessing. Rory emphasized that her hazy memory of the experience revealed her mental state.

Finally, a juror asked if her meetings with Professor Medina had been helpful. Rory explained that they had been, but she had sensed his frustration during the meetings.

The jury members had no further questions and the trial moved into tentative resolutions.

Tentative Resolutions

The Chair asked Rory if she had any suggestions for resolutions. Rory said she felt there should be further resources for students having this much trouble. She explained that she wanted to give back to restore her trust with community after violating the Honor Code, perhaps by doing some kind of community service, such as being a Witty Banter tutor. Rory’s support person, her dean, added that Rory had been incredibly proactive throughout and following the entire course. She apologized once more and reiterated that she had panicked when copying her classmate’s exam.

Rory had no further remarks, so she and her dean left, and the jury proceeded to discuss tentative resolutions.

The jury decided there were three important points to address: Rory’s final exam grade, whether she should be a tutor, and Bi-College Witty Banter department communication.

The jury decided Rory should receive a 0.0 on her final exam, but did not want to request that she fail the course. A juror suggested Rory write a letter to the Bi-Co community about stress management and dropping classes. She could also address the idea of failing a class without being a failure. Despite Rory’s suggestion, the jury was unsure what she or the community would
gain from her becoming a Witty Banter tutor. The jury decided to have her create a guide for Bryn Mawr students taking courses at Haverford in the Witty Banter department. Finally, the jury decided to take steps toward bridging the gap between expectations in the two colleges’ Witty Banter departments.

The jury consented on the following Tentative Resolutions:

1. Rory will receive a 0.0 on the exam.
2. Rory will write a reflective letter to the Bi-College community specifically addressing the importance of academic integrity and of maintaining perspective in times of stress.
3. Rory will write a guide for Bryn Mawr students to resources for Witty Banter at Haverford.
4. The jury recommends that the Haverford and Bryn Mawr Witty Banter departments discuss and clarify the variations in content and structure between their curricula.

Rory and Professor Medina were emailed the jury’s tentative resolutions shortly after the adjournment of the meeting.

Final Resolutions

The jurors discussed where they stood on the resolutions. Everyone still felt comfortable with them; no changes were made, and the jury re-consented to the resolutions.

The Chair invited Rory into the room. The Chair read the resolutions and asked Rory if she had any specific questions or concerns. She had no questions and expressed that the resolutions were good and that the process had been helpful.

The jury consented on the following resolutions:

1. Rory will receive a 0.0 on the exam.
2. Rory will write a reflective letter to the Bi-College community specifically addressing the importance of academic integrity and of maintaining perspective in times of stress.
3. Rory will write a guide for Bryn Mawr students to resources for Witty Banter at Haverford.
4. The jury recommends that the Haverford and Bryn Mawr Witty Banter departments discuss and clarify the variations in content and structure between their curricula.

Discussion Questions

1. What should students consider when taking a course at another college in the Tri-Co?
2. To what extent should professors be available to help students taking classes that are not their own?
3. How can academic resources be made more accessible to students?
4. What happens when a student changes their story upon further reflection?
Letter to the Community

Dearest Bi-College Community,

I write this to you as a senior with four wonderful years at Bryn Mawr College almost behind her and looking forward to a new bright future among new, different communities. I look back and realize how important certain aspects of our precious bi-co community are and what they can teach us in our future community life. Academic integrity is a specific kind of integrity which we discuss a great deal in the college atmosphere and is equally as important to have as a guide for keeping with our moral character in everything we do. It is the very foundation upon which academic life rests. Such integrity is integral to the academic process because it fosters honesty, trust, fairness, respect and responsibility within the community.

All of this said, I myself know that such stability is not always easily maintained during times of stress. We all are susceptible to temptations of trading our integrity for the prospect of excellence, trading out honesty for a feeling of accomplishment. If we learn nothing else in college, we must take with us the lesson of self-competition and growth. Academic achievement is about working hard and getting to a point where we can be proud of ourselves and lauded by our community and in doing so, we learn a better lesson than simply receiving a passing grade in a class. Unfortunately, stress has the ability to challenge our self confidence but we must keep our mantra clear: the achievement is not in the grade, but in the process of achieving it. Unfortunately, sometimes that means the lesson lies in failing. Our community, especially the community of Bryn Mawr and Haverford, is there to support us when we have difficulty and celebrate us in the betterment of ourselves and above all NOT there for our persecution. Soon, the stressful time of finals will be upon us and we all must keep our head up high, try our best and in the end what lesson we learn of remaining honest to ourselves and our community will benefit us and our community more substantially than we may care to know. The foundation of the bi-co community is only as strong as the individual members within it. In the end, we must be true to ourselves. Best of luck, Bi-co, on all your endeavors.

Sincerely,

Forever Bryn Mawr