The time & location of the abstract discussion for this abstract is to be determined.

Monty Python:
An Honor Council Academic Trial
Released Fall 2016

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Key:
Confronting Party: Professor John Cleese
Confronted Party: Michael Palin
Class: Historical Silly Walks 102

Summary:
This trial involved [Michael], who violated the Honor Code by plagiarizing on two papers and being dishonest with his professor for [Historical Silly Walks 102], [John Cleese]. Throughout the trial, Michael had a degree of difficulty recalling and discussing the events that led to the violation, which seemed to be related to the fact that he was struggling with depression during the semester when the violation took place. The jury seriously considered separation, coming to two sets of tentative resolutions, one of which included one semester of separation. Ultimately, the jury decided against separation and came to a set of tentative resolutions including a significant amount of written work and other measures of accountability.

Pre-trial:
Professor Cleese reported the case to Honor Council in the summer after discovering plagiarism in Michael’s final paper. He sent Honor Council an extremely detailed statement regarding the plagiarism as well as Michael’s continued dishonesty with him. Because Michael was home and being treated for depression, the trial was postponed until the fall. The trial was run with nine jurors.

Fact Finding:
The meeting began with Professor Cleese briefly summarizing his concerns: he had noticed a significant degree of overlap between Michael’s papers and sources that he found online. While he had initially been relieved that the final paper had appeared better than
Michael’s previous work in the class, he had discovered plagiarized sections after noticing that the paper seemed disjointed. These included long passages copied verbatim from sources, some passages that were very close but slightly modified, and some more subtle instances of plagiarism where the paper followed the sequence of ideas in summary or review papers. He had then looked back and discovered plagiarism in another significant paper that Michael had submitted for the class. He felt that Michael had shown a failure of communication and lack of candor in several communications throughout the course, notably when Michael had lied about having completed the reading. Professor Cleese felt it was clear from Michael’s final paper that he hadn’t read the book in question. This failure of communication had not been rectified by the confrontation. Next, Michael said that he had had a difficult semester and then spent the summer trying to address issues that he was facing and get back to normal. He apologized for the lack of communication and said that he and Professor Cleese hadn’t spoken since the end of the previous semester.

The trial chair asked Michael what he remembered about writing the paper: he remembered feeling hopeless after struggling with the course and as a result began borrowing ideas, structures, and words from from outside sources. He said he knew he was wrong to do this and it was a result of his not knowing what to do. Asked about the second paper, he said that he had spent a lot of time struggling and second-guessing himself. He expressed general agreement with Professor Cleese’s account, but stated that the decline in his mental state during the semester of the violation made it difficult to recall details. He stated that he took full responsibility for violating the academic Honor Code.

Professor Cleese left, giving the jury the opportunity to speak to Michael alone. Michael said that he had been struggling with depression throughout the semester and had difficulty communicating with Professor Cleese and his other professors and difficulty participating in the class. He felt that he had obscured the truth rather than being intentionally deceitful, and spoke highly of Professor Cleese. He had not addressed the mental health issues at all during the semester, and had felt trapped and made the wrong choice.

Jury Deliberations/Statement of Violation:

The jury immediately agreed that a violation of the Honor Code had occurred, but given Michael’s vague account of the events and his inability to remember the details of the semester, the intentionality and extent of the violation was difficult to characterize. The jury discussed whether Michael had violated Professor Cleese’s trust in more ways than just the plagiarism. The jury decided to include this in the statement of violation as they thought they might want to address this in the resolutions.

The jury consented to the following statement of violation:

[Michael] violated the Honor Code by plagiarizing on two papers and by contributing to a
breach of trust with Professor [Cleese] in their communications. (9 jurors consent)

Circumstantial Portion:

The trial chair read a statement from Professor Cleese regarding circumstances, in which he considered whether he could have done more to prevent Michael’s violation. However, he felt that the workload for the class had not been too heavy, and that he had been generous in trying to make grading less stressful for students. Though he had been moved to question the way he organized his classes and whether he’d had a negative impact on Michael’s experience, he came to the conclusion that he was not at fault. He felt that the violation may have been the result of a taxing academic and extracurricular schedule. Finally, Professor Cleese emphasized that he hoped Michael would understand that in addition to recognizing that copying full passages was a problem, “painting by numbers” plagiarism - copying the ideas of another author without necessarily copying all of their words - was also a serious problem and that he would learn not to do this in the future.

Michael began by making it clear that he did not feel that Professor Cleese was at fault in any way. He explained that he had experienced a traumatic event, after which he had developed depression, which he began treatment for over the summer. He took full responsibility for his actions, and explained that he did not want to obfuscate the truth but didn’t remember a lot of details about the violation. He explained emotionally that he had spent a great deal of time thinking about his actions over the summer, and felt “stupid” for not being able to control his actions to make a better choice. He thought about his violation all the time, and said it was “always with him.”

In response to questions from the jury, Michael explained that the current semester was more under control. He had friends looking out for him, was meeting with his professors, his advisor, and his dean, and went home regularly to see his therapist. He enjoyed going home regularly and felt that it allowed him to keep in balance. However, the last semester was still a “blur.” He hadn’t felt like he was cheating at the time but was trying to get out of the situation of having to write a paper. He was struggling with difficult tasks and couldn’t find the motivation to do his work.

Michael hoped to develop more of a relationship with Professor Cleese through the trial. While he had enjoyed the class at the beginning of the semester and liked Professor Cleese, he hadn’t been able to communicate with him due to the stress of his mental health issues. This also made him less receptive when Professor Cleese, who had noticed early on that he was struggling, had tried to get him in touch with his dean and with the director of the Writing Center. Michael said again that he had not been intentionally dishonest, except for claiming to have read a book that he hadn’t read, which had become evident to Professor Cleese in a conference between the two of them. Michael claimed that he had read the book before writing the paper, something Professor Cleese thought to be impossible given the nature of his final paper, and the jury kept this in mind throughout the trial.
As the semester had gone on, Michael had become less able to function in his academic and extracurricular activities, feeling lost. A juror asked how Michael would act if he got into a similar situation again, and he said that he would be honest with his professor and it would be better to tell them that he couldn’t do the work than to cheat.

The trial chair asked Michael what resolutions he thought would address the trial goals of education, restoration, and accountability. Michael wanted to stay at Haverford, as being in the community was very comforting to him. He had made a change and felt that separation would be extremely counterproductive. He also explained that, should he be separated, his parents would want him to transfer to a school closer to home and live with them. In terms of other resolutions, he wanted to restore his relationship with Professor Cleese and the community as a whole. Michael explained that Professor Cleese had given him a grade of 0.0 in the class, and he was comfortable with this. He was also comfortable with whatever the jury decided in terms of whether the trial would be considered disciplinary for the purposes of reporting to graduate and transfer schools.

He explained that the Honor Code had been something he liked about Haverford in deciding to come here, but that he felt more informed about it now than before the violation. Since the violation he had been trying to learn more by reading abstracts. After learning a lot through this research and the trial process, he was interested in giving back to the community, perhaps by becoming an HCO or even joining Honor Council. Finally, he expressed that he was eager to hear what resolutions the jury came to, and wanted to feel whole in the community again.

**Jury Deliberations and Tentative Resolutions:**

The jury felt that an in-person meeting would help restore trust between Michael and Professor Cleese. A juror expressed that he would like to see Michael reflect more deeply on the situation and come to a more concrete understanding of how to avoid similar issues in the future. The jury discussed how he may need to develop more of a support system to address such an issue well, and some jurors were unsure of whether he was ready to do this. They discussed resources such as his dean, the office of Access and Disability Services (ADS), and the OAR.

To restore his relationship with the community, the jury wanted Michael to write a letter to be attached to the abstract, as well as a letter addressed to students in similar circumstances. In addition, they discussed having him do some kind of project, perhaps through the OAR, to share his insights about coping with mental health issues and academic honesty. The jury also considered how Michael could contribute to college initiatives and/or Honor Council projects (such as events) about issues of mental wellness without breaking his confidentiality. They agreed that a resolution suggesting that Michael continue to use counseling services would represent what the jury felt, while acknowledging that this is a personal choice.

The jury was comfortable with the grade of 0.0, and felt that assigning a grade to the course as a whole was better than looking at the individual assignments, given the nature and
extent of the violation. It was also mentioned that the grade that Michael would have earned in
the class just for his non-plagiarized work was likely barely passing, and that a grade reduction
to 0.0 in the course was actually not significantly lowering his grade.

The trial chair noted that the extent of the violation made it important to consider whether
separation would be productive. Several jurors felt that separation might not be helpful from
Michael’s perspective because the community was supportive to him and he had already taken
some time to reflect over the summer. Some jurors felt that separation would be harsh, and some
were concerned about whether Michael’s parents would let him return if he were separated. The
jury consented to the following tentative resolutions:
1. The jury supports Professor [Cleese]’s assigned grade of 0.0 in the course. (9 jurors consent)
2. [Michael] will meet with Professor [Cleese] in order to repair the breach of trust in their
   relationship before end of the semester. (9 jurors consent)
3. [Michael] will continue to meet with his dean. They will meet once per month until the end of
   the [following semester]. (9 jurors consent)
4. [Michael] will meet with each of his professors at least once at the beginning of [semester]
   in order to establish working relationships with them. (9 jurors consent)
5. [Michael] will write a letter to the community by [date]. (9 jurors consent)
6. [Michael] will write a letter by [date] addressing students who may find themselves in a
   similar situation. (9 jurors consent)
7. [Michael] will work with Honor Council to educate the Haverford community about issues
   surrounding mental health and the Honor Code. (9 jurors consent)
8. The jury supports [Michael]’s continued use of counseling resources. (9 jurors consent)

Resolutions as a whole: 9 jurors consent

The jury also consented to the following statement regarding whether the proceeding should be
considered disciplinary for the purposes of reporting to graduate schools:
Since plagiarism is generally considered a major violation of academic standards, and this was
a particularly serious instance of plagiarism, the jury recommends that this trial be considered
disciplinary for the purposes of reporting to other institutions of higher learning. (9 consent)

Finalizing Resolutions Part 1:

The trial chair began the meeting by reading a statement from Professor Cleese in which
he urged the jury to increase the level of accountability in their resolutions. He said that he
believed not doing so would create a precedent for using mental health concerns as a way of
avoiding accountability. He suggested adding a resolution in which Michael create a documented
list of all of the ways he plagiarized and breached Professor Cleese’s trust, which Professor
Cleese would then have to approve. He also urged the jury to reconsider the issue of separation.
The jury was conflicted about Professor Cleese’s letter. While most jurors saw merit in his suggested resolution, some were uncomfortable with his need to approve such a list and his suggestion that the resolutions as they stood would create a “mental health escape clause.”

Michael arrived and expressed his comfort with the tentative resolutions, adding that he might retake the Academic Integrity Tutorial and resign the Honor Code as another method of restoration. Upon hearing Professor Cleese’s suggested resolution about documenting his academic integrity, Michael expressed concern regarding the level of discomfort this would cause him, as it was still very difficult for him to look back on the events of the previous semester. That being said, he said he would be willing to do it if it meant restoring his relationship with Professor Cleese.

The jury was concerned that they had so few details surrounding the events. Michael expressed that much of the semester was still a blur, but invited the jury to ask more questions that he would do his best to answer in as much detail as possible. The jury asked him about several of the instances Professor Cleese had mentioned in his statement, and Michael provided some explanation. The jury, however, still felt uncomfortable about the knowledge they had and were unsure of how to proceed. One juror felt that Michael had been more dishonest with Professor Cleese than he let on, and was possibly continuing to be dishonest during the trial. The jury had a spectrum of feelings regarding Michael’s level of honesty and struggled with how to create resolutions to prevent such an incident from reoccurring when they were so unclear about everything that had happened. The trial chair suggested that they adjourn to reflect.

**Finalizing Part 2:**

The jury met with Professor Cleese to discuss his concerns in more depth. His main concern was that Michael had plagiarized in a variety of different ways, and much of it had been quite carefully crafted. He felt that Michael was not taking full responsibility for his actions and was unsure that Michael was being honest with the jury, speculating that it may be an attempt to garner sympathy from them. He felt that Michael was potentially creating a dishonest “habit of mind” and wanted to see that change through the trial. Professor Cleese felt that his suggested resolution could help to accomplish this, but also felt that separation would be an important part of this process for Michael.

The jury tried through extensive discussion to reconcile the the two very different perspectives on the situation. After doing so, they were leaning towards separation, feeling that it could be beneficial whether or not Michael had been totally honest with them during the trial, as it was clear Michael needed to reflect further on everything that had happened.

Because their perspective had changed significantly since their last meeting, the jury decided to draft a new set of tentative resolutions that they would then discuss with Michael and Professor Cleese. They felt this was especially necessary because Michael’s somewhat distressed state during meetings had prevented them from asking certain questions. They came to the following new set of tentative resolutions.
**New Tentative Resolutions:**

1. The jury supports Professor [Cleese]’s assigned grade of 0.0 in the course. (9 jurors consent)
2. [Michael] will be separated from Haverford College for [semester]. (8 jurors consent, 1 stands outside)
3. Before the end of the [semester], [Michael] will read Maud McInerney’s essay “Plagiarism and How To Avoid It.” (9 jurors consent)
4. [Michael] will write a letter to the community by [date]. (9 jurors consent)
5. [Michael] will reflect upon his acts of dishonesty both in plagiarism in academic writing and in communications with Professor [Cleese]. He will compile a comprehensive list describing these acts, which he will share with Professor [Cleese] as part of their meeting upon his return to Haverford. (9 jurors consent)
6. [Michael] will meet with Professor [Cleese] at the beginning of [semester] in order to repair the breach of trust in their relationship. (9 jurors consent)
7. [Michael] will re-sign the Honor Code upon his return to Haverford. (9 jurors consent)
8. [Michael] will meet with each of his professors at least once at the beginning of [semester] in order to establish working relationships with them. (9 jurors consent)
9. [Michael] will continue to meet with his dean. They will meet once per month during the [semester]. (9 jurors consent)
10. [Michael] will work with Honor Council during [semester] to educate the Haverford community about issues surrounding mental health and the Honor Code. (9 jurors consent)
11. The jury supports [Michael]’s continued use of counseling resources. (9 jurors consent)

**Resolutions as a whole: 9 jurors consent**

They chose to keep the statement on reporting to other institutions of higher learning as it was: *Since plagiarism is generally considered a major violation of academic standards, and this was a particularly serious instance of plagiarism, the jury recommends that this trial be considered disciplinary for the purposes of reporting to other institutions of higher learning. (9 consent)*

**Finalizing Part 3:**

The meeting began with Michael expressing his feelings regarding the separation resolution. While he understood the jury’s reasoning, he felt that his parents would not allow him to return to Haverford should he be separated and that he had found a great deal of support in the Haverford community. The jury explained that they came to the resolution because they felt Michael needed more time to reflect given that he was unable to discuss much of what happened. Michael was confident that he would be able to do this reflection while at Haverford and struggled to get the jury to share in this confidence.

At this point Michael left the room briefly, and the jury discussed whether they had done
enough during fact finding to get the information they needed from Michael. A few jurors expressed discomfort with separating someone who may not be able to return, and the jury discussed whether they thought Michael was being honest about it or if it should even affect their decision.

Michael return and spoke about his dishonesty with Professor Cleese. He explained that while they had never had a bad relationship, it had involved misunderstandings, avoidance, and some lying about having done readings, but that he had felt more comfortable seeing Professor Cleese around campus since the start of the trial. Michael felt that he was in a much better place emotionally and that although his story had evolved over the course of the trial, he felt that he had gotten everything out and simply wanted closure.

One juror explained that part of the reason the jury had consented to separation were the discrepancies between Michael and Professor Cleese’s stories. He explained that Professor Cleese seemed to believe that Michael’s plagiarism was more intentional and malicious than Michael described. Michael explained that he was simply desperate to get the papers done and saw no other way of completing them in the mindset that he found himself in at the time.

After Michael left, the jury decided they would take some time to reflect on the issue of separation and meet again. While many jurors were theoretically in favor of separation, they were concerned with the fact that Michael may not be able to return to Haverford.

**Finalizing Part 4:**

At the beginning of this meeting, some members of the jury were still committed to the belief that the separation resolution was necessary, but many had significant concerns with implementing such a resolution. They began by discussing what purpose they felt separation served: some jurors felt that it was important in order to hold Michael accountable, some felt that he needed to have reflected more on the violation before they would be comfortable with him being restored to the Haverford community. Some jurors, however, did feel that they would be comfortable taking a class with him, and they were just concerned about giving him more time to reflect and come to an understanding of what had gone wrong, which they felt wouldn’t be possible with all of the demands on his time if he were not separated. The jury agreed that Michael was on his way to being able to access the resources that he would need to prevent himself from violating the Code again, and that they wanted their resolutions to encourage him to utilize these resources, including his dean.

The jury also debated whether they should consider the possibility that Michael wouldn’t be able to come back after a semester, or if that were outside of their purview. Some jurors felt that the best approach would be to decide what they ideologically felt they should do and then decide how to handle the practical implications. They also discussed other potential resolutions that would address the goals of accountability and restoration that they were trying to achieve with separation. Some suggestions for accountability included having him complete some community service, having him rewrite the papers or do some other kind of writing project,
having him work on a tutorial about plagiarism or write an essay about plagiarism, or putting him on academic probation (regular academic warning\textsuperscript{1}). Some jurors, however, argued that giving him a lot of work to do during the upcoming semester would do the opposite of what they hoped to achieve with separation -- giving him time to reflect and restore himself without stress.

The jury was interested in the ideas of giving him another writing assignment either about plagiarism or related to the course material and putting him on academic probation, in addition to other resolutions addressing education that they already had, such as reading “Plagiarism and How to Avoid It,” and perhaps writing something in response to it. They also felt that they should make a resolution to encourage active reflection, such as asking him to periodically meet with a juror or write regular reflections. Many jurors, but not all of them, felt that these resolutions might be able to take the place of a separation resolution, which they felt would be preferable because of the possibility that Michael wouldn’t be able to return if he were separated.

Jurors who had issues with removing the separation resolution were concerned that Michael had not been honest during the trial, and that his lying to Professor Cleese during the previous semester had been more malicious than he had indicated. Several jurors felt conflicted about what they wanted to do in the case that Michael was being dishonest, because they weren’t sure that separation would address their concerns if he were, and they felt that mental health struggles and the passage of time at least partially explained why his story seemed different from Professor Cleese’s. This harsher interpretation of the extent of the violation meant, for some jurors, that much more accountability was necessary than they felt could be achieved without separation. Somewhat in order to assuage this concern, the jury decided to add a resolution about visiting the Writing Center to add accountability and also contribute to education. At this point, the jury wrote out the wording of their resolutions, but they did not feel comfortable consenting after such a long, contentious, and tiring meeting. They decided to meet again so that they would have more time to think about their decisions before coming to consensus.

**Finalizing Part 5:**

The jury began by having each member share their thoughts. The jury was in general satisfied with their resolutions, although one juror still felt that there wasn’t enough accountability, and therefore stood outside on the resolutions as a whole. After a brief discussion, the jury agreed that they were ready to consent, and consented to the following final resolutions:

1. *The jury supports Professor [Cleese]'s assigned grade of 0.0 in the course.* (9 consent)
2. *[Michael] will be placed on Regular Academic Warning for [semester].* (9 consent)
3. *Until the end of [semester], [Michael] will write fortnightly reflections of at least 150 words reflecting on the trial and his restoration process.* (9 consent)
4. *During [semester], [Michael] will participate in the Writing Center’s Writing Partner program.* (9 consent)

\textsuperscript{1} https://www.haverford.edu/academic-affairs/committee-student-standing-programs/academic-concern
5. Before the beginning of [semester], [Michael] will read Maud McInerney’s essay “Plagiarism and How To Avoid It” and write a 3-5 page paper about how it relates to his violation. (9 consent)

6. [Michael] will write a letter to the community before the start of [semester]. (9 consent)

7. [Michael] will meet with Professor [Cleese] before [date] in order to repair the breach of trust in their relationship. (9 consent)

8. [Michael] will reflect upon his acts of dishonesty both in plagiarism in academic writing and in communications with Professor [Cleese]. He will compile a comprehensive list describing these acts, which he will share with Professor [Cleese] as part of their meeting. If Professor [Cleese] finds this list insufficient, [Michael] will revise the list and meet with Professor [Cleese] again. (9 consent)

9. Upon the completion of Resolution 8, [Michael] will read the Honor Code and re-sign the Honor Pledge. (9 consent)

10. [Michael] will write a 5 page paper following the prompt of the final assignment about a book of Professor [Cleese]’s choosing by [date]. (9 consent)

11. [Michael] will meet with each of his professors at least once at the beginning of the [semester] in order to establish working relationships with them. (9 consent)

12. [Michael] will work with Honor Council during the [semester] to educate the Haverford community about issues surrounding mental health and the Honor Code. (9 consent)

13. The jury supports [Michael]’s continued use of counseling resources. (9 consent)

Resolutions as a whole: 8 consent, 1 stands outside

The jury also consented to the following statement on reporting to other institutions of higher learning:

Since plagiarism is generally considered a major violation of academic standards, and this was a particularly serious instance of plagiarism, the jury recommends that this trial be considered disciplinary for the purposes of reporting to other institutions of higher learning. (9 consent)

Post-Trial:

The resolutions were not appealed.

[Michael]’s Letter:

Writing this letter is without a doubt one of the hardest things I’ve ever had to do. However, I know that it is essential not only to express my sincerest apologies to the Haverford Community, but also to assist me on my journey towards restoration. I have committed an offense against the core values of this great institution, by breaking the Honor Code. There is not a day that passes where I am not constantly thinking about my violation, and reminding myself of the second chance that I have so graciously been given. The guilt that resides in my
conscience serves as a constant reminder to practice the academic integrity expected from every student at Haverford.

Last spring, I went through what was the most definitely the hardest times of my life. In short, I experienced a very rapid downward spiral of my mental health and emotional stability. It is not something I can easily admit or discuss because in all honesty, most of it has become a blur.

However, I know that this is not an excuse for my actions, because there really is no excuse for such a significant infraction of the Honor code. Plagiarism, in my mind, is one of the worst offenses a person can commit. This is because not only are you stealing something that belongs to someone else, but you are stealing someone’s ideas and thoughts. The human mind is what makes each of us unique and our own person. Thus, through my acts of plagiarism, I have taken credit for what make’s someone else who they are. By not crediting other writers for their work, I have taken credit for their thoughts and their mental capacity to develop ideas into written word. I also deprived my Professor of the respect that he rightfully deserves, and can only hope that through open communication and a genuine apology, our relationship can be salvaged. While fighting to suppress my inner demons, I looked for any out that I could possibly find. I found myself struggling to form coherent thoughts, let alone finding the right words to put down on paper. For this I am deeply sorry, for I have violated the trust of everyone at this school. However, through the trial process, and my own personal reflection, I have been able to take steps toward making sure this never happens again.

Since the conclusion of my trial, I have taken more time to reflect upon my studying habits and the way in which I approach my academic work. While I have already taken drastic action to improve my mental health and keep myself on the right track, I know there is more work to be done, and I am determined to follow through with my resolutions not only to restore my relationship with the community but to also to better myself. This whole process has been eye opening for me and has allowed me to really focus on improving my time management and organization skills, specifically. I now know what I struggle with and what I need to spend more time and focus on. I am aware that the process will be hard, and will take time, but I am ready and willing to take the necessary steps towards becoming the student and person that I should be. The kind of person that the Haverford College Community, as well as myself, can be proud of.

Sincerely,

[Michael Palin]

Discussion Questions:
1. What factors should a jury take into consideration when considering separation?
2. How should the jury take account for mental illness when considering the degree of accountability in the resolutions?
3. In a case that deals with mental illness as a circumstance, to what degree should the resolutions deal directly with mental illness?
4. Is lying to a professor about the completion of a reading a violation of the Honor Code?