Abstract discussion TBA.

**Across the Universe Part 1:**

**An Honor Council Academic Trial**

**Released Fall 2017**

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.

**Key:**

**Confronting Party:** Professor Billy Shears  
**Confronted Party:** Desmond  
**Class:** Across the Universe 299

**Summary/Pre-Trial:**

This case concerned Desmond, a student in Professor Shears’ course, Across the Universe 299. During a take home exam, Desmond posted problems from the exam to an online forum and discussed the solutions to those problems with other users of the site. Because the take home exam was open internet, this case dealt with the classification and severity of the violation.

The jury in this case was not aware of any part of the matter chronicled in the abstract Across the Universe Part 2. Due to a heavy caseload at the time of this case Honor Council consented to run this trial under extenuating circumstances, meaning that there were 9, rather than the usual 10, jurors.

**Fact Finding:**

Professor Shears began the meeting by describing the chain of events as he had experienced it. He was first made aware of the material posted on a music forum by a fellow professor who was teaching another section of the same course. Both professors had assigned a midterm exam which consisted of one in class part and one take home part. The take home portion was open book, open notes, and untimed. A student in the second professor’s class had noticed a question from the take home midterm posted on an online forum. Both professors were “horrified” to see their question online and scrutinized the postings carefully, all of which were made by one user during the exam period. Once the midterms were turned in both professors searched them for similarities to the postings and responses. Desmond’s exam
jumped out, as four out of his five answers very closely resembled the answers provided on the forum. Professor Shears confronted Desmond about the similarities between his midterm and the postings on the music forum. Desmond admitted that he had made the postings. Desmond emailed Honor Council later that day.

Desmond shared that he had felt fine while taking the in class portion of the exam, but that when he started the take home portion he panicked. The midterm fell during an especially busy time for Desmond. He felt that he probably did have the time to do all his work, but that he didn’t manage it well and that this contributed to the stress that led him to use the forum. Desmond tried to answer the questions on his own using only his notes, homework, and slides and other materials from class but if he couldn’t figure it out he would post the prompt for the question to the music forum. Other users on the site wrote back with hints and complete answers. Desmond then responded asking clarifying questions. Desmond admitted that he knew his actions were wrong at the time and that they violated the professor’s instructions, but claimed that he had a temporary lapse in judgment.

Professor Shears initially stated that using the forum was not a violation of exam instructions, as students were allowed to use outside resources to a certain extent provided they cited them, but he was displeased nonetheless. However, later Professor Shears clarified that if a student had asked him whether it would be appropriate to post prompts for questions on the site he would have said no. He saw using the site in this fashion as violating the exam instruction that prohibited collaboration. This led him to see the violation as inappropriate collaboration and use of disallowed resources.

When Desmond was not in the room Professor Shears expressed respect for how seriously Desmond was taking the process and how he had taken responsibility for his actions. He also expressed disappointment that Desmond had felt the need to violate the code since Desmond had dedicated a great deal of hard work to the course and had a deep understanding of the material.

**Jury Deliberations/Statement of Violation:**

The jury immediately agreed that a violation had occurred and set about discussing how to characterize it. They felt grateful that Professor Shears and Desmond seemed to be on the same page and both clearly respected one another. The jury felt that this would make the processes of restoration and education much easier and more effective.

The jury first considered whether or not this qualified as the use of a disallowed resource. Professor Shears had seemed to indicate that use of the internet was allowed, but that if Desmond had asked whether he could use the site in this manner the professor would have told him he could not. One juror recalled Professor Shears’ statement that internet resources were allowed, but that they had to be cited. The jury then felt that this wasn’t a case of disallowed resources, merely a failure to cite a source.

The jury then considered whether this constituted inappropriate collaboration. One juror
pointed out that since the exam instructions prohibited any collaboration, all collaboration was inappropriate, and the jury was certain that collaboration had taken place. One juror wondered whether it mattered that the collaboration had been with someone outside of the Haverford community. The jury decided that it wouldn’t change the statement one way or the other. One juror felt that this collaboration was more serious since it was a dialogue rather than a one time question and answer.

In the end the jury felt that inappropriate collaboration was the most important element, as it was a specific violation of the exam instructions. The jury came to the following statement of violation.

**Statement of Violation**

*Desmond violated the Honor Code by failing to follow exam instructions through collaborating and not citing outside resources. (9 jurors consent)*

**Circumstantial Portion:**

Desmond shared that he’d had a tough week and weekend leading up to the test. He had a lot of other commitments, which led him to be very stressed while taking the exam. Desmond suggested that this stress was a big part of why he had a lapse in judgement.

One juror asked Desmond how he would feel about separation as a possible resolution. Desmond responded that he felt it wouldn’t be helpful, and that he felt he would benefit more from deeper integration into the community rather than separation from it. Desmond shared that he’d been reflecting on his place in the community and how this related to the notion that academic violations are committed against the community, not just the professor involved.

**Jury Deliberations and Tentative Resolutions:**

The most fundamental question facing the jury at this point was regarding a grade change. Desmond had showed openness to, and support for, a grade changing resolution, and every member of the jury was clear that some grade change was needed, but there was disagreement as to what the grade change should be.

Most jurors felt that whatever grade change was suggested should be worse than if Desmond had simply chosen not to turn in the exam at all. If there was a lesser grade change it would be unfair to a student who had not taken the exam at all. Several jurors felt that a significant grade change would make an example of Desmond, which they felt very uncomfortable with. The notion of “hanging him up on the flagpole for all to see,” as one juror put it, seemed antithetical to the trial goals. Other jurors agreed that making an example of Desmond shouldn’t motivate any grade change, but they felt that a greater grade change than a zero on the take home portion of the exam was warranted.

The jury was reluctant to change Desmond’s grade on the in class portion of the test because it was clear he had studied hard for it and knew the material. However, some jurors felt
that his academic dishonesty had impacted the integrity of his course grade and thus advocated for a deduction to be taken out of his cumulative grade. A full letter grade seemed too great a deduction and out of scale with the violation. The jury settled on 5% as a reasonable deduction. The jury saw fit to include a clause that would stop Desmond’s grade from dropping below 2.0 as this course was needed for Desmond’s major.

There was some discussion of the seriousness of Desmond’s violation. Some jurors felt that it wasn’t as serious as cases like Amelia Earhart or The Tempest and shouldn’t be treated too harshly. Others felt that this case certainly wasn’t as serious as either of those, but that it was egregious in its own right. The element of the violation that led some of the jurors to judge it as particularly serious was that Desmond repeated it over and over during the exam period. Each time he logged on to the music forum he knew he was violating Haverford’s honor code and he went ahead with it all the same. It was this feeling that prompted the jury to add that if something like this ever happened again, the future jury be notified of this case and that separation should be very seriously considered.

The jury considered various ways to inspire reflection in Desmond, ultimately choosing three written reflections. The jury set dates for the completion of each of these reflections. The jury also wanted Desmond to attend some abstract discussions to encourage him to think more about the honor code and the trial process.

The jury accepted Desmond’s characterization of his lapse in judgement and that stress had played a role. Jurors felt that Desmond was likely to face this stress again later in his academic career and that he needed to learn some strategies for dealing with it or violations like this one would recur. Desmond brought up OAR visits as a possible resolution to address this concern.

After deciding on resolutions, the jury briefly discussed the statement on reporting, with some members feeling that this is the sort of offense that should be reported, and ultimately settled on the statement below.

Tentative Resolutions
1. [Desmond] will read the honor code as early as possible, or by [date redacted]. (9 jurors consent)
2. The jury recommends that [Desmond] receive a grade of 0.0 on the take home portion of the midterm exam and an additional five percent off of his final course grade, but not below the grade of 2.0 (provided the final grade before the five percent reduction is not below 2.0). (9 jurors consent)
3. The jury recommends that if [Desmond] is found to have violated the academic honor code again that the jury of that case be notified of this case and that separation as well as other measures of accountability such as a grade change are strongly considered. (9 jurors consent)
4. [Desmond] will write three (3) reflections:
a. The first will be about what it means to be a part of an academic community, and will be completed by [date redacted].
b. The second will be about the process of the take home exam and the way it is implemented. This will be completed by the beginning of the [date redacted] semester with the option to be shared with the members of the [Music] department if [Desmond] is comfortable with this.
c. The third will be about the stress he was feeling at the time of the violation and how he would deal with it more effectively, and will be completed by [date redacted]. (9 jurors consent)

5. [Desmond] will meet with the OAR once a month during the [redacted] semester to learn how to better manage time and stress. [Desmond] will meet with the OAR again at the beginning of the [redacted] semester to plan his semester schedule. (9 jurors consent)

6. After [Desmond’s] [date redacted] meetings with the OAR, [Desmond] will write a guide on time and stress management for him to use in times of similar circumstances, to be completed by [date redacted]. (9 jurors consent)

7. [Desmond] will attend two (2) abstract discussions during the [redacted] semester. (9 jurors consent)

8. [Desmond] will write a letter to the community by the beginning of the [redacted] semester. This letter will address [Desmond’s] violation and his process of restoration. (9 jurors consent)

9. The jury encourages [Desmond] to consider grading, becoming a Teacher’s Assistant, or tutoring in this department in the future as a way of restoring trust. (9 jurors consent)

On resolutions as a whole: (9 jurors consent)

Statement on Reporting
Some members of the jury feel that this is the type of violation other institutions of higher learning would want to be notified about; other members of the jury feel that this case should not be reported to institutions of higher learning. Overall, the jury feels that both the seriousness of the violation and the early stage in [Desmond’s] academic career should be considered; however, the jury strongly feels that if [Desmond] is found to have violated the academic honor code again, this case should be reported to other institutions of higher learning. (9 jurors consent)

Finalizing Resolutions:
Desmond thought the resolutions were fair. The trial chair read an email from Professor Shears expressing concerns that this abstract would make professors less likely to assign take home exams in the future. One juror expressed that while that was possible, many of the cases Honor Council deals with relate to dishonesty on take home exams. In each case the jury
emphasizes to students that their dishonesty endangers the continued trust that exists between professors and students. One juror expressed hope that the resolutions the jury created for Desmond would leave him with a greater respect for the trust that take home exams represent.

9 jurors were present for this meeting
1. [Desmond] will read the honor code as early as possible, or by [date redacted]. (9 jurors consent)
2. The jury recommends that [Desmond] receive a grade of 0.0 on the take home portion of the midterm exam and an additional five percent off of his final course grade, but not below the grade of 2.0 (provided the final grade before the five percent reduction is not below 2.0). (9 jurors consent)
3. The jury recommends that if [Desmond] is found to have violated the academic honor code again that the jury of that case be notified of this case and that separation as well as other measures of accountability such as a grade change are strongly considered. (9 jurors consent)
4. [Desmond] will write three (3) reflections:
   a. The first will be about what it means to be a part of an academic community, and will be completed by [date redacted].
   b. The second will be about the process of the take home exam and the way it is implemented. This will be completed by [date redacted] with the option to be shared with the members of the [Music] department if [Desmond] is comfortable with this.
   c. The third will be about the stress he was feeling at the time of the violation and how he would deal with it more effectively, and will be completed by [date redacted]. (9 jurors consent)
5. [Desmond] will meet with the OAR once a month during the [redacted] semester to learn how to better manage time and stress. [Desmond] will meet with the OAR again at the beginning of the [redacted] semester to plan his semester schedule. (9 jurors consent)
6. After [Desmond’s] fall meetings with the OAR, [Desmond] will write a guide on time and stress management for him to use in times of similar circumstances, to be completed by [date redacted]. (9 jurors consent)
7. [Desmond] will attend two (2) abstract discussions during the [redacted] semester. (9 jurors consent)
8. [Desmond] will write a letter to the community by [date redacted]. This letter will address [Desmond’s] violation and his process of restoration. (9 jurors consent)
9. The jury encourages [Desmond] to consider grading, becoming a Teacher’s Assistant, or tutoring in this department in the future as a way of restoring trust. (9 jurors consent)

On resolutions as a whole: (9 jurors consent)
Statement on Reporting:

Some members of the jury feel that this is the type of violation other institutions of higher learning would want to be notified about; other members of the jury feel that this case should not be reported to institutions of higher learning. Overall, the jury feels that both the seriousness of the violation and the early stage in [Desmond’s] academic career should be considered; however, the jury strongly feels that if [Desmond] is found to have violated the academic honor code again, this case should be reported to other institutions of higher learning.

(9 jurors consent)

Post-Trial:

Desmond did not appeal any of his resolutions. Desmond’s Letter to the Community will be attached when it is completed.

Discussion Questions:

1. If use of the forum was not prohibited in the exam instructions was it reasonable to assume that students would know such use to be unacceptable?
2. Would there still be a violation if Desmond had cited his post to the forum?
3. How would this case have been impacted if the jury had been made aware of Across the Universe Part 2?