

Abstract Discussions: Wednesday, March 16th at 5 PM and Thursday, March 17th at 1 PM in the Sunken Lounge of the Dining Center.

Eugene

An Honor Council Academic Trial

Released Fall 2001 & Re-Released¹ Spring 2005

Introduction:

Professor Holt confronted Eugene regarding a take-home test he had turned in which bore an uncanny resemblance to another student's exam. Eugene met with Professor Holt, and the matter was taken to Honor Council.

Fact-Finding:

Professor Holt's statement:

While grading tests, Professor Holt noticed striking similarities between Eugene's answers to the questions and those of Samantha, one of Eugene's friends. The test was a take-home test, open book, worth a significant portion of the grade. The similarities Professor Holt noticed in the exams were that, of the ten questions asked, eight of them had the same solutions, but could have, in the professor's opinion, been arrived at independently. One question the first, had obviously been done independently, as Eugene got the correct answer and Samantha did not. One question, however, had the same wrong answer, with little explanatory work. Professor Holt contacted the two students via email, and Eugene admitted that he had copied some of Samantha's papers in preparing for the test, not realizing that he was copying from her exam, and mentioned Antonio, another friend with whom he had been studying. When pressed for details, Eugene responded by saying that he knew what he had done was wrong. Professor Holt gauged Samantha's response to these events as surprise. She acknowledged that she, Eugene, and Antonio had formed a study group, but said that she did not feel as if she had done anything wrong. Professor Holt expressed concern to the jury that her practice of giving a final exam as a take-home test, and take-homes in general, were in jeopardy as a result of this situation.

Eugene's statement

Eugene began by stating that he, Samantha, and Antonio had been working together all semester long in a study group, a practice that had been encouraged by the professor.

¹ At the time Honor Council released the original *Eugene*, Eugene had not submitted his letter to the Community. Now that he has fulfilled his resolutions, Council considered it appropriate to re-release the abstract with his letter. A few slight changes were made for reformatting and grammatical correctness.

They did homework together, and when Eugene could not figure out the answers, Samantha would help him, as something of a tutor. In addition, Eugene would often look through Antonio's and Samantha's notes for this class, with their consent. The night before the test was due, Eugene, attempting to study, compiled a series of sample questions to use as guidelines for the test, which was within the guidelines the professor had set. His computer was broken, and so Eugene had been using Samantha's computer to check email, and on the night before the test was using it to collect sample questions from an online resource. He saw Samantha's test and, thinking it was a review sheet he had not received, copied the answers from the test into his notes, placing them in chronological order, not all together. While taking the test, roughly an hour later, Eugene noticed that some of the questions were identical to ones in his notes, but was so relieved that he had the right answers that he did not notice or care that he was copying answers he did not understand onto his paper. Eugene mentioned that, when confronted by Professor Holt, he had displayed a bad attitude because he did not think that he had cheated, and resented the confrontation, considering that his actions were unintentional.

Questions:

The Jury members asked Eugene and Professor Holt several clarifying questions. The following is a summary of their responses:

Professor Holt stated that students were allowed to collaborate until the tests were opened. Eugene ruled out the possibility that he had copied Samantha's notes for the exam rather than the exam itself. He first realized that he had done this when confronted by Professor Holt. Eugene was surprised when he saw that he had the answers to the exam in his notes, he thought that Professor Holt was asking questions they had already gone over in class or in review. Professor Holt pointed out that she would not have done this, considering that she makes the answers from the homework available to her students. Eugene was unable to attend review sessions due to time conflicts, but Samantha and Antonio always went; he figured that the sheet he was copying from was from the review. Professor Holt mentioned that she did indeed give out review sheets that resembled the test; however, the test was clearly marked as such on the front page, right above the first question. Eugene told the jury that he did not see the first page, as the test was face down when he found it. Eugene also told the jury that he didn't know that Samantha had taken the test. He took the test about an hour after being in Samantha's room and copying her exam. One jury member asked Professor Holt what her opinions on Eugene's collaboration with the other students was, to which she responded that it did not seem conducive to learning the material. Eugene asserted that, although Samantha had helped him, the majority of the work had been his, and that he understood most of the material. Eugene was shocked that Professor Holt thought he'd copied 8 of the 10 questions, and stated that he remembered doing 1, 2, 3, and 9 by himself, using the notes from Samantha's exam as a basis for questions 5, 7, 8, and 10, and copying 6 verbatim from his notes. He could not recall the circumstances of question 4. Professor Holt asked Eugene whether he feels this was representing another's work as one's own. Eugene replied that if it was, then the entire year's work had been as well.

Samantha's statement:

Samantha stated that she, Eugene, and Antonio always did their homework for this class together, but took the tests separately. After taking the test the night before it was due, she placed it on her bookshelf, face down, so as not to forget to turn it in. The next morning at breakfast, Eugene, speaking about the test, displayed confidence about some of the questions, which was unusual and made Samantha uncomfortable. She knew that Antonio had given Eugene his test the night before so that he could hand it in. and thought that Eugene might have copied Antonio's exam.

Questions:

The Jury members asked Samantha several clarifying questions. The following is a summary of her responses:

That night, Samantha had gone to the library to take the test, and finished at about 8. She saw Eugene when she came home, and told him that she had just completed the test. The test was upside-down on her bookshelf which was in the center of the room, along with some other things, but no class-related notes. Samantha said that it was not normal for Eugene to look at notes that she had done independently, and that although he had been using her computer, he did not have express permission to go through her papers. Samantha told the Jury that the test was distinctive, and should not have been mistaken for a review sheet. She said that she could see how Eugene's story about not realizing he was copying the exam could be true, but that she had a hard time believing it.

Jury Deliberations:

After much discussion of the nature of cheating vs. plagiarism and the possible role of intent in each, the Jury decided to contact Antonio, who, Samantha had mentioned, had further information that could affect the nature of the statement of violation.

Antonio's statement:

Antonio confirmed that the three had been studying together all year, except for when Eugene's busy schedule prevented them from doing so, on which occasions he would do the work alone, without his or Samantha's aid. Antonio was of the impression that Eugene wanted to start his test the morning of the day before it was due. Antonio did not feel that Eugene had any motivation to cheat, and could not understand the situation at all.

Statement of Violation:

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

The student violated the Honor Code by copying another student's exam and representing that person's work as his own.²

Circumstantial Portion:

Eugene cited his state of mind at the time of the exam for his mistaking Samantha's exam for review questions. Although he was under academic stress, he said that the main reason for his state at the time was a family crisis that had been present throughout the semester but had escalated in the 2-3 days prior to the exam, due to which he was emotionally drained and pressed for time. In addition, the class fulfilled a requirement that he wanted to fulfill. Financial circumstances were also mentioned.

Eugene was adamant that the Jury not believe that he intentionally cheated. He cited the fact that he had copied question 6 verbatim, which, had he planned to cheat, he would not have done. He also pointed out that, while he was taking the test, he was in possession of Antonio's test, which he also could have cheated off of if had he planned to do so.

In terms of suggested resolutions, Eugene felt that he should fail the test, but not the class. Alternately, he suggested that his overall GPA be reduced, but that he be given credit for the class. Eugene also proposed writing a letter to the community, and engaging in a dialogue with the professor. Professor Holt felt that Eugene was not being honest, and needed time to think about what he had done. She felt that this was an instance of cheating, and as such was in favor of Eugene failing the class. She also pointed out that, should Eugene fail the test, he would also fail the class.

Jury Deliberations:

The Jury again discussed the question of intent, and tried to reconcile the evidence of extensive intentional cheating with Eugene's assertions that he did not know he was copying from the exam. Many jurors believed Eugene, and thought that he had accurately represented the events as he remembered them, while others felt that they had been explicitly lied to. In order to get past this issue, the Jury focused on the act of copying itself, which all jurors felt displayed a lack of academic integrity. The Jury felt that as a Haverford student, Eugene should have displayed extra caution while taking the take-home test. There was discussion as to whether Eugene should fail the class as well as the test, despite the practical outcomes of the two options being the same. Some jurors felt that the lapse in academic integrity should negate the work he had done all semester long, as is customary in cases of plagiarism, and others felt that if all Eugene failed was the test, it would send the message to other students that, if they feel they are going to fail a test, there would be no negative repercussions for cheating. A grade reduction was also considered, but the Jury decided against it because it would have been purely symbolic, as Eugene would have already failed the class. The possibility of separation was also

² Prior to the presentation of this statement, Professor Holt, having re-examined Eugene's test, discovered that part of question 1, which was on the front page along with the label of the test and the guidelines for taking it, was undoubtedly copied, despite Eugene's assertions to the contrary. The Jury did not feel that this merited changing the statement of violation.

discussed, but dismissed after much deliberation because of the circumstances of the situation. As to Eugene's passing the class, some jurors felt that it was Eugene's responsibility to explore methods of doing so, and not Honor Council's. Others felt that it was important for Eugene and Professor Holt to have the further contact involved in Eugene's working to pass the class in order to repair the breach of trust between them.

The Jury came to consensus on the following resolutions:

- 1. The student will receive a 0.0 for both the exam and the course**
- 2. The student will write a letter to the community addressing the importance of take home exams and the trust placed in students by professors when giving such exams. This letter will also discuss how to maintain academic integrity in stressful situations.**
- 3. The student and the professor will have a mediated dialogue with the goal of repairing the breach of trust caused by this action.**
- 4. Following this dialogue, if and when both parties feel that the breach of trust is sufficiently repaired for them to work together, they may develop a plan to allow the student to do make up work for the course. If the work is completed to the professor's satisfaction, the student may receive the lowest passing grade for the course.**

Questions:

1. How important is intent in cases of plagiarism or cheating?
2. How can the Jury reconcile conflicting accounts, given that each witness must be assumed to be telling the truth?
3. Where should the limits of collaboration be? Do students have an obligation to consider their own standards of academic integrity in addition to (or above and beyond) those given by the professor?

Eugene's Letter to the Community

Dear Haverford,

What stands out from this experience is how necessary it is to recognize and value the gift of accountability that we have been given by taking part in the honor code. The entire concept is an inspiring one to me, especially after making a mistake. While the honor code is meant to help us build community, I think it is most valuable on a personal level. Even after screwing up big time, owning one's mistake is still an honorable decision. It lets you move forward and learn from your own actions. Denying yourself that path is far too lonely decision to make. Use this gift.

The professors and the students have to build trust and accountability together, and a big part of how we do that is the trust necessitated by take home exams. It's not simply a convenience, it is a way to continue the growth and strengthening of the honor code. I think of take home exams as little tests, little ways to check our commitment to the community, and to ourselves. Obviously, I failed one such test. But in the end, I think the experience of failing has given me an insight into the inner workings of the honor code. I think I didn't value the code enough, and now its importance seems to manifest itself everywhere. I actually value this part of my Haverford experience as much as anything. It makes me happy that despite the mistake I made (and I'm sure other people have done similar things) we still have take home exams— their importance is not academic, it's another way we're able to learn and grow into better people.

I think it's important to note that the trust and accountability that take home exams require is undone by anything less than total honesty in every circumstance. And to truly be faithful to the code, you have to maintain your integrity through even the most intense and stressful situations. There are no excuses. In the end, a stressful situation is an opportunity to rely upon the code, to use it for strength rather than fall away from it. In the middle of a really rough time I wasn't able to communicate what I was going through. I found myself in a deep hole, with an easy way out that I shouldn't have taken, but which I took anyway. I deeply regret my actions, and I am thankful to go to a school where the aim of the community is to help me learn from my mistake, rather than punish me for it.

Thank you, Haverford, for allowing me to be accountable for what I did.

Best,
Eugene