Charlotte’s Web:
An Honor Council Academic Trial
Released Spring 2019

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Key:
Confronted Party: Wilbur
Confronting Party: Professor Charlotte
Course: Web Design 150

Summary/Pre-Trial:
Wilbur, a student in Web Design 150, contacted Honor Council after being confronted by Professor Charlotte for using the professor’s posted solutions to complete a problem set. Due to a heavy caseload at the time, this trial was run with nine jurors and chaired by an experienced member of Honor Council.

Fact Finding:
This meeting began with both parties summarizing their understanding of the events. Professor Charlotte noted that Wilbur had taken one of the allowed “free” extensions on his problem set, which meant that the solutions for the problem set were posted for the rest of the class’ use before Wilbur turned in his problem set. Accessing those solutions were explicitly disallowed for students taking extensions. One of the farmhands for the course notified Professor Charlotte that Wilbur’s problem set closely resembled the posted solutions. Professor Charlotte then confronted Wilbur about this and he immediately admitted that he had in fact used the solutions to complete his problem set.

Wilbur seconded Professor Charlotte’s account, noting that he had used the solutions for the whole of the problem set and felt this constituted a violation of the Honor Code. The jury then spoke briefly with each party alone in which they clarified some points of the timeline, and asked Professor Charlotte about Wilbur’s performance in the class otherwise. She noted that Wilbur had done very well on all exams and problem sets and that she had no reason to believe that Wilbur had acted dishonestly on any other work.
Jury Deliberations/Statement of Violation:

All jurors agreed that Wilbur’s actions constituted a violation of the Honor Code. They discussed the nature of this violation, noting that it was deliberate, as Wilbur was clearly aware that his actions violated course policies. They considered whether Wilbur’s use of the solutions constituted plagiarism, and ultimately decided that, though it was a form of plagiarism, it was better classified as use of disallowed resources. The jury consented to the following statement of violation:

Statement of Violation:

[Wilbur] violated the Honor Code by deliberately using his professor’s solutions to the problem set, which was explicitly disallowed (8 consent, 1 stands outside in absentia).

Circumstantial Portion:

The meeting began with Wilbur reiterating the circumstances he had shared during the fact-finding meeting. He had several assignments due the same week as the problem set and did not leave himself enough time to complete it, so he decided in the moment to look at the solution set. The jury asked Wilbur some questions regarding his use of campus resources such as the OAR, Professor Charlotte’s office hours, and the [Web Design Help Center]. He said that he had attended some OAR sessions on time management, but had made little use of the other resources, noting that he was used to working on his own from high school and had maintained that habit in college.

The jury asked what resolutions Wilbur thought were appropriate, and he suggested that a grade of 0 on the problem set plus one additional step down (e.g. 4.0 to 3.7) and writing a letter to the community. Professor Charlotte said she felt similarly about a grade change, offering either 2 steps down without factoring in the problem set or a 0 and one step down (these were essentially equivalent). The jury asked each party separately how they felt about their working relationship. Professor Charlotte expressed feeling comfortable with Wilbur, noting that he had apologized sincerely during their confrontation and that a meeting would not be particularly productive. Wilbur noted feeling somewhat intimidated by Professor Charlotte in general and not really knowing where he stood in terms of this incident.

Jury Deliberations:

After the parties left, the jury discussed potential resolutions. Everyone agreed with Wilbur’s suggestion that he write a letter to the community. They also felt comfortable with the proposed grade change, with some mixed feelings on how to state it (whether it should be 2 steps down excluding the problem set or one step down in addition to a 0 on the problem set). Some jurors liked the consistency of the two steps down, while others felt philosophically that the 0 on the problem set should be factored into his grade.
The jury then discussed whether a meeting between the parties would be helpful. Many felt after talking with them and hearing Professor Charlotte’s feedback that a meeting between the two of them would likely accomplish very little. They did, however, want to offer a space for Wilbur to reflect on the trial and decided that he should meet with the Honor Council librarian. They also felt it might be helpful for Wilbur to try to establish better relationships with professors going forward so that he would feel more comfortable using professors as a resource, and making use of office hours as a helpful time management tool. Some jurors felt uncomfortable mandating attendance of office hours/meetings, but decided to do so for now with the plan to get feedback from Wilbur on whether he would find this useful.

The jury discussed what other resources might be useful for Wilbur going forward. Some jurors expressed that he might find individual sessions with an OAR staff member more useful than the group sessions he had previously attended. They decided to mandate only one meeting in order to allow Wilbur to determine what was most helpful for him and not have him attend meetings just for the sake of doing so.

The jury returned to the issue of the grade change. The weight of the room was in favor of a 0 on the problem set and an additional reduction of one step down. One juror was uncomfortable with the fact that this might affect him differently depending on how well he was doing in the class. They discussed the merits of doing it one way vs. the other, ultimately deciding that the 0 on the problem set option felt less arbitrary than the other. They decided they would consent to the former and ask Professor Charlotte about the potential implications of each on Wilbur’s grade and reflect further.

**Tentative Resolutions:**

1. The jury recommends that [Wilbur] receive a 0.0 on the problem set and an additional grade reduction of one step down (e.g. from 4.0 to 3.7). (9 Jurors consent).
2. [Wilbur] will write a letter to the community by [date]. (9 Jurors consent).
3. [Wilbur] will meet with [an OAR staff member] once within the first 5 weeks of the [next] semester. The jury encourages him to continue to do so if he finds it helpful. (9 Jurors consent).
4. [Wilbur] will meet with each of his professors in the first 5 weeks of the [next] semester. (9 Jurors consent).
5. Before writing his letter to the community, [Wilbur] will meet with the Honor Council Librarian to discuss any remaining thoughts and questions about the trial. (9 Jurors consent).

*On Resolutions as a whole: (9 Jurors consent).*
Tentative Statement on Reporting
Although this case may have been considered disciplinary at other institutions, the jury feels [Wilbur’s] status as a [redacted class year student] and the relatively minor scale of the violation should be taken into account. Additionally, the jury feels this represented a momentary lapse in judgement, rather than a general lack of integrity. (9 Jurors consent).

Finalizing Resolutions:
Wilbur and Professor Charlotte were both comfortable with the resolutions as they stood. Wilbur noted that he believed meeting with his professors at the start of the semester would be helpful, and Professor Charlotte clarified that the two potential grade changes the jury had discussed would most likely result in the same final grade for Wilbur. The parties left, and the jury reviewed the resolutions. Everyone felt comfortable with the resolutions as they were and did not feel there was anything that should be added or changed. They consented to the following set of resolutions:

Final Resolutions
1. The jury recommends that [Wilbur] receive a 0.0 on the problem set and an additional grade reduction of one step down (e.g. from 4.0 to 3.7). (8 Jurors consent, 1 stands outside in absentia).
2. [Wilbur] will write a letter to the community by [date]. (8 Jurors consent, 1 stands outside in absentia).
3. [Wilbur] will meet with [an OAR staff member] once within the first 5 weeks of the [next] semester. The jury encourages him to continue to do so if he finds it helpful. (8 Jurors consent, 1 stands outside in absentia).
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Statement on reporting
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[Wilbur’s] status as a [redacted class year student] and the relatively minor scale of the violation should be taken into account. Additionally, the jury feels this represented a momentary lapse in judgement, rather than a general lack of integrity. (8 Jurors consent, 1 stands outside in absentia).

Post-Trial:
The trial was not appealed.

Discussion Questions:
1. How should juries consider, if at all, a confronted party’s class year during the trial process?
2. What does it mean that Honor Council so frequently has extreme caseloads which require modifications of juries? (e.g. 9-person jury, chaired by a non Co-Chair, etc.)