Abstract discussions will be held on Wednesday, October 9 and Thursday, October 10 at 7:30 PM in Ryan Gym.

Blue’s Clues: An Honor Council Academic Trial
Released Fall 2013

This abstract was not released in accordance to the timeline specified by the Students’ Association Constitution. (The addition of this disclaimer began in Spring 2010.)

KEY
Blue: Confronted Party
Professor Steve: Confronting Party
Magenta: Classmate (who created the plagiarized work)
Puzzle Solving 200: Professor Steve’s course
ThinkingChair: Computer program used for some of the course work

SUMMARY
Professor Steve confronted Blue, a first year student from Bryn Mawr, for plagiarising from another student on her final for Puzzle Solving 200. Honor Council sent the case to an Academic Trial, where Blue admitted to using Magenta’s work as a reference and including Magenta’s work in her own final.

FACT-FINDING
Blue began by stating that because there was so much going on during finals, she felt that she did not always consciously know what was going on. Because of this, she had some trouble remembering everything that had happened, even at the time she had written her statement. When Professor Steve confronted her and they went through everything that had happened step by step, that helped her remember. Additionally, because Blue was an international student and English was not her first language, she felt that she sometimes had trouble making herself clear.

Blue stated that she had had some trouble with Professor Steve’s final. The final included several problems, some done by hand and some using ThinkingChair. At first, she was able to do all of the paper problems and some of the ThinkingChair problems with the assistance of sample problems, class notes, and homework, all of which were allowed as resources. However, she had difficulty with a
couple problems, and set them aside until later.

Later, on a whim, Blue got on the Blue Bus and decided, upon arriving at Haverford, to work on her final. When she opened ThinkingChair in the lab, the search history opened, and Blue noticed a previous search for information that corresponded with a problem she had not yet finished. Blue “couldn’t help” but see it, since it had popped up unprompted, and she said she hadn’t thought of it as stealing to copy the information she’d been missing from the search into her own final for reference. Later, when Blue was submitting her final via email, she was unable to withstand temptation, and included Magenta’s work along with her own.

Blue returned to the final on another day, and after working on various parts, she felt she had finished. However, two questions contained some work by Magenta. Blue rewrote some of Magenta’s work to make it fit her answer better and sent it in.

After the exam, Blue received an email from Professor Steve confronting her about her exam. Initially, she was confused about the timeline of things, but after discussing the matter she was able to put together a clearer idea of what happened.

Blue finished by stating that she realized now that what she had done was wrong, and that she regretted her actions. She had been very tired and scatterbrained because of finals, and it had interfered with her judgment.

Professor Steve began by stating that his memory of the timing of various things was “fuzzy.” He stated that he had noticed similarities between parts of two exams that he felt were unlikely to be coincidence. Professor Steve emailed Magenta, and confirmed that she had done her final using ThinkingChair on a public computer. Before confronting Blue, Professor Steve checked the electronic logs in order to see when students had been working on the assignment, because he wanted to check for “proof of innocence.” The timing from the keycard logs indicated that Blue, not Magenta, had most likely been responsible.

Professor Steve said that Blue only admitted to her actions in increments over email, first saying she had indeed been in the lab, and then saying that she had used Magenta’s work as a reference. Finally, Blue explained what had happened in a way that made sense to Prof. Steve, which was what she had previously stated to the jury.

A juror asked Professor Steve to elaborate on the similarities between the exam answers. Professor Steve explained that there were a lot of choices the students had to make in order to find the solution, and that most people make different choices. However, the similar solutions had exactly the same ordering of choices, as well as some extraneous work that were very similar.

The jury asked Blue if she agreed with what the professor had said. She explained that she sometimes had a hard time keeping track of where she was in her work, but that she did not disagree. A juror asked Blue if she was aware that she was using Magenta’s work. Blue said that she was using it as a comparison and didn’t realize it was wrong.

A juror asked Blue what portion of each of the two problems in question she felt had been her own independent work. Blue and Professor Steve estimated that one answer was probably two-thirds her own, and that the other took Magenta’s work almost verbatim.
The jury asked Blue to explain how she went about solving the problems. She answered that for one, she uploaded both her file and Magenta’s to an email. When she was back at Bryn Mawr, she opened the wrong file from the email. Professor Steve interjected that Magenta’s name was in the file name so it seemed unlikely that she would just open the wrong file and save it as her own. He himself had a hard time seeing it as entirely accidental.

Blue continued, saying she was not trying to use Magenta’s work as her final. She changed the name on the file and used it to see if it would run. She got confused because the two files had the same name, deleted hers, and kept Magenta’s file with her changes.

Professor Steve spoke to clarify a few points. He stated that students worked in pairs on everything in the class, and each pair handed in one sheet. In the case of Blue and her regular partner, they generally turned in Blue’s partners’ sheet. Professor Steve added that ThinkingChair’s command history opens immediately upon startup, so he felt that Blue’s statement about Magenta’s files being there when Blue opened the program was plausible.

**STATEMENT OF VIOLATION**

After Blue and Professor Steve left, the jury discussed the statement of violation. One juror suggested that the statement say that Blue had violated the Honor Code by representing another student’s work as her own. Another juror pointed out that it was also a violation for Blue to reference outside sources during the exam, which included the other student’s exam. The jury consented to the following statement of violation:

*Blue violated the Honor Code by referencing another student's exam while writing her own, as well as by representing that student's work as her own. In doing so, she explicitly violated the exam instructions.*

**CIRCUMSTANTIAL**

Blue began by stating that she had had a flight the morning after the exam was due and was stressed about packing in addition to finishing finals. While working on Professor Steve’s final, she was multitasking, and had not been paying proper attention. She added that she was still adjusting to college-level work, and may have been in over her head. The professor’s explanations in class were not always helpful, and Blue couldn’t always attend help sessions, so she relied on a classmate to check over the homework she did on her own. There were no other freshmen in Puzzle Solving 200, but she had taken the prerequisite in high school.

A juror asked Blue if she had felt well-prepared for the exam. She said she knew it would be different from homework, but since she was doing well and had used ThinkingChair on the midterm, she thought she would be prepared. A juror asked her what her exams were like in high school, and Blue replied that they were all proctored, closed-book, taken in a classroom. A juror then asked why Blue used Magenta’s work instead of the professor’s examples, which were permitted references. Blue answered that Magenta’s work was immediately available, and she copied it for reference because she
didn’t understand why her answer was wrong. The jury asked Blue several times why she had gotten on the Blue Bus. Blue emphasized that she had not come to steal someone else’s work; she had gotten on the Blue Bus on a whim, with no plans except to maybe go to the lab. A juror asked if she had considered going to Professor Steve about her violation. She said she’d been too tired to think of it afterward and hadn’t realized she’d done anything wrong.

The jury asked Blue if she had any recommendations for resolutions. She said there should be a grade change and perhaps separation. Finally, Blue stated that there was a professor who wished to write the jury a character reference on her behalf.

TENTATIVE RESOLUTIONS

First, the jury agreed that there should be a letter to the community, which should focus on being mindful of one’s actions and how they fit with the Code, since much of the issue seemed to come from the fact that Blue “hadn’t thought about” the fact that her actions might be violating the Honor Code. All jurors also agreed to recommend that she receive a zero for the final.

A juror brought up the proposed character reference. Since the jury sounded very suspicious of Blue, a character reference could help allay some suspicions. Another expressed concern that it would take away from the objectivity of the trial. The trial chair asked the jury if they felt seeing the character reference would contribute to the goals of the trial: education, restoration, and accountability. Some felt it would, others felt it would not. Eventually they agreed that the Honor Council Librarian could read the letter and decide whether it was relevant without biasing the jury.

The chair brought up the idea of separation, pointing out that the Honor Code states that plagiarism “will normally result in separation from the community,” and that Blue had plagiarized. A juror stated that it didn’t seem like Blue was very remorseful, which was important for restoration. Another replied that it didn’t seem like too large an amount of plagiarism, and that she seemed more embarrassed than anything else. This case seemed to be more about thoughtlessness than maliciousness, and that perhaps she did not express remorse because it was unintentional. One juror pointed out that she herself had suggested separation as a potential resolution. Many jurors felt that separation was extreme, but one juror talked about separation as “taking time off you didn’t know you needed.” Another stated that by plagiarizing, Blue had already separated herself from the community, and part of restoration involved thinking about one’s actions, which couldn’t be done while at school. A juror pointed out that even if Haverford separated her, Bryn Mawr did not have to. The jury agreed that she should be separated from Haverford, but not Bryn Mawr.

The jury then discussed the timing of the separation. Some did not want Blue to have to withdraw from Haverford classes she might be taking, but another pointed out that it seemed inappropriate for her to take any more exams at Haverford before her separation. They agreed that her separation would begin at the end of the trial, with the understanding that, if she had academic classes at Haverford, they could re-open the discussion.

The jury consented on the following tentative resolutions:
1. Blue will write a letter to the community. The focus of the letter will be being thoughtful about one's actions and mindful of how they fit with the Honor Code.
2. Blue will receive a zero on the final exam.
3. Blue will be separated from the Haverford community for the duration of the school year, effective immediately.

FINALIZING RESOLUTIONS

Before Blue arrived, the trial chair informed the jury members that the Honor Council Librarian had read the character reference. It had been generally positive, describing Blue in a good light, but it was not necessary for the jury members to read it themselves.

At finalizing, Blue informed the jury that she was taking two classes at Haverford, one for her minor and the other very important to her. While she felt the resolutions were fair, she asked that the jury consider waiting until the start of the next semester to implement the separation. She suggested that if the jury was uncomfortable, she could take proctored exams at Haverford.

Following this she left, and the jury began to discuss the final resolutions. Many jurors felt it would be unfair to ask Blue to withdraw in the middle of the semester. However, the jury was very concerned by the idea of Blue taking a Haverford final before her separation went into effect. Blue had suggested that her exam be proctored, but many felt that this would be strange and inappropriate. It was agreed that she would write her letter to the community by the upcoming break, then meet with a member of the jury to discuss the contents of the letter before exams.

The jury consented on the following final resolutions:
1. Blue will write a letter to the community. The focus of the letter will be being thoughtful about one's actions and mindful of how they fit with the Honor Code. This letter will be sent to code@haverford.edu no later than [removed for confidentiality].
2. During the period of time between [removed] and exams, Blue will meet with a member of the jury to discuss her letter and the upcoming exams.
3. Blue will receive a zero on the final exam of Puzzle Solving 200.
4. Blue will be separated from the Haverford community for one year, beginning at the close of the semester.

POST TRIAL

Blue sent in her letter in a timely manner. Prior to exams, Blue briefly met with a juror to discussed her letter. The juror stated that the discussion stayed very close to the content of the letter.

LETTER TO COMMUNITY

“...focus of being thoughtful about one's actions and mindful of how they fit with the Honor Code."
The Confucian value of *shendu*, which means to behave well even when alone was what I associated with when I first encountered the idea of Honor Code in the Bi-Co community. The society I grew up in has a very different reality compared to the ancient and treasured values. Before a life in Bi-Co Community, I had experienced millions of exams supervised by teachers. Even during a proposed Honor Code exam, there were teachers walking around the corridors. The lack of trust between teachers and students led to conflict and made it impossible to achieve *shendu*...

Humans with thoughts are supposed to have the ability to control themselves and to analyze the actual benefits and drawbacks associated with their behavior. However, a large population fighting for few benefits creates pressure and competition in the society which challenging people’s self control over temptation. In turn, the essence of honorable behavior as taught by Confucius has been undermined.

The precious special Honor Code in Bi-Co Community well expresses the idea of *shendu*, in trust of the whole student body, allows students take the lead for their studying and life style. To keep the benefit of self-scheduled and self-monitored exams, students should realize that the purpose of exams is a way for selves to check what has been learned and what needs improvement rather than a method for instructors to evaluate the ability of students, compare and rank them. If students regard the school as considering scores to be the core of evaluation, students will attempt to achieve the highest marks possible, regardless of how they achieve those grades. Given students are fully trust and understand the meaning of exams, the Honor Code would be the best tool for organizing exams, and by extension, the relationships between instructors and students. In the larger view, given that individuals are aware of their actions and behaving in good manna under self-control, we are sharing a fully trust and hence a community with ease in dealing with one another.

In a diverse community like Bi-Co, various backgrounds need to be reconciled. The crucial core of bringing people together is first to trust and to hold a positive heart to hear different points of view. In a place of trust, respect and concern, people can be more confident to venture into new fields and feel freer to explore. With the help of the Honor Code, the community of Bi-Co will promote harmony and earn respect. This is true result of *shendu* highly valued.

Blue

**QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION**

1. Was it within the Librarian’s purview to read the character reference and decide on its relevance? Should Honor Council juries accept references on behalf of a confronted (or confronting) party?
2. What role should ‘proof’ of guilt/innocence have in an Honor Council trial? Do the parties have an obligation to trust one another under the Code? Does the jury have an obligation to trust parties?
3. Do you agree with Blue that the Honor Code is about *shendu*, doing the right thing when no one is watching?