I. Introduction

Edmund noticed that his roommate, Royce, admitted in an anonymous survey that he had violated the Honor Code. Edmund confronted Royce and asked how he had violated the Code. Although at first reluctant to answer, Royce told Edmund that he had copied some answers for an economics problem set from another student, Erik. Both agreed that Royce should approach Professor Thurston, one of the two professors who had taught the economics class.

Professor Thurston and Royce decided that the matter should be brought before Honor Council. Council reached consensus that a trial was necessary. For several reasons, the Chair of Honor Council was not available for the trial. An acting chair was named and will henceforth be referred to as “Chair.”

II. Fact Finding

Royce recounted how the matter came to Edmund’s attention. Royce had filled out an anonymous survey which included questions about the Honor Code. On the survey, Royce had admitted to once having violated the Code. Edmund, having seen Royce’s answer, asked how he had violated the Code. Although initially reluctant to answer, Royce admitted to Edmund he had copied some problems for an economics problem set from another student.

At that point, Edmund confronted Royce about the violation. Royce thought that Edmund was making a big deal out of nothing. People often cheat on these small assignments, he contended. And anyway, after having turned in the copied problems, he had completed the problems himself. Then, he had re-read the reading and felt he had a good grasp of the material. It was a small part of the grade anyway, he concluded. Royce ended the conversation with Edmund by assuring him that he wouldn’t copy another problem set.

Royce noted that Edmund left feeling extremely uncomfortable about the situation. Royce began to question himself in light of the tension between them, and started wondering about his original justification for his actions. He eventually decided that it was a violation, and felt that it would be good to work it out through Honor Council in order to clear the air with Edmund as well as his own conscience.

Professor Thurston stated that Royce had informed him of what had happened. Since the course was taught in two halves by two professors, both might have to be approached. However, Royce recalled that he had copied the problems during Professor Thurston’s half.

In response to questioning from the jury, Royce related what had happened when he copied the assignment. He hadn’t finished the eight problems for that week’s problem set. He often worked with his friend Erik on the homework assignments. Royce had asked to see how Erik had completed the last few problems. Royce then copied Erik’s work and turned it in as his own, without Erik’s knowledge.

Professor Thurston noted that all of the problem sets for the semester had been worth about 10% of the grade, and that even if Royce had received no credit for this assignment, his grade in the course would not have changed.
III. Jury Deliberation

In light of Royce's own statements, the jury quickly agreed that Royce violated the Code. One juror noted that Royce knew it was a violation of the Code and brushed it off as not being important; the juror considered this a serious breach of the community's trust. The jury came to consensus on a statement of violation:

Royce violated the Honor Code by copying a portion of another student's homework assignment and turning it in as his own work.

IV. Circumstantial

A juror asked Royce why he felt he had to cheat. Royce said that it had been a quick decision and that he had been anxious to get all of his work done. He didn't really take into account the gravity of his actions. He also knew that Erik would not have been pleased to know that he had copied his work.

As a possible first resolution, Professor Thurston suggested that Royce fail the homework assignment. This by itself, he felt, would not completely address the violation. Although it was a small violation, Professor Thurston noted that it was an important community issue. The student perspective on academic dishonesty would have to be decided by the jury, regardless of Royce's candor. He suggested a letter to the community.

Professor Thurston asserted that Royce's cheating should not justify a grade change. He noted that Royce's other work in the class was outstanding that that a grade change would be excessive punishment. Had Royce cheated on a larger assignment or test, Professor Thurston would want a grade change -- but not in this situation.

Edmund proposed that the jury make resolutions that would educate Royce and the community. While he believed that Royce's actions had not been premeditated, the issue of his having kept his violation a secret for a long time was an important consideration. Also, he said, the jury would have to consider the breach of trust between Royce and Erik -- which would not be repaired by a letter to the community. Edmund suggested using this matter to educate first semester frosh on the Honor Code and the trial process.

Royce suggested his own resolutions. First, he felt he should write to Erik about what he had done. Second, he should fail the homework assignment. And third, he should do something that would educate the wider community.

V. Jury Deliberation

The jury reviewed the possible resolutions that came up in the circumstantial portion of the trial. A letter to the community, a letter to Erik, educating first semester frosh (perhaps through the HCO program), and failing the homework assignment were the most obvious resolutions. However, the jury felt that something more needed to be done.

Several jurors felt that an overall grade change was absolutely necessary. Cheating on an assignment, after all, is worse than simply not turning in the assignment. Changing Royce's grade, perhaps by .3, would deal with the breach of community trust better than simply failing the assignment -- which would not change his grade at all. Grades, these jurors contended, are the only way that Royce relates to the rest of the class -- and to the community. The grade change would deal with both breaches of trust.

Another faction of jurors countered that a grade change was not justified in this situation, and that it would not resolve the breach of trust with the rest of the community, nor the class. One juror felt that it would be a merely punitive act, and would not solve the issue of community "trust" in any meaningful way. Another stated that a grade is an imperfect approximation of the quality of the work done anyway; a jury-altered grade would be arbitrary and come no closer to resolving the "trust" issue than before. These jurors agreed that more needed to be done, but that a grade change wasn't the best way to
go about it. Other jurors could not decide whether a grade change was called for. Jurors exchanged opinions regarding a grade change for most of the jury deliberation.

Since little progress on this front seemed probable, the jury sought to spell out resolutions upon which they could all agree. Turning to the breach of trust between Erik and Royce, the jury agreed that a letter was called for. In addition, the jury felt some face-to-face discussion ought to occur between them. Since such an encounter might be awkward, the jury agreed that (with Royce’s consent) a jury member or Communication Outreach member should be available to facilitate this discussion.

A resolution not mentioned in circumstantial but universally felt justified was a letter to Professor Sting, who taught the course with Professor Thurston. Thus, the jury agreed that a letter of apology to Professor Sting should be mandated.

The jury then considered idea of trying to use this case in educating frosh about the Honor Code. The jury decided that Royce should write a letter to the community which would be incorporated into Honor Code Orientation.

Finally, although the jurors still disagreed about the issue of a grade change, they unanimously held that he should receive a failing grade for the homework. The jury reached consensus on these four resolutions:

1. Royce will write a letter to the student whose homework he copied [Erik]. The letter will describe his violation. In addition, Royce will initiate a face-to-face meeting to resolve the breach of trust. Either a jury member or a Communication Outreach member will be available upon request to facilitate the discussion.

2. Royce will write a letter to Professor Sting describing his violation.

3. Royce will write an anonymous letter reflecting upon his violation that will be incorporated into Honor Code Orientation.

4. The jury recommends that Royce receive no credit for the assignment which was copied.

Most of the jurors felt more needed to be done. Royce altered his performance in the class by cheating, thereby affecting everyone else in the class and in the community generally. The jury felt more accountability was called for in the resolutions. Since they couldn’t agree on a grade change, the jury considered several alternatives, quickly rejecting most of them. Many jurors liked the idea of some form of community service; others wanted Royce to address his dishonesty by performing some sort of service for the class in which he cheated. One idea that was mentioned in earlier discussions re-surfaced: serving as a grader for the course. Some jurors felt that the obligation would impress upon Royce the serious nature of his actions, and might help to make him accountable to the community, the professors, and the other students in the class. The jury agreed on a fifth resolution before adjourning for the night:

*5. Royce will serve as an unpaid grader for [this] class for a year.

*In the 24 hour period required before final consensus on the resolutions, several jurors began to have misgivings about the fifth resolution. The professors, after having been consulted by the Chair, said they could not accept that resolution. Grading requires active interest in the topic, and grading jobs are given to students who need to make money anyway. The jury began to feel they made their decision too hastily, and had opted for an excessively punitive resolution. Consequently, the jury removed this resolution (#5) from consideration.
The debate again returned to a grade change. Some jurors wanted to mandate a specific grade change, others felt that only the professor could accurately weigh Royce's performance in the class. Some felt that the jury should explicitly state the gravity of Royce's actions, communicate this feeling to Professor Thurston, and then allow him to weigh his performance in the class against the community's opinion regarding his actions. In this way Professor Thurston could come up with a revised grade that most accurately reflected Royce's work in the class. Several thought this was a "cop out": the jury ought to have the fortitude to put its beliefs in the form of a number. After more debate, the jury agreed on the following resolution. Two jurors stood outside of consensus, feeling that a formal recommendation of a grade change was in order:

5. Despite the low proportional value of the assignment itself, the jury feels that Royce's copying constitutes a serious violation of the Honor Code. To make him accountable to the class, the jury recommends that the professor reevaluate Royce's overall performance and strongly reconsider his grade, taking into account the gravity of the violation.

VI. Presentation of Resolutions

The jury came to final consensus on all of the resolutions, with two jurors standing outside because they felt a formal recommendation of a grade change was in order. When presented with the resolutions, Royce agreed with the first four but disagreed with the fifth. He felt he was already being held accountable to the class. A grade change wouldn't make him feel more accountable. The two jurors who stood outside of consensus explained their position to Royce, saying that he was lucky they had not reached consensus upon a harsher punishment.

VII. Questions

1) What do you think of the jury's resolutions? Do you think that an overall grade change was in order or that it was enough for Royce to fail that one assignment?

2) Do you feel that Royce's action constituted a violation of the Honor Code?
3) How should Honor Code juries mandate a grade change, if they feel that one is necessary? Under what circumstances is a grade change necessary?

4) If we are finite beings, then why are we so concerned about grades in the first place?

If you have further comments, please write them on the back of this sheet.