Ghostbusters:  
An Honor Council Academic Trial  
Released Fall 2018

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Key:
Confronting Party: Professor Egon Spengler
Confronted Party: Peter Venkman
Course: Ectoplasmic Containment 101

Summary/Pre-Trial:
This trial involved Peter Venkman, a student in Professor Egon Spengler’s Ectoplasmic Containment 101 class. Professor Spengler confronted Venkman via email about the great similarity between several of Venkman’s answers in the final exam and the answers in the practice tests that Spengler had provided. While Venkman insisted that it was a product of repetition of the answers after thoroughly studying for the exam throughout the whole trial, the jury came to a statement of violation and grew in frustration with Venkman as the trial continued. The resolutions focused vastly on accountability and restoration via education.

Preliminary Meeting:
9 jurors were present for this meeting. After reading the statements from both parties, the trial chair presented two documents that were given to him by the Dean’s office. One was the exam log of students who had self-scheduled exams, and the other was the Moodle timestamps from Venkman’s account. The first said that Venkman had taken the exam on [date], from 9-12, a day before what Venkman had said he took the exam on his statement. The second showed that Venkman had accessed his Moodle account, and more specifically a folder within his Ectoplasmic Containment course, at 9:07 on [date]. The jury discussed how to move forward, and the jury was divided as to whether they wanted to tell Venkman beforehand about these documents, or if they should wait. They ultimately decided that the trial chair would contact him in order to meet with him prior to Fact Finding in order to talk about these documents.

The jury also asked that Professor Spengler send a copy of Venkman’s exam, as well as copies of other student’s exams to see how they answered the parts of the final exam in question, and whether there was one who appeared similar but there was no suspicion of violation.
Between Preliminary and Fact Finding:

The trial chair was able to arrange a meeting with Venkman, but when Venkman came to the room, he was on his phone with his parents through speaker. The trial chair told Venkman to end the conversation outside and then he was welcome to come in, but both he and his parents refused to hang up. His parents were asking that if this was an official meeting of the trial, and if so, why was there only one juror meeting with Venkman. As a student government representative, the trial chair is not allowed to speak to anyone from outside of the community about a trial when it is happening. The trial chair tried to explain to Venkman that while it might not have been an official meeting, in many cases it was necessary and helpful in order to have a conversation with any of the parties without the presence of the other party and/or the rest of the jury, so as to be in a lower-stress environment or hold a more private conversation. After his parents refused to hang up and Venkman did not cooperate, the trial chair ended the meeting and left the room. The trail chair emailed the jury about the update, and decided to present the documents to Venkman during Fact Finding.

Fact Finding:

The jury met with Professor Spengler and Venkman for fact-finding. Professor Spengler explained that he had graded some exams right before leaving for the holidays, and took the rest of the exams with him to grade in the weeks after. Venkman’s test was the first one of that batch to grade, and since the answer key was not fresh in Professor Spengler’s mind, he looked at it closely. As he started grading the test, he almost immediately felt very suspicious about the great similarities between Venkman’s answers and those on the key, more than he had ever had before. He also stated that he did not know it was Venkman’s test because he graded them anonymously, but after feeling such suspicion, he decided to look who it was.

Venkman then explained that he started studying two weeks prior to the test. He looked at previous exams, midterms, his notes, and the class textbook. He said he studied for hours per day, and that he did the practice exams many times, so his answers were purely based on memory. He presented some of the practice exams he did to the jury. When asked, Venkman said that his memorization process focused on studying his notes along with previous midterms, and once he was more familiar with the content, he started using practice exams until he felt confident with every answer.

Professor Spengler then explained that there were two exams that he found very suspicious, much more than any other test. Based on the sample of twenty tests he had provided the jury, he had given partial or full credit to many different answers that were not suspicious. Venkman clarified that Professor Spengler implied that he wanted the answers a certain way, and he had put up the exams on Moodle, so Venkman thought that it was very important to use them. He then presented a statement that someone in the class signed stating that Professor Spengler said there would be the practice exams posted on Moodle and that they could use that, evidence
that the jury already knew to be true. Professor Spengler emphasized that he wanted the answers to be complete, not that they had to be the same words, though he did say that this was the first time he had recycled so many questions for an exam. After no further questions were asked, Professor Spengler was asked to step out so that the jury could talk to Venkman alone.

At that point, the trial chair presented both the exam access log and the Moodle timestamp documents, and asked for clarification from Venkman. While the exam access log stated that Venkman took the exam on Tuesday, he affirmed that he had taken it on Wednesday, as was written in his statement, and that the log must have an error. As for the Moodle timestamps, which were also from Tuesday, Venkman stated that he had checked Moodle when he was making the line to get his test, and also previously during breakfast, at around 8:20. It is important to note that there was no Moodle access after Tuesday at 9:07, and that there had not been any access to Moodle on Tuesday at 8:20—the last time Venkman had entered Moodle before 9:07 was at around 12:00 am of that Tuesday.

Venkman went on explaining that he had presented proof that he had studied for the final exam for a very long time, and that there was no motivation to cheat, as he was doing fine in the class. There was also nothing going on in his life that would have caused him to cheat. Both the jury and Venkman went back and forth with the logic behind Venkman’s statement versus what was presented on the exam access log and Moodle timestamps. Venkman stuck to what he had said in the statement, including the day that he stated he had taken the test. No more questions were asked.

The jury then spoke to Professor Spengler alone. The trial chair presented the exam access log and the Moodle timestamps to Professor Spengler, as well as Venkman’s explanation for it. Professor Spengler went on to explain how he suspected this violation, first by noticing the great similarity between the exam and the answer key, to an extent he had never seen before, and second by noticing who the exam belonged to, because Venkman had had a previous incident in Professor Spengler’s class and with another student, which was dealt with between them. Both Venkman and the other student had answers in their final exam that were very suspiciously similar to the answer key, but Professor Spengler stated that he thinks that was a coincidence, and not a product of collaboration. The jury and Professor Spengler talked about the causality of the original confrontation, but soon realized that it was not relevant to the violation per se. Professor Spengler restated that he had never been so sure that this was a violation, and that in his many years of teaching he had never seen something so similar to the answer key. After no further questions were asked, Professor Spengler left, and the jury ended the meeting with a moment of silence.

Jury Deliberations/Statement of Violation:

All but one juror were present for deliberations, but this missing juror sent an email to the chair with their thoughts. Several jurors agreed that they were more suspicious than not that a violation had occurred. Some were very unsure as to where they leaned, as they could see this as
a series of unfortunate events and pure coincidence that the evidence presented could align with a violation. One juror said that while they were in a gray area, the more they looked at the exams, the more they could see that this was a product of memorization. Some disagreed, as they could not see how Venkman could have memorized such a large number of questions and remember such detailed answers. They also felt they could not rely on the Moodle timestamps since many
found it plausible that he had simply accessed Moodle while standing in line for his exam. Overall, the jury felt that it would be difficult to come to anything with complete certainty given that Venkman denied that a violation had occurred, but there was evidence that could prove otherwise. While they did not want to disregard Venkman and take Professor Spengler’s word fully, they also acknowledged that there were plenty of inconsistencies and questions left unanswered that left many jurors uneasy, and thus made them lean towards a statement of violation.

Going around the room, there seemed to be many jurors leaning towards a violation that included cheating, but also some who were uncomfortable with it. However, there was a general consensus that they could consent to an overall Statement of Violation. Jurors who had been in trials before shared that sometimes in cases like this it was a matter of going with their gut and making the most of what was present. While Honor Council is not a precedent-based body, the jury felt that, given the many inconsistencies and the Professor’s statement, that it was much more likely than not that it was a violation, and thus proceeded to write a Statement of Violation.

They left the statement particularly vague because, while everyone agreed that there was a statement of violation, they could not specify what it was, and they would have not been able to reach consensus had they explained further. Several jurors would have been comfortable consenting to a statement that included that Venkman had used disallowed resources, committed plagiarism, or cheated during the final exam, although consensus could not be reached on this. The jury consented to the following Statement of Violation:

**Statement of Violation:**

*Due to the great similarities in [Venkman’s] test to the practice exams’ answer keys, the jury believes beyond a reasonable doubt that [Venkman] committed academic dishonesty and therefore is in violation of the code. (9 jurors consent, 1 stands outside in absentia)*

**Circumstantial:**

The meeting started with an attempt from the jury to explain to Venkman the thought process behind consenting to a statement of violation, as well as the reasoning behind the wording of it, though Venkman kept saying that what he said in Fact Finding was true. The jury and Venkman then discussed the circumstances of the violation. Jurors expressed that they wanted the best for Venkman and that he could confide in them if he was hiding something or needed to say something else, but Venkman said that any similarity was caused by repeated studying and memorizing the answers of the practice tests beforehand. He also said that he was
doing well in the class and that he did not need to use any disallowed resources, nor did he feel the need to cheat. When asked, he said that he did not believe what he had done was plagiarizing, because he did not see Professor Spengler’s answer keys as cited work, and given that Spengler provided them, Venkman utilized him how he saw fit.

The conversation shifted towards the actual circumstances, rather than going back to fact finding. Venkman said that he felt targeted and uneasy with the whole process involving both Professor Spengler and the jury, and that he would have liked that Professor Spengler had talked about the incident personally before being told to contact Honor Council, though he understood the communication was over winter break. In terms of studying, he said he went to plenty of TA office hours to do his homework and to study for the final.

Venkman suggested that he not receive credit only on the questions where Professor Spengler thought there was a violation, even though he believed that he hadn’t done anything wrong. He also proposed resolutions asking him to meet with the OAR, and do community service. He was opposed to any other grade change or accountability resolution, and was open to a proposed meeting with Professor Spengler. After no further resolutions were proposed and no questions were asked, Venkman was dismissed.

Jury Deliberations I:

There was a consensus that there was still a violation in place, but the confusion from fact finding remained. One juror proposed moving forward with the fact that Venkman cheated despite it not being the most comfortable thing to do as this was the most likely event given the facts the jury had. Some jurors also stated that they felt disrespected by him, due to his consistent lying, and the majority of the jury that believed he cheated. Due to time constraints, the meeting was adjourned for the night.

Jury Deliberations II and Tentative Resolutions:

A slight majority of jurors leaned towards believing that cheating had occurred, though the other jurors maintained their doubts. There was also a divide in terms of what the proper accountability resolutions in relation to a grade change should be. The jury felt good about Venkman meeting with the OAR to improve his study habits. They also discussed the possibility of having him meet with Professor Spengler, and how productive (or not) that would be. There was a strong sense of the jury leaning towards not writing a resolution on separation, and a consensus on not writing a resolution on community service.

The jury discussed the grade change resolution. A proposed idea was a 0 on the exam, plus no more than a 1.0 on the class. Some supported the idea and stated that the jury believed that Venkman did put some effort in the class. Others were against this resolution, thinking that a 0.0 better represented the gravity of the violation. Another few jurors were against the idea because they thought the proper grade change resolution was only a 0.0 on the exam at most. There was a divide as to what the exam represented in relation to the whole class.
The jury digressed and proposed several other resolutions, such as to write a reflection on Professor McInerney’s ‘Plagiarism and how to avoid it’, a meeting with Professor Spengler, a letter to the community, and a meeting the jury, before going back to the grade change and statement on reporting. After thorough talk, most agreed to consent to a 0.0 on the test for tentative resolutions so that they could talk about it with Venkman, with the condition that they would discuss it in detail for finalizing.

**Tentative Resolutions:**

1. [Venkman] will receive a grade of 0.0 on the final exam. (8 jurors consent, 1 juror stands outside, 1 juror stands outside in absentia)

2. During the [redacted time], [Venkman] will read “Plagiarism and How to Avoid It” by Maud McInerney, and will write a reflection on it before the [redacted] semester, to be sent to the Staff Support Person for archiving.
   a. The reflection will focus on how [Venkman] sees plagiarism relating to relationships of trust with other people, both inside and outside the community.
   b. This letter can also include how [Venkman] sees his violation relating to plagiarism. (9 jurors consent, 1 juror stands outside in absentia)

3. [Venkman] will meet with the OAR every two weeks in order to improve his study habits and manage school work for an academic year, starting [date redacted]. The jury recommends [Venkman] to keep this practice for h

4. is remaining time at Haverford. (9 jurors consent, 1 juror stands outside in absentia)

5. [Venkman] will have the chance to write a letter to the community by the end of his Senior year, to be appended to the abstract. This letter should come after thorough reflection and must be written after he completes resolution 2. The jury strongly encourages [Venkman] to write this letter in order to restore himself fully into the community.
   a. The Staff Support person will remind [Venkman] at the beginning of his senior year of the possibility of writing this letter, unless he has already written it. (9 jurors consent, 1 juror stands outside in absentia)

6. Should [Venkman] write a letter to the community, [Venkman] will have the chance to meet with the remaining members of the jury at any point before the end of his senior year, if they are willing and available. The jury strongly encourages [Venkman] to take advantage of this meeting to restore any remaining breach of trust. (9 jurors consent, 1 juror stands outside in absentia)

7. [Venkman] will meet with [Professor Spengler], if they are both willing. This meeting will be mediated by a member of Honor Council’s Executive Board who was not a juror of the trial. (9 jurors consent, 1 juror stands outside in absentia)
On the resolutions as a whole: (8 jurors consent, 1 juror stands outside, 1 juror stands outside in absentia)

Statement on Reporting:
There is a weight of the room of the jury that believes that this incident should not be reported to other institutions of higher learning, should [Venkman] not violate the Academic Honor Code again. (9 jurors consent, 1 juror stands outside in absentia)

Finalizing Resolutions:
Venkman said that he felt okay with most of the resolutions, except the 0.0 on the exam, which he thought was still harsh, and Professor McInerney’s essay, which he did not find useful. He insisted he had not plagiarized, and that the similarities were simply because he had memorized the answer keys, and reproduced said answers when he saw the questions in the test, and that plagiarism was not his intention. After no further relevant questions were asked and he did not have anything else to add, Venkman left.

The jury went on to talk about changes in the resolutions. They agreed that resolution 2 had to be removed, since it proved already to be unproductive as Venkman still did not understand how the violation had included plagiarism. After thorough discussion in terms of what would be most productive for both the trial process and Venkman, as well as what addressed the violation best, there was a shift in the jury and a weight of the room leaning towards a 0.0 in the exam, as well as no more than a 1.0 in the class. A few jurors still preferred a 0.0 in the exam only due to the uncertainty as to what happened, and their inability to say beyond a reasonable doubt that cheating happened. After thorough talking, the jurors present felt as though they could consent to a 0.0 in the exam and no more than a 1.0 in the class.

Since the jurors felt that education had been lost by striking resolution 2, they decided to add two resolutions to replace it, which would be reading abstracts and attending abstract discussions, as well as to write a paper in relation to the Honor Code. Ultimately, they felt uneasy about moving forward with a set of resolutions that did not properly address the breach, mainly because Venkman had not confessed to anything. Nevertheless, they proceeded to do so since it was the best thing to do, and they knew they would not be able to get a valid response from Venkman that would make them cooperate. Given Venkman’s consistent stance, some jurors changed their mind from last meeting and there was a divide as to whether this case should be reported, and the statement on reporting reflects so.

Final Resolutions:
1. The jury recommends that Venkman receives a grade of 0.0 in his final exam, and no more than a 1.0 in his overall class grade. (8 jurors consent, 2 jurors stand outside in absentia)
2. [Venkman] will meet with the OAR every two weeks in order to improve his study habits and manage school work for an academic year, starting [date]. The jury recommends [Venkman] to keep this practice for his remaining time at Haverford. (8 jurors consent, 2 jurors stand outside in absentia)

3. [Venkman] will write a paper of at least two pages focusing on the Honor Code and what it means to live under it, both academically and socially. This paper must be written before [Venkman’s] meeting with [Professor Spengler], and we encourage him to send and discuss this paper with [Professor Spengler] in their meeting.
   a. This essay can include:
      i. Talking about plagiarism, all the forms it can take, and how to actively avoid it;
      ii. The different natures of committing academic dishonesty;
      iii. How he plans to grow from his violation;
      iv. Any other topic of importance to him.
   b. This essay must be written by the start of the [redacted] semester, and will be sent to the Staff Support person for archiving. (8 jurors consent, 2 jurors stand outside in absentia)

4. [Venkman] will have the chance to write a letter to the community by the end of his senior year, to be appended to the abstract. This letter should come after thorough reflection and must be written after he completes resolution 3. The jury strongly encourages [Venkman] to write this letter in order to restore himself fully into the community.
   a. The Staff Support person will remind [Venkman] at the beginning of his senior year of the possibility of writing this letter, unless he has already written it. (8 jurors consent, 2 jurors stand outside in absentia)

5. Should [Venkman] write a letter to the community, [Venkman] will have the chance to meet with the remaining members of the jury at any point before the end of his senior year, if they are willing and available. The jury strongly encourages Venkman to take advantage of this meeting to restore any remaining breach of trust. (8 jurors consent, 2 jurors stand outside in absentia)

6. [Venkman] will meet with [Professor Spengler], if [Professor Spengler] is willing. This meeting can be mediated by a member of Honor Council’s Executive Board who was not a juror of the trial. (8 jurors consent, 2 jurors stand outside in absentia)

7. [Venkman] will read 3 abstracts chosen by the Honor Council Librarian. These abstracts should focus on unusual cases of academic dishonesty, plagiarism, and/or cheating, which relate to the nature of [Venkman’s] violation. (8 jurors consent, 2 jurors stand outside in absentia)
8. [Venkman] will attend 3 abstract discussions by the end of his [redacted] year. The jury encourages him to actively participate in these discussions. (8 jurors consent, 2 jurors stand outside in absentia)

On the resolutions as a whole: (8 jurors consent, 2 jurors stand outside in absentia)

Statement on Reporting:
There are jurors who feel that this case should be reported to other institutions of higher learning. There are others that feel that this case should not be reported. The jury leaves this decision up to the discretion of whoever sends the academic report to other institutions of higher learning. (8 jurors consent, 2 jurors stand outside in absentia)

Post-Trial:
Venkman appealed the resolutions on substantive grounds. After careful consideration, the President did not grant the request.

Discussion Questions:
1. How can plagiarism on exams be better understood within the Haverford community?
2. How representative is a final exam of a student’s work in the class over the entire semester? How should grade change resolutions address violations on a final exam?
3. How can a trial move forward constructively when the jury and confronted party cannot come to an agreement on what happened during a potential violation?