Frozen:
An Honor Council Academic Trial
Released Spring 2014

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Confronted Party: Olaf  
Confronting Party: Professor Sven  
Course: You Want to Build a Snowman 105

Summary

This Academic Trial involved Olaf, a junior in Professor Sven’s class: You Want to Build a Snowman 105. In Olaf’s final paper he included a bibliography but no in-text citations or marked quotations. Parts of the paper had been copied verbatim, and much of the rest was copied with only minor modification. Olaf had never written a paper in the discipline, and had a tense relationship with his professor. The jury came to a statement of violation and resolutions focused primarily on education,1 including the completion of another research paper and meetings with the Office of Academic Resources.

Fact-Finding

Professor Sven explained the final paper in which students were expected to put together a package of research on a topic of their choosing. He said that citations should be in a specific style and assumed that students were aware of the citation method. He had approved Olaf’s topic and the paper was turned in on time, but when grading Olaf’s paper, Professor Sven found that it contained a bibliography but had no quotations or in-text citations. The paper was written in a professional language unexpected of the student and a Google search revealed that portions of the paper had been copied verbatim from online sources, while the sentences between these sections had minor modifications from text appearing in these sources.

Professor Sven then confronted Olaf who said that he had pulled an all-nighter to write the paper and did not know how to write a research paper properly. Olaf asked if he could rewrite the paper for a lower grade, since he felt that he had cited his sources, though not in requested style. Olaf said that the citation style had not been on his mind because he hadn’t had previous issues with plagiarism. Since this was Professor Sven’s first encounter with a potential Honor Code violation, he

1 The goals of an Honor Council trial are restoration, accountability, and education.
sought the opinions of other colleagues on Olaf’s paper anonymously, all of whom said that it appeared to be a violation of the Code. Professor Sven asked Olaf to bring himself to Honor Council, which Olaf did, and submitted the paper’s grade as an incomplete.

Olaf explained that he wasn’t used to writing research papers, and his paper contained no quotations because the entire essay was other people’s research; he would have used quotations if he were critically analyzing something. He explained that he wasn’t trying to be deceitful. He simply hadn’t received comprehensive plagiarism education in high school and hadn’t had any issues with it so far in college. The Trial Chair then explained that in papers, the student is taking credit for everything below their name unless they specify that it’s coming from something else. Olaf agreed and stated that he wasn’t taking credit for anything in the paper because he didn’t do any of the research that his sources had published; he viewed their findings as definitive facts. However, it would still be difficult for him to cite properly if it was due tomorrow. Olaf said that he had never written something with in-text citations before and was unsure of what he was doing in this assignment. Professor Sven said that even though Olaf hadn’t written a paper in this discipline at Haverford, he couldn’t use ignorance as a defense because he was a junior and should have taken steps to educate himself. Olaf explained that he preferred to figure things out for himself and also did not feel like he could reach out to his professor for help on the paper because of tensions between him and the Professor. When he had tried to get assistance from Professor Sven for the midterm, he had found Sven distant. He also felt uncomfortable that Professor Sven had approached Olaf’s dean about an attendance problem that Olaf did not feel he had.

Professor Sven explained that he wanted to see research in this paper and did not doubt that Olaf had spent time working on it. However, he expected to be able to tell where each piece of information in the paper came from.

**Jury Deliberations & Statement of Violation**

During deliberations, some jurors expressed the opinion that Olaf’s plagiarism had not been malicious in its intent but ultimately decided that Olaf had violated the Honor Code even though he had not plagiarized knowingly. The jury then consented to the following statement of violation:

> Olaf violated the Honor Code by failing to cite his sources properly. (All jurors consented, no jurors stood outside.)

**Circumstantial**

After the Trial Chair summarized the jury’s deliberations, Olaf began by stating that he wanted to take responsibility for what had happened, and that he should have tried to figure out something he was unsure of. He explained that he had not had much experience writing papers like this in college and that his plagiarism education before college had been limited. Because of tension between him and the Professor, Olaf said that he had not felt comfortable going to Professor Sven for help.
Professor Sven then explained his side of the circumstances surrounding the perceived tension Olaf had mentioned during Fact Finding. At one point in the semester, he had noticed Olaf’s absence one day when trying to return an assignment. Later, Professor Sven received an email from CSSP, notifying him that Olaf was on academic warning and advising him to notify Olaf’s dean if he had any concerns about his academic performance. When Olaf asked for an extension due to illness, Professor Sven granted it but contacted Olaf’s dean. When Olaf did poorly on the first exam the following week, Professor Sven again notified Olaf’s Dean, and Olaf got a tutor for the course. Olaf turned in his final paper a few weeks later, after which Professor Sven confronted him. Sven said that he recognized that the environment in the course was not the best for Olaf but he didn’t know how to make it better. Olaf then recalled that there hadn’t been enough transparency when he needed to miss class for extracurricular commitments.

Proposed Resolutions

Immediately following Circumstantial Portion

The Trial Chair then asked both parties for their proposed resolutions, explaining that education was the most important outcome for this case since the jury felt that Olaf had mostly taken accountability for his actions and the meeting seemed to restore the professor-student relationship. Olaf suggested that he rewrite the paper to show that he could approach research and citation in the proper fashion. For education, Professor Sven thought it would be appropriate for Olaf to take the plagiarism webinar, meet with a librarian to discuss intellectual property, and to write another paper, though he thought it would be better for Olaf to write it on a subject he was more interested in. Olaf agreed that in retrospect, part of the issue was that he did not fully understand his topic, and that he had missed the junior research seminar for his major because his advisor was on leave and the department hadn't assigned him another.

Professor Sven expressed the opinion that Olaf’s rewritten paper shouldn’t affect his ability to pass the course. He thought Olaf should receive a 0.0 on the paper but still pass the course, which Olaf agreed was appropriate. On the topic of separation, though the Honor Code says that cases of plagiarism normally result in separation, the jury and both parties felt that separation in this case would be unnecessarily punitive. On the subject of restoration, Professor Sven said that he wished he could have helped Olaf more, and Olaf said that it seemed that their difficulties had come from a lack of transparency in their relationship. After talking to Professor Sven throughout the trial, he felt that their relationship had been restored and that Professor Sven had been acting in his best interest.

Jury Deliberations & Tentative Resolutions

Most jurors agreed that education should be the main focus of the tentative resolutions since it seemed that Olaf had already taken responsibility for his actions and Professor Sven had given him a zero on the paper. Jurors discussed whether Olaf’s violation was a last-ditch effort to complete the assignment, or if he truly did not understand proper citation -- and what impact that distinction would have on their recommendation that Olaf rewrite the paper.
The discussion then moved to the relationship between Olaf and Professor Sven. While jurors agreed that they should have some sort of conversation or opportunity to work together, some felt that a mediator was necessary, while others felt that they should give the parties the opportunity to work out their issues on their own.

On the subject of reporting the incident to graduate schools, opinions were mixed. Some jurors felt that it would offer an explanation for why Olaf received a significantly lower grade in the class. Others felt that reporting was punitive if Olaf was fully restored at the end of the process, but they weren’t sure what to do since the trial process wasn’t over. After much discussion, most jurors were mostly undecided on the issue. The Trial Chair suggested that the jury consent to report the incident to grad schools as a tentative resolution and discuss it again after speaking with the parties.

The jury then consented to the following tentative resolutions:

1. The jury recommends that [Olaf] receive a 0.0 on the paper. (All consent, no jurors stand outside)
2. [Olaf] will take the Academic Integrity Tutorial. (All consent, no jurors stand outside)
3. [Olaf] will write a 4-6 page research paper on a topic chosen by both him and professor Sven. The jury recommends that [Olaf] only receive credit for the course if the paper meets Professor Sven’s citation standards. (All consent, no jurors stand outside)
4. [Olaf] must schedule a meeting with an Office of Academic Resources staff member to review proper citation and research processes for Resolution 3. (All consent, no jurors stand outside)
5. [Olaf] will write a letter to the community reflecting on how he violated the Honor Code and on this entire process. (All consent, no jurors stand outside)
6. [Olaf] will not be separated. (All consent, no jurors stand outside)
7. The jury recommends that this violation be reported on graduate or transfer applications. (Jury consents, 2 jurors stand outside)

Finalizing Resolutions

The jury met with Olaf to discuss the tentative resolutions. While Professor Sven elected not to attend, he sent the Trial Chair his responses to the resolutions, which the jury read. For Resolution 3, Professor Sven felt that the idea was well-conceived, but that it would be more effective if Olaf wrote on a topic that interested him. He also felt that he would have difficulty helping Olaf since his term as a visiting professor was about to end, and that others in the community were more qualified than he was. Professor Sven felt that a letter to the community was unnecessary, and he had no opinions either way on reporting the incident to graduate schools.

Olaf agreed with the first six resolutions but felt that reporting the incident to graduate schools was not restorative and would not allow him to put the incident behind him, since it would change everything he had worked for at Haverford. Jurors explained that they could not know how graduate schools would respond to such a report, since it could serve as an explanation for Olaf’s grade in the class. Olaf said that his low grade in the course would have to be explained if he were asked about it;
reporting to grad schools would mean forcing the explanation out. He said he didn’t see the point of the first six resolutions if the incident were still reported to graduate schools at the end of the day.

Jurors brought up the point that Haverford had an obligation to other institutions to report cases of plagiarism regardless of the outcome. Olaf said that the jury had collectively made the choice to keep him in the community, and reporting to graduate schools was the equivalent of not forgiving him for his violation. When the discussion ended, a juror reminded Olaf that they would think carefully about the decision and take his objections seriously.

Jury Deliberations Part I

The jury began by discussing Olaf's writing a letter to the community. One juror felt that Professor Sven’s objections to a letter to the community were objections to these letters in general, and other jurors agreed that even if Olaf wrote a bad letter, it was not their role to set the tone of the abstract. The jury felt that they needed to give Olaf a chance to explain how the process has affected him.

Jurors were still split on the issue of reporting to graduate schools. One juror brought up the fact that a minor infraction could cause a graduate school to disqualify an applicant. Another juror explained that the Dean of the College would be aware of this issue and could override the jury’s recommendation if it seemed appropriate. The Trial Chair then suggested that the jury revisit this issue later after the deans had been consulted on the matter.

Jury Deliberations II & Final Resolutions

One juror was absent from this meeting, so all resolutions automatically had one juror standing outside. Some jurors expressed the opinion that the major issue for their decision was how much it would affect Olaf’s admission to graduate school and whether that outweighed their obligation to the community at large. Another juror brought up the point that they did not have the final say. Ultimately, most jurors were comfortable recommending to report the incident on graduate school applications since the Dean of the College would still have the final say.

The jury the consented to the following final resolutions:

1. The jury recommends that [Olaf] receive a 0.0 on the paper. (All present jurors consent, 1 juror stood outside)
2. [Olaf] will take the Academic Integrity Tutorial. (All present jurors consent, 1 juror stood outside)
3. [Olaf] will write a 4-6 page research paper on a topic of his choice utilizing proper research and citation skills. (All present jurors consent, 1 juror stood outside)
4. [Olaf] must schedule a meeting with an Office of Academic Resources staff member to review proper citation and research processes for Resolution #3. (All present jurors consent, 1 juror stood outside)
5. The jury leaves [Olaf] the option to write a letter to the community reflecting on how he violated the Honor Code and on this entire process. (All present jurors consent, 1 juror stood outside)

6. [Olaf] will not be separated. (All present jurors consent, 1 juror stood outside)

7. The jury recommends that this violation be reported on graduate or transfer applications. (Jury consents, 2 jurors stood outside)

Resolutions as a whole: All present jurors consented, 1 juror stood outside.

Post-Trial

Olaf did not write a letter to the community.

Discussion Questions:

1. Do you agree with Olaf that a recommendation to report to other institutions of higher learning is inherently anti-restorative?

2. Given the tension between the professor and the student, should the jury have done more to try to restore their relationship?