Heathers: An Honor Council Academic Trial
Released Fall 2018

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Key:
Confronted Party: Ram Sweeney
Confronting Party: Professor Veronica Sawyer
Authors of the plagiarized documents: Heather Duke, Heather Chandler, Heather McNamara
Assignments plagiarized: Croquet technique summaries
Course: Croquet 300

Summary/Pre-Trial:
This trial involved Ram, a student in Professor Sawyer’s Croquet 300 class. Ram contacted Honor Council after having met with Professor Sawyer over a plagiarized assignment. After deliberating, Honor Council decided to send it to an Academic Trial. In the preliminary meeting, the jury was unsure whether a violation had occurred. Jurors expressed that they felt that due to the wording of the statements, they could consent to either a Statement of Violation or a Statement of Non-Violation. They felt they could not get a clear idea of the case until they had met with both parties and seen the assignment in question.

Fact Finding:
During fact finding, the jurors spoke with Ram and Professor Sawyer about what happened. Ram explained that the assignment involved summarizing the croquet writings of several authors, Heather Duke, Heather Chandler, and Heather McNamara. However, after Ram had submitted the summaries, Professor Sawyer approached him with concerns about plagiarizing the croquet techniques. Ram explained that he felt he did not intentionally plagiarize, and he said that he had adequately cited the author’s croquet techniques. Professor Sawyer mostly agreed with Ram’s recounting of events, but she noted that some of the croquet techniques were not cited and others were copied verbatim without quotation marks. She also explained that on the first day of class all of the students were given a lecture on what constitutes plagiarism and how there are no excuses for plagiarism. She expressed disappointment that Ram was trying to explain his actions with reasoning that had been specifically refuted during that
lecture. Additionally, she emphasized that a lack of proper citation, whether intentional or unintentional, still constituted plagiarism.

    The jury asked Ram if he thought he had violated the Honor Code. Ram said that if he did, it was unintentional, and that he had used this method of citation before without any problems. Additionally, Ram felt that some of the portions that were copied verbatim could not be rephrased because they used technical terms to describe a croquet swing. At this point, Professor Sawyer expressed frustration with Ram’s description of the events. She believed that Ram’s claims of not being able to reword the techniques contradicted what he had told her before the trial, and she was confused as to whether Ram was admitting to intent or not.

    When the jury spoke with Professor Sawyer alone, she expressed that she wanted the best for Ram and that she did not want to harm Ram’s academic career. She clarified that she did not care about whether there was intent to plagiarize or not, but whether there was plagiarism or not. Since the jury had no further questions, Professor Sawyer was dismissed.

    When meeting with Ram alone, Ram did not have any questions, and the jury had no further questions for him, so he was dismissed as well.

**Jury Deliberations/Statement of Violation:**

    The jury stayed for deliberations. The weight of the room appeared to be that Ram had violated the Honor Code, since he had copied verbatim or nearly verbatim without proper citation and that constituted plagiarism. The jury also believed that Ram’s intent should not affect their statement. The jury consented to the following statement:

    *Statement of Violation:*
    *Ram violated the Honor Code by plagiarizing his summary assignment. (10 jurors consent)*

**Circumstantial Portion:**

    Ram and all the jurors were present for Circumstantial. Ram explained that he had been juggling classes and personal family issues at the time of the violation. However, he acknowledged that these were not excuses and that he was just careless. He emphasized that the violation was not intentional, but he was aware of the consequences of plagiarism.

    During the question period Ram said that he had a good relationship with Professor Sawyer, since she was going to be Ram’s thesis advisor. He also said that he knows how to write and that this was a one-time incident that he would never let slide again. As for resolutions, he suggested going to the Writing Center, so as to have another set of eyes picking out things he may have missed. He would prefer to not get a zero on the assignment, and definitely not in the class. He said that he was pretty confident about avoiding plagiarism and that this was his first offense, which should be taken into consideration. After no further questions, Ram left the room.

**Jury Deliberations I**
The jury then stayed for tentative resolution deliberations. The trial chair first read Professor Sawyer’s email suggesting resolutions. Professor Sawyer wanted a grade deduction in the class of no less than 0.3 and no more of 1.0, as well as a 0.0 in the assignment. She also wanted Ram to realize the gravity of plagiarism, which she thought Ram did not quite grasp.

After that, the jury spoke from silence to express feelings and thoughts. Some jurors felt Ram had thought about this incident since the last meeting, and some felt he still did not understand the gravity of plagiarism. They agreed, however, that there was no such thing as an unintentional case of plagiarism, and that Ram should understand that one should always guard against plagiarism, regardless of circumstances. The jury discussed several potential resolutions, including a 0.0 on the assignment, a grade change in the course, and going to the Writing Center. The jury felt certain that they wanted a 0.0 in the assignment, and a deduction in Ram’s grade in Croquet 300 within the range Professor Sawyer had proposed, but they were not sure what specific grade change to choose. After extended deliberation on the grade change, one juror expressed discomfort with the tone of the conversation, and pointed out that trials should not be focused only on accountability or a grade change, but should be a restorative justice process. However, the meeting was about to hit the two hour mark, and so the jury decided to continue deliberations at a later meeting.

Jury Deliberations II and Tentative Resolutions:

Nine members of the jury were present for the second set of deliberations. The jury first discussed restoration and if Ram should write a letter to Professor Sawyer, a letter to the authors of the croquet techniques, and/or a letter to the community. After deliberations, the jury felt that a letter to Professor Sawyer would be unnecessary because she and Ram were already restoring their relationship. The jury felt that writing a letter to the authors would allow Ram to be more reflective about his plagiarism. Ultimately, the jury decided that Ram should only be required to write a letter to the authors of the croquet techniques, with the option of writing a letter to the community as well. Next, the jury discussed education. The jury felt that any resolutions regarding the Writing Center or other outside resources should be recommendations only, since avoiding plagiarism is Ram’s own responsibility. The jury also discussed having Ram rewrite the assignment, but after deliberations, decided that would appear punitive and would not actually address the goal of education. Another juror suggested that Ram meet with the Honor Council Librarian to discuss the plagiarized portions of his assignments. The jury then turned to accountability. All the jurors were comfortable giving Ram a 0.0 on the plagiarized assignment. All the jurors wanted some form of grade change in the class, but there was no clear weight of the room on what that change should be. After some deliberation the jury decided to provide a range for the potential grade change.

Lastly, the jury returned to the relationship between Professor Sawyer and Ram. Some jurors felt that the jury needed to be more clear about why there were no resolutions addressing that relationship. They proposed the following resolution:
The jury acknowledges Ram and Professor Sawyer’s working relationship, and encourages further meetings and continued discussion.

However, other jurors felt that this resolution would not serve any purpose, and therefore should not be part of the final set. After some consideration, the jury decided to strike it out. Without further questions or suggestions, the jury consented to the following tentative resolutions and statement on reporting:

**Tentative Resolutions**

1. **Ram will write a letter to Heather Duke, Heather Chandler, and Heather McNamara, the authors from whom he plagiarized, by [date];**
   - a. This letter will acknowledge the plagiarism that occurred and reflect on his actions. (9 jurors consent, 1 stands outside in absentia)

2. **Ram will meet with the Honor Council Librarian to identify and discuss the plagiarized portions of his assignment. This meeting will happen by [date].** (9 jurors consent, 1 stands outside in absentia)

3. **The jury recommends that Ram gets a 0.0 on the plagiarized assignment.** (9 jurors consent, 1 stands outside in absentia)

4. **The jury recommends that Ram gets an overall grade deduction in Croquet 300 between 0.3 and 0.7.** (9 jurors consent, 1 stands outside in absentia)

5. **The jury hopes that Ram understands that avoiding plagiarism is his own responsibility. However, the jury highly encourages Ram to utilize the Writing Center, the OAR, and other resources on campus as tools to help him avoid plagiarism.** (9 jurors consent, 1 stands outside in absentia)

6. **Ram will have the option to write a letter to the community, to be appended to the abstract.** (9 jurors consent, 1 stands outside in absentia)

**Resolutions as a whole:** (9 jurors consent, 1 stands outside in absentia)

**Statement on Reporting:**

The jury believes that no form of plagiarism is unintentional. Therefore, the jury recommends that this case should be reported to other institutions of higher learning. (9 jurors consent, 1 stands outside in absentia)

**Finalizing Resolutions:**

Nine jurors and Ram were present for finalizing resolutions. Ram asked the jury about their reasoning behind the letters to the authors (Resolution 1) and the grade changes
Once the jury answered his questions, Ram felt comfortable with the resolutions, and the jury dismissed him to finalize the resolutions.

The juror who was not present for tentative resolutions said they were uncomfortable with and could not consent to a range for the grade change (Resolution 4). The jury discussed whether a range or a specific grade change was more beneficial. A juror asked if the discomfort came from having a range, or having a range with a 0.3 as a starting point. The other juror responded that, while they preferred a more serious grade change, they could consent to a 0.3 deduction. Members of the jury also felt that providing a range and asking Professor Sawyer to choose the actual grade change had the potential to damage her relationship with Ram. The jury also discussed if they wanted the resolutions to specify a numerical grade change or a letter grade change. Some jurors wanted a letter grade change because they felt it made the impact of the resolution more clear. Other jurors preferred a numerical grade change to show the quantitative aspect. After thorough discussion, the weight of the room felt that the jury should phrase the grade change resolutions (3 and 4) as letter changes, not numerical changes. Additionally, the jury consented to a one third letter grade deduction in the course as a whole rather than a range.

Lastly, the jury discussed adding an anonymity subclause for the letter to the authors (Resolution 1), since the jury cannot force Ram to break his confidentiality, even to people outside the community. Once the jury was comfortable with the resolutions, they moved to consensus.

Final Resolutions:

1. Ram will write a letter to Heather Duke, Heather Chandler, and Heather McNamara, the authors from whom he plagiarized, by [date];
   a. This letter will acknowledge the plagiarism that occurred and reflect on his actions.
   b. This letter will be sent to the authors along with the abstract. Ram will choose whether or not the letter will be pseudonymised. (9 jurors consent, 1 stands outside in absentia)
2. Ram will meet with the Honor Council Librarian to identify and discuss the plagiarized portions of his assignment. This meeting will happen by [date]. (9 jurors consent, 1 stands outside in absentia)
3. The jury recommends that Ram does not receive credit for the plagiarized assignment. (9 jurors consent, 1 stands outside in absentia)
4. The jury recommends that Ram gets a third of a letter grade deduction in Croquet 300 (A to A-, A- to B+, etc.) (9 jurors consent, 1 stands outside in absentia)
5. The jury hopes that Ram understands that avoiding plagiarism is his own responsibility. However, the jury highly encourages Ram to utilize the Writing Center, the OAR, and
other resources on campus as tools to help him avoid plagiarism. (9 jurors consent, 1 stands outside in absentia)

6. Ram will have the option to write a letter to the community, to be appended to the abstract. (9 jurors consent, 1 stands outside in absentia)

Resolutions as a whole: (9 jurors consent, 1 stands outside in absentia)

Statement on Reporting:
The jury believes that no form of plagiarism is unintentional. Therefore, the jury recommends that this case should be reported to other institutions of higher learning. (9 jurors consent, 1 stands outside in absentia)

Post-Trial:
The resolutions of this trial were not appealed.

Discussion Questions:
1. Should jurors be responsible for recommending grade changes as a part of the resolutions, even when they are unsure of what the grade change means in the context of the course?
2. Is recommending a range for a grade deduction appropriate? How could that recommendation impact the trial goal of restoration?
3. The Honor Code states, "Although Honor Council trials are not intended as punitive proceedings, there are repercussions for violating the Code." How can juries balance those concerns, especially when writing resolutions that deal with accountability?
4. How could a confronted party’s attitude towards the trial affect the jury’s resolutions? Should the jury take that into account when writing resolutions?
5. How is writing a letter to authors outside of the Haverford community a restorative process? How might it be more or less effective than alternative resolutions?
6. The jury in this trial felt very strongly that intent to plagiarize has no bearing on whether or not plagiarism occurred. What is your opinion on this statement? Is there such a thing as unintentional plagiarism?