Abstract discussion will be held on Wednesday, October 7th at 7 PM in the MCC (Stokes 106).

A Midsummer Night’s Dream: An Honor Council Academic Trial
Released Fall 2015

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:
Hermia - Confronted student (received statement of violation)
Helena - Confronted student (received statement of non-violation)
Professor Oberon and Professor Lysander - Confronting parties
Enchantments - Class
Theatrical Arts - Academic Discipline

Summary:

This case involves two students, [Hermia] and [Helena], whose answers to a set of questions about an article were, in their professors’ opinion, too similar to be completely independent. The jury came to a statement of violation for [Hermia], but a statement of non-violation for [Helena]. This trial’s resolutions address not only [Hermia]’s education, restoration, and accountability, but also [Helena]’s concerns and the jury members’ explanations of their reasoning.

Pre-Trial:

[Hermia] and [Helena] were confronted by Professors [Oberon] and [Lysander] after the professors noticed outstanding similarities between the students’ responses to several questions on a written homework assignment that the students had turned in for their [Enchantments] class. Although the students were allowed to collaborate on the assignment, which involved reading an article and responding to questions about it, provided that each student formulate and turn in
independent answers, the professors agreed that the wording and syntax were too similar to reflect two independent products. When [Hermia] and [Helena]’s preliminary explanations of the similarities were inconsistent, the professors asked the students to write a joint statement explaining the similarities between their answers. [Helena] was not comfortable writing such a statement and explained this to [Hermia] and to her professors. The case then came to Honor Council and was sent to an academic trial.

**Fact Finding:**

[Professor Oberon] reiterated his statement that the two students’ answers, especially those in the second half of the assignment, were too similar to represent independent work. [Professor Lysander] could not attend, but emailed the trial chair expressing a similar sentiment. [Hermia] began by saying that, as she had not printed the assignment herself, she never saw the instructions regarding the requirement that responses be generated independently. She had assumed, as had been the case in previous [Enchantments] classes, that responses could be produced collaboratively and thus saw no problem in turning in answers that resembled those of her collaborator. She explained that the similarity in her and [Helena]’s responses stemmed from the fact that they had discussed their answers and had each produced their answers together based on that discussion. She had worked together for two hours with [Helena] and another classmate, although during that time she had left briefly and come back. She explained that the third collaborator’s answers were unique because he had read the instructions and consequently made sure to re-word his responses from the discussion.

[Helena] believed that her responses reflected her own work and was confused when she found out that [Hermia] had produced such similar responses, given that they had been working on separate computers. She pointed out that she had come prepared to the study session with outlines of all of her responses with the intent to discuss and finalize them. She mentioned that when [Hermia] left, [Helena] and the third collaborator finished discussing the remaining questions, and that [Hermia] may have looked at her answers for inspiration upon returning, which explains why the second half of the question sets bore more resemblance to each other than the first. [Helena] had felt uncomfortable with the idea of confronting [Hermia], a friend and frequent collaborator, when she realized that [Hermia]’s responses were similar to hers (after being confronted), which she admitted may have complicated the situation.

In answering the jury’s questions to [Hermia] and [Helena], [Hermia] maintained that each of the collaborators had contributed equally while [Helena] asserted that she had produced her responses independently and that [Hermia] had not acted within the bounds of appropriate collaboration; she felt that her work had been unfairly used.

[Helena] then asked to speak to the jury without [Hermia] and the professors present. She told the jury that she never saw [Hermia]’s computer during the collaboration, but that [Hermia] had seen hers. She explained that she had not indicated that she thought that [Hermia]
had not completed the assignment honestly in her initial text messages with [Hermia] after they were approached by the professors in order to avoid confrontation. She also mentioned that when she didn’t agree to write a joint statement, she felt threatened by [Hermia]’s response.

**Statement of Violation:**

After a brief discussion, the jury consented to a statement of violation for [Hermia]:

“[Hermia] violated the Honor Code by representing another student’s work as her own by collaborating inappropriately.” (One juror stood outside, absent)

The jury met briefly before the circumstantial portion and consented to a statement of non-violation for Helena. (Two jurors stood outside, absent)

**Circumstantial Portion:**

[H Helena] and the professors did not attend the circumstantial portion.

When asked about the circumstances surrounding her violation, [Hermia] emphasized that her violation had come from ignorance about the expectations of the assignment, stemming from her failure to read the instructions. She talked about how she respected the Honor Code and how she had become more familiar with it throughout the process and had learned that ignorance is not an excuse for representing another’s work as her own. She was enthusiastic about the goals of the trial and eager to take responsibility for not reading the instructions and not clarifying the terms of the collaboration with her partners.

When asked about the effect that the process had had on her relationship with [Helena], she responded that they had been friends and that she didn’t feel that they had had any negative interactions, and that any tension came from them being upset that they are both in this situation. Until the fact finding meeting, she hadn’t realized that [Helena]’s view of what had happened was different than hers. She proposed a resolution for her to write a letter to [Helena] to apologize for not reading the instructions and for putting her in this situation, as well as how she would act differently in the future based on what she had learned.

[Hermia] finished by presenting a list of proposed resolutions, including assisting in making a guide for appropriate collaboration, recommending that professors keep instructions for collaboration consistent between different forms of an assignment, taking a zero on the assignment in question, and writing a letter to [Helena]. [Hermia] felt that her breach of trust with her professors had been repaired through satisfactory completion of subsequent assignments in their courses.
Jury Deliberations and Tentative Resolutions:

The jury asked that [Helena] and the professors each email the Trial Chair regarding proposed resolutions. Each of the professors responded expressing their confidence in the jury to come to appropriate resolutions, but offered to give additional information or insight if necessary.

[Helena]’s email to the trial chair emphasized her view that the resolutions should focus on holding [Hermia] sufficiently accountable. She expressed concern that [Hermia] had not taken and did not intend to take responsibility for her actions. She felt that [Hermia] did not have an attitude that was consistent with the values of the Honor Code and that her conduct before and during the trial had been threatening. Additionally, she explained that as a consequence of the situation, she and [Hermia] had both been left without a partner for the rest of the semester, which had placed a significant academic burden on her. She wanted an apology for the entire situation.

The jury first discussed recommending a mediation between [Hermia] and [Helena] in order to allow them to reconcile their different views of the situation for the benefit of their relationship (because [Helena] was not found in violation, the jury’s resolutions for her would not be binding). The jury agreed that the goals of a mediation, face to face communication and mutual understanding, made it a good option, but worried that it may not be successful in satisfying [Helena] since the two parties seemed to have different points of view on the circumstances surrounding the trial.

The jury discussed how to ensure accountability for [Hermia] and to reconcile [Hermia]’s account of the violation as completely accidental with [Helena]’s opinion that there had been intention behind it. The jury agreed that recommending that [Hermia] receive a zero on the assignment in question would be an appropriate start, but also believed that an additional grade change in the course was warranted, considering that the assignment constituted a relatively insignificant portion of the course grade. The jury created additional resolutions that would allow [Hermia] to educate herself and the community.

The jury consented to the following tentative resolutions:

1. [Hermia] should receive a zero on the assignment. In addition to the zero, the jury strongly recommends that [Hermia]’s grade in the class be changed at the Professor’s discretion to reflect the fact that an academic violation occurred. (One juror stood outside, absent)

2. The jury strongly recommends that [Helena] and [Hermia] attend a mediation, which is to be led by the trial chair. (One juror stood outside, absent)

3. After her mediation with [Helena], [Hermia] will write a personal letter of reflection to [Helena]. (One juror stood outside, absent)
4. After her mediation with [Helena], [Hermia] will write a letter to the community to be published with the abstract. This letter should include a reflection on the trial and mediation processes, as well as the ways in which her actions can affect others. (One juror stood outside, absent)

5. The jury recommends that [Helena] write a letter to the community to be published with the abstract. (One juror stood outside, absent)

6. [Hermia] will work with her professors and/or a member of the jury in order to draft a guide to appropriate collaboration in the [theatrical arts]. (One juror stood outside, absent)

Resolutions as a whole: One juror stood outside, absent

Finalizing Resolutions:

The jury met with [Hermia] to discuss the tentative resolutions. She expressed concern with Resolution 1 regarding the grade change. She felt that changing her grade in the class was an unfair representation of the rest of her work in the class. Members of the jury explained that they wanted her final grade in the class to reflect the fact that not all of the work was completed under the Honor Code, but emphasized that at the end of the day, any grade change was up to the professor's discretion, and that if she had concerns with her final grade in the class she could discuss it with her professors.

The jury then discussed [Professor Oberon]'s responses to the tentative resolutions. He had expressed concern that [Hermia]'s collaboration guide would focus on the [theatrical arts]. Additionally, he thought that members of the jury should work with [Hermia] to create this guide. The jury changed the wording of Resolution 4 to reflect [Professor Oberon]'s concerns.

The jury then discussed [Helena]'s response to the tentative resolutions. In short, [Helena] did not feel that [Hermia] was truly being held accountable for her actions. She also did not feel that a mediation would be productive. The trial chair discussed how best to balance [Helena’s] concerns with the trial goals of [Hermia]’s education, restoration, and accountability. In the end, the jury decided to make the wording of Resolution 1 more powerful by adding a specific amount of grade change. The jury also removed the mediation from the resolutions to respect [Helena’s] desire not to participate. Lastly, the jury decided to require [Hermia] to read Maud McInerney’s essay about plagiarism before making her collaboration guide in an attempt to help her realize that plagiarizing by accident is not an excuse for inappropriate collaboration.

Since the jury was still worried that [Helena] might feel that her concerns were not being heard and that she was feeling frustrated with the process, the jury decided to write letters to [Helena] explaining their reasoning behind each resolution, in the hope that the letters would help her to understand the choices the jury made in order to balance her and [Hermia]’s needs and concerns. The jury added Resolution 5 to reflect this new idea.
The jury consented to the following final resolutions:

1. [Hermia] should receive a zero on the assignment. In addition to the zero, the jury strongly recommends that [Hermia]’s grade in the class be reduced by half a letter grade to reflect the fact that an academic violation occurred. (Two jurors stood outside, absent)

2. After a brief period of reflection, [Hermia] will write a personal letter to [Helena] by the end of the semester. (Two jurors stood outside, absent)

3. By the end of the semester, [Hermia] will write a letter to the community to be published with the abstract. This letter should include a reflection on the trial process, as well as the ways in which her actions can affect others. (Two jurors stood outside, absent)

4. [Hermia] will read Maud McInerney’s essay, “Plagiarism and How to Avoid It.” She will then meet with two members of the jury in order to draft a guide to appropriate collaboration, with an emphasis on the [theatrical arts]. (Two jurors stood outside, absent)

5. Six jurors will write individual letters to [Helena] explaining their reasoning for consenting to each resolution. (Two jurors stood outside, absent)

6. The jury strongly recommends that [Helena] write a letter to the community to be published with the abstract. (Two jurors stood outside, absent)

7. The jury recommends that this incident not be reported to institutions of higher learning. (Two jurors stood outside, absent)

Resolutions as a whole: Two jurors stood outside consensus, absent

Post-Trial:
There was no appeal of the trial resolutions.

[Helena] chose not to write a letter to the community.

[Hermia]’s letter to the community:
Haverford Community,

The Honor Council trial process was an eye-opening experience for me. It led me to gain a deeper understanding of the Honor Code and the responsibilities we each have as part of the Haverford community. It made me aware that though the Honor Code directly addresses many issues, members of the community must always consider how it relates to the situation at hand, both academic and social, since it may not be a clear cut scenario. It is also important to remember that ignorance is not an excuse and that a violation can still occur even if it is unintentional.
My own violation involved one of the more difficult to navigate situations because it addresses the parameters of appropriate collaboration. The appropriate amount of collaboration can be different from one professor to the next and can even vary between assignments from the same professor. Therefore, it is crucial to understand the expectations and clarify the assignment with your professor if you are at all unsure of what they are looking for. It is also important that you make sure your partner(s) are aware of how you are intending on completing the assignment before you begin working. Communication is a key factor in any academic or social situation.

My situation arose from not being clear on my professors’ expectations, making assumptions and not discussing the assignment parameters with my partner. Even though my actions were not intentional and I was not aware I was inappropriately collaborating, I definitely violated the Honor Code and I apologize to my professors and my partner. I hope my accepting responsibility for my actions and my cooperation throughout the trial has helped to restore trust.

In the future, I will be proactive and make sure that I completely understand my professors’ expectations and those of my partner in order to avoid any confusion or unintentional violations. I also will be helping Honor Council create a guide to collaboration in an attempt to educate my peers and help them avoid a similar situation.

[Hermia]

**Discussion Questions:**

1. To what degree should the concerns of a non-confronted party influence a jury’s resolutions for the confronted party?
2. How should a jury make decisions in cases in which the degree of intention behind a violation is unclear?