SEAN

Sean was suspected of cheating on an exam in his physics class. It had been given as an in-class exam, but students had the option of taking it the day before due to the upcoming vacation. Sean's professor, Professor Wilson, was out of town, so students who were taking the exam early were to pick it up from Professor Goldstein and return it to her 55 minutes later. Professor Wilson had suspicions that Sean may have used supplemental materials for two of the problems and that he may have taken more than the specified 55 minutes to complete his exam. Professor Wilson confronted Sean with these suspicions and Sean then contacted the Honor Council Chair. Honor Council reached consensus that a trial was necessary.

FACT-FINDING:

Professor Wilson began by explaining the problems in question. He said the problem on the exam was identical to a homework problem, and the solutions were posted on the wall inside the building where the exam was taken. The second problem in question was one that was significantly easier with the use of certain tables which were not allowed to be used.

One of Sean's solutions was exactly the same as one of the posted solutions. This in itself is not particularly significant because many students are good at memorizing. However, Professor Wilson doubted Sean's memory because of his earlier performance on an exam in which many of the solutions could have been memorized. On one such exam, Sean's performance was close to the bottom of the class.

The second problem involved a table which was not allowed to be used. Professor Wilson said with the table, "You could do it easily." He also noted that Sean's answer was perfect yet he had shown no work. Finally, Professor Wilson pointed out that Sean had not taken the exam in the same room with the other students who were taking it early.

During the confrontation Professor Wilson asked Sean to reproduce his work, and he was unable to do so. Professor Wilson felt that Sean's attempts did not resemble the answers on his exam.
Sean said that he had arrived at Professor Goldstein's office to pick up the exam a few minutes late. He didn't know where the other people were sitting because there was not a specified room. Because of his late arrival, he finished the exam five minutes after it was to be returned. At that time, Professor Goldstein was no longer in her office. After searching for her for five more minutes, Sean wrote "5:10" on the exam and slipped it under her door. Sean's support person was with him at this time and verified that the exam was turned in then.

Sean had prepared a written response to the two problems in question. In response to Professor Wilson's suspicion that he may have copied the solution that was posted on the wall, Sean explained that this homework assignment was only a few days old. In addition, he reviewed the problems from the homework assignments, and memorized the ones he didn't know.

In response to the accusation that he used tables to solve another problem, Sean wrote that he knew a significant part of the answer and was able to solve the problem for the rest. He said that he didn't even have access to the tables since he didn't have anything with him while taking the exam.

Jurors then asked clarifying questions:

One juror asked Sean about scratch work since there was not very much on the test paper itself. He said that he used other paper and then transferred his answer onto the test. Sean said that he threw the scratch work away after the exam, and his support person verified that he did not have any papers or books with him when he left the exam room. Sean also added that he really didn't do very much scratch work for the problems in question.

Another juror asked about the problem involving the solution set. This juror pointed out that Sean skipped necessary steps to get to his answer. Sean said that what he wrote was part of the solution set, and he started from where he remembered.

Sean was then asked if he saw the solution sets right before the exam. He said that he had seen them both the night and morning before the exam.

A juror then asked Professor Wilson how Sean's performance compared to the rest of the class. He said that only one other person solved the solution set problem correctly. Sean said, "I knew the answers but not the work."
In reference to the problem involving tables, Sean said that the tables are easily retained since "we go over them in many problems". He said that when Professor Wilson confronted him with this problem 15 days later, it was an unreasonable request for him to be able to reproduce it exactly as it was on the exam. He had studied by writing, rewriting, and reviewing the problems he couldn't do. Thus, he couldn't remember the specifics of the problem.

Sean was asked by a juror why he did not turn in his scratch work since it could be used for partial credit. Sean said, "It's scratch paper. I doodle, I write things, I don't hand that in."

In reference to a previous exam in which Sean did not demonstrate a strong ability to memorize, he said that he didn't have very much time to study. He said he studied much more for this exam. Sean also said that his bad grade on that particular exam could be attributed to the fact that no partial credit was given.

Sean and Professor Wilson were asked about their relationship. Both agreed that it was a large class, and there was very little contact between them. Essentially, there was no relationship.

Fact-finding was then completed. "It lasted a little more than two hours.

JURY DELIBERATIONS:

The jury began by giving first impressions. Jurors expressed varying degrees of skepticism while trying to keep in mind that the evidence must show guilt beyond any reasonable doubt — Sean did not need to prove his innocence.

The discussion was broken down into two parts since there were two questions at hand. The first was the table problem, and the question was whether or not Sean had used the table in the textbook. The second was the solution set problem in which Sean wrote exactly what was on the solution set.

Some jurors expressed discomfort about Professor Wilson's eager attitude to show that Sean was guilty. Professor Wilson had originally been concerned that Sean may have cheated overnight, but when Sean proved that he turned in his exam only a few minutes late, Professor Wilson concentrated
on other suspicious aspects of the exam. After a little more discussion, the jury broke for the evening.

The jury reconvened the next day and examined some new information. Professor Wilson and Sean independently confirmed that one question in the book used the same information from the table that was used in the exam. Sean said that he studied this problem in preparation for the exam.

Sean also presented a copy of the previous exam which confirmed Sean's assertion that he had lost a great deal of points by forgetting minor details. This suggested that perhaps Professor Wilson was incorrect in his assumption that Sean's memory was not good enough to remember the solution set or the facts from the table used in the exam at hand.

In evaluating reasonable doubt one juror said that he needed one of two things to overcome his concerns: either a strong piece of hard evidence, or a mountain of circumstantial evidence. The jury had neither. Someone else noted that Sean couldn't be proven innocent. If you are taking a take-home exam and someone says you cheated, there isn't much you can do other than say that you didn't cheat. "It's entirely possible that he did or he didn't," summarized one lucid juror. With that, the jury moved on to discuss the arguments for and against finding a violation.

Arguments in favor of a violation:
1) Sean's answers demonstrated a lack of understanding of the material. He skipped crucial steps in finding solutions.
2) It seemed coincidental that Sean memorized the information necessary for two problems on the exam.
3) Only one other student solved the problem correctly. Why didn't the other students who previously demonstrated good memorization skills do as well on this exam?
4) The leap in Sean's problem skipped quite a bit of important information. The information with which he began was indented on the solution sheet. Perhaps he saw this as a logical starting point if/when he was cheating.

Arguments against finding a violation:
1) If he was cheating, he would have cheated well enough to receive credit. He would have included the necessary steps to complete the solution.
2) He went over many problems, so the chances were very good that one (or two) would be on the exam. Additionally, five or six lines isn't that much to remember.
3) Other students didn't simply memorize the problems, because they knew they had to explain their solutions in depth to receive credit.
4) It seems logical to start from the indentation and ignore the explanation if you are memorizing and reviewing, just as well as if you are cheating.

The jury discussed these issues for a very long time and found that for each argument as to why Sean cheated, a counter argument could be made using the same point to show that he didn't cheat. Many summarizing comments were made by jurors such as, "I feel like there is too much doubt involved. It's possible that a violation occurred, but I have no reason to assume that." One juror who had been arguing in favor of a violation said, "I can see both sides and both conclusions, and thus [if we must err] we must err on the side of innocence."

The jury reached consensus that it would be unable to reach consensus that Sean violated the Honor Code, and with this the trial ended.
Okay, we messed up. This is the Dean's review of the SEAN case which should have been included in the abstract. This is the final decision.

Dean's review-

There were four questions of the examination. Students were not allowed to use outside materials on the exam. Doubts were raised about whether answers to Question B (the table problem) and Question D (the solution set problem) could have been derived by Sean without the help of outside materials.

After careful review of the material, the Dean of the College found Sean’s account to be improbable to the point of being unbelievable.

In the case of the table problem:

1. The problem was created to test a general mode of reasoning. Given the design of the course as a whole, an "exact and perfect" solution was neither sought nor thought possible. Sean's solution, oddly, was "exact and perfect."

2. Two outside experts confirmed, separately, that that outcome was possible only if Sean used information provided on the table. It was also possible if Sean derived information himself by using a complex set of techniques, which had NOT been taught in the course.

   The other possible way to achieve that kind of perfection in the answer would have been to derive it through a set of mathematical techniques: a student, exceptionally gifted in mathematics, may have been able to do this. Sean's attempts to derive the solution in this way failed.

3. Although Sean never explicitly stated that he memorized the information in the table, which would have led to deriving a solution in its perfect and exact manner, he did say that he had repeatedly written down information in the table while trying to understand problems of "the same form."
However, there was only ONE problem in over 100 problems that used the information in the table. Furthermore, that one problem was not assigned for homework or for preparation.

The solution set problem:

1. The solution that Sean presented for that problem was exactly the same as the posted solution, down to the minutest detail. Only one other student solved the problem, but that student's solution was not exactly the same as the posted solution. (There were 48 homework problems, for which solutions were posted.)

2. The solution was rather lengthy, and although Sean claimed to have memorized it, he could not reproduce even parts of it when he was asked to do so by Prof. Wilson.

Given this entire picture, the Dean believed that Sean had cheated.

Under these circumstances, the Dean normally would have recommended separation from the College, as well as recording a failing grade for the class. However, due to circumstances beyond the control of the College or Sean, such a decision would have meant permanent expulsion. Thus, the Dean recommended:

1. A failing grade in the course.

2. An essay about the Honor Code and its meaning with regard to the academic and social life at Haverford to be completed before the beginning of the following academic term.

3. One year of community service.

4. A confidential letter will be placed in Sean's file. Should Sean be found guilty in the future of an academic violation with intent, he would be separated immediately with no opportunity to complete the term. The letter will be destroyed upon graduation.

(written by Dean Hamabaça)