

Abstract Discussions: Thursday, September 16, at 6:00 PM, and Friday, September 17, at 12:30 PM in the Sunken Lounge of the DC

Peter and Professor Lois

An Honor Council Academic Trial

Released Fall 2004

Introduction:

Peter was a student in Professor Lois's class. Peter handed in a paper to Professor Lois with several passages that Lois suspected were not Peter's own work. After discussing her suspicions with Peter, both parties contacted Honor Council. After meeting with an Honor Council Co-Chair, both parties decided to bring the matter before Council. Honor Council asked both parties to submit statements. Council came to consensus on a suspicion of violation.

Fact Finding:

Professor Lois's statement:

At the trial, Professor Lois paraphrased the statement she had submitted to Council. She restated that the assignment was to compare and contrast class readings in a 7-9 page paper. Students were instructed to utilize only readings that had been assigned in the course and not outside resources. Upon an initial reading of Peter's paper, Professor Lois noted that some of the writing did not appear to be consistent with Peter's typical writing style. She Googled five sentences and found word for word quotations from online scholarly journals and papers. She met with Peter to discuss the paper, and he admitted to using outside sources. When she showed him the un-cited quotations, Peter said that he had used outside sources even though he knew that it wasn't part of the assignment. However, he also said that he had intended to cite these outside sources but had forgotten. After this initial meeting, Professor Lois did another Internet search and found that nearly half the paper was taken verbatim from 10 different online sources.

When Professor Lois confronted Peter with the results of this second search, Peter said that he thought that he had put citations in because, when glancing over the paper, he had mistaken the citations from the sources as his own. They discussed tentative ways to resolve the issue. Professor Lois suggested that Peter could rewrite the paper with a different topic using only class resources as one possible resolution. In addition, she planned to give Peter no credit for the original paper, but she said that she would grade the new paper separately.

[Professor Lois brought the original paper with the contested sections highlighted. At this point she made the paper available to the jury for examination and clarification.]

Peter's statement:

Peter read the following statement to the jury (slightly edited for confidentiality):

"I was confronted on Monday by Professor Lois about a paper that I submitted.... She had questioned me about portions of my paper that were not cited and I responded by simply stating, 'I had forgotten to cite my sources.' So she had requested that we meet the following day, Tuesday, to discuss and bring forth the external sources. I returned to her office on Tuesday and presented the sources to her. In terms of the dialogue we had, I felt that it went well. I had and still affirm that my intentions were not to take someone else's work and present it as my own. I simply had just forgotten to cite the external sources. I have a bad habit of waiting till the end of my paper to cite my work. I had also mentioned to her that I had stayed up two consecutive nights till 6 am writing this paper and did not get a chance to proof read the paper, because I had [other work] due that week. Whenever I write a paper, I make sure that I leave a page number after the sentence so that I can come back to the work and make the proper citations. In this case, in the sources that I used, there were page numbers already in the passages that I had used and when I went back at the odd hours of the morning, I had thought that I had already put the page numbers at the end of the sentences and that I just needed to put the author's name. Continuing, I had also brought forth submitted work for another class in which I had cited a whole paragraph from a book word for word with footnotes. My intent was to show Professor Lois that I had cited whole paragraphs for other classes and that my Professors had not once corrected me. For that class, Professor Stewie simply emailed me telling me that I had not cited the work properly and that, if this were a graded assignment, I would get failing marks. Never once has a professor corrected me with this.

"After these presentations, I affirmed that I had good intentions when I wrote this paper; I stayed up till 6am two consecutive nights and I worked really hard. I have been taught good moral values from my family and these include hard work and integrity. And I had worked extremely hard on this assignment and I had great intentions. [In all my time at Haverford,] never once did I ever conceive of performing such an act.

"I had also reiterated that this was simply a mistake and I spoke these words to my professor. "Professor, what makes me feel ashamed is that you now have this perception of me that is not true...I never had those intentions...my intentions were good and this is simply a mistake. Professor Lois responded by saying that, 'It's not that I don't believe you...I just feel that if we did not take this to Honor Council we would be breaching the Honor Code...It's not like I am going to go against you, I just feel that this is best thing to do.'

"I had also had a talk with my Dean about my situation and how to approach such a situation and he suggested that I contact a Co-Chair. He also suggested that since my professor and I had such a good relationship, that maybe I could request to resolve this between my professor and me. I have also spoken with the Co-Chair about this matter

and both meetings were very helpful. On behalf of the Honor Council, I am requesting, with the permission of Professor Lois, that this be resolved between my Professor and me. Because we have such a wonderful relationship in and out of the classroom..., Professor Lois is ... allowing me to re-write the paper on another topic."

[Peter brought the paper from the other class to show the jury.]

Jury Questions:

The jury members asked many questions to clarify both parties' statements.

Peter said that neither Professor Stewie nor Professor Lois had provided citation instructions for their respective papers. He also said that he had written down external sources in a separate document. He emphatically stated that he had not copied and pasted the outside sources directly into his paper. He in fact wrote down the sources, although he neglected to attach a bibliography to his paper. He stated that it was not out of the ordinary for him to use quotations in the introduction and conclusion to his papers. He said that his usual citation method was to copy the quotations he planned to incorporate into his paper in a separate document from the actual paper. He would then go back and integrate them, with citations, into the final paper. He stated that his failure to cite was the result of his lack of proofreading. He reiterated that he had not had enough time to proofread the paper.

He said that he was not in full consciousness of what he was doing and that he was in a severely exhausted state.

[At this point the Chair reminded the jury and the confronting and confronted parties that this was the fact-finding portion of the trial and to focus on the objective facts of what happened.]

Peter also admitted that he did not know how to cite papers specific to his major.

Professor Lois said that approximately 60% of the paper was Peter's own words. She said that, if Peter had cited the external sources that he had used, she would not have brought this to Honor Council's attention.

Deliberation:

The jurors were unanimous in their opinion that Peter's failure to cite constituted a violation of the academic Honor Code's passages on citation. The jury, however, was split as to whether or not Peter's failure to cite constituted an act of *gross* plagiarism. The Chair pointed out that this type of plagiarism, according to the Code, usually results in separation from the community. Several jury members were hesitant to define Peter's failure to cite as gross plagiarism, arguing that the Code uses but never explains what constitutes "*gross*". The jury decided not to use the word gross because it implied the

confronted party's intent to plagiarize. They felt that the question of intent could not be properly answered until after the circumstantial portion of the trial.

One jury member, Chris, was concerned with Peter's failure to find out the proper citation method needed for his class, especially since Professor Stewie had explicitly said that Peter's methods of citation were inadequate. Chris pointed out that the Academic portion of the Honor Code specifically states that it is each student's responsibility to find out what "each of his/her professors expects in terms of acknowledging sources of information on papers, exams, and assignments." Another jury member, Meg, argued that Peter was not confronted by Professor Lois for not asking about proper citation methods. Meg pointed out that Peter had not been brought to trial because of his failure to cite properly but rather for his failure to cite at all.

After further deliberation, the jury came to consensus that Peter's failure to cite constituted a violation. Chris sat outside consensus because he felt that the issue of Peter's responsibility to seek out professors' citation standards could not be properly addressed at this point. The jury focused on the plagiarism itself as the primary issue at hand and came to consensus on the following statement of violation.

Statement of Violation:

The student presented multiple words and scholarship as his own for a significant portion of his paper. By failing to cite these sources, the student committed an act of plagiarism.

Circumstantial:

Professor Lois's Statement:

Professor Lois did not have anything to add to the statements she made at the fact-finding session.

Peter's Statement:

Peter stated that he did not ever intend to represent other people's work as his own. His motivations were not malicious. He stated that this class would count towards his major requirements, and, as such, he took it very seriously. He hoped that his honesty in admitting to his use of outside sources and failure to cite would maintain his standing of good faith with the community. He reiterated that he felt that his main fault lay with his failure to proofread. He had been up all night working on this paper and did not go to bed until dawn, when he took a nap and handed in the paper on time without looking it over again. He admitted to his procrastination, but emphasized his past hard work and academic integrity. He stated that he wanted to maintain trust with the community and has realized that he needs to ask questions when he is unsure of citation methods.

Jury Questions:

The jury members asked many questions to clarify both parties' statements.

Peter stated that he had had a lot of work due at the same time as this paper, so he was having a hard time balancing all his commitments. He said that he had maintained a good relationship with Professor Lois before and after the incident. He said that the second paper on a different topic, alluded to in Professor Lois's statements, was due in a few days and that he still unsure about citation methods. Finally, he stressed that there was never any intent on his part to represent other scholars' work as his own.

At this point the Chair asked if the confronting and confronted parties would take this opportunity to propose resolutions.

Professor Lois stated that the paper rewrite was a good first step. She said that the original paper had received a 0.0 and suggested that Peter be given no more than the minimal passing grade for the course, a 1.0. [Note: This would mean that the class would not give Peter credit towards his major requirements, as 2.0 is the minimum passing grade for a class that counts towards a student's major.]

Peter notified the jury that he had a position for the following year where he would be working with freshmen. He hoped that he could use this role to educate freshmen about proper citation and the perils of procrastination.

Jury Deliberation:

The jury agreed early in deliberations that the student would receive a 0.0 for the paper. Professor Lois had suggested this resolution. She considered this a standard course of action for this type of infraction, and the jury was inclined to agree.

The issue of course credit was then discussed. The jury was reminded that a 1.0 was the minimum grade required to receive credit for a course. The jury, encouraged by the good working relationship between the professor and student, wanted to maintain an atmosphere that would motivate Peter's completion of the course. There was some concern that, if Peter did not receive this credit, a future semester of extra coursework would cause undo stress. Concerns were raised that this credit would not count towards the student's major requirements. While the jury wanted Peter to receive credit for the course itself, it felt the academic violation was severe enough to prohibit Peter receiving credit towards his major.

Chris raised his previous concern about Peter's failure to find out the proper citation method needed for his class. Chris was worried that, even after the circumstantial portion, Peter did not understand the full extent and ramifications of this specific failure. To encourage Peter's personal reflection on this specific issue, it was suggested that Peter write an essay on the passage of the Honor Code specifically addressing this concern.

In the circumstantial portion, Peter stressed his future position. He expressed his hopes that this position would give him the chance to educate community members about avoiding violations of the Academic portion of the Honor Code. To facilitate this, it was suggested that the student, with the help of a jury member, would create a pamphlet that outlined the school's policy on plagiarism, including preventative measures. The pamphlet would be an in-depth statement of what constituted plagiarism and the on-campus resources available to all community members, e.g. the Writing Center.

At this point in the deliberations, the jury felt that the resolutions discussed thus far did a good job addressing Peter's accountability to the Haverford community. To further facilitate the student's recognition of his act, a jury member, Brian, suggested that Peter write a letter of apology to the scholars of the works he had failed to cite. This resolution spoke to the jury's desire to help Peter view his actions in a larger context than a single course at Haverford.

Throughout the jury's deliberations, the question of intent was a constant issue. Specifically, did Peter purposely represent the work of others as his own? Obviously if the jury had believed that his plagiarism had been intentional, the resolutions would have reflected this in their severity. The jury, however, felt that, in this particular case, the question of intent could never be fully resolved, and as such, felt obliged to give Peter the benefit of the doubt. Professor Lois's statements reaffirming Peter's character and her interpretation of his actions as a careless error informed the jury's thought process on this issue.

The issue of separation had heretofore been addressed only briefly because, for the most part, the jury felt that, without ill intent, separation would be too harsh a resolution for the violation. Because it was felt that Peter had not intended to plagiarize, the issue of separation remained largely undiscussed. Near the end of deliberations, however, the suggestion of separation was again raised. Joe, another juror, voiced her specific concerns with separation in general, and she admitted that her feelings on this subject motivated her to steer the conversation away from the consideration of separation as a possible resolution in the trial at hand. Some members were uneasy with the limited discussion that had been given to the subject of separation. Even still, the jury felt that, in this case, separation was in no way applicable to the jury's conception of the violation that had occurred.

The jury then consented to the following tentative resolutions.

Tentative Resolutions:

- 1. The student will receive a 0.0 for the paper.**
- 2. The student will receive a 1.0 for the class contingent upon satisfactory completion of the course. This course will not count as a credit toward the student's major requirements.**

3. The student will write a pamphlet promoting practices helpful in avoiding plagiarism to be approved by the professor and a member of the jury. This pamphlet will be distributed and used by HCOs and UCAs.

4. The student will write an essay on an individual's responsibility to uphold the academic code, with respect to academic integrity, plagiarism, and the line, "It is each student's responsibility to find out exactly what each of his/her professors expects in terms of acknowledging sources of information on papers, exams and assignments." This essay will be released with the abstract.

5. The student will write a letter of apology to the authors of the un-cited sources he used.

Presentation of Resolutions:

Peter respected the jury's decision and expressed his willingness to do what the jury had requested of him.

Professor Lois thought that the resolutions were appropriate. She conceded that the resolutions might be viewed as lenient by someone who only read the abstract, but that her good personal relationship with Peter helped her to view the resolutions as appropriate.

The jury again discussed the resolutions after the required break from the case, and came to final consensus on the resolutions **above**.

Discussion Questions:

1. What constitutes gross plagiarism? Is it intent? Should it concern us that the code does not articulate what constitutes gross plagiarism?

2. Where, when, and to what degree is separation appropriate? To what degree is intent a factor?

3. How do we reconcile individual accountability with the community at large with confidentiality? Is the former compromised by the latter? Are they mutually exclusive?

4. Should a jury address only the specific violations articulated by the confronting parties? Can a jury also come to a statement of violation for actions brought to light by the trial proceedings?

The student will write an essay on an individual's responsibility to uphold the academic code, with respect to academic integrity, plagiarism, and the line, "It is each student's responsibility to find out exactly what each of his/her professors expects in terms of acknowledging sources on papers, exams, and the assignments." This essay will be released with the abstract.

As a member of the Haverford Community, it is my responsibility to uphold the responsibilities that stem from the social and academic Honor Code. My experience during the Honor Council trial has been very difficult, but at the same time, a learning process. Through this period, I have had the time to reflect on the responsibilities of my actions. At the end of the trial, I realized how much I had grown as a person, both intellectually and socially. My unintentional plagiarism is inexcusable and I should have taken more of an initiative to prevent such a matter from taking place. I should have taken the initiative to proof read my paper and follow the guidelines given by my professor. If any set of instructions were unclear, I should have made a concerted effort to approach my professor outside of the classroom and during my professor's office hours. If I was unclear on the quality of my paper, I also should have consulted with my professor.

An important tool which a student must utilize between a professor, is communication. Aside from this incident, communication is a vital instrument in strengthening and preserving the relationship between a professor and a student. In addition, clear communication is an effective means for understanding the expectations one has for the other. I should have effectively communicated with my professor about the expectations. Despite the fact the professor had not mentioned the proper citation format; it was my responsibility to inform my professor of such a matter. Clarity is the most effective element of communication. The responsibilities of adhering to the Honor Code should be mutual. As students at Haverford, we should not rely on our professors to outline every expectation; rather, if we are unclear, we must inform our professors through dialogue. If one is unclear of the proper citation format, there are many resources available to the students. One resource which students fail to utilize is the writing center. In this case, I was one of those students who failed to take advantage of the writing center.

This process was extremely daunting, but due to my relationship with my professor, I was able to endure and overcome the procedure. Although I made the effort to go to my professor's office hours, I still failed to consult with the matter at hand. One important lesson that I have taken from the trial, is that plagiarism is a very important offense, regardless if it is intentional or unintentional. As a student at Haverford, I should have made it my responsibility to proof read my paper to prevent deception. Although I had not intentionally presented someone else's scholarly work as my own, it appeared to be the opposite in the eyes of my professor. I should have made the initiative to find out my professor's criteria on citations for papers. Although my actions were unintentional, I am ashamed at the fact that my professor will have this perception of me which is false. Ultimately, it is every individual's responsibility to uphold the academic code, especially integrity and plagiarism.