

1987 Honor Council Abstract: Sylvia

Summary: Security officer Hughes was called about extraordinarily loud music coming from a student's room. When he got there, he asked the person playing the music, Sylvia, to turn it down. She turned the music down, but after officer Hughes left, turned the music up again. When officer Hughes returned to again request that the music be turned down, the music was turned down. Officer Hughes then waited to see if the music would be turned up again. When it was, he told Sylvia that the Dean of the College would have to be called. As he was leaving, he heard some slurs against the Dean of the College and one racial slur against him. Because it was an administrative concern and a student concern socially, a Dean's Panel (consisting of four members of Honor Council and a Dean) assembled to resolve the situation.

At the inquiry, Sylvia told the panel she had not made the slurs against the Dean of the College, nor had she made any racist remark. The jury determined there had been a violation of the social Honor Code regarding the agreement between Sylvia and Officer Hughes to turn down the music. The jury's resolution:

- 1) Sylvia and Officer Hughes should meet to discuss the incident;
- 2) Sylvia and two members of the jury would meet to talk about the treatment of people who are not under the Honor Code.
- 3) The jury issued a statement about the responsibility of the social host.

I. FACT-FINDING

The panel brought Officer Hughes in to elaborate on the incident. Officer Hughes said that there were complaints about the noise from somewhere on campus. He went to quiet the music. Sylvia appeared to be intoxicated: "she was holding a bottle in her hand and the room was full of beer bottles." He had to return three times in order to get the music turned down. After the third time, he heard some slurs against the Dean of the College. Then he heard a derogatory racist remark directed at him. He left and filed a report with his supervisor. He said he was not sure it was Sylvia who said it, but "I definitely heard it." Since Sylvia had been standing in the window, she was the only person officer Hughes could identify.

Confronted party: Sylvia said that nothing was yelled out the window. She said that the comments about the Dean may have been said, but not by her. She was certain that the racist remark had not been said, and was "shocked" upon learning that the officer had heard such a remark. She was certain that if such a remark had been made, it would have

stuck in her mind, since it is so unacceptable. Sylvia had turned up the music after Officer Hughes left because she felt annoyed that an "authority figure", in the form of Officer Hughes, came to shut down the party music. In retrospect, she said that her action "was stupid."

The jury came to concensus that there was a violation of the social Honor Code regarding Sylvia's failure to follow through on her agreement with Officer Hughes to turn down the music. Officer Hughes could not trust Sylvia but had to wait outside to check on her.

The jury also issued the following statements:

- 1) Regarding the slurs about the Dean of the College, the jury issued a statement: "We find such undirected expressions of frustration unnecessary and disrespectful, but we cannot say that they constitute a violation of the Code."
- 3) The jury found the racial slur "clearly inconsistent with the standards of the community." However, Officer Hughes could not confirm that Sylvia made the comment and she insisted she didn't say it, so the comment could not be attributed to Sylvia.
- 4) The jury also stated that the use of alcohol played a role in this incident. Only Sylvia knows how large a role it in fact did play. We ask that she consider this issue as she reflects upon what happened on the evening in question.

II. CIRCUMSTANTIAL

Sylvia returned to the room and was informed of the jury's decision. Regarding the violation, she was surprised but said she understood why the jury found her action problematic. She turned the music up after she told the officer she would turn it down not to indicate a disregard for the security officer, but because she felt frustrated at being told to turn down the music. She felt there had been no dialogue with Officer Hughes that night and was bothered that a representative of authority simply told her she must turn down the music. She "really felt it had nothing to do with the Code", because the officer was not under the Honor Code.

III. RESOLUTION

Tentative: 1. Sylvia suggested that she and Officer Hughes should meet to discuss their conduct of that evening. The jury agreed to Sylvia's proposal.

2. The jury decided that two of its members should meet with Sylvia to go over two points which had been raised during the trial:

a. Sylvia must be considerate of people outside the community. The professor who had complained about the noise deserved the same respect given to fellow students. Sylvia's responsibility extends beyond people directly under the Honor Code.

b. Sylvia's words and actions had been inconsistent. She had told the officer she would turn down the music, then went back on her word and turned the music back up. The officer could not trust Sylvia to turn down the music but had to wait to confirm her actions.

3. The jury also related to Sylvia the discussion it had had about the responsibility of a party-thrower for her/his guests. On one hand, the host has a responsibility for the neighbors and for guests. The host should try to keep her/his guests in check and is obligated to do something about guests' actions which the host finds offensive, or dangerous. Under the Honor Code, we take responsibility for others' actions. On the other hand, it is often difficult to control guests' actions or words, especially at a large party. The panel realized that the host cannot "put a muzzle" on her/his guests.

Final: Sylvia reacted positively to the resolution. The tentative resolution became the final resolution.