The Queen’s Gambit
An Honor Council Academic Trial
Released Fall 2023

This abstract was not released in accordance with 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:
Course: Chess 207
Confronted Party: Beth Harmon
Confronting Party: Professor Vasily Borgov

Co-Chess 207 Professor: Professor Benny Watts
Chess Professor supporting Professor Borgov in confrontation: Professor DL Townes
Beth Harmon’s Dean: Dean Harry Beltik

Summary/Pre-Trial:
This trial involved a student who needed to retake an exam after improperly understanding the format the first time. The student was ultimately asked to take the exam a third time. There was also a debate over whether the student accessed improper materials during the period in between the first two exam attempts. The co-chair of this case did not write a chair’s report so this abstract has been compiled by a future co-secretary from the trial minutes. We apologize if this abstract does not perfectly represent the details of the case. There were only nine jurors instead of ten in this trial for unclear reasons.

Fact Finding:
Beth Harmon began by introducing herself and what she believed was the crux of the case: a missed email. Beth then told the story of the violation. She stated that she took her Chess 207 final exam during the annual Board Game Festival, a time in which other chess masters indulge in many intoxicants. Beth stated that because of her religion, she does not partake in this type of behavior. During this time, because of her dorm’s prominence as a social space, she felt that she was surrounded by intoxicated individuals, a circumstance that caused her great discomfort. Beth explained that after reading the instructions she understood that the exam was open notes and that she could take her exam either as a hard copy or on the internet, and she chose to do the hard copy version. She later found out that there was an email she missed that
said that students had to submit their final answers digitally and return the hard copy of the test, whether it was used or not. She insisted that this was not written anywhere on the exam.

Beth said that she took the paper version of the exam within the correct timeframe and followed all the instructions and protocols provided by the professor. She added that the Professor could confirm there was no Moodle activity during the exam. Beth’s trouble began when she had to turn in the exam. She detailed that there were intoxicated people engaging in physical behaviors that led her to feel uncomfortable and unable to walk over to the exam drop-off point at the Chess Center. She described calling her family in distress over the circumstances in her dorm.

Being too upset to leave, Beth emailed professor Benny Watts. Benny Watts was the professor for the other section of Chess 207 but she had had him for a previous class in the Chess department. She asked to turn in her exam first thing the next morning, keeping it sealed in the envelope, and not accessing Moodle in the interim. Professor Watts indicated that this was totally fine. The next morning she left the envelope out front of Professor Vasily Borgov’s door.

Later that day, she went to an activism event in the city to show support for her religion and members of her community facing injustices. She recollects that the injustices caused her a lot of distress, and the day was very chaotic. When she checked her email, she found a message from Professor Borgov saying that he had not yet heard from her as to why she had not submitted a digital copy and would therefore be giving her a 10% grade deduction for the late work. Beth and Professor Borgov decided that Beth should transcribe the exam into Moodle that night with an additional 10% grade deduction. Because Beth didn’t have her exam anymore, she scrolled through Moodle to refresh her memory. While taking the digital exam, she did not remember what she had originally written on the hard copy, so she ran to the Chess Center to grab the envelope. When she returned home, the exam time had expired. She then submitted pictures of her written exam, asking Professor Borgov to grade off of the photos. Professor Borgov refused to grade this way, saying that he could re-open the exam, but that there would be yet another 10% grade deduction. In the end, Beth took the exam three times, and stated that this repetition was the reason behind any changing answers.

Beth wrote to Professor Borgov in an attempt to explain the distress she was currently undergoing because of the injustices her community was facing. She also requested a meeting with Professor Borgov and Dean Harry Beltik, a trusted advisor. Professor Borgov told Beth that he would not allow the Dean to come to this meeting, saying that he would meet with the dean one-on-one. Shortly before Beth’s meeting with Professor Borgov, he emailed her to say that Professor DL Townes would be present as his support person; this detail was upsetting to Beth as she had previously been denied having her own support person present. In this meeting, Beth felt she was subjected to a power imbalance due to racial and educational differences, a problem that is all too common in the Chess world at large. Beth asked if she was being accused of cheating. Professor Borgov said no. Professor Borgov praised Beth’s work in the class as a whole, and said that it looked good that Beth agreed to come speak with him. Beth felt that Professor Borgov wanted to teach her a lesson about following directions. Beth said she thought that they were
both on the same page about there being no improper use of resources, but was confused why Professor Borgov wanted to teach her a lesson, and, moreover, why this lesson was being taught with such harsh consequences.

Beth expressed anguish over the consequences of this grade deduction on her plans to apply to graduate programs in the board game industry. She also was upset that the lowering of the grade did not represent her mastery of the subject matter.

The jurors asked more about Professor Benny Watts. Beth said that he was looped in at first, but was eventually removed from the email chain as the consequences became more severe. The jury asked why Beth emailed Professor Watts, rather than Professor Borgov. She said that generally he was more experienced with Haverford’s culture and was generally more sympathetic.

The jury expressed confusion over the timeline of Moodle checking and exam submission. They didn’t understand what Beth meant when she said she went back to Moodle to review. However this question was never answered as the conversation pivoted back to Beth’s discomfort with how Professor Borgov handled the situation. Beth said that she hadn’t talked to Professor Borgov since the incident.

Next, Professor Borgov provided his statement. He clarified that he was the professor for the specific section of Chess 207 in which the violation occurred. Professor Borgov reiterated that the exam was take home, and nothing was allowed to be accessed on Moodle except for notes. Professor Borgov found it odd that Beth chose to email Professor Benny Watts since Professor Borgov was the professor for Beth’s section and discussion group. Professor Borgov maintained that he didn’t want to accuse Beth of improperly accessing Moodle, but he still thought her behavior with the email was odd, and also that she didn’t understand the exam format, even though the class had taken previous exams this way. Professor Borgov was much more concerned with Beth accessing Moodle before transcribing her test later on.

Professor Borgov stated that Beth was a very good student. However, she was often late or distracted, possibly because of her involvement in campus activities and social justice initiatives. He said that Beth was a middle-of-the-road student in terms of grades.

Professor Borgov said that there were no substantial differences between the hard copy and digital versions of the exams. This being said, he was confused because the exam was written in pencil while the time stamps on the front of the exam were written in red pen, but ultimately that wasn’t something he would penalize a student for. Professor Borgov also brought up concerns over statements in which Beth contradicted herself when stating the (non)impact of her Moodle use. He also expressed confusion about how she was able to drop off and pick up her exam when normally it should have been placed in a locked box. Professor Borgov said he tried to convey that he wasn’t accusing Beth of cheating, or even to penalize her, but he needed her to acknowledge that she was knowingly not following the rules.

The jury asked why Professor Borgov invited Professor DL Townes to the meeting with Beth. He said that, as the head of the Chess department, Professor DL Townes served as his support person. The jury asked if he knew that students should also have the right to a support
person and he said that he did. When the jury asked about Beth’s statement that Professor Borgov had declined her request for Dean Harry Beltik’s presence, he said he did not remember that exchange.

The jury asked why accessing Moodle was a problem when the test was open note. Professor Borgov explained that students were told to download the resources ahead of time, as it would save time during the exam, and, hopefully, help them study. Professor Borgov reiterated that this was a rule: no Moodle, only downloaded notes. He mentioned that no other students had attempted to access Moodle.

The meeting ended with Professor Borgov expressing that he wanted to trust Beth and had no problem with her making accommodations to preserve personal safety. He only became concerned about the disallowed Moodle access and his inability to tell whether it had impacted Beth’s answers and performance.

**Jury Deliberations:**

Most jury members felt that a violation had occurred, but were more split on whether or not the violation was intentional and how it should be handled by Council. One jury member pointed out that an unintentional degree of harm was being done to the student simply due to the norms, circumstances, and power dynamics of the Chess department. Many other jury members agreed, echoing that the resolutions should avoid being punitive and rather focus on educating Beth. A couple jury members pushed back, asking if it would even be productive to come to a statement of violation without punishment. Another noted that even if the whole issue was just Beth missing the email which confirmed the exam had to be taken digitally, that was her fault. Several jury members replied that even so, that should not necessarily merit a consequence harsh enough to have severe negative effects on one’s post-graduate career. Further, jury members pointed out that resolutions meant to achieve trial goals of restoration and education do not have to be punitive, and should instead focus on preventing the violation from repeating. The jury came to the following statement of violation:

**Statement of Violation:**

Given that she accessed new Moodle resources having already taken the hard copy of the exam and with an understanding that she would later have to retake it, Beth didn’t adhere to exam instructions, which constitutes a violation of the Honor Code.
7 consent, 2 stand outside in absentia

**Circumstantial Portion:**

Beth Harmon was not present for the beginning of the meeting. The jurors began by reviewing the trial goals, and the general facts of the case. They began by deliberating about whether or not the grade is changeable. They also discussed what version of the exam they thought was the most authentic/which grade should be thought of as the original grade. Furthermore, they also wondered if that original grade should receive a deduction. The jurors
thought some sort of deduction was fair, especially since the exam was turned in late, but they thought that the 3*10% deduction was excessive and would be an overwhelming detriment to Beth’s grade. They agreed 10% would be a standard deduction that could be attributed to the, albeit ambiguous, violation of the exam rules.

The jurors decided that resolutions should have a strong focus on accountability. They suggested that Beth visit the OAR. They felt that Beth was not malicious in her actions, rather that she needed to learn lessons in time management, communication, and accountability that could be taught in OAR coaching sessions.

Professor Borgov also showed a desire to learn from this situation, so the jurors decided they could write a recommendation for the professor. Specifically, the jury wanted to make recommendations about how to better handle student interactions and confrontations in the future.

At this point, Beth entered the meeting with her support person. After hearing the statement of violation, Beth and her support person expressed their feelings that the jury had sided more with Professor Borgov. Beth and the jury went on to disagree about whether the potential mid-exam accessing of restricted materials constituted a violation. The jury went on to emphasize that just because they recognized that there was a violation, they did not think that Beth had poor character, especially when contextualized with her extenuating circumstances. They also explained to her that they would advise that the original hard copy be the one that was graded which, in the end, would mitigate the outside resources problem.

Beth also heavily criticized Professor Borgov’s handling of the situation. She said that the professor should have been more compassionate. She also said that she thought the exam instructions were too confusing and should have been presented in a more concise manner. She also thought that the professor should have an alternative exam on hand for students to retake if need be.

Beth was very concerned about her future, especially with other professors in the Chess department. Beth also asked for the abstract to be delayed in its release.

**Jury Deliberations:**

The jury wanted to convey through the tentative resolutions that the main concerns with Beth’s actions seemed to be her failure to properly follow exam instructions and the discontinuities between her several exam attempts. That being said, the jury also wanted to explicitly acknowledge and consider Beth’s intentions, emotions, and extenuating circumstances, all of which shed much light on the context and nuances of this case.

Regarding the trial goal of accountability, the jury agreed that a grade deduction regarding the exam was necessary, but jurors felt differently on how much of a grade deduction was appropriate and what to attribute the deduction to. One jury member expressed concerns with grading Beth’s exam(s) after the first one because she may have been able to access further information and/or outside resources since then. Another mentioned that they were comfortable with the jury’s decision regardless of the grade, as long as Beth did not fail the class. Another
chimed in that a 30% deduction would probably be too harsh, but 5-10% instead sounded reasonable and not too severe. They also pointed out that 10% is the “standard” deduction based on similar previous cases and incidents in the Chess department, although Honor Council is not driven by precedent and instead considers each violation on a case by case basis. At this point in the conversation, one jury member inquired about Honor Council’s official power regarding grades and punishments at Haverford. The trial chair explained that professors normally comply with Council’s procedure and follow the recommended resolutions, but are not required to do so. Therefore, the jury should be mindful of writing resolutions that the professor would follow through with, yet also accurately reflect Council’s collective opinion as well as Beth’s needs. The jury eventually decided to recommend grading Beth’s original hard copy exam with a 10% deduction, which they felt both parties would accept.

Another jury member mentioned that it could be helpful to write a resolution for Professor Borgov, who said that he has modified his behavior in the past from trial resolutions. Specifically, the jury hoped to educate Professor Borgov on how to approach confrontation with students and how to appropriately react to student meetings. One jury member mentioned that it is important that the language of the resolution prevents similar instances from occurring in the future and accounts for how Professor Borgov’s initial reaction negatively affected Beth.

The jury felt conflicted on how to address the trial goal of restoration, since Beth made it clear that she was not interested in communicating with Professor Borgov in the future. Beth especially felt disrespected, uncomfortable, and concerned throughout this trial about how Professor Borgov was trying to impose his personal ideas regarding “how life works” rather than simply being a Chess professor. The jury decided it could be helpful to focus restoration resolutions on the relationship between Beth and Professor Borgov, but also Beth’s (potential) relationships with other professors in the Chess department. Eventually, they decided to recommend a flexible mediated conversation between Beth and any professor of her choice in the Chess department, mainly to discuss the complexities that led to the violation and how she can proceed with Chess in the future.

**Tentative Resolutions:**

1. *The jury recommends that [Beth] receive a grade on the exam based on her initial hard copy submission with a 10% standard deduction.* (7 consent, 2 stand outside in absentia)
2. *If exam protocol is complicated by extenuating circumstances, [Beth] will take initiative to learn professors’ exact expectations as is required by the Honor Code.* (7 consent, 2 stand outside in absentia)
3. *The jury supports [Beth] in going to the OAR and resolves that she continues to do so, at a pace agreed upon by her and her OAR Coach, while she remains at Haverford.* (7 consent, 2 stand outside in absentia)
4. The trial chair will mediate conversations between [Beth] and individual [Chess] professors she selects in the interest of restoring trust and securing positive relationships if and when she so chooses to have them. (7 consent, 2 stand outside in absentia)
5. In the interest of healthier communication and mutually beneficial resolution of situations like this one, the jury recommends that Professor [Borgov] works to better understand the context surrounding students’ actions going forward. (7 consent, 2 stand outside in absentia)
6. Should he need to confront another student at some point in the future, the jury recommends that Professor [Borgov] reach out to the Honor Council Co-Chairs for support in how to proceed. (7 consent, 2 stand outside in absentia)
7. The jury recommends that Professor [Borgov] take steps to more clearly communicate exam instructions, especially in circumstances when standard procedure has been disrupted.

All resolutions: (7 consent, 2 stand outside in absentia)

Finalizing Resolutions:

1. The jury recommends that [Beth] receive a grade on the exam based on her initial hard copy submission with a 10% standard deduction. (9 consent)
2. If exam protocol is complicated by extenuating circumstances, [Beth] will take initiative to learn professors’ exact expectations as is required by the Honor Code. (9 consent)
3. The jury supports [Beth] in going to the OAR and resolves that she continues to do so, at a pace agreed upon by her and her OAR Coach, while she remains at Haverford. (9 consent)
4. The trial chair will mediate conversations between [Beth] and individual [Chess] professors she selects in the interest of restoring trust and securing positive relationships if and when she so chooses to have them. (9 consent)
5. In the interest of healthier communication and mutually beneficial resolution of situations like this one, the jury recommends that Professor [Borgov] works to better understand the context surrounding students’ actions going forward. (9 consent)
6. Should he need to confront another student at some point in the future, the jury recommends that Professor [Borgov] reach out to the Honor Council Co-Chairs for support in how to proceed. (9 consent)
7. The jury recommends that Professor [Borgov] take steps to more clearly communicate exam instructions, especially in circumstances when standard procedure has been disrupted. (9 consent)

All resolutions: (9 consent)
The jury recommends this not be reported to institutions of higher education. (9 Consent)

Discussion Questions:
1. How did the presence or absence of support people impact the confrontation process and
1. how can students and professors better communicate about exam rules to avoid future confusion?