

**Abstract Discussion:**  
**Wednesday, November 7, 2007 @ 7:00 PM in the Sunken Lounge**  
**Thursday, November 8, 2007 @ 10:00 PM in Zubrow Commons**

## Pete Maple, Nigel Willow and Professor Oaks

**An Honor Council Trial Released November 2007**

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### **Introduction:**

Pete Maple and Nigel Willow, students in Professor Oaks's class, Chemical Botany, were confronted by their professor after Oaks noticed similarities on a take-home portion of the midterm exam and on multiple homework assignments. The professor initially found that the students gave similar answers on an exam question where multiple correct answers were possible and that both students used a botanical technique not covered in class to answer one of the questions, but he accepted the students' explanation that they had studied together extensively. After the exam, Oaks and his graders noticed similarities in the daily homework assignments that Pete and Nigel handed in. He sent an email to both, reminding them again of his and the department's policies concerning collaboration. After sending the email, Oaks continued to see similarities in homework scratch work and answers. He confronted both students and asked them to bring themselves to Honor Council. All three parties submitted formal statements to Honor Council, and were present for the fact finding portion of the trial.

### **Fact Finding:**

#### *Professor Oaks's Statement:*

Professor Oaks explained that his first suspicion of a violation of the Honor Code occurred after the first midterm exam. The professor noticed similarities on the take home portions of Pete Maple's and Nigel Willow's exams that did not appear to be coincidental. For example, one of the exam questions asked the students to draw a graph of the growth rates of a few types of trees that fit certain descriptions. Both Pete and Nigel had very similar graphs, even when there were multiple correct answers. The two also used the same fact, concerning the medicinal properties of ginseng when treating hepatitis C, in an explanation for an answer. This idea was not covered in class. Nigel and Pete explained that they studied together extensively for the exam, which might justify their similar techniques to solving problems, and that they had learned the fact about ginseng from Pete's tutor. Professor Oaks warned both not to work too closely together.

The next month, a grader brought Pete and Nigel's homework to the attention of Professor Oaks because some answers appeared to have been copied verbatim. Some problems in the homework assignments had identical correct answers where a great number of correct answers were possible. Other problems contained answers that did not appear to follow the scratch work and answers without scratch work. One of the problems contained some characters that Oaks could only explain as typos from transcribing an unfamiliar problem onto one's own

homework. He sent an email to both students urging them to read the homework policies and to not work so closely together. He asked them to look at the department's guidelines for collaboration: that working with other students on homework is allowed as long as the students discard all scratch work from the group session before independently writing their work and answers on a clean, separate sheet to be turned in.

Later that week, Professor Oaks again noticed similarities on Pete's and Nigel's homework, despite his warning email. He confronted Nigel, asking him to solve one of the problems from one of the suspicious problem sets. Nigel was unable to solve it. Oaks felt that this confirmed his suspicion that the pair had been copying homework from each other and other friends in the class. The professor confronted both Pete and Nigel about the suspected Honor Code violation and asked them to take themselves to Honor Council.

*Pete Maple's Statement:*

Pete explained that he and Professor Oaks had a conversation about whether Pete was collaborating with other students on the homework assignments, which Pete said he was. Pete stated he did not understand the professor's policy concerning collaboration, so he completed his homework as he would have done in high school. Pete had not read the part of the course syllabus concerning collaboration or looked at the department's collaboration policies. Pete explained he always worked with others on botany homework during high school. For Chemical Botany, he would always try the homework independently, but usually would get stuck. At times he would use a calculator, not realizing it was not allowed. After getting stuck, he would seek help from a botany tutor, from a department approved assistance program, from *Botany for Dummies*, or from Nigel Willow, with whom he often studied.

When Pete received the email from Professor Oaks, he did not realize the warning was addressed specifically to him. Thinking it was an all-class email, he disregarded it and continued to work with Nigel as before.

*Nigel Willow's Statement:*

Nigel stated that he told Professor Oaks that he had collaborated with Pete. Nigel took Chemical Botany in high school, but found the college course increasingly difficult. He turned to Pete for help with the homework. Like Pete, Nigel did not read the specifics of the syllabus and did not know Professor Oaks's policies concerning collaboration. Nigel sought help from others, including those in the department approved assistance program who would carefully walk him through the procedures. To the jury Nigel stated he never copied homework verbatim. This statement, however, directly contradicted the written statement he submitted to Honor Council, in which he explained "[Professor Oaks] believed that I copied some homework verbatim, which I had." Nigel admitted that the violation of the professor's homework policy was "ignorance on our part[s]...which we are still fully responsible for." He expressed an interest in doing whatever was necessary to handle this situation.

**Jury Questions:**

After reading and hearing the confronted parties' statements, the jury asked some clarifying questions. One juror asked how both Pete and Nigel came to use the same fact about ginseng (not covered in class) in answering a question on the take home portion of the midterm exam. Nigel answered that he learned this fact in a high school chemical botany course. He and Pete studied for this midterm together and taught each other. Another juror asked when the

confronted parties had finally understood the professor's policy on collaboration. Nigel answered that they were only aware of the policy after turning themselves in to Honor Council. When asked about the "typos in transcription," Nigel replied that this instance was due to his haste in trying to get his work done. The typos were fast, actual typos of his own work, "like a misspelling." Professor Oaks, however, didn't "think the typos are quite as innocent as [Nigel] claims." Neither confronted student sought Professor Oaks for assistance with problems in the homework assignments. Pete clarified that he had trouble understanding Professor Oaks in class, so he didn't think it would be best to see him again outside of class. He wanted a different explanation from someone else.

In answering a juror's question, Professor Oaks stated that he did not explain his policies in class, but had found his reminder/warning emails effective in stopping inappropriate collaboration when sent to others in the class. Nigel stated that he did not respond to the email sent by Professor Oaks because he thought it was a mass email and didn't think it pertained to him specifically.

### **Deliberations:**

Many members of the jury felt that the confronted parties were in violation of the Honor Code because "ignorance is no excuse." One juror stressed that it is each student's responsibility to know the course guidelines. After receiving both spoken and written (in email format) warnings, the confronted parties should have checked the policies, but did not. Another juror expressed doubt in the truth of the confronted parties' statements. One juror was less convinced that what Nigel and Pete did was a blatant violation. He expressed confusion about the difference between collaboration and copying. Another argued that the actions of Pete and Nigel were violations regardless of intention. In discussing the midterm exam, the jury could not find concrete proof of collaboration or copying. With regards to homework, however, the jury came to a statement of violation.

### **Statement of Violation:**

*Nigel Willow and Pete Maple violated the Honor Code by failing to find out and to "follow [their] professor's instructions as to the completion of ... homework," and by repeatedly "representing 'another person's scholarship as [their] own'" (quoted from the Honor Code and the faculty handbook).*

All members of the jury consented to this statement.

### **Circumstantial:**

When the trial reconvened, the Chair reviewed key points that had been made in the parties' absence, including concerns about breaches of trust in the relationships between the pair and Professor Oaks, and between them and the community. Pete and Nigel were then asked to recount any outside circumstances that they felt had contributed to their violations of the Honor Code.

Pete and Nigel talked at length about problems that they had with Professor Oaks' teaching style. They commented because they found Professor Oaks vague, intimidating and hard to understand in class, they had never felt that it would be useful to go to his office hours.

A juror questioned how Professor Oaks' teaching style contributed to their Honor Code violation. Pete reiterated that their collaboration was merely an attempt to understand concepts that they could not grasp when Professor Oaks taught them, and Nigel reiterated how heavily homework figured into the final grade and how he had consequently felt that it was important that he at least turn something in.

Pete and Nigel said that they were both concerned by their low grades (Pete was taking the course to fulfill a requirement for his botany major, Nigel also had an interest in a botany major). They mentioned that they should have been able to handle the work load, but that having a problem set due for each class was a lot of work since they also took a History of Botany class together that met on the same days and had homework due for each class.

A juror asked Nigel and Pete to talk about why they'd been attracted to Haverford. The pair mentioned, among other things, being attracted to the Honor Code, the atmosphere that it creates, and the relationships between professors and students that it fosters. They mentioned that neither of them had read Haverford's Honor Code, but that having been through the trial process they would do so.

Following these comments, jurors asked them more about their high schools' guidelines for collaboration, and their relationship with Professor Oaks. Nigel admitted that in his high school, you needed to cite everyone with whom you collaborated. Pete mourned the size of the Chemical Botany class and his lack of motivation to develop a relationship with Professor Oaks the way he did with other professors.

As the circumstantial portion came to an end, jurors asked how the pair saw their violation in relation to the community, and asked them to talk about the midterm again. Pete commented that their violation was disrespectful to the community, that it gave them an unfair advantage, and that it damaged their relationship with the community. They reiterated that they did not collaborate on the exam; at that point in the semester they felt they had a strong grasp of the material, and that they had studied very hard (together) before starting it. Nigel commented again that their ignorance of the guidelines in the syllabus made them no less responsible for their violation, but "maybe a little less culpable."

Then Pete, Nigel and the jury discussed Professor Oaks' comment from the fact finding portion of the trial, when he had said that all four students whom he suspected were collaborating were on the Curling team (Nigel, Pete, and two friends whom he had not felt it necessary to confront). Pete clarified that he was not on the team, but was friends with team members. Nigel expressed a concern that Professor Oaks was targeting them as athletes and that such "profiling" seemed "unprofessional." Pete commented that if the four of them had been members of a cappella group, it would not have been commented upon in a trial setting. A jury member suggested that the dynamics of any campus group – whether it is a sports team or a cappella singers – could either bring its members closer to the values of the larger Haverford community or further away from them. Pete and Nigel said that they wanted Professor Oaks and the community to feel that he could trust all students, regardless of whether or not they played sports.

A juror expressed what many seemed to be feeling, that Professor Oaks, Nigel and Pete seemed to be "worlds apart," and hoped that the trial's resolutions would help to bridge that gap and restore trust.

### **Chair's Meeting with Professor Oaks:**

The Chair then met privately with Professor Oaks. The Chair had wished to clarify that neither Professor Oaks nor a senior member had been able to find concrete evidence of cheating on the confronted parties' midterms. The Chair explained that the jury had not found any either, and, since Pete and Nigel maintained that they had not cheated, the jury was inclined to drop the matter of the midterm exam. Professor Oaks was comfortable with this, admitting that had he been convinced that they had cheated he would have brought the matter to Honor Council earlier. The Chair asked about Professor Oaks' comment regarding the Curling team. He was surprised to find that Pete was not on the same team as the other three. He said that the senior member of his department with whom he had spoken about the students' exams had initially given him the impression that they were teammates.

### **Deliberation & Tentative Resolutions:**

Jury members wondered whether Pete and Nigel had been sincere in their conversations with the jury and whether the two would be able to work sincerely to repair the breach of trust with Professor Oaks, particularly since there seemed to be so much mistrust on both sides. The jury began to unite around the idea of asking the pair to write apologies to Professor Oaks, and then having all three engage in dialogue, hoping that such steps would begin to restore the trust between them. The jury questioned to what extent the confronted parties felt that they had done anything wrong, and - feeling that it was impossible and perhaps inappropriate to force such a realization - the jury hoped that Pete and Nigel would reflect on their actions as they educated the community through letters to be included with their abstract, and through recommendations to help Honor Code Orienteers educate freshmen.

Through continued discussion, the jury came to consensus on tentative resolutions. The discussion was guided by concerns that Nigel and Pete be held accountable for their actions, be encouraged to reflect further on the effects of their violations, restore trust and better communicate with Professor Oaks, and educate the community through sharing their experiences and through writing suggestions for HCOs that reinforced the importance of understanding a professor's guidelines not only for taking exams and citing papers, but also for collaborating on homework assignments.

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

The parties were prepared to accept the tentative resolutions; no concerns were raised and no alternative resolutions were suggested.

The Chair spoke to the significance of the breach of trust with the community involved in the Honor Code violations that Pete and Nigel had committed (as small as each homework assignment may have seemed), and to the importance of the trial as an educational and restorative process through which the parties had engaged with community members and with the Code.

When confronted and confronting parties left, the jury turned to discussing final resolutions. As the parties had not expressed any concerns about the resolutions, the jury came to consensus that the tentative resolutions should be made final.

### **Final Resolutions:**

*- Pete and Nigel will each write a reflective letter to the community to be released with the abstract. It should be at least one page. The letter should address the relationship between*

*collaboration and the Honor Code and the importance of finding out and following professors' instructions and course guidelines.*

*- Pete and Nigel will each write a letter of apology to Professor Oaks before the end of this semester. All three will meet for a mediated discussion with a member of Honor Council and will continue to meet on their own for as long as they deem necessary. We recommend that the meetings begin within the first month of next semester.*

*- Pete and Nigel will redo each of the homework assignments presented to the jury according to Professor Oaks's guidelines. They will submit them to Professor Oaks for review before the start of next semester.*

*- Pete and Nigel will create recommendations to be given to the Honor Code Orienteer Committee prior to the training of the next HCOs so that they can be discussed with first year students. These recommendations should concern collaboration and the importance of finding out and following course guidelines and professors' instructions.*

*- We recommend that Professor Oaks halve the grade on all of Pete and Nigel's homework prior to the confrontation.*

No members of the jury stood outside of consensus on these resolutions.

### **Questions for Discussion**

1. What is the difference between collaboration and representing another's work as one's own?
2. When creating resolutions, how should a jury take into consideration the intentions of the confronted party when the violation occurred? What are the differences between intentional and unintentional violations?
3. Should claiming ignorance mitigate the seriousness of a violation of the Honor Code?
4. How can students cope with a teaching style that doesn't suit them?
5. To what extent do students' involvement in extracurricular activities affect their relationships with the community as a whole?

## **Pete Maple's Letter to the Community**

Dear Haverford Community,

As I write this letter, I reflect on the course of events that lead up to this trial, and on the semester as a whole. Throughout the course of the semester, I have learnt a vast array of knowledge. I have been through the emotions; remorse, regret, grief, anguish, pity, shame, and guilt, to name a few. I have thought long and hard about my actions, how they affected myself, the community, and my teacher. I have communicated with honor council about my actions, and how I went against the honor code. However, I think the most important lesson that I learnt from this experience was how it reinforced my belief in the honor code. Through this process, as I teetered over the edge and made amends for the actions I took, the honor code created an environment in which my actions could be dealt with in an honest manner, my student teacher relationship could be repaired, and I could be held accountable for my wrong doings with an effort to fix them and work towards the future.

Although this process has helped to reinforce my belief in the honor code, it has also made me feel a great sense of guilt and anguish for my actions. Even though my breach of the honor code has been kept between the jury, the professor, and myself, I still cannot get over that sense of guilt. Maybe this guilt stems from a complete betrayal of my morals. I remember when I first signed that honor code when I decided to attend Haverford, and my actions makes that signature feel forged.

As I walk around campus, and am greeted by different faces, I feel as if I am entitled to apologize to each and every one of you for my wrongdoing. Although I still wish to feel anonymous, because I do not want to wear a scarlet letter, or a badge of infamy, I feel that it is my duty to try to sincerely connect with each and every person that reads this letter of apology. I hope that after reading this letter, that each and every member of the community can feel that I have repented for my actions, and that over time this sense of guilt that I have can and will be lifted.

In conclusion, I want to furthermore apologize for putting the community, and my professor in a situation that everyone was unfairly placed. To the students around me in the classroom, my teacher and the campus on a whole, I was dishonest. My actions, in a community which is founded on honesty, were deceitful not only to you, the other students in the class, but to myself and personal growth as a student. I hope that you take this letter as a sincere apology, and we can move to foster an honest relationship, and work towards educating others, so that these course of events do not happen with other students in the future.

## **Nigel Willow's Letter to the Community**

Dear Haverford College Community,

The community here at Haverford College is set up in a manner in which the students are both blessed and burdened with a high level freedom. The level freedom which we are granted is not something we have a right to, but instead that we are privileged to receive. We as

members of this special community must not forget that responsibility is an intrinsic value that comes with the territory privileges. Because responsibility comes hand in hand with privileges, we must always respect this virtue and strive to maintain it in order for the Honor Code's system to succeed. The freedom we are so privileged to receive is something we cannot abuse and for this to happen there are certain responsibilities that we as Haverfordians are required to uphold. Among these responsibilities, the student-professor relationship is something that the students are held accountable for.

In order to maintain the student-professor relationship, it is the responsibility of the student to be aware of the guidelines that our professors require in our classes. The guidelines of classes are the first things we as students must be aware of. It is our responsibility to be familiar with the syllabus of the class so that we may know our limitations in each particular class. Whenever doubt or confusion arises, it is our responsibility to seek guidance from our professors and, if necessary, from Honor Council. An important issue that pertains to this responsibility is that of understanding the limitations of collaboration with respect to the Honor Code. This means that we, students, must take the liberty to understand the specific guidelines for each individual class. It is important that we take the initiative in this situation in order to avoid any confusion that could lead to an infraction of the Honor Code, even if unintentional. Ignorance is often a reason why this sort of infraction occurs, but it is never accepted as an excuse. It is our responsibility as students to create the Honor Code, but more importantly, to uphold the Honor Code, as every individual in the Haverford community has committed themselves to it.

