Jim and Professor Schrute:  
An Honor Council Academic Trial  
Released SEMESTER

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Key:
Confronting Party: Professor Dwight Schrute  
Confronted Party: Jim Halpert  
Friend of confronted party: Pam Beesly  
Course: Paper Products 200

Summary/Pre-Trial: 
This case involved Jim Halpert, a student suspected of cheating on an exam by his Paper 200 professor, Dwight Schrute. Throughout the trial process, Jim maintained that he did not violate the Honor Code. The jury carefully reviewed Professor Schrute’s concerns, as well as consulted with professors of the same department at other institutions. While there was much conflict within the jury throughout the process, they eventually came to a statement of non-violation due to their belief that they could not conclude beyond a reasonable doubt that a violation had occurred.

Jim Halpert contacted Honor Council due to concerns expressed by his professor, Dwight Schrute, about a possible Honor Code violation. Professor Schrute had found similarities between the tests of Jim and another student, Pam Beesly. Initially, he believed that Jim had copied off of Pam’s exam because there were similarities in structures of problems with different variable names, and in one case, Jim had chosen a strange [paper product] that did not make sense for the test. Additionally, Professor Schrute was suspicious because Jim had asked for an extension on Thursday, but emailed again Friday morning letting him know that he no longer needed the extension. After speaking to both Jim and Pam, Professor Schrute learned that Jim had temporarily used Pam’s computer on Thursday night. This solidified his concerns and led him to suspect that Jim had accessed Pam’s test, which would also explain the sudden reversal of his request for an extension.

Jim had told Professor Schrute that there were multiple reasons why it would not make sense for him to cheat such as the fact that he was taking the course pass/fail, he could get a zero on this exam and still pass the class, and was applying to graduate schools where programs
would look at academic dishonesty as much more severe than failing a class. However, Professor Schrute thought that even though it may have been illogical for him to cheat, he was still suspicious. Jim continued to assert that he had not cheated and expressed concerns that his professor had treated him with bias. Having considered the complicated circumstances and conflicting statements, Honor Council consented to send this to an academic trial.

When reviewing the parties’ statements and documents before Fact Finding, the jury agreed that there was a high level of technicality involved in the subject. As a result, the jury felt it would be helpful to contact expert witnesses, professors in Paper departments at other institutions, to weigh in on the materials of the case. These responses were received and reviewed by the jury after Fact Finding.

**Fact Finding:**

One juror removed themselves before Fact-Finding due to personal circumstances, so the jury consisted of 8 members going forward. All jurors were present for Fact-Finding to meet with Jim, who attended in person, and Professor Schrute, who Skyped in to the meeting.

Professor Schrute began by asking the jury if they had any questions about the documents he had sent. One juror asked if the problems the professor gives usually lead to one answer and asked how different other students’ answers had been. Professor Schrute replied that he categorized the question similarities as three types—strong, medium, and mild—and that he was most concerned about the ones he considered strongly suspiciously similar. He added that some problems can only be done a single way, but that solutions can be overall similar but contain slight differences which would indicate that the individuals are doing it differently.

A juror then asked the professor to elaborate on his confrontations and conversations with both Jim and Pam. Professor Schrute reiterated that he contacted both individually and asked the students to explain the similarities to him. He said that Pam responded over email and that he had a phone conversation with Jim. Next, a juror asked the professor to speak about how the timeline of the test submissions made him suspect one student had copied the other. Professor Schrute remarked on the strangeness of Jim asking for an extension, and then quickly changing his mind about needing it. He also commented that Jim had tried to show him examples of him using similar concepts in earlier homeworks for the course. Additionally, Pam had told Professor Schrute that Jim had used her computer, increasing his suspicion that Jim had used that time to copy off of Pam’s test. Professor Schrute’s biggest concern was similar structures within the paper products on Jim and Pam’s tests.

Next, Jim left the room so the jury could speak alone with Professor Schrute. A juror asked the professor if he thought that Jim’s unusual mistakes may have come from his past homeworks in the class, given that it was allowed to use work from past homeworks. Professor Schrute hadn’t noticed similar mistakes in Jim’s past homeworks, and he maintained that the fact that two people making these mistakes on this exam stood out as inexplicable. The jury asked about Jim and Professor Schrute’s interactions within the course, as well as how Jim was doing
in the course overall and as compared with Pam. Professor Schrute replied that Jim had come to
his office hours once or twice and that Jim was doing below average in the class, while Pam was
doing above average. When asked if he had looked at Jim and Pam’s old homeworks for possible
similarities, Professor Schrute said he hadn’t found anything particularly similar. He also added
that students worked in teams of 2 for homework (Jim and Pam were not partners), so some
collaboration was allowed.

Jim then came back into the room to speak with the jury. He started by addressing the
professor’s concerns. He did not see some of them as strong evidence. Jim also emphasized that
Professor Schrute had asked him to contact Honor Council before he had a chance to explain
things to him. When asked about his relationship with Pam and his [sales] partner, Jim explained
that he worked on assignments with his [sales] partner, but he thought that Pam was better at
paper product creation. Since Pam lived close to Jim and his [sales] partner, and Pam didn’t have
a [sales] partner, Jim said that all three of them would work together on the homework.

Next, Jim explained the circumstances which led to him using Pam’s computer. He said
that his computer was having issues and crashed a lot. After trying to create three paper products
on his computer and failing, he knocked on Pam’s door and asked to use her laptop. Jim said he
used Pam’s laptop to work on his own paper products. He emphasized that Pam was awake and
in the room the whole time that he was using the computer. When asked if he ever saw Pam’s
work, Jim said he hadn’t seen it and added that Pam hadn’t even had the paper products on her
laptop at all. However, Jim said that when Professor Schrute had talked to Pam, Pam had said
that her test files had been sent through her email, which was already open on her laptop. Thus,
Professor Schrute was concerned that Jim had accessed Pam’s test files through Pam’s email.
Jim maintained that he had not accessed Pam’s email account, and had only used Pam’s
computer to work on his own test.

Finally, Jim discussed the ways in which he felt Professor Schrute had treated him with
bias. He started by acknowledging that he felt it was normal to have suspicion in a situation like
this. However, Jim said that Professor Schrute emailed him on one day, but then recorded a
grade for Pam the following day before even speaking with Jim. When Jim and Professor
Schrute later spoke on the phone, Jim tried to clear out Professor Schrute’s concerns, but felt that
Professor Schrute seemed in a rush throughout the phone call and didn’t seem to play an active
role to hear him out. Additionally, he felt that the language Professor Schrute used in the email
asking him to contact Honor Council was very strong and made him feel uncomfortable with
how much the professor did not believe him. Though Jim said he initially didn’t want this to go
to trial, he now felt good about this going to trial because he felt such a large gap in trust
between himself and Professor Schrute.

Jury Deliberations Part 1:

The jury reached out to two expert witnesses on paper for the trial. Both individuals
expressed varying levels of concern about the similarities, but left room for the possibility that
academic dishonesty had not occurred. One juror expressed that they felt that the fact that Jim had used Pam’s laptop constituted a violation of the Code in itself. Another juror stated that, after reading through Professor Schrute’s comments along with the expert witnesses’ comments, they felt the similarities between the tests were more than coincidental. Overall, some of the jury felt suspicious that a violation occurred, but not many jurors felt absolutely certain of the fact.

The jury first discussed if they thought that Jim using Pam’s laptop was a violation in itself or not. One juror brought up the fact that the test instructions had told students to work independently, and they felt that using another student’s laptop may have violated that instruction. However, another juror responded that they were uncomfortable including the use of the laptop in a statement of violation because they didn’t think the professor had confronted for the laptop use. They also emphasized that it was possible for Jim to have used the laptop in a way that didn’t access Pam’s materials. The jury then decided to drop the question of the laptop use and focus on the possibility of cheating more broadly. From the beginning, the jury had a lot of mixed opinions ranging from strong suspicion that a violation occurred to strong opposition to saying that a violation occurred.

In terms of suspicion, some of the jury felt that there were lots of coincidences, and too many to be easily explained away. One juror expressed that they thought that three professors (Professor Schrute and the two expert witnesses) wouldn’t have strong motivation to falsely say student cheated, and thus they were inclined to believe the professors. The jury also discussed the suspicious case, as pointed out by Professor Schrute, where Jim had incongruous errors in his paper products, which seemed like a strange occurrence to happen outside of a cheating situation. Some jurors felt that a violation of the Code had occurred, but not necessarily to the degree which Professor Schrute had expressed. Overall, the main point of suspicion for many jurors was the similarity of the structure of Jim and Pam’s paper products.

However, there was also a strong sense of non-suspicion from others on the jury. Some jurors expressed that they felt that they were not convinced based on the documents as well as the fact that neither expert witness stated that they definitely believed cheating had occurred. One juror pointed out that Jim did not submit paper products for all the parts of the test, while Pam had completed the entire test. Another juror felt that Jim may have inherited some of the issues in his paper products on the test from previous homework paper products. Additionally, the jury discussed the fact that Jim and Pam had worked together on homework in the past, which may have contributed to similar styles of work. Some of the jury acknowledged that they had suspicions, but felt very uncomfortable moving toward a statement of violation because they didn’t feel beyond a reasonable doubt that a violation had occurred.

In an attempt to make sense of the many ideas being considered, the jury diagrammed side-by-side the thoughts from Professor Schrute, those from the expert witnesses, and the jury’s own thoughts, but the jury remained very split between strong suspicion, uncertain suspicion, and strong non-suspicion. However, everyone felt that there were areas in which they would like to know more information. The jury discussed the possibility of asking to see other tests from the
class, but one juror felt strongly that that would not be helpful, and might even be harmful because they felt that viewing other tests might artificially influence the jury to think that the degree of similarity between the two tests was even higher.

The jury agreed that they wanted to know more specifically how much Jim had worked with Pam and how much Jim had worked with his sales partner. Additionally, they wanted Professor Schrute to send the jury the homeworks that Jim had mentioned as being similar to his work on the test. Finally, the jury decided to ask the Honor Council Librarian for abstracts of past cases where juries dealt with similar cases of conflicting statements between parties.

Jury Deliberations Part 2:

Honor Council’s Librarian found three abstracts which dealt with issues of honesty, including two that came to statements of violation, while the third came to a statement of non-violation. The jury reviewed these abstracts and considered how these past juries handled similar issues of honesty; however, given that the situations (beyond the honesty issues) of these cases were very different from the present one, most jurors did not feel as though these abstracts strongly shifted their opinions for this trial. Professor Schrute had replied to the suggestion of sending all of Jim’s relevant old homework assignments for the class by letting the jury know that this would entail over 100 files, so the jury decided they did not want to see those files for now. The jury also read and considered a document that Jim had prepared in response to the professor’s document of concerns.

Given that the jury had been fairly torn at the last meeting, they started by discussing what each juror felt was their area of strongest concern (which could be toward suspicion of a violation or toward non-suspicion of a violation). One juror brought up the question of whether or not Professor Schrute knew that Jim had collaborated with Pam on homeworks previously, and if he had noticed past similarities. This juror felt that if the two had collaborated a lot in the past, it was likely that Professor Schrute would have noticed the two using similar formats; however, since this was not the case, the juror felt even more suspicious that he noticed the two students now had such similar formats for their answers on this exam. Another juror discussed that their biggest concern was the similarities in the structures of the two students’ paper products. However, even though this juror felt that this was very suspicious, they emphasized that they did not feel as though there was enough information to definitively say that Jim had violated the Honor Code. Some other jurors agreed, saying that they were suspicious of the structural similarities but did not feel that the suspicion was enough to make them feel inclined toward a statement of violation. Another juror added that they were extremely suspicious of the structural similarities. They said that they were not convinced by Jim’s explanations in his response document to the professor’s concerns and were leaning more toward a statement of violation. Some other jurors expressed similar thoughts and stated that they were more in favor of a statement of violation at this point.

The discussion then shifted to considering the consequences of coming to a statement of
violation as compared to a statement of non-violation. One juror said that they did not feel that the trial goals would be met if the jury came to a statement of non-violation; they felt that they would rather falsely say that Jim had cheated and create resolutions which would not be too detrimental to him and fulfill the three trial goals. Another juror agreed, saying that they felt that coming to a statement of non-violation would be extremely bad and could make the community think that if someone just keeps explaining themselves, then they can get away with anything. This might then damage trust in the Honor Code. However, the juror also acknowledged that they didn’t want to come to a statement of violation if Jim had not actually violated the Honor Code, as they felt this would be unfair to Jim. A different juror added that although the jury needed to come to a binary decision, they felt that the jury had room in the statement of violation to express their discomfort and confusion. However, another juror responded by saying that they felt the jury also would have room in a statement of non-violation to express these similar feelings. Some jurors agreed with this and expressed that they felt that it was better to err on the side of trust because they did not feel as though they could come to statement of violation without being beyond a reasonable doubt.

While many jurors were now leaning more toward a statement of non-violation, there were a few jurors who still felt in favor of a statement of violation. One juror shared that, in their experience in similar courses, they had never produced any work as similar as these tests, even when sales partners worked very close with each other. They acknowledged that they felt other jurors had brought up good reasons for a statement of non-violation, but they felt that there were too many similarities here to be explained away entirely by coincidence. Another juror agreed with this, and emphasized that they were thinking about the implications of the choice the jury needed to make. They stated that they would rather come to a statement of violation and create less harsh resolutions to reflect the uncertainty of the case and focus on restoration. A different juror said that they would stop standing outside on a statement of non-violation if they could see similarities between Jim and Pam’s previous homeworks for the course. Other members of the jury agreed that seeing at least a few homeworks from Jim and Pam would be helpful to compare, so the jury decided to ask for a few homework assignments from Professor Schrute. To give jurors more time to reflect, as well as the need to wait for these documents, the jury adjourned.

**Jury Deliberations Part 3 / Statement of non-violation:**

The jury began by comparing some of Jim and Pam’s previous homeworks that Professor Schrute had sent. Some of the jury felt more suspicious after viewing the homework files because they did not feel as though they saw many similarities between their homeworks, and therefore felt that it was less likely that prior collaboration between Jim and Pam had influenced the similarities between their tests. However, other jurors expressed that they had been thinking more about the idea of reasonable doubt, and felt that they still perceived some reasonable doubt in the situation and were therefore more comfortable with a statement of non-violation now.
While some jurors were still more suspicious, further discussion about a few of Jim’s homework assignments and similar structures seen on Jim’s test made them feel less strongly suspicious. After that, the weight of the room felt comfortable with moving toward a statement of non-violation.

Next, the jury moved on to creating the statement. They felt strongly about phrasing the statement of non-violation in the context of being unable to conclude beyond a reasonable doubt that a violation occurred based on the evidence. Additionally, the jury felt it was important to emphasize that the jury had extensively considered the materials available and perspectives from the parties and the expert witnesses. After a brief discussion about a few words and phrases, the jury consented on the following statement of non-violation:

**Statement of non-violation:**
After thorough consideration of the available evidence, the jury thinks that although there is reason for suspicion, they cannot conclude beyond a reasonable doubt that [Jim] violated the Honor Code. (8 jurors consent, 1 stands outside in absentia)

**Suggested Resolutions:**
The jury then discussed the possibility of suggested resolutions. One idea brought up was for the jury to have a meeting with Professor Schrute to discuss the deliberations. The jury wanted to write this as a suggested resolution, rather than just offer thoughts in a direct email to the professor, so that other people would see it in the abstract. Next, the jury debated whether or not to include a suggested resolution for a meeting between Jim and Professor Schrute, mediated by one to two jurors or members of Honor Council’s Executive Board. However, one juror suggested that since the two did not even have a close relationship to begin with, and based on Jim’s statement about his perceived experience of bias and power dynamics, the juror was unsure if Jim would be comfortable with such a meeting. Another juror questioned the purpose of this meeting. One juror answered that they wanted to help the two of them get on better terms. Another juror expressed doubt that they needed to get on the same page since Jim was a Bryn Mawr student and a graduating senior. No jury member expressed strongly feeling the desire to see this mediated meeting as a suggested resolution, so the jury moved on. Some jurors wondered about including Jim in the earlier proposed suggested resolution involving meeting with jurors to discuss deliberations, but the jury ultimately felt that Professor Schrute would benefit most from this resolution, and no juror felt that Jim would gain much from this meeting. Finally, the jury consented to the following suggested resolution:

**Suggested Resolution:**
1. If [Professor Schrute] would find it helpful, a few members of the jury will meet with him to discuss the jury’s deliberation. (8 jurors consent, 1 stands outside in absentia)
Post-Trial:
The trial was not appealed by either party.

Discussion Questions:
1. What value is there in using expert witnesses from outside the community? How might this be problematic?
2. The Code asks us to trust the parties involved, but how can juries navigate trusting parties when their perspectives directly contradict one another?
3. What does it mean for a jury to come to *statement of violation* when an individual has *not* violated the Honor Code?
4. What does it mean for a jury to come to a *statement of non-violation* when an individual *has* actually violated the Honor Code?