

Abstract Discussions: Wednesday, September 22nd, at 6 PM and Thursday, September 23rd, at 1 PM in the Sunken Lounge of the DC

Nomar and Professor Pedro

An Honor Council Academic Trial

Released Fall 2004

Introduction:

Nomar was a student in Professor Pedro's class. Nomar handed in a paper to Professor Pedro with several sections that Professor Pedro thought were not Nomar's own work. After confronting Nomar about the paper, the parties agreed to contact Honor Council and submit statements. Honor Council came to a suspicion of violation.

Fact Finding:

Professor Pedro's statement:

Professor Pedro began by describing an event involving Nomar that occurred earlier in the semester. For an earlier assignment, Nomar turned in a paper that seemed unrelated to the topic assigned by Professor Pedro. Using an Internet search engine, Professor Pedro found that 98% of the paper had been taken from other sources. Upon confrontation, Nomar explained that he had turned in his notes and not his paper. He quickly returned to his room and emailed the correct paper to Professor Pedro. As a result of this event, Professor Pedro said that he would be more sensitive to potential plagiarism in Nomar's future work.

Later, Professor Pedro assigned a paper in which students were allowed to use outside sources. When reading Nomar's paper, Professor Pedro noticed that two sections of the paper had awkward structures. Suspicious of plagiarism, he performed an Internet search and found that the sections had been copied word-for-word from two different sources. There were no citations that accompanied these sections of the paper. After confronting Nomar, Professor Pedro contacted Honor Council.

Nomar's statement:

Nomar stated that he writes his papers by constructing an outline from notes and sources, and then he goes through the outline, replacing it with text. Nomar did not dispute the uncited quotations but said that he never intended to deceive Professor Pedro by representing another's work as his own. The lack of correct quotation and citation was a result of irresponsibility and sloppy academic behavior, not cheating.

Jury Questions:

The jury wished to know more about Nomar's actions that could have led to the lack of citation. Nomar stated that the paper did not meet the page limit, so he entered the quotes but forgot to properly cite them.

Jury Deliberations:

The jury was concerned as to how and why Nomar had managed to have such large uncited sections of his paper. Regardless, they were all convinced that plagiarism had occurred. The jury then discussed whether the act had been "gross" plagiarism. They ultimately decided that the supposed accidental nature of the plagiarism meant that it was not a gross act.

Statement of Violation:

The jury came to consensus on the following statement of violation:

By failing to cite properly, the student committed an act of plagiarism and thus violated the Honor Code.

Circumstantial Portion:

Nomar explained that he had written the paper well before it was due. He added the quotes to meet the page limit and intended to return to the work in order to properly cite them. However, he was too busy and never had time to return to the paper. He stressed that the plagiarism had simply been due to sloppiness. In addition, he had never been taught how to cite properly. He had thought that plagiarism only occurred when the act is intentionally done to deceive. He also said that he was stressed at the time due to excessive work and events at home. However, he stated that he was already learning from the experience. As resolutions, he suggested that he fail this paper, write a completely new paper, write another paper that sought to properly define plagiarism, and write a letter to the community.

Professor Pedro stated that he didn't like Nomar's method of writing and that it was bound to lead to situations like the one in question. He stressed that Nomar won't get a second chance in the real world and that he didn't seem to have learned from his experience with the earlier paper. He suggested that a new paper that was not as source-based be written so that Nomar could express his own ideas.

Jury Deliberation:

The jury discussed the fact that Nomar had never been taught how to properly cite, nor was he aware that plagiarism was not simply a crime of intent. They discussed ways to address these shortcomings such as teaching standard citation method and having Honor Code Orienteers explain plagiarism more thoroughly. They ultimately decided that Nomar

could create a handout that discussed plagiarism. This handout could be a guide so that future students will not be so unfamiliar with the nature of plagiarism.

The jury also discussed recommending a grade for the class. Ultimately, they did not feel comfortable giving a grade. They did not feel that Nomar should fail, but they wanted to leave the decision up to Professor Pedro.

The jury came to consensus on the following tentative resolutions.

Tentative Resolutions:

- 1. The student will prepare a handout that addresses what plagiarism is and ways to avoid it. The handout will be distributed to the freshman class.**
- 2. The student will write a letter to the community to be distributed with the abstract.**
- 3. The student will receive a 0.0 for the research paper.**
- 4. The student will write a new research paper. The paper is not graded but must be completed to the professor's satisfaction in order for the student to receive credit for the course.**

Presentation of Tentative Resolutions:

Nomar expressed his satisfaction with the resolutions. Professor Pedro was also pleased.

Final Resolutions:

The jury came to final consensus on the above resolutions.

The student will write a letter to the community to be distributed with the abstract.

This trial was an eye-opener for me. I did not realize how a simple mistake could not only harm my grades, but also have an impact on the learning process. The purpose and privilege of higher education is to learn how to think. Plagiarism impedes that process. As well, it is dishonest and indirectly hurts the other members of the community by giving one person an unfair advantage over another. My mistake is avoidable, however it is common. I have learned to not only be more responsible when doing my work but also to honor the privileges that Haverford offers its students and to consider how even the slightest mishaps can harm others.

I am grateful for having such a fair and understanding jury. Rather than the process being punitive and hurtful, it was helpful, not only for me but the community. My incident reflected the need for clarification of the definition of plagiarism and a re-evaluation of how both students and teachers approach the process of learning.

In conclusion, I apologize to the community and I also thank all involved in the trial for such a rewarding experience.