Background

After finishing a take-home exam and feeling doubts about his adherence to the Honor Code, Sven contacted a member of Honor Council with his concern. This Honor Council member suggested to Sven that he reach the Chair of Honor Council and his professor, Professor Ford. The Chair gathered information from both Sven and Ford and brought the issue to Honor Council. Council decided that the matter should go to trial. Because of a concurrent trial, the Chair appointed another member of council to chair Sven's trial. A jury was convened.

Fact Finding

After the jury was called together for the trial, the chair explained the trial procedure. Sven arrived and began his account of what happened.

He had a take-home exam for his Mathematics class. Sven's professor had given instructions that students were allowed to prepare one page of notes and formulas to be used while taking the test. Sven said that while he was preparing his page of notes, someone came in and interrupted him, causing him to forget to write down some of the formulas. Because he was interrupted, he was unable to write down all the formulas he had originally intended to write down. Once Sven had begun the test and had reached certain questions, he realized that he had neglected to record some important formulas. Having realized this, Sven returned to his class notes to retrieve the needed formulas.

Professor Ford then began his account. When Sven contacted him about his possible violation, Professor Ford asked him to hand in his formula sheet as well as all the pertinent class notes. Professor Ford also asked Sven to highlight sections of his class notes which he used on the exam but that were not originally on his formula sheet. Sven used the new formulas on questions #2 and #6.

Professor Ford agreed with the story told by Sven. Sven had contacted Professor Ford immediately after having spoken with a member of Honor Council who had asked him to do so. Ford stated that there was no misrepresentation of work and that there had been no delay in Sven's coming to see him about the issue. He applauded Sven's honesty in having dealt with the matter so quickly (Sven contacted him the day after he took the exam and one day before it was due.)
Professor Ford was concerned that the system of giving take-home exams depends on students closely following instructions. He also affirmed that the policy of having take-home exams is an important part of Haverford's academic life. Ford said that he tried to make the instructions for the exam as lucid as possible and had initially been concerned that his directions might have been unclear, but, upon reading them again, he realized that this was not the issue.

Professor Ford asked Sven if he had written down a whole group of formulas, to which Sven answered that he had. While taking the exam and upon seeing that he had missed some formulas, Sven wrote them down on his formula sheet. A juror asked about Sven's performance in the class. Professor Ford asked the Chair if this question was appropriate. The chair rephrased the question and Ford said that "there had been no previous difficulty" with Sven. Another juror asked how much of the formula sheet was "new". Sven had copied 15% of the formula sheet after formally beginning the exam.

At this point, Sven gave a more exact chronology of events: 1) He studied for a few days before he took the exam. 2) In making the formula sheet, he went through his notes page by page, but, as was already stated, was interrupted by a friend. 3) He then began the test, forgetting that he had left out a few formulas. 4) Ten or fifteen minutes into the test, he realized that he had forgotten the formulas. 5) He finished the parts of the test that he could, then went back to his notes to copy the formulas for questions #2 and #6. He "knew which ones [he] needed". 6) He proceeded to finish the test. 7) Later that day, he discussed the problem with someone because he was not sure about what he had done. This person referred him to a member of Honor Council. 8) He then contacted Professor Ford who asked him to turn in the formula sheet with the test.

One juror asked Sven if he had read the instructions before taking the test. Sven replied that he had. "Were the instructions clear?" asked the juror. "Yes," replied Sven. Sven said that what he was doing was a violation of the letter of the Code, but not the spirit. He used this idea to rationalize his action, but felt guilty later and opened the issue up with Honor Council.

Jury Deliberation

The Chair read a section of the Honor Code which states, "We must follow a professor's instructions as to the completion of tests, homework, and laboratory reports, and must ask for clarification if the instructions are not clear," (Section III, part A, "Academic Concerns"). He then requested that the jury give their thoughts about Sven's actions.
One juror felt that Sven's was a case of "carelessness," and not "maliciousness". She was not sure that it was a violation. Two other jurors agreed. Another juror stated that, although Sven rationalized his actions by thinking in terms of the spirit of the Code, he thought it was a violation. Someone else agreed with this position and added that Sven did not follow the instructions. One juror remarked that a student has the responsibility to work in a place where they are not going to be bothered and she agreed that it was a violation. Five other jurors agreed that a violation had occurred. The Chair called for consensus that a violation occurred. Consensus was quickly reached. The statement of violation reads:

"Sven violated the Honor Code by failing to follow the professor's instructions as to the completion of the test."

Circumstantial

The jurors gave Sven their reasons for finding a violation. They said that the instructions for the exam had not been followed. A juror made it clear that he understood the text of the Honor Code and that one cannot divorce it from the spirit of the Code.

Sven responded by agreeing with the jury's decision. Jurors began to ask him questions about events surrounding the violation. Sven said that he had meant to copy the formulas onto his formula sheet and used this fact to rationalize the action, but, afterwards, found himself doubting his actions. He completed the entire test except for questions #2 and #6 before going back to his notes. The Chair asked whether there was, at the time, a question as to whether he was violating the Code. Sven answered, "Yes". The Chair then asked, "Why did you go back? Was it a matter of just finishing the test or improving your grade?" Sven replied that he knew he could finish the problems with the missing formulas. His intention was to finish the test and not leave any problems unfinished. He said he wasn't as interested in the grade as he was in finishing the test. He thought that he could go back and complete the problems and talk with the professor later.

A juror asked if he ever considered academic integrity. Sven responded that he had not really considered the Honor Code until the trial came up. He would have thought twice about his actions had he known the consequences. Another juror asked whether his decision was deliberate or whether it arose in the "heat of the moment". Sven answered that it was the latter.
The Chair asked Sven to suggest any possible resolution. Sven suggested that he lose the points on the questions that he used the extra formulas on and that he be asked to write a letter to the community.

**Jury Deliberation**

Although the jury was dubious of the value of a letter to the community, they felt that Sven would write a meaningful one. A juror said that he liked the idea of having points taken off the exam. The Chair said that Sven's proposed resolutions corresponded with what Professor Ford had requested, specifically, that he be given guidelines for evaluating Sven but that he not fail the test or the course. Professor Ford had praised Sven's honesty and stated that he did not think he should be punished.

There began a discussion of whether the jury should base the resolutions strictly on Sven's character. Some members of the jury felt that his character was distracting from his offense. One juror pointed out that, in trials, one must see the whole issue, including a person's character. The Chair suggested that, in addition to losing the points and having to write a letter, that he talk with a member of Honor Council about the Code. People agreed, but were concerned whether this would be a breach of confidentiality. In the end, they decided to give Sven a choice of whom he wanted to speak with about the Code. The resolutions follow:

1) The jury suggests that Professor Ford not give Sven credit for questions #2 and #6 on the test.

2) Sven will have a discussion about his experiences with the Honor Code with one or more of the following: a) a willing member of the jury, b) an HCO, or c) a member of Honor Council.

3) Sven will write a letter to the community discussing the issues raised about the Honor Code as a result of his actions.

**Presentation of Resolutions**

A juror began by saying that the first resolution addressed Sven's accountability for his breach of the Code and that the second two were meant to educate Sven about the Code. Another juror added that "we wanted you to speak your way through your thoughts". Sven agreed with the resolutions. Later, Professor Ford said that he agreed with them as well.
To the Community:

As you know, writing this letter was one of the resolutions required by my Honor Code Trial. I suggested a letter to the community, because I hope that by reading this you will better understand what constitutes a violation, and maybe you won’t make the same mistakes I did.

When I consulted outside notes during my test, I was not sure if it was a violation of the Honor Code or not. I decided that it would be better to look at the notes and then tell my professor what had happened, because I thought it was my safest course of action. If it turned out that it was a violation, my professor could simply deduct a few points from my test. If it wasn’t a violation, fine, I would get the points and everybody would be happy. It was better than just assuming that I would be violating the Code, not consulting my notes, and automatically losing the points. Well, I was wrong. I realize now that when I to get those points, I rationalized, and talked myself into it.

I really do believe in the Code and what it stands for. It’s a lot more than just having self-scheduled exams. It works both ways. We get a lot of benefits out of having a Code, but we also have to make some sacrifices. I turned myself in because I believe that the only way the Code can work is if everyone does their part. That means both following it, and admitting it when you screw up. When I violated the Code, it was out of ignorance, but, as they told you in drivers’ ed, ignorance of the law is no excuse. The most important piece of advice I can give you from my experience is that if you’re not sure if an action is a violation of the Code, it’s a whole lot better to be safe than sorry.

I’m serious about that last cliche. I really wish I had never broken the Code. Aside from the fact that my Trial was a pretty traumatic experience, I haven’t felt like a part of the Community for about two months now. It’s a feeling that I miss. I think I’ve come to a better understanding of what the Community is by seeing myself as no longer a part of it. I’ve also gotten a better picture of how the Code works. It’s not just this amorphous concept that can be sidestepped if you manage to convince yourself that it’s okay. You have to pay attention to your conscience and obey the spirit of the Code, not just the letter. So I guess I did learn something from this whole experience, but I wouldn’t recommend trying it yourself. Just take my word for it, and try not to screw up like I did, okay?

I learned one other thing about the Code. It’s not just about what you can and can’t do. It’s also a way to fix things when you mess up. “Repairing the breach of trust” is a really corny euphemism, but having gone through it, I’m glad there is a way to correct dumb mistakes. An Honor Code Trial is not a fun thing, but I think the system works pretty well. And if reading this abstract or letter keeps you from doing making the same mistake I did, so much the better.

Sincerely,
Sven.