Legally Blonde:
An Honor Council Academic Trial
Released Fall 2018

This abstract was not released in accordance to the timeline specified by the Students’ Association Constitution. The confronting party did not consent to the release of the abstract. The confronted party did not consent to the release of the abstract.

Key:
Confronted Party: Elle Woods
Confronting Party: Professor Stromwell
Course: Law 300

Pre-Trial:
This case involved a student, Elle, lying about the completion of multiple small assignments in Law 300. Elle was a BMC student but was off campus for the semester, and thus Skyped into meetings. A Bi-Co Liaison was not available for this trial.

In Professor Stromwell’s statement, she explained that Elle had never turned in some assignments for the course, despite frequent reminders, but had claimed to have done so (suggesting that there might be a technical problem with Professor Stromwell receiving them). Eventually, Elle stopped responding to Professor Stromwell's emails, and Professor Stromwell contacted Elle's dean to request that the dean search Elle's email outbox, and discovered that no such assignments had been sent.

In Elle’s statement, she explained that she had submitted two assignments late, but had told Professor Stromwell that she had submitted them on time, citing a technical issue as justification. This contrasted slightly with Professor Stromwell’s statement, which never acknowledged the assignments being submitted. On the other hand, her account of what happened with her dean matched Professor Stromwell’s: she acknowledged that she had lied to her dean until her dean asked to see evidence of the sent emails, after which she admitted to have lied. Professor Stromwell asked Elle to report herself to Honor Council for the issue in Law 300, and Elle's dean asked her to report herself to the Honor Board for the issue of lying to her dean. Elle explained that she had already reported herself to the Honor Board and was undergoing a separate procedure there.

Throughout Elle's statement, she expressed substantial remorse for the trust she had breached with the Haverford community, explaining how much she valued the Honor Code and the steps she should have taken to avoid what had occurred. Elle also explained that her
decisions were in large part caused by her bipolar disorder, which “flared up this fall, causing [her] overwhelming anxiety and difficulty in thinking clearly.” She expanded that she had been hiding her worsened condition from everyone, including her therapist, and thus she had avoided asking for a doctor’s note from her therapist or an extension from Professor Stromwell.

Elle explained that the sequence of events with Professor Stromwell and her dean has led her to acknowledge how poor her health had become and that she is taking steps to improve, such as being under active care of her psychiatrist. She also explained that she had apologized to Professor Stromwell and offered to withdraw from Law 300 and the Haverford law major, and that “Professor [Stromwell] has accepted my apology and agreed that she believes the above two actions are a sufficient remedy.” Elle added that she is “also willing to undergo a semester of academic separation from Haverford College if the Honor Council believes that would be best.”

Honor Council spent two meetings deliberating on whether or not the case should be sent to trial before ultimately sending it to an academic trial.

**Preliminary Meeting:**

The jury convened to read statements from the parties and go over trial procedures. They discussed the discrepancies between the statements and had a similar dialogue as had occurred in Honor Council about whether the violation was academic or social. The jury was most interested in hearing from Professor Stromwell about whether she had, in fact, accepted Elle’s apology.

**Fact Finding:**

Due to scheduling constraints, the jury spoke to Elle and Professor Stromwell separately. The following sequence of events became clear:

*Professor Stromwell had contacted Elle about the fact that many of her assignments were missing and that given this, Professor Stromwell was concerned about Elle’s status in passing the class. An email chain ensued, in which Elle said twice that she had submitted the assignments through the online portal, and that perhaps it was something on Professor Stromwell's end. Professor Stromwell spent time trying to locate the assignments, which did not exist. Additionally, Elle did not give a presentation that she was supposed to-- she explained later to Professor Stromwell and the jury that she had a presentation prepared but that she had literally been sick in the bathroom and could not present. After Elle was not able to provide copies of the assignments and stopped responding to Professor Stromwell's emails, Professor Stromwell contacted Elle’s dean. Elle then also lied to her dean about the completion of assignments, something which was deemed a violation by Honor Board and underwent a separate procedure there*. When it was finally clear that Elle was lying about the assignments, Elle sent a letter of

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1 The jury’s understanding of this procedure changes throughout the course of the trial. This was the jury’s understanding at this point, as expressed in Elle’s statement and in speaking to Elle. Professor Stromwell did not have any information on this.
apology to Professor Stromwell and they reached an agreement that she withdraw from the course and the Haverford law major (at this point, Elle stopped going to class, although it was very late in the semester). Professor Stromwell was then surprised to find that Elle was still listed on her roster when it was time for her to submit grades. It was not within her power to give Elle a withdrawal, so she gave Elle a 0.0. Elle's dean later clarified in an email to the trial chair that the dean was waiting to hear from the jury as to whether or not to accept a withdrawal or to leave the grade as a 0.0.

Fact Finding with Professor Stromwell:

After reading Elle’s statement to the jury (sent by the trial chair) that morning, Professor Stromwell expressed being shocked, feeling that it misrepresented the nature of the violation. Professor Stromwell explained that she was previously ready to accept Elle’s apology (and would agree with Elle receiving a withdrawal in the class), in part because of the medical circumstance of the potential violation, and also because “we need to take some responsibility as the department in letting her enter this course when she was clearly not equipped for it.”

The following conflicts became clear: Elle claimed to have turned the assignments in late, whereas Professor Stromwell explained that there was “a slew of assignments” of which she had still never received a copy. Additionally, Elle claimed that there were only two assignments in question, whereas Professor Stromwell believed there to be more. Professor Stromwell was upset by this and said that it called their previous agreement into question. At this point, Professor Stromwell felt that Elle should perhaps receive a 0.0 in the class (instead of a withdrawal) and write another letter to her and to Council acknowledging her continued deception.

Due to Professor Stromwell's schedule, she would not have another chance to speak with the jury, so she suggested some resolutions, were the case to be sent to trial. Professor Stromwell asked that the resolutions should help Elle to reflect on the difficulties of the semester and the contexts in which they arose and to develop strategies to prevent or deal with them. Additionally, Professor Stromwell felt strongly that Elle not be able to major in law at Haverford. Professor Stromwell explained that it was beyond a matter of dishonesty: she explained that the assignment Elle turned in at the beginning of the semester showed that she was not well-equipped for a Haverford law major.

When questioned about the academic vs. social nature of the violation, Professor Stromwell explained that “This is a good example where it cuts across both. At the end of the day, this is about being dishonest and deceiving me, but it is in a purely professional context … it's about written work for an academic course and the requirements that she has to satisfy. It cuts across both, quite honestly, and I don't think you can separate the two.”

After Professor Stromwell left the call, the jury reflected on how Professor Stromwell's views regarding the situation had changed drastically as a result of reading Elle’s statement that morning. The jury posed that Professor Stromwell’s frustration and surprise from reading the statement earlier that day could have affected her thoughts on resolutions.
Fact Finding with Elle:

Elle began by apologizing and explaining that she had been behind on assignments and lied about it and said “[I] acknowledge that this was a breach of the Code, which really saddens me because [the Code] is something I really love about Haverford.” She also described the stress of taking five classes for the first time and while also having bipolar disorder.

One juror asked for clarification regarding the number of assignments involved in the case, and Elle replied saying there were two. She then informed the jury that she withdrew from Professor Stromwell's course for medical reasons and that she will be majoring at BMC instead, as per her agreement with Professor Stromwell. With the understanding that Elle in fact received a 0.0 and not a withdrawal, the jury asked for clarification. Elle then explained that her dean was waiting for the trial to occur and planned to retroactively grant her a withdrawal. After being asked whether she may still want to consider a Haverford law major, Elle said that she was now choosing to major at BMC and was fine with it. Elle also explained that she would likely take an additional year of classes and graduate in [year] (the [redacted] semester, the time of the trial, would have been Elle’s final semester. However, Elle was taking the semester off).

When asked about her relationship with Professor Stromwell, Elle described that one time Professor Stromwell approached her and asked how she was doing but that she was embarrassed and did not reveal her struggle of being bipolar and falling behind in class. Lastly, Elle explained that Professor Stromwell was extremely unavailable and that she once waited for her outside her office for several hours. Overall, however, Elle felt like Professor Stromwell cared about her and how she was doing.

One juror asked Elle about missing mandatory meetings with Professor Stromwell and other faculty. Elle responded that she could not recall whether that happened, but if it did, she was sorry. Another juror asked Elle to speak about how her bipolar disorder affected her. Elle said that it was getting worse but that she was embarrassed and anxious and didn’t want anyone, including her psychologist, to know that this was the case. She continued, saying she was now seeing her psychologist again and taking a break from school to ensure that the occurrences of the past semester did not happen again.

A juror then shared with Elle that Professor Stromwell mentioned Elle lying about more than two assignments. At this point, Elle admitted that there had been more assignments and that she should have mentioned this earlier. Since the jury had only seen two instances of lying, a juror explained to Elle that Professor Stromwell had mentioned continuous lying and asked for clarification. Elle explained that after her email confrontations with Professor Stromwell, she had also been lying to her dean about the submission of assignments. However, Elle maintained that, with her dean, she only claimed to have submitted two assignments, not more.

In terms of course attendance, Elle said that she had only missed one class at the start of the semester but then stopped attending class after deciding to withdraw. Regarding a presentation she had to give, Elle explained that she was sick in the bathroom right before she
was supposed to present, that she was quite anxious about it, and thus ultimately did not present.

When asked about her current relationship with Professor Stromwell, Elle said that she hadn’t interacted with her since their last email exchange regarding Elle’s apology and decision to withdraw from Haverford’s law major. Lastly, Elle mentioned that she had good 1-on-1 experiences with Professor Stromwell in the past and hoped that their relationship was not destroyed.

Jury Deliberations/Statement of Violation:
The jury unanimously felt that a violation had occurred but struggled to label the nature of the violation as strictly academic or social. The jury considered that Elle misled Professor Stromwell not just by lying but also by omitting the truth. Additionally, if Elle ended up submitting work, lying about submitting assignments would be synonymous to taking unpermitted extra time. Finally, while Elle had taken steps to hold herself accountable and restore trust with Professor Stromwell and the BMC community, trust had not yet been restored with the HC community.

Statement of Violation:
[Elle] violated the Honor Code by misrepresenting the completion of assignments for [Law 300] to her professor. By compromising her academic integrity in this manner she breached the trust of her professor and the community. (8 members consent, 2 members stand outside in absentia)

Circumstantial Portion:
The jury reviewed the case report from Honor Board which mentioned two courses—before this point, the jury was only aware of issues with Law 300. At Elle’s request, the jury also read a note from Elle’s psychiatrist which described Elle’s conditions under Bipolar Disorder I: Severe. Elle’s psychiatrist urged that the jury allow Elle to withdraw from her Law 300 class for medical reasons.

When Elle joined the meeting, she elaborated on her psychiatrist’s note, describing how she gets incredibly distracted and needs more time to complete work. While she had accommodations for taking more time on exams, it was not helpful or relevant to Law 300 since the course did not involve exams. She explained that the email in which she lied to Professor Stromwell was sent during a bipolar episode, characterized by not having insight or control, having racing thoughts, and acting impulsively.

When asked about the effect of her bipolar condition on her other classes, Elle said she did well in half of her classes and had to withdraw from another, in addition to Law 300. She explained that she hadn’t experienced this in previous semesters -- she had been doing well for a long time, which is why she was so reluctant to reveal that she was doing poorly. Elle continued, saying that taking the semester off had been helpful and that she was significantly less stressed. When asked to speak about the Honor Board case, Elle said that it was for lying to her dean. However, she also mentioned that her dean was part of her support system.
When asked for her ideas for resolutions, Elle said that she’d be interested in writing a letter to the community, that she was already taking a semester off to improve her health, and that she had already withdrawn from Professor Stromwell’s course and the Haverford major. After more discussion, Elle voiced interest in the following: having someone help her with stress management, writing a letter to Professor Stromwell, and receiving a W instead of a 0.0 in the Professor Stromwell’s course. However, Elle was not interested in writing a letter or guide for students who may find themselves in a similar situation. She was also uninterested in providing a record of how she was spending her time off to work towards certain goals.

Regarding a timeline for completing resolutions, Elle said that she would like to complete them as soon as possible in order to have closure on the case. Elle made clear that although she had taken a Haverford course each previous semester, she was not planning to take more.

**Jury Deliberations and Tentative Resolutions:**

The trial chair noted that Elle entered the trial process very prepared, likely due to having gone through an Honor Board trial, and this could have impacted her impression on the jury. A few jurors voiced the desire to have a resolution involving Elle helping students who may be facing similar situations to hers by providing a guide or discussion. One juror believed that accountability had already been met via the resolutions from the Honor Board trial and through the actions Elle was already taking. Two jurors cited the discrepancies between Professor Stromwell and Elle’s reports and did not believe that the goal of accountability had been met. Jurors also noted that Elle’s decision to take a semester of separation was due to medical reasons and so it did not factor into accountability regarding the violation. Ideas for restorative and educational resolutions were discussed by the jury, and the meeting was adjourned.

Before the next meeting, the Honor Council librarian met with Elle to discuss sharing details from the Honor Board case in order to provide additional circumstantial context to the jury. With Elle’s agreement, the trial chair started the next meeting by sharing the following:

“The hearing at Bryn Mawr dealt with two things. The first was that [Elle] had lied to her dean about the issue with assignments in Professor [Stromwell's] class. The other was that she had lied to her dean about a sick note in another class, which had turned out not to be real. These were the only issues Elle lied to her dean about.”

While the situation regarding the sick note involved a Haverford course, Honor Board was addressing Elle’s lying to her dean about the note. During a meeting with the trial chair, a Bryn Mawr dean noted that taking a medical leave had been Elle’s dean’s idea and that Elle had supported it.

After learning this information, many jurors were frustrated by how Elle had omitted relevant information at different points in time. Some jurors felt that instead of being open with the jury, Elle was just saying what she thought they wanted to hear. Jurors voiced that they did not feel like Elle was holding herself accountable to the extent the jury had previously perceived.

One juror proposed separation from Haverford College and another responded, saying
that Elle was already undergoing separation and that mandating additional time may be excessive. The juror wondered if there was a way to make Elle’s semester off more similar to the separation periods resulting from traditional HC trial resolutions.

This discussion ultimately produced Resolution #1, weekly reflections intended to meet the trial goals of accountability and education. In particular, Elle had opposed the idea of having a resolution lasting several months, but the jury felt it was important that Elle spend a sufficient amount of time reflecting on the violation. The jury did not want to cause undue stress and wanted to give Elle some time before beginning the reflection process. The jury also emphasized to Elle that the reflections could be kept confidential—Elle would alert the HC librarian that she had completed each resolution, and her word would be trusted. The jury hoped that his could help Elle think about the trust Professor Stromwell had given her when corresponding about their resolutions, and that this offer of trust would help to restore her to the community.

The jury moved on to discussing academics at Haverford after Elle’s return. Initially, many jurors thought that Elle should not be permitted to take classes or major at Haverford given the violation of trust and the fact that Elle had continuously stated this as one of her measures of accountability, both to the jury and Professor Stromwell. However, the jury was confused by how they had heard at various times (from the HC librarian’s conversation with her and from her dean) that she still wanted to major at Haverford. The jury was also unsure about how to take into account Professor Stromwell’s comment about her not being prepared to major at Haverford—while they did not want to set Elle up for an infeasible separation, they also did not think it was their place as a jury to make a determination on that, and did not want to imply that BMC’s major was less rigorous than Haverford’s.

A few jurors voiced their discomfort with the notion that a Honor Code violation could preclude someone from completing a chosen major and wondered if Elle could really be restored to the Bi-Co community if she was barred from her chosen major. The jury began discussion on the recommendation of grade change, struggling with the fact that they felt there were only two reasonable options (leaving it as a 0.0 or recommending the change to a withdrawal), whereas normally juries are able to deduct grade steps from a student’s grade. Making it a withdrawal, and thereby having it disappear entirely from Elle’s record, felt strange to them. However, the jury had difficulty with the fact that the violation was partially social, whereas a grade change felt very academic. Ultimately, the jury felt that leaving the grade as a 0.0 was the most appropriate resolution. With this grade change, the jury felt confident that no separation from Haverford or the major should be one of the resolutions.

Resolutions #2, 3, and 9 were created to provide academic support for the remainder of Elle's undergraduate career. Resolutions #4, 5, 7, and 10 were created to help restore trust between Elle and the Bi-Co community (including Professor Stromwell and the jury). Resolution #7 was intended to help restore Elle to the Haverford community by having her engage with it upon her return to the Bi-Co, assuming she was not taking another Haverford course. The jury discussed various resolutions relating to Elle’s mental health and decided that they wanted to
support Elle in decisions she was already making for herself (see resolution #6).

Tentative Resolutions:

1. [Elle] will complete weekly reflections during a 4-month period before returning to the Bi-Co community. Each reflection will be in response to a prompt given by the Honor Council Librarian, in consultation with the jury. The jury encourages [Elle] to continue these reflections, unprompted, after her return to the Bi-co. If [Elle] wishes to discuss these reflections, we recommend that she meet with a juror or the Honor Council librarian during this reflection period. (9 jurors consent, 1 stands outside in absentia)

2. [Elle] will outline a plan for what resources and strategies, in the Bi-Co community and beyond, she can use in the coming semester. [Elle] will send this plan to the Honor Council staff support person before she returns to the Bi-co. The jury encourages her to consult with the Honor Council librarian about the resources available. (9 jurors consent, 1 stands outside in absentia)

3. [Elle] will meet with [redacted], BMC Academic Support and Learning Resources Specialist, at least once during the first month after her return to the Bi-Co to discuss stress and time management (9 jurors consent, 1 stands outside in absentia)

4. [Elle] will write a letter to Professor [Stromwell] three weeks before returning to the Bi-Co community. The jury strongly encourages [Elle] and Professor [Stromwell] to meet. If the parties so choose, a member of the jury or of the Honor Council Executive Board can facilitate this meeting. (9 jurors consent, 1 stands outside in absentia)

5. [Elle] will meet up with two jurors on Haverford’s Campus within the first two months after her return to the Bi-Co. (9 jurors consent, 1 stands outside in absentia)

6. The jury supports [Elle's] consistent communication with her psychiatrist. (9 jurors consent, 1 stands outside in absentia)

7. [Elle] will attend at least one discussion-based event on Haverford’s campus of her choosing within the first semester after her return to the Bi-Co (e.g. an abstract discussion, [re]act discussion, etc). (9 jurors consent, 1 stands outside in absentia)

8. The jury recommends that [Elle’s] grade in [Law 300] remains a 0.0. (9 jurors consent, 1 stands outside in absentia)

9. [Elle] will meet with her major advisor, or another [law] professor, to discuss her plan for the completion of her major within the first quarter of her first semester back on campus. The jury supports her continued communication with professors throughout the remainder of her time in the Bi-Co. (9 jurors consent, 1 stands outside in absentia)

10. [Elle] will write a letter to the community within one month after the completion of her first semester back in the Bi-Co. (9 jurors consent, 1 stands outside in absentia)

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

Statement on Reporting:
The jury feels that this violation would not result in a disciplinary procedure at another institution of higher learning. Therefore, the jury suggests that this case not be reported as a disciplinary proceeding to other institutions of higher learning. (9 jurors consent, 1 stands outside in absentia)
Finalizing Resolutions:

Elle responded positively to all resolutions aside from #1 and #8. Regarding #1, she requested that it be a biweekly rather than weekly commitment due to the stress it may cause. However, the jury explained that having it be part of a weekly routine would be more meaningful and prevent it from being left to the last minute. Elle was strongly opposed to resolution #8, reiterating to the jury that not only did her psychiatrist recommend a withdrawal, her dean and Professor Stromwell had also agreed to it. However, the jury questioned this, prompting Elle to clarify that her dean still thought the grade should be up to the jury. In fact, the trial chair noted that her dean told the jury that a 0.0 would appropriately represent the violation, influencing the jury’s decision. Elle told the jury that a 0.0 would result in her average GPA being below a 3.0, which she felt would drastically limit her graduate school and employment opportunities.

The jury went on to explain that giving her a 0.0 was a measure of accountability (the jury struggled to come up with other resolutions they felt fully adequately addressed accountability) and asked Elle if she had any other suggestions for accountability. Elle then suggested receiving a 2.0 as well as formalizing her decision to major at BMC and undergoing academic separation from Haverford into another resolution.

After the call with Elle and much discussion, the jury modified resolutions #1 and #8. Resolution #1 was modified to be completed over a three (rather than four)-month period, in order to lessen the stress on Elle while keeping the routineness of the weekly reflections that the jury found important. Resolution #8 was changed to not have the 0.0 factor in to her GPA. Prior to this meeting, the jury had not thought of omitting the Law 300 grade into Elle’s GPA. This served as a middle ground which seemed to address the issue of accountability while avoiding undue penalization in terms of impacting Elle’s future opportunities.

Final Resolutions:

1. [Elle] will complete weekly reflections during a 3-month period before returning to the Bi-Co community. Each reflection will be in response to a prompt given by the Honor Council Librarian, in consultation with the jury. The jury encourages [Elle] to continue these reflections, unprompted, after her return to the Bi-Co. If [Elle] wishes to discuss these reflections, we recommend that she speak with a juror or the Honor Council librarian during this reflection period. (9 jurors consent, 1 stands outside in absentia)

2. [Elle] will outline a plan for what resources and strategies, in the Bi-Co community and beyond, she can use in the coming semester. [Elle] will send this plan to the Honor Council staff support person before she returns to the Bi-Co. The jury encourages her to consult with the Honor Council librarian about the resources available. (9 jurors consent, 1 stands outside in absentia)

3. [Elle] will meet with [redacted] BMC Academic Support and Learning Resources Specialist, at least once during the first month after her return to the Bi-Co to discuss stress and time management. The jury supports her continued use of this resource. (9 jurors consent, 1 stands outside in absentia)
4. [Elle] will write a letter to Professor [Stromwell] three weeks before returning to the Bi-Co community. The jury strongly encourages [Elle] and Professor [Stromwell] to meet upon [Elle’s] return to the Bi-Co. If the parties so choose, a member of the jury or of the Honor Council Executive Board can facilitate this meeting. (9 jurors consent, 1 stands outside in absentia)

5. [Elle] will meet up with two jurors on Haverford’s Campus within the first two months after her return to the Bi-Co. (9 jurors consent, 1 stands outside in absentia)

6. The jury supports [Elle's] consistent communication with her psychiatrist. (9 jurors consent, 1 stands outside in absentia)

7. [Elle] will attend at least one discussion-based event on Haverford’s campus of her choosing within the first semester after her return to the Bi-Co (e.g. an abstract discussion, [re]act discussion, etc). (9 jurors consent, 1 stands outside in absentia)

8. The jury recommends that [Elle’s] grade in [Law 300] appear as a 0.0 on her transcript, but that this grade not be factored into her GPA. (8 jurors consent, 1 stands outside, 1 stands outside in absentia)

9. [Elle] will meet with her major advisor, or another [law] professor, within the first quarter of her first semester back in the Bi-Co to discuss her plan for the completion of her major. The jury supports her continued communication with professors throughout the remainder of her time in the Bi-Co. (9 jurors consent, 1 stands outside in absentia)

10. [Elle] will write a letter to the community within one month after the completion of her first semester back in the Bi-Co. (9 jurors consent, 1 stands outside in absentia)

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

**Statement on Reporting:**
The jury feels that this violation would not result in a disciplinary procedure at another institution of higher learning. Therefore, the jury suggests that this case not be reported as a disciplinary proceeding to other institutions of higher learning. (9 jurors consent, 1 stands outside in absentia)

**Post-Trial:**
The resolutions were not appealed. However, the confronted party plagiarized their letter to the community (Resolution #10). This situation was dealt with in a social trial, with an abstract not yet released.

**Discussion Questions:**
1. How can juries balance accountability with restoration in trials like this?
2. How should juries balance the information given from Honor Board trials at Bryn Mawr?