

The Matrix:

An Honor Council Academic Trial

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Key:

Confronted Party: Neo

Confronting Party: Professor Smith

Course: Alternative Reality Simulations 333

Summary:

While assembling notes and quotes for his paper proposal and literature review, Neo failed to quote portions of text that he had copied and pasted from online resources. When writing, he used these portions of text from his notes sheet, uncited, believing it to be his own work because it was unquoted in his notes. When Professor Smith noticed wording that he found to be beyond Neo's understanding, he searched the text to confirm that it was plagiarized, and confronted Neo who immediately realized what had gone wrong. Throughout the trial, Professor Smith and Neo expressed respect for each other. The level of cooperation between Professor Smith and Neo allowed the jury to focus more on community trust, as the relationship between Professor Smith and Neo was already far on its way to being restored. The jury easily came to a statement of violation but struggled to formulate a grade-change resolution to which the entire group felt they could consent.

Fact Finding:

Neo explained that he had created a notes document that compiled all of the quotes that he felt were pertinent as well as his own thoughts on readings and lectures. He used this notes document to write his proposal and literature review, copying and pasting cited quotes and his own notes. After Neo submitted the assignments, Professor Smith reached out to ask about the portions that seemed suspicious. When he looked back at the notes document, Neo realized that the portions Professor Smith had questioned were in fact quotes from articles that he had failed to cite when he pasted them into his notes document. When he had assembled his paper proposal and literature review, Neo had taken these uncited and unquoted portions to be his own words that he had written at a previous time.

Professor Smith gave a similar account of the events. He said that when he read Neo's assignments, the plagiarized portions had stood out to him because they seemed too advanced for a student to have written on their own. He clarified that Neo was an exceptional student for whom he had the utmost respect. Professor Smith stated that he believed this incident was a mistake, and he did not believe Neo had plagiarized intentionally. He said, however, that he was still surprised that this had happened, because he had given extensive plagiarism training in his course and warned against the dangers of this particular form of note-taking. The jury asked Neo if he remembered the plagiarism training or Professor Smith's mention about the note taking strategy. He said that he did not remember it explicitly but believed that Professor Smith may have mentioned it.

Jury Deliberations/Statement of Violation:

The jury felt unanimously that a violation had occurred and the trial goals of education, accountability, and restoration were all on their way to being met. The jury hoped to focus their resolutions on education, especially regarding citation and note-taking practices. After some discussion, the jury decided to leave the statement vague so as not to be unnecessarily wordy.

Statement of Violation:

[Neo] violated the Honor Code by plagiarizing short fragments of other scholars' work. (All jurors consent)

Circumstantial Portion/Jury Deliberations I:

Neither Neo nor Professor Smith felt that there was anything circumstantial pertaining to the situation worth mentioning. The jury asked some questions about Neo's experience with plagiarism training, and he expressed that he did not feel he had had adequate plagiarism training at the college level but was eager to rectify this.

After the parties left, the jury started discussing resolutions. These included a resolution supporting Professor Smith's decision to have Neo rewrite the assignment prior to the trial, a resolution requiring Neo to re-read the Haverford Honor Code, and resolutions supporting and encouraging Neo to take advantage of on-campus resources for academic and stress management. Additionally, the jury felt that a letter to the community would be beneficial for both Neo and the community. The jury felt that such a letter could be a good resource for other students and for HCOs because it could attest to the fact that a well-meaning student may end up plagiarizing not because of any mal-intent but because of poor note-taking practices.

When the jury opened discussion regarding a grade change, which Professor Smith said he felt was necessary, it became clear that two of the jurors had a strongly held moral opposition to numerical grades as a system. While one of the two jurors felt that a grade change seemed punitive, did not help the trial goals, and played into, and thus gave validity to, the already problematic system of quantitative grades, he was willing to stand outside of consensus if the

other jurors felt strongly that a grade change was necessary. The other juror expressed a moral opposition to grade changes, citing another trial that he had been on in which he felt there had been a miscarriage of justice relating to an overly punitive grade change.

The other jurors expressed unease with the idea of a student plagiarizing and not having this action reflected in their grade. The two jurors opposed to grade changes believed that altering a grade was punitive and rewriting the assignment was accountability enough. Other jurors expressed desire to defer to Professor Smith to decide on a grade change. The chair explained that all grade change resolutions are ultimately suggestions and that the final decision would be up to Professor Smith, who said that he would follow what the jury suggested.

Since it was evident that no more progress could be made at the moment, the jury began fleshing out the education resolutions, especially ones that recommended resources to Neo. After some time spent on these resolutions, the jury considered returning to the topic of a grade change. Although many jurors wanted to return to the topic, one juror requested a few days to reflect. Over the course of this conversation, it became evident that the two jurors were still opposed to a grade change in any form, while the rest of the jury still felt uncomfortable omitting a grade change. The jury discussed the impact of a grade change given the weight of the assignment was worth, and some jurors wanted to reach out to Professor Smith for a grade change suggestion. Several of the jurors, however, worried that a recommendation from Professor Smith might sway the jury unfairly as they might feel uncomfortable presenting a resolution which differed from his opinion. Ultimately, the weight of the room was that, as an appointed jury of peers, the jurors were the most qualified to determine the grade change.

Jury Deliberations II:

At the beginning of the following meeting for deliberations, the chair suggested putting a cap on the grade that Neo could receive for the re-written assignment rather than enforcing a traditional grade deduction. The jurors who had advocated for a grade change had previously expressed frustration with the idea that Neo would receive the same grade as if he had not plagiarised if a grade change were not implemented. The proposed solution meant that the grade for the new assignment could not surpass the grade of the first assignment. This satisfied the majority of jurors, who felt that there should be quantitative ramifications for Neo's plagiarism.

All of the jurors felt comfortable with the resolution, although one of the two who felt opposed to a grade change still felt it was unnecessary. Another juror reminded the jury that Professor Smith felt that a grade change would help restore his relationship with Neo. For this reason, they felt comfortable with the idea of a cap which put the power in the hands of Professor Smith and did not seem like an arbitrary grade change.

Tentative Resolutions:

1. *[Neo] will read the Haverford Honor Code before the beginning of the [Semester]. (9 jurors consent, 1 juror stands outside in absentia)*

2. *The jury supports [Professor Smith]'s decision to have [Neo] rewrite the Literature Review prior to the trial. (9 jurors consent, 1 juror stands outside in absentia)*
3. *The jury recommends that the grade of the rewritten literature review replace the grades of the original literature review and paper proposal. The jury further recommends that [Professor Smith] grade the rewritten literature review such that the new grade is neither equal to nor greater than the original combined grade. (9 jurors consent, 1 juror stands outside in absentia)*
4. *The jury supports [Neo]'s decision to meet with his dean to address stressful situations. (9 jurors consent, 1 juror stands outside in absentia)*
5. *The jury encourages [Neo] to utilize the academic resources he has access to, including, but not limited to, the Haverford and Bryn Mawr Writing Centers, TA's, the OAR, [redacted] (BMC Academic Support and Learning Resources Specialist), Peer Tutors, and Professors' office hours. (9 jurors consent, 1 juror stands outside in absentia)*
6. *[Neo] will write a letter to the community which addresses the circumstances that may have contributed to his violation and reflects on how they could have been avoided. (To be completed before the beginning of the [Semester]) (9 jurors consent, 1 juror stands outside in absentia)*

On Resolutions as a Whole: 9 jurors consent, 1 juror stands outside in absentia

Statement on Reporting: *The jury unanimously believes that this proceeding should not be reported to other institutions of higher learning. (9 jurors consent, 1 juror stands outside in absentia)*

Finalizing Resolutions:

Neo and Professor Smith were comfortable with all of the resolutions. Neo asked for clarification and a change to the wording of resolution 5. Additionally, the jury added the paper proposal to Resolution 2 to show support for the rewrite of both assignments.

Final Resolutions:

1. *[Neo] will read the Haverford Honor Code before the beginning of the [Semester]. (9 jurors consent, 1 juror stands outside in absentia)*
2. *The jury supports [Professor Smith]'s decision to have [Neo] rewrite the paper proposal and literature review prior to the trial. (9 jurors consent, 1 juror stands outside in absentia)*
3. *The jury recommends that the grade of the rewritten literature review replace the grades of the original literature review and paper proposal. The jury further recommends that [Professor Smith] grade the rewritten literature review such that the new grade is neither equal to nor greater than the original combined grade. (9 jurors consent, 1 juror stands outside in absentia)*

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5. *The jury encourages [Neo] to utilize the academic resources he has access to, including, but not limited to, the Haverford and Bryn Mawr Writing Centers, TA's, the Office of Academic Resources (OAR), [redacted] (BMC Academic Support and Learning Resources Specialist), Peer Tutors, and Professors' office hours. (9 jurors consent, 1 juror stands outside in absentia)*
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Discussion Questions:

1. How can juries balance discomfort with grade structures with the need for accountability?
2. Do you feel that a grade cap is any less “arbitrary” than a grade reduction?

Letter to the Community:

To the Haverford Community,

During the past semester, I performed actions that have violated the Haverford honor code, specifically with regards to plagiarism. The incidence occurred due to the combination of several stressful factors, such as the mixture of unfamiliar and challenging courses I chose to took last semester, difficult and high level course material for this course, and stress coming in as an international student. All of which contributed to the occurrence of this incident. However, throughout the trail proceedings and the meeting with [Professor Smith], I realized that while unintentional in nature, my actions still violated the integrity of producing one’s own work. In the future, I would prevent this kind of incidences from happening by either looking for academic help from the Bi-Co resources or emotional support from my dean.

Best Regards,

[Neo]