Abstract discussion will be held on Wednesday, 10/29/14 at 7:30 PM in Ryan Gym.

THE NEWSROOM

An Honor Council Academic Trial

Released Fall 2014

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

Key:
Confronting Party: Professor Charlie Skinner
Confronted Party: Sloan Sabbith
Class: Atlantis Cable News 101 (ACN 101)

Summary/Pre-Trial:
While grading the take-home portion of a midterm exam in his Atlantis Cable News 101 course, Professor Charlie Skinner noted peculiarities in Sloan Sabbith’s answer to question #1, particularly on part (d) of the question. The phrasing in part (d) was very sophisticated compared to what the Professor expected. After returning the exams to the students, Professor Skinner asked Sloan about that question #1 and asked her to explain how she answered it. According to the professor, she appeared nervous and struggled to explain her answer, and so he asked her to take a few days to think about it and then they would talk again. After the next class, Sloan asked to speak with Professor Skinner. She admitted that she had gotten stuck and had searched the internet to find help. She offered to turn herself into Honor Council, which Professor Skinner agreed would be appropriate.

Fact Finding:
The exam in question was the first midterm for ACN 101 in the sixth week of the first semester. The exam had in-class and take-home portions, but Professor Skinner was only suspicious of question #1 on the take-home portion. Sloan explained that she was able to do most of question #1 on her own, but got stuck on part (d). Unsure of how to proceed, she searched the internet for the next part and turned in the exam. She also made a paperwork mistake, printing a wrong graph out, which caused additional confusion. Sloan acknowledged in trial that this would have been a good time to admit to cheating.
During the grading process, the lab instructor had informed Professor Skinner that the answer to one of the questions on the take-home was much more general than the methods used in class. The part in question was worth approximately 12% of the full exam. Her answer was unfounded in the coursework and one specific piece of the first question raised suspicion. It was established in trial that the rest of the exam was Sloan’s own thoughts.

During the class period following the return of the exams, Professor Skinner asked Sloan to explain her work. It had been a few weeks since the exam, and she was visibly uncomfortable, saying she needed time to remember how she had done the problems. A few days later Sloan came back and admitted to being “overwhelmed” while taking the test, tried to work backwards, and eventually panicked and found an answer via Google on a webpage. She said some of the work was her own, and that only one particular portion came from the internet. Skinner consulted colleagues and advised the student to contact the Honor Council. Throughout the process, the professor supported the student and endorsed limited consequences because she was clearly apologetic.

**Jury Deliberations/Statement of Violation:**

*Sloan Sabbith violated the Honor Code by consulting unauthorized resources on a portion of a question on the take-home section of a midterm exam in ACN 101.*

**Circumstantial Portion:**

The context of the confronted party’s decision greatly informed the jury’s decisions. The confronted party had four midterms and two sports games the week the exam was due. Every day she had two hour lifts and practices. She started the ACN 101 midterm on Sunday morning and worked for many hours, even seeking help in the ACN lab. Sloan’s decision to Google the answer was made at 3 AM after days of handling this workload, and she reported strong feelings of guilt in the following weeks. Issues of stress, feelings of inadequacy, the pressure to get good grades, and the transition from high school to Haverford were all discussed between Sloan and the jury.

**Jury Deliberations and Tentative Resolutions:**

It was agreed upon by the jury that a grade-change would be appropriate in this case. Essentially no one wanted Sloan to be penalized for the in-class portion of the exam, and the possibility that she might have asked for help from another student as opposed to just Google was examined and dismissed. It was decided that she shouldn’t only lose points on the small part of the take-home that she did cheat on, because that would give her the same grade she would have received if she had simply left the hard question blank. Additional points certainly had to be docked for having plagiarized, but the jury was split on whether or not the whole take home portion should be penalized. Some felt that a 0.0 on the take-home portion was overly harsh, while others felt it was too lenient to penalize only the small portion. They also considered leaving it entirely up to Professor Skinner. Ultimately, the jury consented to revisit the issue after talking to Sloan and Professor Skinner. The fact that the nature of the exam was such that one plagiarized section of a question might inform other answers was considered.
It was quickly decided that the incident was too minor to be reported to graduate schools. One juror stood outside for this tentative resolution because they felt the decision should be left entirely up to the dean. The other resolutions/recommendations regarding CAPS and the OAR were largely made with Sloan’s stress-management and future success in mind. Two jurors felt that including CAPS as a formal resolution was unnecessary and that the jury could simply talk to Sloan during the finalizing portion.

The jury consented to the following tentative resolutions:

1. Sloan Sabbith will write a letter to the community reflecting on her experiences with the Honor Code. (10 jurors consent)
2. Sloan will schedule a meeting at the Office of Academic Resources to discuss college academics and stress management. (10 jurors consent)
3. Sloan will meet individually with Professor Skinner as soon as possible to discuss study strategies for the final exam. (10 jurors consent)
4. The jury recommends that Sloan schedule an appointment with Counseling and Psychological Services. (8 jurors consent, 2 jurors stand outside)
5. The jury recommends that this incident is not reported to institutions of higher learning. (9 jurors consent, 1 juror stands outside)

Resolutions as a whole: 10 jurors consent

Finalizing Resolutions:

The finalizing resolutions meeting began with a moment of silence, and then the tentative resolutions were read to refresh everyone’s memory. Sloan said that she felt that all five were good resolutions. Regarding the grade change, she said that wanted the best grade she could get, but she understood that it might not be possible.

A juror spoke to clarify that the CAPS resolution was not to say that she needed help, and was only a recommendation. Also, the grade change resolution was intended to help Sloan feel that she had paid her dues. Sloan agreed, and said that it would be unfair to the other members of the class if she did not get a zero. The jurors then asked Sloan questions about specific resolutions. First, a juror asked if she believed that going to CAPS would be helpful, and Sloan agreed that it would be. Next, a juror asked whether or not Sloan thought the incident should be reported to other institutions of grad school. Sloan thought that it would be harsh to penalize her in such a way for a mistake made the first semester of her freshmen year. After this, Sloan left the room and the jury entered deliberations on the final resolutions.

The jury decided to keep the tentative resolutions with only minor wording changes. All the jurors felt that separation was not necessary. The jury then moved on to discuss the possible grade change. After speaking to Sloan, the jurors were comfortable recommending a 0.0 on the take-home portion of the exam.

The jury consented to the following final resolutions:
1. Sloan will not be separated from the community. (10 jurors consent)
2. The jury recommends that Sloan receive a 0.0 on the take-home portion of this midterm exam in ACN 101. (10 jurors consent)
3. The jury recommends that this incident is not reported to institutions of higher learning. (10 jurors consent)
4. Sloan will meet individually with Professor Skinner as soon as possible to discuss study strategies for the final exam. (10 jurors consent)
5. Sloan will schedule a meeting at the Office of Academic Resources to discuss college academics and stress management. (10 jurors consent)
6. The jury recommends that Sloan schedule an appointment with Counseling and Psychological Services. (10 jurors consent)
7. Sloan will write a letter to the community reflecting on her experiences with the Honor Code to be included in the abstract. (10 jurors consent)

Resolutions as a whole: 10 jurors consent

Post-Trial:
The trial resolutions were not appealed.

Letter to the Community:
Dear Haverford Community,

In my first semester at Haverford, I have experienced probably the best and worst moments of my life, and I feel like I have grown more as a student, friend, and just person in these past four months than I had in all of high school. Violating the Honor Code and the resulting trials and conclusions definitely played a role in some of the worst moments—and best, however. Through the violation I had more feelings of guilt and remorse than I ever had in my life, but what I learned and gained from the trials really opened my eyes to the person I was and the person I aspire to be. Bringing the Type A, high-strung, and perfectionist qualities I had developed in high school into freshman year made me so stressed and anxious when I was taking harder college classes and drove me to make an extremely poor decision as a result. What I realized was that trying to be perfect is just irrational, and if I kept focusing on an end result I was not able to enjoy the means. Haverford creates an environment that stresses the enjoyment of the “means” or the actual learning for the sake of learning rather than a means to an end. All the other students in my class had made the right decision, conscious or subconscious, to abide by the Honor Code when taking the exam. My parents had always told me that the easy decision and the right decision are usually not the same, and this fact had never been more evident. And through this process I realized that I wanted to try and live the rest of my life making the right decision—even if it goes unnoticed or unappreciated as it often does—and doing what I can to responsibly enjoy the means.
When my professor first confronted me I was scared and panicked. I am typically not the type of person to get in trouble, and I was immature and like I had done earlier, taken the easy way out. Through that week I had many sleepless nights. Why had I come to Haverford, a community that generously cultures a community of trust, concern, and respect—a community I had once been so adamant about joining—if I was just going to break it? What would my parents say if they knew? They would be so disappointed. What will happen to my grade? I really want to get into medical school. But despite these sleepless nights, the only thing I knew for sure was that I was going to tell my professor the truth. I thought it would relieve me of the guilt, but it only exacerbated my guilt because I finally had to come to terms with what I had done.

Before the trial, I did not know what was going to happen. I was expecting trials like you see in movies: cold and detached. However, I did not get what was expected. I have honestly never been so overwhelmed by complete strangers’ compassion. I was so overwhelmed not just because they were being nice but how nice they were despite my wrongdoings and because of their genuine willingness to aid my restoration. My professor also was understanding and was genuinely trying to ease the process. All of which made me even more guilty; these students and faculty members were giving me undeserved kindness though I breached their and the community’s trust.

I recently reread the notes I made when I was visiting schools as a high school senior. The words that really struck me in the notes were “community, friendly…honor code???” I tried to understand the Honor Code and its impact, and even though I had read the Honor Code and learned more about it in Customs Week and HCO sessions, I really didn’t understand or appreciate what it did for the Haverford community. Though most of the Honor Code does not carry through into the real world—who would leave their laptop alone in Starbucks?—it just creates a general guide for a way to live, one where you simply respect yourself and others and hold yourself to a higher standard that will hopefully generate some sort of self-fulfillment. Overall, I just sincerely want to apologize to the Haverford community for breaching the trust I was so generously and blindly given and hope that I will be able to find a way in the next three years to substantially give back to the community that has already given me so much.

Discussion Questions:

1. How can Customs teams and Honor Council aid freshmen in managing stress present in the transition between high school and college?
2. Would it be beneficial for Customs teams to give incoming freshmen advice about what to do when works becomes overly taxing?
3. What is the value of resolutions recommending rather than requiring action by the trial party, such as recommendations to visit CAPS, the OAR, etc.?