

Abstract Discussions: Thursday, February 23<sup>rd</sup> at 7:30 PM in Lunt Cafe.

# Jack and Professor King

## An Honor Council Academic Trial

### Released Spring 2006

**Confronted Party:** Jack, **Confronting Party:** Professor King, **Jurors:** Chester, Peter, Harold, Mortimer (chair), Cecily, and Doratheia.

#### **Introduction:**

Jack was a sophomore in Professor King's class entitled "Learning to Write Research Papers." Professor King suspected that Jack's final paper was not his own work. Professor King initially contacted the deans and was referred to Honor Council.

Professor King received Jack's paper and immediately confronted Jack via email regarding the lack of bibliography. Upon reading Jack's paper, Professor King noticed discrepancies in the writing style and an apparent lack of citations.

Both parties were present for the fact-finding portion; both parties submitted statements.

#### **Fact Finding:**

##### *Professor King's Statement:*

Professor King had been disappointed with Jack's work the entire semester and in the course Jack had previously taken with him. Jack had failed to complete the preliminary assignments (most importantly the preliminary bibliography) leading to the completion of the final research paper. After Professor King noticed that there were discrepancies in the writing style of the paper and that large portions of the paper were uncited, his first instinct was to talk to Jack and settle the issue privately. The deans directed him to take his concerns to Honor Council. Professor King stated that, at best, Jack had "willfully refused to follow scholarly protocol," and at worst, he had plagiarized.

##### *Jack's Statement:*

Jack readily admitted that he had done little work in the course. He had not begun researching or writing his final paper for the course until the week before the deadline. He stated that he had rewritten or reworked notes he compiled from internet sources ten to fifteen times before the final draft. He believed that he was paraphrasing, not plagiarizing, and stated that he did not cite sources in many instances because he thought he did not need to provide citations for material he considered factual. He thought that the only instance that required citation was quoting directly from a source. Jack said that he was aware of the poor quality of the paper for which he blamed his poor writing abilities and time management skills. He stated that he did not intend to plagiarize and he did not believe he had plagiarized, but was sorry if he had, in fact, plagiarized.

#### **Jury Questions:**

The jury members asked questions to clarify the statements of both parties:

*Regarding the extent of the plagiarism:* Professor King did not know the source of the material that Jack supposedly plagiarized, but felt that the sophistication of the ideas and language used were well above Jack's

level of scholarship and demanded appropriate citation. He noted a marked difference between Jack's introductory paragraphs and the body of the paper.

Jack told the jury that he had "Googled" key words on his topic and used perhaps ten to fifteen internet sources. He stated that he had then typed up and re-worded the information he found.

*Regarding the use of citations:* Professor King stated that the seminar course was designed to teach research methods and that the final paper was a 'training exercise' for future courses. Accordingly, he had organized a library presentation and distributed handouts to the class that taught research methods and proper citation for research papers.

Jack admitted that he was not 'taking the course seriously' and had failed to pay attention to exercises and assignments designed to assist research, writing, and proper citation. Jack told the jury that he believed he did not need to cite factual information. He had cited sources in the same way in his past papers and did not see any problem with his use of citations. Both Jack and Professor King agreed that no other paper thus far in the course had demanded the same grasp of proper citation for outside sources.

Several jurors asked questions meant to clarify what information constitutes facts versus ideas or opinions and the implications of this distinction on citation standards. Jack stated that Professor King had taught the class many of the facts that he had used in his paper, and that thus he believed they did not need to be cited. He went on to state that he believed only opinions and direct quotes needed to be cited.

Professor King told the jury that facts of this specific nature were by no means obvious because they inherently represented the author's original interpretation, and thus demanded citation.

### **Deliberations:**

#### *Regarding Plagiarism:*

The jury agreed that Jack was not taking the course or his college education seriously, but acknowledged that apathy is not truly an Honor Code violation. Some jury members believed that Jack did not know how to cite properly and did not intend to plagiarize. One juror pointed out that because the objective of the course was to teach students how to properly research and cite, it was understandable that Jack went into the assignment unsure of how to do these things. Peter stated that not citing is plagiarism regardless of whether the student knows how to cite or not. Other jury members agreed with this sentiment and were troubled by Jack's unwillingness to learn how to cite properly. Another juror pointed out that under the Honor Code, it is every student's responsibility to seek out his/her professor to learn or to clarify his/her expectations regarding citations. Several jury members felt that Jack had neglected this responsibility. However, the weight of the group seemed to be uncertain if Jack's actions actually constituted plagiarism and were still unsure whether the paper had been plagiarized or whether it had been simply badly written because of poor study habits and last-minute pressure. Ultimately, the jury decided that it could not come to a statement of violation until each member had had the opportunity to review Jack's paper for himself/herself. Mortimer, the trial chair, agreed to contact Professor King to obtain Jack's paper and to give a copy to each jury member.

The jury then discussed whether it could conduct internet research to ascertain the source(s) of possible plagiarism. Mortimer stated that jury members were free to do as they liked, but the spirit of the Honor Code required them to trust Jack. Pending the review of Jack's paper, the jury adjourned for the evening.

The jury reconvened. Peter had typed in keywords into a search engine and located many of the sources Jack had used in his paper. In many cases, large sections and whole phrases taken word for word from these internet sources appeared in Jack's paper without citation. With this development, the jury agreed that the Honor Code had been violated.

Discussion ensued within the jury regarding whether Jack actually “represented someone else’s words or ideas as his own” (the definition of plagiarism in the Honor Code) or if he simply paraphrased facts that were considered “common knowledge” and thus did not require citation. Most jury members felt that the information that Jack took from these internet sources did constitute the words or ideas of another, even if these words were comprised of mostly facts and little analysis.

Many jury members still did not believe that Jack’s actions constituted an intentional attempt to deceive Professor King, and may have been the product of ignorance.

**Statement of Violation:**

**Considering only the facts of the case and not any extenuating circumstances, the jury came to consensus on the following statement<sup>1</sup>:**

**"Jack violated the honor code by plagiarizing and neglecting his responsibility to understand his professor’s citation standards."**

Harold stood outside consensus because he felt that the wording of the statement suggested that the jury sided with Professor King about his criticisms of Jack unrelated to citation issues and would convey the impression that the jury was unsympathetic to Jack. Peter also stood outside because he felt that the statement should not have included the portion concerning Jack’s neglect of his responsibilities to understand citation standards, and should have simply focused on the act of plagiarism.

**Circumstantial:**

The jury reconvened for the circumstantial portion. Both parties were present.

*Professor King’s Statement:*

Professor King did not believe the plagiarism was malicious but rather reflected Jack’s poor approach to learning. Professor King expressed frustration that deans, faculty, and Honor Council were expending considerable energy to help Jack. He suggested that Jack did not belong at the college and lacked maturity, and added that Jack was not taking responsibility for his actions or for his education. Professor King pointed out that Jack was already on academic probation at the beginning of his sophomore year, and his disregard for the agreement made in accordance with his probation reflected his stubbornness and unwillingness to learn. Professor King concluded by saying that he had gone over citation rules in class, and stressed the importance of students asking for clarification when there was an ambiguity concerning citation standards.

*Jack’s Statement:*

Jack chose not to give a statement.

**Jury Questions:**

The jury asked several questions to gather more information:

*Regarding the lack of citation:* Professor King explained that facts need to be cited unless they are so common that everyone knows them. He stated that the un-cited material was not common knowledge nor was it purely factual for it contained an interpretation and a conceptual approach to these facts, and as such, demanded citation.

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<sup>1</sup> Note: Prior to the circumstantial portion, the jury had consented on a preliminary statement of violation. For time and scheduling reasons, the jury proceeded to the circumstantial portion without finalizing a statement of violation. The following statement of violation was consented upon immediately following the circumstantial portion.

Professor King admitted that his hand-outs may not have covered this particular question about citation – he had assumed that students would know so basic a tenet as facts should be cited.

Jack admitted that he had not read the hand-outs provided by Professor King, and had simply assumed that the only instance in which citation was necessary was for direct quotes. He also stated that this was his first research paper as a college student, and the first real research paper of his career as a student, as his high school had not trained him in citation.

*Regarding Jack's grade in the class:* Professor King stated that even had Jack not plagiarized the paper, he would have failed the class.

*Regarding Jack's state of mind when he wrote the paper:* Jack told the jury that he had stayed up for four days straight during the exam period. He had started this paper the afternoon of the day before it was due. In response to questions from the jury, he described his poor academic performance starting freshman year. He had had conflicts with Professor King in the class he took with him previously. He was overwhelmed with work and lacked sleep the week he wrote the paper, which he attributed to poor time management skills. He also described problems with drugs and alcohol and a painful break-up during the time period leading up to the paper's due date.

*Regarding Jack's wish to return to the college:* Jack stated that he had, to that date, never read the Honor Code, even when he signed it as an incoming freshman. He admitted that he had not been following the guidelines of his academic probation, and that because of this, he had been forced to take time away from the college. He expressed a plan to take a full semester of classes at another institution, and promised that he would take his classes at Haverford more seriously were he allowed to return. When asked if he wished to return to the college, he responded in the affirmative, but could not state clear reasons why he wished to return.

### **Jury Reactions to Circumstantial Portion:**

The jury noted the animosity between Jack and Professor King and expressed hope that the trial resolutions would specifically address the breach of trust between student and professor. The jury also noted what appeared to be Jack's continuing apathy toward the trial itself and toward returning to the college. It concerned the jury that Jack had still not read the Honor Code, even when he was on trial for violating it. The jury hoped that the resolutions would make Jack less apathetic about the Honor Code and his education. However, some jury members noted progress in Jack's attitude since the fact-finding session and were convinced that Jack truly did want to return.

### **Jury Deliberation on Tentative Resolutions:**

There was initial discussion of whether Jack's paper constituted a gross act of plagiarism, with the weight of the group feeling uncomfortable using the word "gross" to describe Jack's plagiarism. Discussion focused primarily on trial resolutions.

The jury wanted to construct resolutions that would both make Jack appreciate the seriousness of the Honor Code and his violation of it, and that would help him to re-enter the community as an effective student and trustworthy community member.

The jury was concerned that Jack seemed to have little appreciation for the values of Haverford, little respect for the Honor Code, and little confidence in his own scholastic abilities. Members of the jury also felt strongly that Jack needed learn to cite correctly. Accordingly, preliminary ideas for possible resolutions centered around three goals:

1. Make Jack take responsibility for his violation of the Honor Code

2. Ensure an improvement in Jack's academic performance and in his ability to cite correctly
3. Ensure that Jack re-enters the community with an understanding of the Honor Code and his role in an honor system

One juror suggested that Jack write a research paper for no credit under the guidance of a professor that would teach him how to research, write, and cite correctly. Other suggestions included that a support system be constructed for Jack, both academically, in the form of a dean or fellow student, and emotionally, perhaps in the form of psychological services. It was also suggested that he take some kind of remedial course designed to teach Jack basic writing and citation skills. The jury was generally in agreement about the positive value of having Jack write such a research paper, as it would hold Jack accountable for his actions (i.e. not writing the paper in the first place) and would have educational value in teaching Jack study habits, writing skills, and how to cite. Some members of the jury were concerned about whether the breach of trust between Jack and Professor King was too great for them to work together on this paper, and whether it might be more beneficial for Jack to be paired with another professor.

To address the third concern, a wide variety of approaches were discussed. The traditional letter to the community was suggested, as was an essay on the Honor Code designed to produce reflection on the experience. Several jury members felt Honor Code essays were ineffectual "fluff" that would not produce the desired reflection and personal growth. Another juror stated that even though the value of the essay itself might be minimal, the simple act of being forced to write such an essay or letter might force Jack to at least think about the issues at stake and might actually result in genuine reflection. Several jurors agreed. The idea that Jack might be compelled to do community service such as tutoring students from under-served communities was also discussed as a way in which Jack could gain confidence in his own scholastic abilities and be forced to confront apathy in others, and thus confront his own apathy. Other suggestions designed to encourage Jack to take part in Haverford's specific honor system included compelling him to attend events in the Haverford community concerning the Honor Code, and asking him to design his own individual plan with the Honor Council co-chairs and a dean to demonstrate his commitment to Haverford's honor system. The jury felt positively towards this last suggestion, as it would place the responsibility in Jack's hands and force him to be more actively engaged in re-entering the community, and would give him more flexibility and choice, thus making him more inclined to follow through.

Separation was again discussed, but was complicated by Jack's poor academic performance and resultant plans created for Jack by the Committee on Student Standing and Programs<sup>2</sup> (CSSP), that already included a one year separation from Haverford. The Honor Council chair researched what plans had already been constructed for Jack and found that these plans focused around standards for academic performance, frequent check-ins with his dean, and a two semester separation from the college during the first semester of which he was to take time off, and during the second semester of which he was to take courses at another educational institution.

Cecily expressed the sentiment that originally she had been inclined to trust Jack and had been uncomfortable using the term "gross" to describe his plagiarism, but after hearing what he had to say in the circumstantial portion and after Peter revealed how much of the information in Jack's paper had truly been lifted from internet sources, she had become comfortable using the term "gross." The weight of the group seemed to support this sentiment. Other jurors felt that Jack had purposefully refused to learn citation guidelines, and that willful ignorance was no excuse for plagiarism. Most of the jurors also agreed that Jack should be separated from the college. In light of Jack's one year CSSP separation, jury members discussed whether separation from the college should run concurrently or should be an "additional" semester, meaning his total time away from the college would be one and a half years. Several members of the jury were concerned that if separation ran concurrently, Jack would not have time to complete the resolutions and

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<sup>2</sup> The Committee on Student Standing and Programs (CSSP), a standing committee of the Faculty, is composed of three faculty members (one from each of the three Divisions of the College) appointed by Academic Council, three students (one of whom must be a sophomore) appointed by Students' Council, and the Deans of the College. The Committee is charged with reviewing students' academic performance regularly.

consider how his actions violated the Honor Code before returning to campus. However, other jury members were concerned that Jack had already spent a significant amount of time away from the college, and that separation for an additional semester would not be helpful to Jack, and would simply be punitive. The jury generally agreed that separation running concurrently would be more appropriate, as the jury would still be separating Jack from the community for his Honor Code violation at least symbolically, while still appreciating Jack's unique circumstances.

Several jury members expressed strong concern that Jack should not be allowed to return to Haverford until the resolutions were completed. Some jury members also thought that upon his return to Haverford Jack should re-apply and re-sign the Honor Code.

The jury came to tentative resolutions, which are reprinted below:

#### **Tentative Resolutions:**

- 1. Jack will read the Honor Code.**
- 2. Jack will write a 15 to 20 page research paper on a topic to be approved by Professor King. The professor will return drafts of the paper and bibliography until he is satisfied with the quality of the work. The jury suggested that the student and professor meet regularly to facilitate this process. This must be completed before readmission to the college.**
- 3. Jack will demonstrate his understanding of what he did and how it relates to the Honor Code and the community his willingness to actively participate in an honor system and his desire to return to Haverford in a method of his choosing.**
- 4. Jack will be separated for one semester to run concurrently with his CSSP separation.**

#### *Suggestions:*

It is recommended that Jack establish a support network including, but not limited to, psychological services and a dean or professor.

One juror stood outside of consensus on resolution number three.

Two jurors stood outside of consensus on resolution number four.

One juror stood outside of consensus on the resolutions as a whole.

#### **Presentation of Resolutions:**

The jury reconvened with Jack. Professor King was absent but had been sent a copy of the tentative resolutions via email and had also responded to Mortimer via email. Professor King disagreed with the tentative resolutions for the following reasons:

- He disagreed with the jury's resolutions that required the participation and guidance of himself or other professors because he felt it was making undue demands on his time and resources.
- He acknowledged a trend in recent abstracts of supporting instead of "punishing" plagiarism confrontees.
- He suggested that the faculty should address how citation standards are taught in first-year writing courses. He then suggested that council punish violators of these standards in a consistent way.

The jury then discussed the following points with Jack:

- The jury expressed concern over Jack's attitude and apathy towards the trial manifested by Jack's neglecting to read the Honor Code before the trial.
- The jury explained to Jack that the research paper was included not only to make Jack take accountability for his actions, but that it was also an opportunity for Jack to really learn the necessary skills involved in correctly researching, constructing, and citing an original research paper. The jury also emphasized that it understood that the animosity between Jack and Professor King was the

product of mistakes and miscommunications made on both sides. When informed that Professor King had declined the opportunity to work with Jack as the guiding professor on this research paper, Jack agreed that this was for the best, and expressed doubt as to whether they would have been able to repair the breach of trust and work together again in an academic setting.

- The jury explained to Jack that the third resolution was also an opportunity for Jack to demonstrate his commitment to the Honor Code and his personal maturity to the jury and to the community. The flexibility of this resolution was also emphasized, and the jury encouraged Jack to be creative and create a plan that truly interested him.
- The jury explained to Jack that it believed separating him for a semester in addition to the separation already mandated by CSSP would not be beneficial to him in any way.
- The jury stressed the importance and possible benefits of establishing a support system to Jack – that it was not meant as a patronizing statement on his academic or personal strength, but simply a recommendation that would help him set up a system that could serve as a resource in difficult or stressful situations in the future.
- Jack expressed concern over the feasibility of completing all of the resolutions at the same time that he was working and taking classes, as he believed they would require an immense amount of time.

### **Jury Deliberations on Final Resolutions:**

After presenting the resolutions, the following issues were discussed:

Most of the jurors felt comfortable with the resolutions as a whole. Several jurors, particularly Harold and Dorathea, were concerned that the resolutions were overly harsh and did not fit the level of severity of Jack's Honor Code violation. Many were still concerned about Jack's attitude of apathy and disrespect for the process, but believed the resolutions would adequately address these concerns. Cecily was concerned that the resolutions were overly lenient, saying that an additional semester of separation might be beneficial to Jack and an appropriate response to his serious actions. It was suggested that resolution #2 (the research paper) be eliminated or reduced in response to Harold expressing concerns that this was too much work for the jury to demand of Jack. But several jury members felt strongly that the paper was a key way in which it was asking Jack to take accountability for his actions, and also an important tool in Jack's education as a student and community member.

The jury then came to consensus on the following final resolutions:

### **Final Resolutions:**

- 1. Jack will read the Honor Code.**
- 2. Jack will write a 15 to 20 page paper on a topic to be approved by a Haverford professor or dean. The professor/dean will return drafts of the paper and bibliography until he/she is satisfied with the quality of the work. The jury suggested that the student and professor/dean meet regularly to complete this process. This work must be completed before readmission to the college.**
- 3. Jack will demonstrate his understanding of what he did and how it relates to the Honor Code and the community, his willingness to actively participate in an honor system, and his desire to return to Haverford in a method of his choosing.**
- 4. Jack will be separated for one semester to run concurrently with his CSSP separation.**

### *Suggestions:*

It is recommended that Jack establish a support network including, but not limited to, psychological services and a dean or professor.

Both Harold and Cecily stood outside consensus on resolution #2. Harold believed that that the length of the paper was excessive, and was an unreasonable amount of work for the jury to expect Jack to complete. Cecily stood outside because she believed the paper was not substantial enough to make Jack take accountability for his actions.

Doratheia and Peter both stood outside consensus on resolution #3. Doratheia felt that the jury was overstepping its bounds with this resolution, and that it constituted overkill. Peter took issue with the general principle of the resolution, saying among other things, that he believed it wasn't possible to be genuine regarding the Honor Code if not on campus.

Harold and Cecily again stood outside consensus on resolution #4. Harold felt that separation at all was unwarranted and overly harsh. Cecily took the opposite position, stating that she felt that having the semester separation run concurrently was too lenient, and that an additional semester of separation was warranted because of Jack's continuing attitude of apathy and continuing lack of respect for the Honor Code.

Doratheia and Harold stood outside consensus on the resolutions as a whole. Doratheia again felt that the resolutions were too harsh and that the jury has overstepped its bounds considering what Jack had actually done. Harold agreed that the resolutions were generally too harsh for the level of severity of Jack's actions.

**Discussion Questions:**

1. Should CSSP be taken into consideration when separating a student? Should separation run concurrently to minimize the negative impact for the student?
2. Should Honor Council resolutions be designed to help students gain maturity and take greater responsibility for their actions? Should honor council resolutions simply reflect the consequences of a student's actions?

Honor Council welcomes any and all opinions on this or any abstract. Please tell us what you think by coming to the abstract discussions, talking to an Honor Council representative, or e-mailing [code@haverford.edu](mailto:code@haverford.edu).