Legend of Korra: An Honor Council Academic Trial
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Key:
- Confronted Party: Korra
- Confronting Party: Professor Tenzin
- Class: Airbending Studies 109

Summary/Pre-Trial:
This trial involved a student who plagiarized on their final paper for Airbending Studies 109 by misrepresenting someone else’s work as their own and improperly citing their sources. In this paper, after attempting to write an explanation of the concept on her own, Korra ultimately inserted a page and a half of screenshots from the Western Air Temple University (WATU) in place of her explanation. After being confronted by Professor Tenzin, Korra took responsibility for inserting the screenshots, and was given the option of taking a 0 on the final paper, dropping her course grade to a 1.3, or going to Honor Council.

Fact Finding:
Both parties and ten out of ten jurors were present for the fact-finding meeting. Korra shared her version of the events first. She explained that the final paper for Airbending Studies 109 was worth a significant portion of their total grade and was meant to be on an airbending topic they did not cover in class. She was initially having trouble finding an explanation for her topic and completing the explanation on her own when she came across notes from the WATU with the explanation. She then expanded on the concept in the paragraph after. She emailed Professor Tenzin during finals to ask if rewriting and expanding on the explanation of the concept was alright. Professor Tenzin said it was alright as long as she cited her sources and did not simply copy them. After this email exchange, though, Korra decided that since her explanation of the concept was slightly worse than the original, she would instead insert screenshots of the original
explanation. She did not communicate further with Professor Tenzin about her paper.

Over winter break, Professor Tenzin contacted Korra about the paper, saying that the screenshots constituted plagiarism. Professor Tenzin’s resolution was to give Korra a 0 on the paper, resulting in a 1.3 in the class. After discussing the case with her dean, Korra decided to self-report to Honor Council. She then stated that she had no intention of plagiarizing, although she understood at that point why Professor Tenzin thought she had.

Professor Tenzin then shared his recounting of the events, saying Korra had summarized the case clearly. When grading the paper, he noticed that there was a page and a half of screenshots taken of a source which he saw as a clear violation of the Honor Code. He had tried to make it clear in the assignment and over email that taking ownership of a concept requires expanding it further and writing it in your own words, and he did not see that in Korra’s paper. He also did not think there was any expansion on the concept beyond the screenshots.

At this point, the jury had the opportunity to ask both parties questions about what happened. A juror asked if the screenshots were cited in the paper, and Professor Tenzin said that immediately before the screenshots, Korra wrote, “Shown below is an adaptation of the WATU’s explanation of the … concept.” Professor Tenzin said that this was not a proper citation, that there were no works cited at the end of the paper, and that it was not apparent what exact source the screenshots came from.

Another juror asked about the academic norms in the field of airbending with regards to writing explanations. Professor Tenzin shared that airbenders do not always explain things clearly, so part of the assignment was to find sources and evaluate whether their explanations have appropriate detail. He also said that this was not an appropriate source because it was someone else’s notes, not a published source.

A juror asked Korra if this was her impression of the norms, and she said that she had thought that these concepts were final and could not be paraphrased. She also found the notes from the WATU to be extremely helpful and wanted to share them with the reader.

A juror asked if paraphrasing the university’s explanation would have been sufficient and for Professor Tenzin to elaborate on what an acceptable submission would have been. Professor Tenzin said that the project could not have been based on a single source, and the appropriate thing to do with sources is to give a short summary. The writer can do this by condensing information to make it more accessible. It would not have been appropriate to cite these notes as a source, as the paper required appropriate sources. A juror asked if the inclusion of a non-peer reviewed source was part of Professor Tenzin’s concern. He said that was one of his concerns but not why he suggested Korra go to Honor Council.

One juror asked if Korra had sought help from resources on campus for this paper, to which she said no. Another asked about how much training Korra had had in the airbending department on
citations and paper writing, and Korra said that this was her first airbending essay. Professor Tenzin said that he tried to make his expectations surrounding the use of sources very clear.

At this point, the trial chair suggested that this conversation be postponed to the circumstantial meeting since the goal of the fact-finding meeting is to determine what happened, not the circumstances surrounding the potential violation. A juror then asked if from the email exchange, Korra understood that she needed to elaborate on the concept. She said she only somewhat understood and that her biggest mistake was not sending a follow-up email asking for more clarification.

A juror asked how significant the portion with the screenshots was in the grading scheme of the paper, and Professor Tenzin said it was worth about 30-40% of the grade and was instrumental in the paper.

The group then discussed the language “adaptation of the explanation,” since Professor Tenzin brought up that it was the same explanation. Korra said she did not deliberately use that word and likely left it in after removing her own explanation. A juror asked if this wording was the reason Professor Tenzin considered this plagiarism, to which he said no, it was the general presentation of the explanation.

Lastly, Korra was asked by a juror if she believed she violated the Honor Code, to which she said she did think her paper constituted plagiarism. She then wanted to know if intent was considered in Honor Council proceedings, as her dean thought this was more of a skill gap than intentional plagiarism. The trial chair explained that intent plays a large role in the circumstantial portion of the trial so that the resolutions best suit the individual’s needs, but that intent does not play a role in determining whether a code violation occurred.

**Jury Deliberations:**

The jury agreed early on that this paper constituted plagiarism. One juror pointed out that there were improper citations and that the Honor Code requires students to ask for clarification if instructions are not clear. Another juror brought up that the word “adaptation” implies that the explanation has been significantly altered, which it was not. The jury discussed other issues surrounding the paper such as the use of an improper source, but did not see those actions as code violations, even if they failed to meet the project requirements. Before consenting on a statement, one juror mentioned that it would be helpful to see the assignment rubric for future meetings. The jury then consented on the following statement of violation.

**Statement of Violation:**

*Korra violated the academic honor code by misrepresenting someone else’s work as her own and improperly citing a source on the final paper project of Professor Tenzin’s Airbending Studies 109 course [10 consent].*
Circumstantial Portion:

Korra and all ten members of the jury were present at this meeting, but Professor Tenzin was not. When asked about the circumstances surrounding the paper and the code violation, Korra shared that she had a rough start to the semester in all classes, including Airbending Studies 109, due to illness. Airbending Studies 109 was not like any class she had taken before and she said she was performing poorly in the class up until the first midterm. After the midterm, though, she was more focused and motivated to succeed in the course and her grades reflected that increased effort. However, the final paper was worth a significant portion of her grade, and she had never written an airbending paper before.

At this point, the jury had the opportunity to ask Korra about the circumstances surrounding this situation. One juror asked about her original explanation and why she replaced it. She said that she was not confident in her original explanation, so she searched for better sources and found these notes that explained everything very clearly. Therefore, she decided to copy the image and include it in her paper.

Another juror asked about the use of the word “adaptation,” to which Korra said she used that phrasing when she was originally generating her own explanation. She said it must have slipped her mind to change that word.

A juror asked about Korra’s experience with the airbending department and their education about plagiarism. She said there was not much said in Airbending Studies 109 regarding academic integrity. At this point, the jury looked at the rubric and project description that Professor Tenzin had sent to Honor Council upon request. One juror asked if Korra had read these instructions, including the line saying that unpublished notes were not an acceptable source. Korra explained that she had thought this was a formal source, that the university itself had published it because there was no professor’s name on it. It was formatted like an actual paper. She said she should have clarified but she thought it was an acceptable source.

Another juror asked if Korra now understands what ownership of a concept means. She said she understood now but did not when she was writing the paper. When asked if she was under any time constraints, Korra said that she turned in the paper in the middle of finals but that she was leaving campus on Friday and needed to finish all her work before then.

At this point, jurors did not have any more questions and Korra had nothing else to share, so the group transitioned to discussing resolutions. Korra shared that she had read through some abstracts and paid particular attention to similar cases with plagiarism due to skill gaps. Two resolutions she saw and was interested in pursuing were having appointments with the writing center and being able to rewrite the paper.

A juror asked if Korra needed support from the writing center on general citations or airbending specifically, and she said both. The trial chair then shared that the option to rewrite the paper is
ultimately up to Professor Tenzin but that they should discuss what that could look like.

A couple of jurors agreed that both resolutions would be productive. One pointed out that the option to rewrite the paper and show what she has learned about airbending writing would be a restorative measure with the airbending department, and that this is especially important given that Korra may pursue an airbending major.

Another juror suggested that Korra work with the airbending department to create a resource on proper sources and citations to help students not make the same mistakes she did. They also suggested that if Korra is not already involved with the department in some capacity (employment or extracurriculars), she pursue that. Korra said she was interested in the first suggestion and is already affiliated with the department.

The group then discussed the timeline and format the paper rewrite could take, as well as grading. Korra shared that she can realistically finish a new paper by the end of the semester, and that she was open to rewriting the paper on the same topic or choosing a new topic. Jurors suggested different grading options, including getting back credit anywhere between 50 and 100% or being able to earn back credit in some sections of a rubric. The jury also wanted to make sure that whatever grading scheme they chose allowed Korra to earn a class grade of at least a 2.0, allowing the course to count towards the airbending major.

The group also discussed Korra potentially reaching out to the professor whose notes she used to apologize, but some jurors believed this would be punitive and logistically difficult given that there was no name attached to the notes. They also discussed whether any restoration between Korra and Professor Tenzin was needed, and Korra said she was open to a conversation but did not see it as being necessary and did not want to take more of Professor Tenzin’s time.

Circling back to meeting with the writing center, a juror asked if Korra was taking any airbending classes this semester and if she would need to write another paper. She was taking airbending classes and would likely have to write at least one paper. She also said she’ll likely have a non-airbending final paper for another class.

**Jury Deliberations:**

Since the jury did not yet know Professor Tenzin’s stance on Korra being able to rewrite the paper, they discussed what they thought would be the most productive iteration of this resolution knowing that it may not be implemented. Furthermore, they agreed that the trial chair would communicate to Professor Tenzin that they had discussed these different pathways. When discussing whether to write on a new topic or rewrite for an old one, the jury agreed that a new topic would give Korra the best opportunity to start from the beginning to show what she has learned through the trial process. Regarding the grading scheme, the jurors thought that Korra should be able to receive full credit due to her willingness to take accountability and eagerness to demonstrate her new understanding.
Regarding the writing center, one juror suggested that Korra meet with the writing center twice to discuss airbending writing. Another suggested that this be done by the end of the [current] semester since she had a final paper in an airbending class. When discussing whether Korra should also have to go to the writing center to discuss citations in general, the jury decided to only recommend this, particularly since one juror with knowledge of the writing center expressed that 1-2 meetings could easily be enough. The jury decided that these additional two meetings could be completed by the end of the following semester so as not to overburden Korra during the current semester.

The jury was in agreement that writing a resource for the airbending department would be productive and that Korra should be able to choose who she writes it with.

The jury also discussed recommending a facilitated discussion between Korra and Professor Tenzin but decided to not write it as a resolution until hearing Professor Tenzin’s opinions on the resolutions. They also circled back to discuss whether Korra should write to the professor at the WATU but ultimately decided against it. The jury then consented on the following tentative resolutions:

1. The jury recommends that Korra rewrite the Airbending Studies 109 final paper on a new topic, which will be regraded according to class scheme by the end of the [current] semester, allowing her to gain full credit for the paper. (10 jurors consent)

2. Korra will meet with the Writing Center regarding airbending writing at least twice by the end of the [current] semester. The jury recommends that Korra meet twice with the Writing Center regarding general citations before [the next] finals. (10 jurors consent)

3. The jury recommends that Korra collaborate with another faculty member of her choosing to create a resource on citations & proper sources for the airbending department. (10 jurors consent)

Consensus on the resolutions as a whole: 10 consent

Finalizing Resolutions:

After going through a reflecting period, the jury reconvened to determine whether they were still satisfied with the resolutions. One juror suggested changing the third resolution to a requirement instead of a recommendation since it would be foundational in demonstrating her education on the subject and restoring her relationship with the airbending department. The jury then consented to change the third resolution as follows:

Korra will collaborate with another faculty member of her choosing to create a resource on citations & proper sources for the airbending department. (10 jurors consent)
The finalizing resolutions meeting then began, with Korra, Professor Tenzin, and all 10 jurors present. The jury presented their reasoning for each resolution and asked Korra and Professor Tenzin for their thoughts. Korra said the resolutions were similar to what they discussed at the circumstantial meeting, so she had no objections. Professor Tenzin shared that he was concerned about the first resolution with regards to equity among students who took the class. He said that other students’ grades would have benefitted from rewriting their papers but that they did not have that opportunity. A juror asked if rewriting the paper for partial credit would address the issue of equity, and Professor Tenzin said he thought it would.

A juror summarized the different partial credit grading schemes that were discussed in the previous meeting and that they wanted Korra to be able to earn a 2.0. Tenzin did not think it would be possible to regrade it in only some rubric categories because the writing on the concept would impact many categories.

Professor Tenzin said that if Korra rewrote the paper and could earn up to 50%, that would enable her to earn a 2.0, and that he was open to this iteration of a paper rewrite. All parties agreed that writing the paper on a new topic would best demonstrate her new understanding. Korra shared that she can finish the paper by the end of [next] finals week. Professor Tenzin said that Korra should choose a new topic as soon as possible and send it to him, and that he can grade the paper by the time normal grades are due.

The group then discussed the third resolution, writing a resource for the airbending department on proper sources and citations. Everyone agreed that Korra would find a faculty member to work with by the end of the current semester but would have until the start of the next finals week to complete the guide. The jury asked Professor Tenzin what he thought an average professor’s availability would be to assist with this project, and he said he thought the faculty role should be limited to checking the final product and anonymously disseminating it to the department. To ensure that Korra had support in starting this project, the trial chair suggested that they meet with Korra before the end of the current semester to devise a plan together.

Regarding reporting to graduate schools, everyone agreed that the jury should not recommend that this case be reported to institutions of higher education. Korra and Professor Tenzin left the meeting at this point and the jury discussed the final resolutions. They updated the resolution language to reflect the discussion they had with Korra and Professor Tenzin, and no one had any objections or additions to what had been discussed. They then consented on the following resolutions:

1. **The jury recommends that Korra rewrites the Airbending Studies 109 final paper on a new topic by the end of [the current] finals week, which will be regraded according to class scheme, allowing her to gain up to 50% credit for the paper. (10 jurors consent)**
2. Korra will meet with the Writing Center regarding airbending writing at least twice by the end of the [current] semester. The jury recommends that Korra meet twice with the Writing Center regarding general citations before [the next] finals. (10 jurors consent)

3. Korra will collaborate with a faculty member of her choosing to create a resource on citations & proper sources for the airbending department by the start of [next] finals week. To complete this, she will meet with a Co-Chair by the end of the [current] semester to devise a plan for drafting this resource. (10 jurors consent)

4. The jury recommends that this incident not be reported to institutions of higher education. (10 jurors consent)

Statement on reporting: The jury recommends that this incident not be reported to institutions of higher education. (10 jurors consent)

Consensus on the resolutions as a whole: 10 jurors consent

Discussion Questions:

1. To what extent should a student be able to regain credit when they have violated the Honor Code and taken steps towards accountability and education?

2. Should students apologize to people from whom they’ve plagiarized, particularly when this person is not a member of the Haverford community?