Eragon:
An Honor Council Academic Trial
Released Spring 2016

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:
Professor Saphira: Confronting Party
Eragon: Confronted Party
Dragon Flying: Department
Draconic Aviation 300: 300 level course in Dragon Flying

Summary/Pre-Trial:
[Eragon], a Bryn Mawr student, contacted Honor Council after being confronted by Professor [Saphira] over a problem set in Draconic Aviation 300. Professor Saphira believed that Eragon had copied a solution from an online solution guide, a prohibited resource, which Eragon admitted to having done. Honor Council reviewed statements from both parties and consented to send the case to an academic trial. Because of Honor Council’s heavy case load at the time, the trial was chaired by an experienced member of Council, rather than by one of the Honor Council Co-Chairs (both parties consented to this modification). Due to scheduling conflicts, the Bi-Co liaison was not present for Fact-finding. The final resolutions included a focus on plagiarism education and communication with professors.

Fact Finding:
Eragon began by explaining that he¹ had been confronted by Professor Saphira over a particular solution on a problem set that he had turned in. Eragon admitted to using an online solution guide to complete the question, and contacted Honor Council at Professor Saphira’s request.

Professor Saphira elaborated. She had been aware going into the semester that a solutions guide for the course textbook had been posted online, but had decided to keep the course textbook because the problems were well-tested. She had, however, told her graders to keep an eye out for solutions resembling the online ones. When grading, one of the graders noticed that

¹ Pronouns in abstracts reflect the gender of the pseudonym chosen and do not necessarily reflect the pronouns used by the involved parties.
Eragon had used notation and format that had not been used in class but was used in the online solutions, and alerted Professor Saphira.

The jury then asked questions. The assignment had been one of the course’s weekly problem sets, which altogether constituted 25% of the course grade. When prompted, Eragon said that he had been stuck and intending to just get enough inspiration to attempt the problem on his own, he had looked and found the solution online. Eragon admitted that the solutions manual had heavily influenced his answer. The jury asked about Professor Saphira’s instructions for the assignment as well as the nature of the online solution guide. The students were allowed to collaborate with other students but had to write up the problems independently. Professor Saphira specifically told the class that use of the internet was prohibited.

The jury asked Professor Saphira whether she saw Eragon using the online source to come up with a solution and Eragon copying verbatim from the online source as separate issues. Professor Saphira responded that there were two important parts of the solution, figuring out a solution and then expressing it clearly, and that the online solution helped with the first part but not with the second. Professor Saphira believed that Eragon had represented someone else’s work as his own in copying from the solution. Eragon agreed with Professor Saphira’s assessment of the situation.

A juror asked Eragon whether he had used the solutions on any future homework assignments, which he had not. His statement had mentioned that he deleted the solutions manual from his computer and restarted the next homework assignment at Professor Saphira’s request.

The parties were asked about how things had changed after the violation. Professor Saphira told the jury that as a result of the violation, she had had to start coming up with new problem set questions to use on homework assignments. Apart from being more work for her, she believed the class also suffered since these problems had not been tested. Eragon told the jury that after the confrontation, he had been better about talking to his classmates about the assignments and attending Professor Saphira’s office hours.

**Jury Deliberations/Statement of Violation:**

The jury quickly agreed that a violation had occurred, both in Eragon’s use of a prohibited source and in his copying directly from that source, although jurors were hesitant to comment on the degree of direct copying before seeing the assignment. They agreed to ask Professor Saphira for both versions of the solution before coming up with tentative resolutions. They also considered a resolution asking Eragon to help Professor Saphira in some way, to make up for the time that she lost in having to make up new problem sets. The jury decided to ask Professor Saphira whether she would find this helpful before including it as a resolution.

There was some discussion of what constitutes plagiarism and/or representing another’s work as one’s own in a Natural Science course. Many jurors felt that regardless of the extent to which the solution was copied verbatim, taking a solution that someone else has come up with is a violation in and of itself. Others disagreed, arguing that assignments in STEM fields seemed to
involve trying to arrive at one ‘correct’ answer.

The jury felt that it was unfortunate that Professor Saphira had had to stop using the course textbook for problem sets, but felt that this was an unintended consequence of the violation rather than part of the violation itself. With that the jury consented to the following statement of violation.

[Eragon] violated the Honor Code by using a disallowed source and representing others’ work as his own on a homework assignment. (10 jurors consent)

Circumstantial Portion:

Due to scheduling conflicts, one juror was absent for the circumstantial and tentative meetings.

Eragon was asked to discuss any circumstances surrounding the violation. He said that he had had a lot of accumulated stress at the time because he had many assignments due during those few days, but that at this point in the semester he felt he had a better handle on time management. He said that he had not gone to Professor Saphira’s office hours much before the incident, but had started attending more after the confrontation.

Jurors asked Eragon about his thought processes at the time the violation occurred. He said that when looking online, he had hoped to find the answer to a similar question that could help him think through this particular question, but had ended up finding the solution guide. A juror asked why Eragon had not left the question blank, to which he responded that he wanted to have something down for future review. He said that it had not occurred to him at the time that his actions could be a violation of the code, but that now it made sense. He told the jury that as a result of the confrontation, he pays more attention to time management and starts the homework earlier.

A juror asked Eragon whether this incident had changed his perspective on the Honor Code or academic integrity in the sciences. He said that his impression at the time had been that there was only one way to write the answer to a question, but now realizes that there are multiple ways to write things. He said that he hadn’t read through either Haverford’s or Bryn Mawr’s Honor Code itself, but that he understood the main ideas. He added that he had been taught about plagiarism in high school.

Eragon did not have any suggested resolutions in mind. When asked specifically, he said that he would prefer writing a letter to Professor Saphira to meeting with her in person to talk about the violation, informing the jury that he found it difficult to initially reach out to professors in general, and that he was working on it.

Jury Deliberations and Tentative Resolutions:

After Eragon left, the jury began to brainstorm resolutions to address the three trial goals of education, restoration, and accountability. Professor Saphira had been unable to send the
problem set and copied solution for this meeting since she had been out of town, but would send it when she returned. For proposed resolutions, Professor Saphira suggested that Eragon get a 0.0 on the assignment.

All jurors present quickly agreed with Professor Saphira’s suggested grade change, concluding that anything more would be punitive and that simply taking away credit for the one problem would not fully account for the violation.

The jury was concerned about Eragon’s difficulties with time management and approaching professors, and thought to recommend that he meet with an academic support resource to help him in these areas. They also thought that Eragon should be required to educate himself about academic integrity, particularly how the violation involved representing other’s work as his own as opposed to simply going against the professor’s instructions.

In terms of restoration, the jury thought that Eragon should communicate with Professor Saphira to restore the breach of trust caused by the violation. One juror thought that this should take the form of an in-person meeting, however others worried that having to talk to Professor Saphira in person would limit Eragon’s ability to communicate his feelings. The jury also thought that encouraging Eragon to continue attending Professor Saphira’s office hours would restore their working relationship and help Eragon academically. Finally, the jury thought that Eragon should write a letter to the community reflecting on the violation.

**Jury Deliberations and Tentative Resolutions 2:**

The jury began by comparing Eragon’s written solution to that of the online solution set, both of which Professor Saphira had provided to the jury. It was clear to the jury that the solutions were essentially identical, with small attempts at modification. This suggested to the jury that Eragon had written down the solution without understanding it.

As a result of this new understanding of the violation, the jury added a resolution asking Eragon to reflect on how copying the solution constituted plagiarism. In addition, the jury felt that there was a general lack of understanding in the community of what plagiarism looks like in the Natural Sciences, with most plagiarism education focusing on the humanities and social sciences, and so decided to make a resolution directed at the Natural Science departments at Haverford in order to help address this.

**Tentative Resolutions:**

1. *The jury recommends that [Eragon] receive a 0.0 on the assignment. (9 jurors consent, 1 stands outside in absentia, Bi-Co liaison supports)*
2. *[Eragon] will write a letter to [Professor Saphira] to help restore any remaining breach of trust caused by the violation. He will write this letter by [date]. (8 jurors consent, 1 stands outside, 1 stands outside in absentia, Bi-Co liaison supports)*
3. *Before the end of the [semester], [Eragon] will meet with the Bryn Mawr academic support and learning specialist (Rachel Heiser) at least twice with a focus on developing*
a plan surrounding communication with professors and time management. He will also check in with Rachel Heiser within the first two weeks of [semester]. We encourage [Eragon] to continue these meetings on a regular basis if he feels this would be helpful. (9 jurors consent, 1 stands outside in absentia, Bi-Co liaison supports)

4. [Eragon] will read the Haverford Honor Code and take the Haverford Academic Integrity Tutorial. After completing these tasks, [Eragon] will write a paper reflecting on how his understanding of plagiarism and her violation have been affected by this process. He will complete this by the start of the [semester]. (9 jurors consent, 1 stands outside in absentia, Bi-Co liaison supports)

5. [Eragon] will write a letter to the community reflecting on what he has learned through the trial process. This letter will be completed by the start of the [semester]. (9 jurors consent, 1 stands outside in absentia, Bi-Co liaison supports)

6. The jury supports [Eragon]’s continued attendance at [Professor Saphira]’s office hours. (9 jurors consent, 1 stands outside in absentia, Bi-Co liaison supports)

7. The jury recommends that the Natural Science departments increase their emphasis on plagiarism education and intellectual ownership in the Natural Sciences, especially in their introductory courses. The abstract for this case will be sent to the chairs of the Natural Science departments emphasizing this resolution. (9 jurors consent, 1 stands outside in absentia, Bi-Co liaison supports)

Resolutions as a whole: 9 jurors consent, 1 stands outside in absentia, Bi-Co liaison supports

The jury also consented on the following tentative statement on whether or not to report this case to other institutions of higher learning:

The jury recommends that this proceeding not be considered a disciplinary proceeding because the violation occurred on a homework assignment. (8 jurors consent, 2 stand outside in absentia, Bi-Co liaison supports)

Finalizing Resolutions:

Eragon thought that the tentative resolutions were reasonable and asked some clarifying questions of the jury. The trial chair read a brief email from Professor Saphira in which she expressed that the resolutions were fine.

The trial chair asked the jury whether their thoughts on the tentative resolutions had changed in any way since consenting. The juror who was absent for the tentative resolutions meetings expressed concern over the grade change resolution. He felt that the grade change did not fit into his conception of restorative justice. He felt that professors should have the sole discretion over grades, and so the jury should not recommend a grade change. The remaining jurors explained their thought processes behind the recommended grade change. Ultimately, the juror was comfortable with the group moving forward with this resolution. This juror also wanted a resolution requiring Eragon to help Professor Saphira in some way to make up for lost
time. The trial chair had asked Professor Saphira about whether this would be a possibility, and Professor Saphira answered negatively.

Additionally, the jury felt that their tentative statement on grad school reporting did not accurately reflect their reasons for recommending that the violation not be reported. They thus rewrote the statement to clarify that their view reflected the fact that the assignment was relatively minor, rather than that it was a homework assignment. With that the jury consented to a set of final resolutions that were identical to the tentative resolutions, and a statement on reporting that was identical in substance but different in wording.

**Final Resolutions:**

1. The jury recommends that [Eragon] receive a 0.0 on the assignment. (9 jurors consent, 1 stands outside, Bi-Co liaison supports)
2. [Eragon] will write a letter to [Professor Saphira] to help restore any remaining breach of trust caused by the violation. He will write this letter by [date]. (10 jurors consent, Bi-Co liaison supports)
3. Before the end of the [semester], [Eragon] will meet with the Bryn Mawr academic support and learning specialist (Rachel Heiser) at least twice with a focus on developing a plan surrounding communication with professors and time management. He will also check in with Rachel Heiser within the first two weeks of the [semester]. We encourage Eragon to continue these meetings on a regular basis if he feels this would be helpful. (10 jurors consent, Bi-Co liaison supports)
4. [Eragon] will read the Haverford Honor Code and take the Haverford Academic Integrity Tutorial. After completing these tasks, [Eragon] will write a paper reflecting on how his understanding of plagiarism and her violation have been affected by this process. He will complete this by the start of the [semester]. (10 jurors consent, Bi-Co liaison supports)
5. [Eragon] will write a letter to the community reflecting on what he has learned through the trial process. This letter will be completed by the start of the [semester]. (10 jurors consent, Bi-Co liaison supports)
6. The jury supports [Eragon]’s continued attendance at [Professor Saphira]’s office hours. (10 jurors consent, Bi-Co liaison supports)
7. The jury recommends that the Natural Science departments increase their emphasis on plagiarism education and intellectual ownership in the Natural Sciences, especially in their introductory courses. The abstract for this case will be sent to the chairs of the Natural Science departments emphasizing this resolution. (10 jurors consent, Bi-Co liaison supports)

**Resolutions as a whole:** 10 jurors consent, Bi-Co liaison supports

Statement on reporting to other institutions of higher learning:
The jury feels that this violation would not result in a disciplinary proceeding at other institutions of higher learning and so should not be reported as such. (10 jurors consent, Bi-Co liaison supports)

[Eragon]’s Letter to the Community:
I have learned a few things during this trial process. While I regret the actions that led to the trial, I was able to experience how the Haverford trial process worked, and appreciated the way the community (in the form of the jury) worked with me to come up with resolutions that would help me learn from my mistakes. I understand what I did wrong, and I now also have a better understanding of the Haverford Honor Code. I can now move forward and ensure that I do not make those mistakes in the future.

Post-Trial:
The resolutions were not appealed.

Discussion Questions:
1. Should the fact that the violation occurred in a natural science class as opposed to a social science/humanities class have influenced the jury’s resolutions?
2. Should juries distinguish between “minor” plagiarism and “severe” plagiarism? And should intent influence the jury at all?
3. Is it the role of the jury to recommend grade changes or should that be left solely to the discretion of the professor?
4. What distinguishes plagiarism in natural sciences versus social sciences/humanities?
5. Should Honor Council pseudonyms always match the genders of the parties involved?