Peter Rabbit: 
An Honor Council Academic Case 
Released Spring 2021

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Key:
Confronted Party: Peter Rabbit
Confronting Party: Professor McGregor
Course: Vegetable Gardening 111

Summary/Pre-Trial:
This case involved plagiarism on a homework assignment.

Fact Finding I (with Peter Rabbit):
Due to some scheduling issues, the jury met separately with Peter Rabbit and Professor McGregor. Peter Rabbit began by describing the assignment in question, which was one of a series of weekly assignments requiring a written response. Peter Rabbit said that this particular assignment required students to choose and argue for one of two hypotheses presented to them. Peter Rabbit said that he didn’t feel very comfortable with the topic, so he did some research to try to better his understanding. Peter Rabbit said he then began writing the assignment, and when he came to a point where he needed example sentences to reference, he saw some sentences he liked from the source he looked up, and included them in the assignment. Peter Rabbit said that he did this in a moment of lapsed judgement, and that not citing the source constituted plagiarism.

One juror asked Peter Rabbit how the article he found online related to the topic of the assignment. Peter Rabbit responded that his assignment was on how to best grow carrots, and the assignment included example sentences and two hypotheses. Students had to argue for one of the two hypotheses using the example sentences given to them. Peter Rabbit said he did use the sentences from the homework in his argument, but that he wanted to include more evidence to illustrate the best way to grow carrots in his write-up. Peter Rabbit said he used the sentences from the online source as additional evidence to support his argument. Another juror asked Peter Rabbit how many of the sentences he used in his assignment were from the uncited online source. Peter Rabbit replied that three out of seven or eight sentences he used were from the source. Peter Rabbit was then asked by a juror whether what he took from the online source was evidence for his argument or an analysis of the topic. Peter Rabbit clarified that he only used the
sentences as examples, and that he wrote his own analysis.

When asked how he could have properly cited the source he used, Peter Rabbit said that he could have explicitly stated that the examples he took were from the source he used. He also added that the example sentences were separate from the body of his own analysis. A juror then asked Peter Rabbit if the sentences he used from the online source were sentences he could have thought of on his own. Peter Rabbit said he could have used original examples. Another jury member followed up on Peter Rabbit saying he only used the sentences as examples in his own analysis, stating that Professor McGregor had mentioned Peter Rabbit using terminology in his write-up that he shouldn’t have known. This juror then asked Peter Rabbit whether this terminology came from the source he got the example sentences from. Peter Rabbit said he did not believe so.

Peter Rabbit was then asked whether the use of outside sources in the class was allowed at all, and if he knew of anyone else using outside sources on their assignments. Peter Rabbit said the course syllabus did not specify whether the use of outside sources was allowed or not, and that he did not know of anyone who had used outside sources on their assignments. A juror asked Peter Rabbit whether his argument lined up with the arguments made in the paper he found online. Peter Rabbit said that the paper he found was more informative than argumentative. Another juror then asked Peter Rabbit whether he had used outside sources for other assignments he had completed for the course. Peter Rabbit said that he had. The Fact Finding meeting then ended, and the jury began deliberations over their conversation with Peter Rabbit.

Jury Deliberations:

The jury began by considering the nature of Peter Rabbit’s potential violation of the Honor Code. One juror said they believe plagiarism occurred, but to a small degree, and that they weren’t sure whether that would qualify as a violation of the Honor Code or not. Another juror expressed concern regarding what Professor McGregor said in his statement about Peter Rabbit using terminology that students in the class wouldn’t have known. A third juror said that it was hard to believe that the source Peter Rabbit used did not influence or shape his assignment in any way. Another juror pointed out that Peter Rabbit said the source he used was more informative than argumentative. A juror then said that they wanted to see the examples Peter Rabbit took from the online source to see whether or not Professor McGregor could judge whether or not they were Peter Rabbit’s work by reading them. Another juror said that they believed this could mean that the higher-level terminology Professor McGregor said Peter Rabbit used in his assignment could be playing more of a role in characterizing a violation of the Honor Code. The jury as a whole seemed to agree that it would be beneficial to see Peter Rabbit’s assignment as well as the rubric for the assignment.

Fact Finding II (with Professor McGregor):

The jury then met with Professor McGregor. Professor McGregor said he was grading the assignment when he noticed that the examples Peter Rabbit gave and the language he used in his
analysis were too high-level for the class. Professor McGregor said this made him suspicious, so he did a Google search and found the source Peter Rabbit used for his assignment. He said Peter Rabbit admitted to using the source without citing it when he first confronted him about it.

One juror asked Professor McGregor whether he permitted the use of outside sources in the class. Professor McGregor responded that it was a gray area — he designed the class such that outside sources were not needed, but that he didn’t ban students, especially prospective Gardening majors, from researching topics if they were interested in them or wanted to learn more about them and what the literature said. Another juror said that Peter Rabbit didn’t fully understand the topic of the assignment, and asked if there was a textbook he could use to help him. Professor McGregor said that instead of using a textbook, he provided students with daily handouts detailing the information they needed to know. He also said students could work in small groups for the assignment or email him if they had any questions.

When asked about the examples Peter Rabbit used from the online source, Professor McGregor said that he did not think Peter Rabbit understood them because they did not adequately support his argument, and they seemed to be randomly placed in the assignment. One juror asked Professor McGregor whether Peter Rabbit used the examples from the online source as evidence for his analysis or if he used analysis from the source. Professor McGregor replied that he believed Peter Rabbit had attempted to use them to support his own arguments, but that they didn’t make much sense in his write-up. Professor McGregor also said that he believed Peter Rabbit had googled the topic because he was unfamiliar with it, and when he looked up the source he took the examples from, he might have just forgotten to cite it. Professor McGregor noted, however, that the online source Peter Rabbit referenced covered the same topic as the assignment, but it did not relate to what students specifically learned in class. Professor McGregor also noted that his course policy was to drop each student’s lowest grade, and that if the jury recommended a grade change for Peter Rabbit that grade should not be able to be dropped.

**Jury Deliberations II:**

The jury met again to deliberate after hearing from both Peter Rabbit and Professor McGregor. The jurors began discussing the contradiction between Peter Rabbit saying he had used outside sources on previous assignments and Professor McGregor saying he had not. One juror noted that they might not feel comfortable taking this into account. Another juror said this contradiction could be because Peter Rabbit was not used to citing examples. A third juror noted that since the sentences Peter Rabbit included in his assignment were blatantly copied according to Professor McGregor, Peter Rabbit not citing them could have really been unintentional. The trial chair responded that even if plagiarism was unintentional, it still constituted a violation of the Honor Code. One juror then said they wondered whether Peter Rabbit looked at outside sources to get a better understanding of the topic, but did not cite them. Another juror said that Professor McGregor said that students looking up outside information was rare in the class. The trial chair noted that it would make sense, however, for a student to look up a topic they didn't
understand especially since the class had no assigned textbook.

One juror said they believed that by giving Peter Rabbit a 0 on the assignment, he was already being punished and as such no other action was needed. The trial chair then reviewed the trial goals of education, accountability, and restoration. The trial chair agreed that there was no need to deliberate a grade change, but that resolutions could address other aspects of what happened; they specifically suggested a resolution pertaining to education. One juror said that plagiarism consisted of stealing another’s ideas, not simply example sentences. Another juror said they believed a violation still occurred because Peter Rabbit could have come up with his own examples, and that in carrot gardening, thinking of specific examples is difficult, so Peter Rabbit taking the sentences from the online source did constitute taking another’s ideas. A third juror agreed, emphasizing that Peter Rabbit did not do anything to change the sentences and that they did not go particularly well with his analysis. The jurors then consented to the following statement of violation:

Statement of Violation:

[Peter Rabbit] violated the Honor Code by using examples from an academic source without citation. (9 jurors consent, 1 stands outside in absentia)

The jury then returned to the suggestion of giving Peter Rabbit a 0 on his assignment. Since it was Professor McGregor’s policy to drop students’ lowest grade, the jury discussed the feasibility of a grade change that couldn’t be dropped. The trial chair said they thought Peter Rabbit should get a 0 on the assignment, but finding a way not to drop that grade would be a challenge. One juror said they would be uncomfortable with recommending that Peter Rabbit’s grade be lowered by one step. Another juror said that Peter Rabbit receiving a 0 on the assignment would likely result in Peter Rabbit’s grade decreasing by a step regardless.

Circumstantial:

The jury met to hear from Peter Rabbit about the circumstances that may have contributed to a violation of the Honor Code. Peter Rabbit said that he might have experienced a lapse of judgement in not citing the source he referenced because he began working on the assignment the night before it was due, which resulted in him rushing to finish it. The trial chair asked Peter Rabbit if there were any resolutions that would be helpful to him, and Peter Rabbit suggested meeting with the OAR to get help with time management strategies and refresh his memory on citation practices.

Jury Deliberations:

The jury then discussed tentative resolutions. They believed that suggesting a meeting with the Writing Center for Peter Rabbit would not be helpful. They agreed that a grade change met the trial goals of accountability and restoration, and they also agreed with Peter Rabbit’s suggestion to meet with the OAR. The jury agreed that Peter Rabbit’s violation of the Honor
Code should not be reported to institutions of higher learning, since the assignment was small and the violation minor, and at other institutions the student and professor would likely have worked things out on their own.

**Tentative Resolutions:**
1. [Peter Rabbit] will receive a 0% for the plagiarized assignment, and this grade will not be dropped as his lowest homework score. (8 consent, 2 stand outside in absentia)
2. [Peter Rabbit] will meet with the OAR to discuss time management strategies. (8 consent, 2 stand outside in absentia)

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

**Finalizing:**
The jury met to consent on finalized resolutions for Peter Rabbit. They consented to the following finalized resolutions:

**Finalized Resolutions:**
1. [Peter Rabbit] will receive a 0% for the plagiarized assignment, and this grade will not be dropped as his lowest homework score. (8 consent, 2 stand outside in absentia)
2. [Peter Rabbit] will meet with the OAR to discuss time management strategies. (8 consent, 2 stand outside in absentia)

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

**Statement on Reporting:**
The jury feels that this case should not be reported to other institutions of higher learning. (8 consent, 2 stand outside in absentia)

**Post-Trial:**
There were no post-trial updates.

**Discussion Questions:**
1. Should a confronted party’s forthcomingness be considered when creating resolutions?
2. Should accountability measures be different depending on the grade weight of the assignment?