

5/7 Kim Jackson reaches out to Tori about violation: car was found illegally parked in the WWS driveway on 4/23. It was booted and towed to the Lawrence apartments. On 4/29 the car was still there and letter was sent to Sharon informing her that she needed to contact TPS. On 5/7 TPS discovered that the car was missing along with the boot.

Tori emailed me on 5/9, and I reached out to Sharon on 5/9; she responded that she had no knowledge of the situation. Specifically she wrote, "I don't know what happened."

I wrote back on 5/12 asking if the car was hers. She did not respond.

On 5/14 I wrote to Sharon:

Sharon,

We should meet to discuss the parking boot issue with your car. As of right now, the residential college disciplinary board is prepared to proceed with a RRR violation against you for improperly removing a car-boot, which is university property. If you do not respond to my emails or provide a further explanation of what happened, we will assume that you take full responsibility.

So why don't we meet sometime before next Wednesday to discuss. I know this is not the best time for you so I will keep our meeting as brief as possible.

We met on 5/20 and wrote to Tori about the meeting. Sharon claimed that it wasn't her car and didn't know anything about how the car was removed so that is why she ignored the TPS inquires.

I followed up with Kim Jackson who said that the car was registered to Sharon's father and her home address.

5/21 email from me to Sharon:

Sharon,

I reported back to the parking office as well as the central office of ODUS, which handles all disciplinary issues, that you claimed that it was not your car nor did you have any knowledge about the car or incident in question beyond getting emails from the parking office.

I have heard back from the parking office that the car in question is registered to your home address. I have asked for confirmation of that address as well as the make/model of the car.

If in fact the car is registered to your home address, we will proceed with the disciplinary investigation. So perhaps it is still the case that somehow you are not involved or you did not use the car in question, but it will hard to believe that if this is in fact a car belonging to your family. I therefore want to remind you for the need to be completely honest with me during this investigation (I've copy and pasted the relevant section from Rights, Rules, Responsibilities for you below). So if you have more information than you shared yesterday, let's go ahead and meet.

Thanks,

Matt

1.1.4 Honesty and Cooperation in University Matters

Members of the University community are expected to be honest and straightforward in their official dealings with University processes, activities, and personnel. This obligation includes honoring contracts and agreements and providing accurate information on official forms and documents as well as to official University personnel, offices, and committees. Deliberate violations of this provision will be considered serious offenses; subsequent violations, or systematic violations in the first instance, will be considered extremely serious.

Students are expected to cooperate fully in the disciplinary process, and any student (whether a party or a witness) who refuses to cooperate may be subject to discipline.

She responded on 5/22 with the following:

I'd be happy to talk again, but I wouldn't have much to add to our last meeting. As you know, I live very close by and don't need to park extensively at school.

More alarmingly, I checked my student account and discovered all the fines you spoke of already charged to my account. I'd like to ask the parking office to respectfully remove these charges.

According to Transportation & Parking Services' own Rules and Regulations (cited below), "the vehicle owner is responsible for all violations and citations". It was the parking office's error to make a leap of faith and speculate that I drove the car, parked it illegally, and removed the boot. Though I understand that they might want to reach out to me if the car is registered to my family address, it is not my responsibility to be their scapegoat or medium for fine enforcement. The right course of action would have been to get in contact with the vehicle owner immediately and charge them directly.

I'd appreciate if you could forward this email to whoever is in charge of fines at the parking office. Or I could CC them directly if you feel that would be better.

I replied on 5/22 that Sharon should contact TPS directly about the fines but that we should meet again to discuss the disciplinary case.

On 5/26 Sharon sent Kim the following:

In case you're not already aware, I'd like to bring to your attention a situation that needs to be resolved. On April 29, I received an email from Pamela Slater saying that my vehicle was booted and towed a week before. I responded that I don't have a vehicle and did not recall parking illegally. Because I don't have a car, I assumed that parking & transportation made a mistake and continued work on my JP, which was due imminently.

Much later on May 9, the Dean of my residential College Matt Frawley asked me what happened with the situation about my car, and how I removed the boot, etc. I told him that I didn't know what

happened. He followed up by saying that there was a pending RRR disciplinary action violation on account of destruction of university property.

This is shocking and alarming to me. Even more alarming is that I checked my student account and found almost a thousand dollars worth of fines charged to my account. I'd like to ask the parking office to respectfully remove these charges, immediately.

According to Transportation & Parking Services' own Rules and Regulations (cited below), "the vehicle owner is responsible for all violations and citations". As I mentioned, I do not own a car, have a hangtag, etc. All issues should be forwarded to the owner of the vehicle.

I was told just 3 days ago that the car in question is registered to my home address. Although now it makes more sense as to why parking services might want to reach out to me, I am appalled by how this situation has been handled. It is not my responsibility to be your scapegoat or medium for fine enforcement. Additionally, it is a grand leap of faith to speculate to such an extent as to incriminate me for the destruction of university property. Any number of people could have driven the car, removed the boot, and done whatever else happened to this vehicle. As I already mentioned, I am not aware of what happened in this incident.

To summarize, I would like Parking Services to 1.) remove all "auto fines" from my account, as they are not my responsibility, and 2.) suspend this destruction of property allegation and any other unfairly incriminating assumptions.

I did meet with Sharon and then sent the following email to Tori and Kim Jackson on 5/27:

I met again with Sharon Gao about the parking issue. She acknowledges that her father did receive the letter, but she then related that he chose a similar path of simply ignoring the letter. She claims that she did not drive the car and park it on campus so it's unfair that she is being charged for the infraction. I suggested that it would probably be a good idea for her father to get involved and find out who in the family did this and have him or her take responsibility. For now, we will assume it was her given that she is the representative of her family on campus and the only one who would ever need to be on campus.

I ended with the suggestion that she and her father set up a meeting with Kim. Hope that was o.k. Kim.

In early June Sharon and Kim exchanged emails in which Sharon continued to deny any responsibility. Sharon argued that TPS and ODUS were responsible for finding out who was responsible, not her. On 6/9, for example, Sharon wrote the following to Kim:

If I were subletting an apartment and one of my non-Princeton housemates repeatedly parked a vehicle on campus and removed it after it was booted and towed, would you charge me because my registered address is the same as theirs? Shouldn't you contact and charge the owner of the car?

I'm coming back from Vermont on the 11th, and flying out to San Francisco on June 12th around 5:30pm, so if we could meet earlier before or around noon, that would work better for me.

On 6/24 I wrote the following to Sharon:

I'm emailing you to let you know that we are looking to adjudicate your disciplinary case sometime soon. If you have any additional information, like whether you met with Kim Jackson

and resolved the issue, I would need to hear back from you by this Friday. Additionally, if are still claiming that someone else in your family parked the car on campus, we would need to know who that is and whether they have paid the fines to the parking office.

So, again, I need to hear back from you by this Friday with any additional information you have.

I didn't hear back so emailed her again on 6/27.

She responded on 6/29 with the following:

Sorry for the long response time- I've been busy with work and rarely check this email.

Kim and I couldn't find a mutual time to meet before I left for SF, so she suggested we talk after I come back for the summer.

I am not "claiming" that anybody in my family parked the car on campus, and the fines are already outstanding on my student account so I don't see how they would be paid. I've already stressed that this isn't my car and it's not up to me to find out who was driving it. If you'd like to contact my dad, his email is briancgao@gmail.com.

On 6/30 I responded:

Thank you Sharon for getting back to me and given that you wish not to provide anything more beyond reiterating your innocence, we will proceed with the information we have. For your convenience, let me review:

We were contacted in early May about a car, later discovered to be registered to your family (your father specifically), that was improperly removed from the Lawrence Apartments. The car in question, a black Acura (you acknowledged to me that your family owns a black Acura), was towed from the WWS circle on 4/24 and booted. On that same day, the parking office dispatcher got a call from a young women inquiring about the car but who refused to give her name.

On 4/29 the car was still at the Lawrence Apartments so they tried to contact you (and your family) asking you to call the parking office so as not to incur storage fees. The parking office emailed you repeatedly and sent a letter home to your father. If you recall, I encouraged you to ask your father about that letter and have him contact the parking office to resolved the issue.

On 5/7 they discovered that the car had been removed (along with the boot which cost \$300.00) from the Lawrence Apartments without permission.

This is the record of events that I will present to the residential college disciplinary board for a possible violation of misappropriation of university property. If you are found responsible you are looking at a probation of about 3 to 6 months.

On 7/1 I emailed RCDB and recommended that Sharon be held responsible and given 3 months probation. Tori responded that appeared too low of a possible penalty. Tori ended up doing a better review of precedents than me which led us to a much higher penalty

of 15 months. As she put it in one of her emails: "Case 1997-00094 was admittedly a long time ago, but involved a student who "took a parking boot; entered another person's car and took parking decal." No previous history; 18 months DP. "

On 7/1 Sharon wrote to me that she that my summary was quite skewed and that she would provide me a summary of her perspective later that I week. She couldn't do it earlier because she had a big project at work that took priority. I wrote back the same day with the following, "We have already begun the process of deliberation. You were asked to provide whatever information you wanted by last Friday. If you have anything you want to add, I recommend that you do so immediately." She responded with the following, "I don't understand how you can begin the process with such biased and incomplete information. I've already already told you my perspective but I can see that you've obviously failed to take it into account. Princeton as an institution is proving more and more disappointing as I see the uglier aspects of how it operates. Regardless, the disciplinary board can't possibly find me guilty for something I didn't do. I will respond when I get the chance to do so."

She did provide a summary that day:

Here are the facts as I see them. I'd appreciate if you could bring this to the disciplinary board to balance the biased information they're receiving.

On April 29th, I received an email from Pamela Slater with a list of fines, saying that my vehicle was towed from WWS circle. It did not provide any other information. I responded immediately asking whether they had contacted the wrong person and why they thought this vehicle was mine, because I did not recall parking illegally. The response was: "The car in question has been linked to you. Please visit our office immediately to avoid your car being abandoned and removed from campus." Since they did not provide any additional information and I had no issue with this car being abandoned and removed from campus, I did not continue email correspondence. I would hardly call this "emailing me repeatedly".

My father received a letter from parking services an entire week later on May 5th saying our vehicle would be permanently removed on May 7th. Since the deadline was almost immediate, and to his knowledge no cars were missing, he assumed there was a mistake. No further communications were issued from parking services.

On May 9th, I received an accusatory email from Matt Frawley asking "The parking office contacted us about the situation with your car. How did you end up moving it? Did you remove the boot yourself?" I responded that I didn't know what happened. Matt then asked me if I was in possession of my car. Being as I didn't know 1.) which car it was 2.) that the car had been missing in

the first place and 3.) had a tough Deans Date/finals schedule, I didn't respond to these accusations.

On May 14th I received an email from Matt Frawley saying that the disciplinary board was prepared to pursue a RRR violation against me for improperly removing a car boot. This was alarming, considering that I didn't receive any information about the situation besides from a list of charges for which I was not responsible for. However, I didn't think much could come of it, as I was confident I couldn't be punished for something I didn't do.

In my meetings with Matt Frawley I learned for the first time that the vehicle in question was a black Acura, which our family does have, and it was registered to my home address. We have many vehicles and many people in our family eligible to drive, and we also frequently lend cars to friends when needed. Parking Services should have contacted the registered owner of the vehicle instead of immediately assuming that I drove it. Is standard procedure for parking violations to find a student with any link to the car and force them to pay the fines?

On May 30th my University Bill showed \$880 charges in "auto fines". I cannot move money into or out of my Student account now without paying these fines for which I am not responsible for. This is highly alarming and I would like these fines to be removed immediately. Parking Services made a large leap of faith to assume that I illegally parked the car and destroyed University property without any proof or reasonable evidence. I don't believe this is allowed within the limits of the law. This is extortion and highly improper by a private institution.

The right course of action would have been to immediately contact the registered owner of the vehicle, which Parking Services did not do. It seems to me that Parking Services is overzealous in extorting money and severely lacking in due diligence. Living at the same address does not in any way make me responsible for this vehicle. For example: if I were subletting an apartment and the residents incurred parking fines, would I be responsible for paying them? I can't be forced to pay without proof that I did something wrong, let alone be punished with disciplinary measures. Your failure to obtain information does not make me guilty.

I provided that summary to RCDB on 7/1, and Tori wrote to me on 7/2 with the following:

There is clear and persuasive evidence that this car, the black Acura, belongs to someone in Sharon's family; in fact, she is not disputing this. She is, however, disputing that she personally drove it to campus and left it in places where it would be ticketed/booted. Moreover, she is claiming ignorance of who might have done so. I believe it is not plausible that Sharon is unaware of who drove this car to campus. It was either Sharon or a family member. In the absence of information to the contrary, I feel there is clear and persuasive evidence that Sharon was responsible for the car on these occasions, and therefore, for the boot. She is the only member of her family to attend Princeton, correct? However, I think we should give her one last chance and make it crystal clear that if Sharon disputes the fines and the disciplinary charge, it is for her to identify who in her family was responsible. If y'all agree, I suggest that Matt write to her one last time, along these lines:

Sharon, thank you for your statement. I have shared it with my colleagues on the Residential College Disciplinary Board. Before a final decision is made in your case, I wanted to explain to you their thinking, in case you have anything else to add. My colleagues are inclined to find you responsible for the boot removal, but they are willing to give you one more chance to identify the individual who was responsible. They agree that because this was a family car, and because you are the only member of your family who attends Princeton and who has reason to be regularly on campus, it is not plausible that you do not know who drove and parked the car on the occasion in question, and yet you have failed to identify the person who was responsible. If you would like to identify that person, I will pass along his/her name to Parking and Transportation so that they can institute legal proceedings against that person to collect the relevant fines. If you wish to provide this information, I will expect to hear from you by Thursday at 9AM. If I have not heard from you by then, the Residential College Disciplinary Board will hold you responsible and will make a final determination in your case.

I wrote to Sharon on 7/2 with the template that Tori provided and made sure to clarify the possible penalty – that it was more likely to be closer to 18 months than the 3 to 6 months I initially stated.

On 7/14 Sharon responded:

I'm sorry, but that reasoning is entirely flawed. Are your colleagues aware that I live only 5 minutes away from Princeton? I can think of an endless number of reasons why somebody would want to park on campus, regardless of how close they are- to hang out with friends, party, eat go shopping, watch movies, etc.

Additionally, it is entirely plausible that I don't know who drove and parked a specific car on a specific day. Cars at our house are often not in the driveway for several days in a row. I would encourage you (and your colleagues) to ask themselves whether they know where their children and their cars are every day.

On 7/14 I wrote to RCDB:

Hello everyone. Looking to wrap up the S.Gao case this week.

As Tori suggested, I emailed Sharon telling her that we were inclined to find her responsible if she did not provide by 7/4 the person (if it wasn't her) in her family who parked the family car on campus and then removed the car-boot and the car from campus. She finally got back this weekend but didn't provide a name; she just reiterated that it was not her responsibility to provide a name.

So I make a motion to find her responsible. The question then is the duration of probation. I had initially proposed 6 months but then Tori provided a case involving a car boot in which the student received 18months (see below). The present case does not involve going into another car and taking a decal so we have to subtract what that infraction is worth. Alexis suggested 3 months less. I suggest 6 months less and make a motion for 12 months probation.

Tori argued persuasively that it should be 15months and that's what we decided. The vote was not unanimous however – we had one vote for “not responsible”.

I sent the following to Sharon on 7/15 along with a pdf of the penalty letter:
The residential college disciplinary board adjudicated your case and decided to give you 15 months probation for misappropriation of university property. I've sent a hard copy to your campus mailbox but attached a pdf for your convenience.

On 7/15 Sharon's father emailed me the following:

My name is Brian Gao and I'm Sharon's father.

I am writing to you to express my concern regarding a parking incident that you think my daughter, Sharon Gao had part in a couple of months ago. She didn't tell me the whole story until recently because she wanted to handle it herself and now feels that it is distracting her from her normal course of work and study. The story I heard was that she parked an Acura on campus illegally, got a ticket and the car was booted and towed. Then the car somehow disappeared from your facility and you believed that she removed the boot and drove it home. Then her student account was charge unauthorized for the fines and she will be punished with disciplinary action.

The first problem I have is the story itself. There are quite a few possibilities of what could have happened. But it seems that since you are the authority and she is the individual, you are always right with "the facts" and she was only allowed to find an explanation to fit your story. This is extremely unfair and worrisome.

However, my most concerns are the way it was handled.

Without evidence that Sharon parked the car and without taking it to the car owner, Sharon's student account was charged for the fines without authorization. This is plain illegal! I challenge you to show me the law or University rules that authorize you to do this. Even if it turns out that I do owe University money for some reason, you still can't take money directly out of her account without authorization. You can't take a father's debt out of their daughter's account simply because of convenience.

Sharon was also threatened with disciplinary action if she doesn't turn in who parked the car. Isn't it your job and responsibility to figure out who parked the car? If you can't do your job, take the appropriate action and go after the vehicle owner instead of her. NYC has cameras at most

intersections and if someone runs a red light, a ticket will be issued to the vehicle owner. It isn't issued to the driver because you can't verify who was driving the car at the moment.

I was very disappointed in how a renowned university such as Princeton has handle this incident. If you do believe our car was parked illegally on campus, direct your questions to me , the car owner and I'd happy to answer your questions.

I responded the same day with the following:

Thank you for reaching out to us and expressing your concerns. As for the fines imposed on Sharon's student account, I encourage you to reach out the Transportation and Parking Office, which, it should be noted, did in fact reach out to you initially. When they learned that the car in question was registered in your name, they sent a letter to you. They never heard back from you.

As for the disciplinary investigation, I encourage you to ask Sharon for permission to look over our email correspondence in which I lay out why we are proceeding as we are.

He responded with the following about the letter from TPS:

Yes, I did receive a letter from the transportation and parking services stating that my car was at their possession while it was parked right on my driveway. Further, my car was never missed overnight from my property. They should never sent out such a mail without ever knowing the status of the car. It caused confusion and led people to believe it was a mistake. Besides, the mail I received was on May 5th, thirteen days after the claimed towing. Yet they charged storage fee without owner knowing the incident and without even having the car. No matter what the argument is, my question stays the same. Please show me the University rules that allow them to take money out of the student account without authorization.

There was an interesting exchange between Kim Jackson and Brian Gao, Sharon's father. At one point Kim wrote the following to him (7/22): I do not have any photos of who parked the vehicle or removed the boot to retrieved the vehicle, however I do have proof the vehicle was towed to a location on campus and again booted on April 23rd. On April 30th, after routine checks, it was discovered that the vehicle had been removed from the tow location and the boot was missing, without approval from this office. If Sharon or someone from your family did not retrieve the vehicle, without paying the fines and contacting our office, I would think you then would have had to reported it stolen. It is also interesting that the vehicle was retrieved immediately after Sharon received her own letter dated April 29th, about the incident, requesting she contact our office, that was email to her Princeton email.

He responded with the following that day:

If the car was towed, then the fact was that you lost our vehicle under your possession and you didn't feel you have any responsibility of it. Now once again,

you pushed everything upon us. We have to find out who remove the boot, we should have filed a stolen report etc as if you are asking me to find the murderer for you and if I don't, I'm the murderer simply because I was on site and maybe had some blood on my hands.

We were lucky that we retrieved the vehicle by ourselves and saved you from embarrassment and responsibilities (of course, if you think you have any) and yet you came back with all these accusations and fines. The car was retrieved on Apr 23 without any boot on it. So the claim that "[The vehicle was indeed in our possession from April 23rd through April 29th.](#)" is a perfect example that you are straight out making things up. If you can find any evidence, any evidence at all that you still had possession of the car on Apr 24th, I'll be more than happy to accept all the fines and penalties you have imposed upon us.

And Kim responded with the following:

The fact remains, as you admit in your emails, you took the car, it was never lost. I have all the paperwork regarding the tow, when staff checked on the status of the vehicle, etc. Please tell me how you can prove you retrieved the vehicle on April 24th? How did you know where it was located on Campus, since no one contact our office?

Kim did meet with Brian Gao and then emailed me:

[I met with Brian Gao, father of Sharon Gao, Class of 2015, Mathey College, this afternoon. After speaking with him I do not believe Sharon was responsible for parking the vehicle, a black Acura, on campus nor was she responsible for the removal of the boot. Although her father is not sure how the boot may have ben removed, he has agreed to pay all fines associated with this incident, minus storage fees. I will be reversing the charges from Sharon's student account.](#)

[I am asking your office rescind any disciplinary action taken for this infraction.](#)

I sent her email to Tori and RCDB.

My first email to Sharon after Kim's email to me was on 7/31. I wrote the following:
Sharon,

I hope this emails finds you well. I apologize for reaching out to you so late after your father's meeting with Kim Jackson but I've been out of town all week. You obviously want to know about the disciplinary action imposed on you by the residential college disciplinary board. Kim Jackson did email me that she is now convinced that you were not responsible for the parking violation and the removal of the boot. However, the residential college disciplinary board cannot simply remove a penalty once it has adjudicated a case. What needs to happen is for you to follow the appeals process outlined in RRR (I've copied and pasted it below for your convenience). The meeting between your father and Kim Jackson is new information we didn't have when we adjudicated the case so you should inform Dean Kathleen Deignan of this new information in your appeal letter.

Let me know if I can be of any assistance to you going forward.

Matt

Section 2.5.3 of RRR:

Appeals

A student has the right to appeal to the dean of undergraduate students any disciplinary decision of the Residential College Disciplinary Board. The appeal should be submitted in writing. The purpose of the appeal is to seek a review of a decision or penalty on the grounds that (1) there exists substantial relevant information that was not presented, and reasonably could not have been presented, to the dean or the RCDB; (2) the imposed penalty does not fall within the range of penalties imposed for similar misconduct; or (3) a procedural irregularity occurred in the adjudication of the incident in question. The purpose of such an appeal is not to initiate a review of substantive issues of fact, or a new determination of whether a violation of rules has occurred. The deadline for filing such an appeal is one week from the date the student was informed in writing of the penalty. The decision of the dean of undergraduate students shall be final.

Sharon didn't respond until 8/15. She wrote the following: "Given that the disciplinary board made such an egregious error, they should be responsible for removing the penalty. As far as I understand, no new evidence has been introduced to the case other than that Kim's personal opinion has changed. "

I immediately responded that she needed to appeal to KD. Tori suggested the following on 8/18: "Having read her email more closely, maybe it is safest if you would please write back and say that the appeals process is the only way forward if she wants this to be changed. Let her know that the deadline has long since passed, but that you are confident that Dean Deignan will consider her appeal if it is submitted by this coming Friday, August 22. And if the dean has not heard from her by then, we will all assume that she has elected not to appeal." I emailed her that message on 8/19.

We then started our conversation about how RCDB decided on its course of action after Kim's email to me.