

# **High School Musical: An Honor Council Academic Trial Released Fall 2019**

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 consented to the release of the abstract.

## **Key:**

**Confronting Party:** Professor Troy

**Confronted Party:** Ryan

**Course Name:** Basketball 101

## **Summary/Pre-Trial:**

Honor Council became aware of the potential plagiarism violation when Professor Troy reached out about a student, Ryan, in his Basketball 101 class. When the situation was reported, Honor Council could not review the case to discuss whether or not to send it to trial because the Honor Code had not been ratified after Spring Plenary. Honor Council trials are run within the guidelines of the Code, so the failure to ratify the Honor Code paused all trial work. Interim guidelines provided by the administration were in place given that the community had agreed to go to Special Plenary at a later date. For the purposes of this abstract, "Old Code" will refer to the Honor Code before the Spring Plenary of 2018, and "New Code" will refer to the Honor Code after Special Plenary 2018. Honor Council returned to the case once the New Code had been ratified.

The Trial Chair explained these circumstances to the confronting party, confronted parties, and jury for clarity and to determine the set of guidelines under which the trial would be run. The violation in question was committed under the Old Code, but it was brought to Council under the Interim Guidelines and was finally being run with the New Code in place. There have never been, nor are there currently, any procedures for such circumstances, so the Trial Chair decided to seek the agreement of both parties and come to a consensus as a jury to make the decision. After multiple discussions between the parties and the jury, all parties involved agreed that the trial should be run under the Old Code.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Copies of the Old and New Honor Code can both be found on the Honor Council Website.

**Fact Finding:**

The jury met with Ryan and Professor Troy for the Fact Finding meeting, with Professor Troy present by phone. Professor Troy explained that his teaching assistant noticed that Ryan's problem set had the exact wording of the answer key. Problem sets were weekly assignments with multiple parts. The teaching assistant noticed the exact wording on one of the homework problems, which required a written response, and notified Professor Troy. Professor Troy reached out to Ryan. Ryan admitted to searching online for help because he had not felt confident in how to word his answer, nor in using those answers as his own.

Professor Troy stated that, because he couldn't access the link that Ryan had found, he believed Ryan used an illegal online answer key in a language that Professor Troy assumed Ryan could read. Professor Troy noted in his statement that he had already given Ryan a 0 on the problem set, and, because students are allowed to drop their lowest problem set grade, this assignment had already been dropped from Ryan's final grade. The Trial Chair asked if the jury had any questions for Professor Troy before hearing Ryan's account of what happened. One juror asked the professor to clarify what he meant when he said he couldn't access the website Ryan had used. Professor Troy answered that teachers manuals are typically accessible only by instructors, so the copy Ryan found must have been illegal.

There were no more questions from the jury, so Ryan gave his account of what happened. Ryan largely agreed with the account of events given by Professor Troy, reiterating that he had felt unsure of how to word his answer and had Googled the question for help. Ryan said he clicked the first link he found, which was the PDF referenced by Professor Troy, and had copied his answers from it. Professor Troy interjected that it was a link in another language, but Ryan responded that he did not speak or read said language. The jury became concerned with Professor Troy's behavior and statement regarding the link, but did not address Professor Troy in the moment.

The Trial Chair asked Ryan how the answers from the PDF made it into the problem set. Ryan responded that he hadn't known the PDF was an answer key. He already had an idea of what the answer should be, but thought the PDF provided better wording, and so used its wording. The jury asked additional clarifying questions about the guidelines and expectations of the problem set. Professor Troy said that he allowed collaboration and the use of internet resources, but both he and Ryan felt that Ryan's actions constituted plagiarism. The Trial Chair then gave the parties the option to speak with the jury individually, without the other present. Professor Troy did not feel this was necessary. After Professor Troy hung-up, the jury apologized to Ryan for Professor Troy's comments. The jury felt that Professor Troy's assumption that Ryan could read a specific language based on his appearance and characterization of the PDF as "illegal" were offensive, xenophobic, and racist.

**Jury Deliberations/Statement of Violation:**

After Ryan left, all of the jurors expressed frustration with Professor Troy's comments.

Beyond whether or not Ryan had violated the Honor Code, the jury felt strongly that Professor Troy's actions needed to be addressed. They felt that the combination of the assumption that Ryan read the language of the PDF and the continual characterization of the PDF as "illegal" was particularly troubling.

The jury decided to first focus on a statement of violation or non-violation and discuss at the end of the meeting how to best address Professor Troy's comments. The jury unanimously agreed that a violation of the Honor Code had occurred, but that the parties had largely handled it in a mutually comfortable manner. Both parties were comfortable with the decision Professor Troy made to give Ryan a 0 on the problem set and drop it from his grade with no further accountability measures. The jury discussed to what extent the trial goals had already been met and how to accurately represent Ryan's violation of the Honor Code in the Statement of Violation. The jury eventually agreed that the use of the online resource was not a violation, as it was permissible under the assignment guidelines, but copying the language verbatim was a violation of the Code. The jury then discussed how to best represent the comparatively small amount of this recurring assignment that was plagiarized. The jury came to the following statement of violation.

***Statement of Violation:*** *Ryan violated the Honor Code by committing an act of plagiarism on part of a problem set question. (9 jurors consent, 1 stands outside in absentia)*

The jury briefly discussed the best way to directly address Professor Troy's comments. The professor had previously expressed that he did not feel he needed to be present for the circumstantial portion of the trial, which is typically optional for the confronting party. Since it was already very late, the trial chair offered to draft a summary of the jury's concerns in the form of a letter to Professor Troy.

**Circumstantial Portion:**

The jury met with Ryan for the circumstantial portion of the trial. Ryan stated that he hadn't had a problem with plagiarism in any of his other classes. He had thought at the time that, since it was only two sentences and he already had an idea of what the response was, his actions weren't plagiarism. The trial chair asked if the professor had reviewed the concept of plagiarism at the start of the semester, and Ryan said Professor Troy had not. Ryan also felt that Professor Troy had been unclear with regards to his expectations for citations. Ryan explained that he felt confident citing properly on essays in classes that provided clearer guidelines, and he was now uncomfortable with the fact that he hadn't considered the need to cite on this assignment. Ryan asked whether the jury was considering separation, concerned he would potentially not be able to return to school if he was separated. Although the jury had not yet discussed separation, they assured Ryan that they did not feel separation would be appropriate. After this, Ryan left and the jury began deliberations.

### **Jury Deliberations and Tentative Resolutions:**

The jury began deliberations by reviewing the letter written by the trial chair. The jury generally felt that the letter summarized their thoughts well. All jurors felt that it would be best to contact Professor Troy before the end of the trial. Some jurors expressed concern about potential retaliation against Ryan, and wanted to emphasize the importance of working toward restoration. The jury discussed writing a resolution addressing Professor Troy, sending him an email, speaking to him over the phone, or a combination of these. Since the jury was unsure, they decided to develop resolutions for Ryan and make a decision about the letter later.

The jury discussed what they wanted to address with tentative resolutions. Some jurors felt that it would be helpful for Ryan to take advantage of resources at the writing center more often to review citation expectations. One juror pointed out that general citation wasn't as much of a problem as knowing when to cite and the citation expectations for each discipline. One juror suggested writing center tutors with a focus in Basketball. Ryan, however, had mentioned he wasn't planning on taking any more Basketball classes, so a discipline specific peer tutor wouldn't be helpful. The jury also discussed a meeting at the OAR to review the differences between paraphrasing, quoting, and plagiarism. The jury felt that some sort of tutoring meeting, combined with having Ryan prepare a how-to-cite guide, would be best.

The jury then discussed the grade change that professor Troy made, and whether or not they wanted to recommend an additional change. Most jurors felt that, because both parties seemed comfortable with the situation as-is, that any further grade changes would be unnecessary. The jury then discussed the statement on reporting. Many jurors felt that since the parties were largely on the same page and that Ryan understood where he went wrong, that this incident did not need to be reported. Resolutions encompassing all of these thoughts went through several drafts before those that the jury decided upon, as provided at the end of this section.

The jury returned to the letter addressing Professor Troy. After carefully writing the letter, the jury eventually agreed to both send the letter as an email attachment to Professor Troy that night and to include it as a resolution. The jury left for the night and the Trial Chair sent the tentative resolutions and corresponding letter to both parties so they could provide feedback, ask questions, and voice any concerns at the finalizing meeting.

#### ***Tentative resolutions:***

1. *When [Ryan] feels unsure how to articulate phrases in an assignment, the jury recommends that [Ryan] seek out a peer tutor who specializes in that field. (8 jurors consent, 2 stand outside in absentia)*
2. *The jury recommends that [Ryan] meet with someone in the OAR to review the differences between using one's own original content and paraphrasing or quoting.*
  - a. *[Ryan] will write a letter explaining how his actions violated the Honor Code using information from this meeting, as well as what he gained from this*

*resolution. [Ryan] will also reflect on what actions would be appropriate should a student find themselves struggling to phrase a concept. This letter will be sent to the Honor Council Staff Support person and appended to the end of this abstract upon release. (8 jurors consent, 2 stand outside in absentia)*

- 3. [Ryan] will make sure that he understands the citation standards for his future classes. This would include thoroughly reading the syllabus for his future classes, and reviewing the citation resources available online through the Writing Center by discipline (Humanities, Social Sciences, and Natural Sciences). (8 jurors consent, 2 stand outside in absentia)*
- 4. The jury supports [Professor Troy] in giving [Ryan] a 0 on the problem set. (8 jurors consent, 2 stand outside in absentia)*
- 5. The jury will write a letter to [Professor Troy] regarding racist comments made during the trial. The jury also implores [Professor Troy] to consider the impact of his words on [Ryan] and the jury rather than solely their intent. This letter will be appended to the abstract upon release. (8 jurors consent, 2 stand outside in absentia)*

***Statement on reporting:***

*The jury does not recommend that this case be reported to institutions of higher learning. (8 jurors consent, 2 stand outside in absentia)*

***Finalizing Resolutions:***

The jury met with Ryan for finalizing. (Professor Troy did not respond to communication from the Trial Chair throughout the duration of the trial and afterwards). The jury asked Ryan if he had any feedback about the resolutions. Ryan asked clarifying questions regarding the second resolution and the deadline for completion of the resolutions as a whole. The jurors assured him that they would add deadlines to the resolutions. Ryan thanked the jury for supporting him with resolution five, and had no further comments or concerns. After Ryan left, a few jurors asked if it was constitutionally acceptable for the jury to finalize resolutions without feedback from the confronting party, which the trial chair confirmed with the librarian. The jury added deadlines to the resolutions and consented on the following final resolutions:

***Finalized Resolutions***

- 1. When [Ryan] feels unsure how to articulate phrases in an assignment, the jury recommends that [Ryan] seek out a peer tutor who specializes in that field. (8 jurors consent, 2 stand outside in absentia)*
- 2. [Ryan] will meet with someone in the OAR to review the differences between using one's own original content and paraphrasing or quoting.*
  - a. [Ryan] will write a letter explaining how his actions violated the Honor Code using information from this meeting, as well as what he gained from this*

*resolution. [Ryan] will also reflect on what actions would be appropriate should a student find themselves struggling with how to phrase a concept. This letter will be sent to the Honor Council Staff Support Person and appended to the abstract upon its release. This resolution will be completed by the end of [time period]. (8 jurors consent, 2 stand outside in absentia)*

3. *[Ryan] will make sure that he understands the citation standards for his future classes. This will include thoroughly reading the syllabi for his courses and reviewing the citation resources available online through the writing center by discipline. (8 jurors consent, 2 stand outside in absentia)*
4. *The jury supports [Professor Troy] in giving [Ryan] a 0 on the problem set. (8 jurors consent, 2 stand outside in absentia)*
5. *The jury will write a letter to [Professor Troy] regarding racist comments made during the trial. The jury implores [Professor Troy] to consider the impact of his words on [Ryan] and the jury rather than solely their intent. This letter will be appended to the abstract upon its release. (8 jurors consent, 2 stand outside in absentia)*

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

**Statement on reporting:**

*The jury does not recommend that this case be reported to institutions of higher learning (8 jurors consent, 2 stand outside in absentia)*

**Post-Trial:**

The trial was not appealed.

**Letter from Ryan to the community**

I violated the Honor Code for using a sentence from a resource I found online without properly citing or paraphrasing it. Although it is not for a paper, I should still cite the source or paraphrase it into my own words. If the professor did not give specific instructions on how to cite sources used, I should always ask for more instructions.

I met with [a tutor] from the OAR to discuss how to paraphrase sentences or ideas into my own words. Because English is not my first language, I am not so confident in writing. I like to use direct quotes because I feel like how can I say it better than the author, they are the experts. That is also one of the reasons I did not paraphrase the sentence enough in my homework problem set. But [the tutor] explained to me that when writing my own work I should have the confidence that my work is unique. The sources I am using are only helping me to reach my destination, I should not have my own voice lost in all the quotes.

As for specific techniques, [the tutor] suggested to me that when paraphrasing quotes or ideas, I can explain the quotes or ideas to a friend or someone at the writing center orally. When explaining the idea to someone not familiar with the subject, I will come up with my own way of

conveying the idea efficiently. When paraphrasing a quote, I should first deconstruct the sentence into multiple possible ways of saying, then reconstructing it in the way I need the sentence to function in my own writing. We practiced deconstruction and reconstruction with one sentence and I found this technique very useful. I realized what I did not do enough in my previous paraphrase is deconstruction, thus when I try to paraphrase, my sentence always refers back to the original quote.

### **Letter from the jury to Professor Troy**

Dear Professor Troy,

Hello, we as the jury would like to address some of the discussion that took place during fact finding. We found your multiple declarations that the PDF answer key link was in [a particular language], and that it was illegal, very concerning. Firstly, Ryan does not speak [the language in the PDF], and more importantly is not [of the racial background you assumed Ryan was]. Secondly, Ryan used the exact words of the question to find the PDF using Google rather than explicitly looking for an illegal copy of the answer key. Therefore, we felt that these comments racially profiled Ryan. In the spirit of making Honor Council trials a space where both parties feel respected by each other and the jury, we felt that it would be remiss of us not to address the microaggressive nature of these statements.

As we move through the trial process, we would like you to consider the impact of your words on Ryan rather than solely their intent. Seeing as we came to a statement of violation, we recognize that Ryan violated the Honor Code and did not hold up the standards expected of Haverford students. We understand this to be the perspective you are speaking from; however, we must also address that these comments were racist in nature. We want to emphasize that as a jury, we cannot support this kind of framework, regardless of intentionality. We want this trial to be an inclusive space for both you and Ryan, and we hope to have a positive and restorative process moving forward. If I can explain any further, or if you have any questions or comments, please don't hesitate to reach out to me.

Best,

[The Trial Chair]

### **Discussion Questions:**

1. How can trial juries and students react when professors make prejudiced comments?
2. How do racism and prejudice affect Honor Council proceedings?
3. How should a trial jury confront a Confronting Party?
4. How should juries react when a Confronting Party is not responsive?