

Abstract discussion will be held on Wednesday, 10/29/14 at 7:30 PM in Ryan Gym.

THE OFFICE:

An Honor Council Academic Trial

Released Fall 2014

This abstract was not released in accordance to the timeline specified by the Students' Association Constitution. The confronting party did not consent to the release of the abstract. The confronted party consented to the release of the abstract. (The addition of this disclaimer began in Spring 2010).

Key:

Angela Martin: Confronted Party

Professor Michael Scott: Confronting Party

Paper Sales 300: Class

Summary:

Angela Martin, a Bryn Mawr student taking Paper Sales 300 with Professor Michael Scott, was confronted about extensive plagiarism in her midterm paper. Upon being confronted, she noticed that she had submitted an earlier draft form of her paper rather than the final copy, and that accounted for a large part of the external source usage and lack of citation. Throughout the trial she was receptive to the trial goals and was honest with the jury about her lack of malicious intent and stress going on in her life at the time. In the end, she received a 0.0 on her midterm paper and was asked to write a letter to the community as well as meet with her deans for continued plagiarism education.

Pre-Trial:

Angela Martin, a junior BMC student, was confronted by her Haverford professor, Michael Scott, over the submission of her midterm paper. The paper contained a number of instances of text close to external sources, which were not cited. In the confrontation process, Angela and Professor Scott agreed that there was a significant instance of plagiarism at hand, and brought the issue to Honor Council for resolution.

Fact Finding:

Angela submitted her midterm paper in Professor Scott's 300-level course with a number of passages that were very close to those found in external sources with no citation. Professor Scott

confronted Angela over the incident via email (jury members were given copies of all email communication between Angela and Prof. Scott), in which he stated his concern over a potentially very serious case of plagiarism. Upon receiving the email, Angela replied that she was surprised to hear that he was concerned about her work, but that she was happy to meet with him in person to discuss the problem at hand. Prior to meeting with Professor Scott, Angela looked over her paper again and sent Professor Scott another email claiming that she saw where his concern stemmed, and that she realized that she had not submitted her final draft of the paper that she had saved on the computer. Professor Scott then asked for her corrected paper, which she promptly emailed. When Professor Scott opened the latest draft Angela had written, he noticed that the last saved timestamp was a minute prior to sending the email. This caused Professor Scott to be concerned with Angela's honesty: he was concerned that she had plagiarized parts of her initial paper, and the latest draft he received was an attempt to retroactively correct the errors made, albeit a poor one because some incorrect citations remained. Angela and Professor Scott then met in person to discuss the incident, and agreed to send the case to Honor Council for resolution. During fact-finding, Angela described to the jury that the reason the timestamp on the later draft was a minute prior to sending was not because she had attempted to retroactively cover her mistake, but rather because she opened the document prior to submission to ensure it was the correct draft and then had hit save instinctively.

Jury Deliberations/Statement of Violation:

The jury sympathized with Angela's honesty regarding her account of the incident at hand, but also shared the concerns of the professor. While it seemed as though the plagiarism was an honest mistake, the paper containing plagiarism was submitted nonetheless, a violation of the Honor Code. Therefore, the jury unanimously consented to the following statement of violation:

Angela Martin violated the Honor Code by plagiarizing from outside sources without proper or complete citation. (All jurors consent)

Circumstantial Portion:

During circumstantial portion, Angela was extremely forthcoming with her concerns as to what underlying problems precipitated this violation of the Honor Code. She had studied abroad in a less challenging program the semester prior, and came into the semester very concerned about how she was going to perform academically. Taking an upper level class in her major caused her to be anxious, and she often felt stressed, sleep-deprived, prone to mistakes, and behind in her studies. Therefore, she felt that between being out of practice in academic writing and her anxiety, she often made careless errors. Angela saw this incident as a wake-up call, and in the time between being confronted and partaking as a trial party, had spoken to the dean and professors about academic integrity, remaining in control of her academic performance, and reducing stress levels.

Jury Deliberations and Tentative Resolutions:

The jury felt that given Angela's receptive attitude towards the Honor Code, the majority of resolutions should focus on holding her accountable for her mistake, while permitting her the ability in the future to become a strong member of the academic community. The most contentious of the tentative resolutions regarded accountability for her mistake: the majority of the jury felt that Angela should not get credit for her midterm, but one juror felt that they could not consent to that term since it seemed that Angela's actions were unintentional. Therefore, the jury consented to the following resolutions:

1. *Angela will write a letter to the community recounting her efforts to restore herself to the Bi-College community, to be published with the abstract. (All jurors consented.)*
2. *The jury requests that Honor Board release this abstract to the Bryn Mawr community. (All jurors consented.)*
3. *The jury recommends that Angela receives a 0.0 on the midterm assignment but that the grades of her other coursework remain unaffected. (One juror stood outside.)*
4. *The jury recommends that the violation not be reported to graduate schools and other institutions of higher education. (All jurors consented.)*

For this case, the jury consensus information for the resolutions as a whole is missing.

Finalizing Resolutions:

When Angela and the jury reconvened to finalize resolutions, they agreed to add an additional resolution to recommend Angela become involved with plagiarism education. Angela felt strongly that other students could learn from her experience, and wished to work to make her experience not only restorative, but helpful for community progress. The finalized resolutions were:

1. *Angela will write a letter to the community recounting her efforts to restore herself to the Bi-College community, to be published with the abstract. (All jurors consented.)*
2. *The jury requests that Honor Board release this abstract to the Bryn Mawr community. (All jurors consented.)*
3. *The jury recommends that Angela receives a 0.0 on the midterm assignment but that the grades of her other coursework remain unaffected. (All jurors consented)*
4. *The jury recommends that the violation not be reported to graduate schools and other institutions of higher education. (All jurors consented)*
5. *Angela will meet with her dean to discuss her potential involvement in plagiarism education at Bryn Mawr College. (All jurors consented)*

For this case, the jury consensus information for the resolutions as a whole is missing.

Post-Trial:

Angela followed up with all resolutions in a timely fashion. There was no appeal.

Letter to the Community:

Dear Student Body,

This letter is recounting issues of unintended, but nevertheless significant, plagiarism in my midterm paper and is being distributed to the bi-college community as a demonstration of my efforts to restore myself and my relationship with the greater community as a trustworthy, honest learner and active community member who respects the importance of the Honor Code. I am writing to you, my fellow students and community members, to inform you of the steps I took to understand these issues of plagiarism by taking responsibility for my actions, learning the proper citation methods and creating an honest and comfortable communication with professors and support persons. Ultimately I want to share with you how I have developed a better understanding of myself through taking the time to better understand and appreciate the Honor Code relevant to both Bryn Mawr and Haverford campuses.

First, I will share with you my story. I was initially confronted with issues of plagiarism by my professor via email and, after exchanging several emails with my professor, and discussing with my professor in person even further, I became aware of what was wrong with my paper: an unyielding amount of non-cited verbatim text or, as my professor declared, plagiarism. At the time of confrontation, I was astonished to see how many errors were in my paper. I felt an immediate amount of guilt and shame, and kept asking myself, “how did I let this happen? How was I so sloppy?” I believed that this mistake was due to my own confusion with proper citation methods, disorganization of the paper format, and a sloppy writing process. So, rather than running from the confrontation, I chose to have an open communication with my professor, and tried my best to explain that I had no intention to copy, not provide proper citation/attribution, nor turn in a paper that was not properly proofread. We arranged a time to meet in person where I reflected on my preparation for the paper, where we both acknowledged the cracks in my writing’s foundation (i.e., taking notes while collecting sources without rewording was not an effective method). Through these initial steps, I was able to see these citation errors he identified as blatant instances of plagiarism.

After this initial confrontation, I approached my Dean, informing my Dean of the situation and asking what steps were to follow. Together we reviewed my professor’s comments and acknowledged the severity of the plagiarism committed. My Dean’s major concern was making sure this did not affect my other classes. I, too, decided I had to face my mistakes head on while also not allowing to fall victim to them. Thus I began taking the necessary actions to learn from this: I contacted the Haverford Honor Council, stating that there was plagiarism in my midterm paper, and, as I awaited word of the trial proceedings, I began seeing a counselor. Counseling enabled me to reflect on how I was feeling at the time of the plagiarism (e.g., stressors, triggers, signals etc.) and provide me context to be as articulate as possible come time of my academic trial.

Ultimately, I came to realize that stress was a serious factor in this incident. I realized I had isolated myself in the challenging class and withdrew from seeking support as I was convinced the topic was

beyond my reach. I was weighed down with self-doubt, causing me to miss the warning signs that shouted, “get help” (such as not understanding the readings, or sleepless nights over paper topics). By further reviewing the situation with the Honor Council, and reflecting more deeply on the actions I had committed, I developed a better understanding of plagiarism in respect to my own paper, as well as plagiarism as an overall violation in the greater community context. I now understand that my hesitation to communicate with my professor disrupted a very important element that these institutions were created and continue to thrive on: the inherent trust of the student body, an understanding of mutual respect. However, I have learned an incredible amount about myself from this very difficult experience and hope that it will continue to support and inform my future.

Discussion Questions:

1. How should juries address the fact that a confronted party violated the code unknowingly or without malicious intent in the resolutions?
2. How can stress and academic pressure play into violations of the Honor Code? How can they be best addressed by a jury?