Abstract of the Honor Council
Case 9, Fall 2009
Wednesday, January 20, 2010

Members Present:
Lindsay Kirton (presiding), Jackie Ammons (clerk), Matthew Diasio, Kaleb Underwood, Trey Burns, David Fortunado, Deian Tabakov, Abhishek Nag, Justine Lin

Ombuds: Lila Kerr, Eric Harrison (observing)

Letter of Accusation:
The Honor Council received a letter accusing Student A, Student B, Student C, and Student D of collaborating on a pledged assignment in a lower-level science course.

Evidence Submitted:
- Letter of Accusation
- Student A's written statement
- Student B's written statement
- Student C's written statement
- Student D's written statement
- Assignment prompt
- Student A's Problem #7, HW 13
- Student B's Problem #7, HW 13
- Student C's Problem #1,2,3,7, HW 13
- Student D's Problems #1,2,3, HW 13
- Solution for Problem #7, HW 13
- Professor deposition
- Email between Student B and Student C
- Emails between Professor and Student C
- Emails between Professor and Student D
- Course syllabus
- Image for Problem #7D submitted by all four students
- Solution image for Problem #7D

Plea:
Student A pled "Not In Violation."
Student B pled "Not In Violation."
Student C and Student D were not present at the hearing because they chose to voluntarily withdraw from the University under the Honor Code's Article XII.

Testimony:
Student A claimed that 6 of his 37 lines of coding that the professor questions in the letter of accusation were used in the professor's previous course material. He said that the reason he used the professor's previous course material was because he did not attend class when the one-line solution was presented. Student A also claimed that the majority of the 37 lines of coding in question were comments and labels that were not central to

the solution. Student B said he used the same methods presented by the professor's previous course material and thereby accounted for their coding similarities. Student B also said that other similarities between his and Student A's coding were coincidences. Student A suggested that their similarities may have come from collaborating on previous assignments, as permitted for those assignments.

Student B said he did not attend class and thus did not know that he did not need to upload the images. In the letter of accusation, the professor suggested as an indication that the accused students collaborated was that they each submitted their images when the assignment did not require this step.

Student A stated that he and Student B were roommates.

Student B admitted to accessing Student A's computer when Student A was not in his room and copying Student B's images onto a USB drive. Before he accessed Student A's computer, Student B said he generated his own image with his own code but accidentally submitted Student B's images. Student B said the reason he accessed Student A's computer was to check and ensure his image generator was working, because it was taking a long time to generate the images from his code, even though the images were provided in the assignment prompt.

Student A and Student B stated that they never worked on the code together. Student B said he did not look at Student A's code when he accessed Student A's computer.

Student B claimed he did not realize he had submitted the wrong images until the investigative meeting.

Student A stated that he and Student B had worked together on assignments for the course but only on assignments in which collaboration was allowed. Student A suggested that this previous collaboration may have given him and Student B similar resources for the assignment in question.

Student A stated that he had not met Student C or Student D before the investigative meeting; Student A referenced Student C's and Student D's written statements to support his claim.

Student B admitted to giving Student A's images, but not Student A's coding, to Student C after Student C asked Student B for help. Student B said he thought it would make no difference to give Student A's images instead of the ones provided in the assignment prompt to Student C, because they were the same, except for the presentation of the images. Student B said he thought it was permissible to give Student C the images because they were included in the assignment prompt with only slight differences in the versions obtained from Student A.

Student B claimed he was not aware that Student C assisted Student D.

Student A said he believed it was likely that Student C and Student D saw his image and then developed coding similar to his own. Student A said his image was the same as the images in the assignment prompt, but his presentation of the images was unique.

Verdict Deliberations:
Council members believed that there was clear and convincing evidence that a violation occurred because of Student A's and Student B's testimony, the evidence presented, and the written statements of all four students. The sharing of files and information clearly violated the Honor Code policy for the pledged assignment which stated, "whatever you submit must be completely your own work."

Straw Poll #1: Is there clear and convincing evidence that a violation occurred?
Yes: 9
No: 0
Abstentions: 0

The Council then discussed whether or not Student A committed the violation. Council members discussed the fact that Student A was not aware that Student B accessed his computer. There was no clear evidence to indicate that Student A willingly gave information to the other three students.

Council members also discussed the fact that Student A's and Student B's coding was very similar and whether this suggested collaboration between the two.

Finally, Council members discussed how Student A seemed to attempt to support and explain Student B's actions. In the end, the Council believed there was not clear and convincing evidence to support that Student A had aided Student B in any way that constituted a violation.

Straw Poll #2: Is there clear and convincing evidence that Student A is "In Violation?"
Yes: 0
No: 9
Abstentions: 0

Council members believed that Student B violated the Honor Code by taking Student A's images when he accessed Student A's computer without Student A's permission and then giving Student A's images to Student C.

Some Council member believed that the extreme similarity—and, at times, identicalness—of Student A's and Student B's coding indicated that when Student B accessed Student A's computer, Student B stole Student A's coding in addition to his images. Other Council members believed that both students' testimony explaining these similarities cast doubt on the assertion that Student B took Student A's coding.

Straw Poll #3: Is there clear and convincing evidence that Student B is "In Violation?"
Yes: 9

No: 0
Abstentions: 0

Straw Polls #1, #2, and #3 made binding.

Penalty Deliberations:
Council members opened by discussing mitigating circumstances for Student B. Most Council members said that they would mitigate based upon Student B's cooperation. One Council member said that he would mitigate little or not at all based on cooperation because he believed Student B deceived the Honor Council. This Council member cited the two different timelines that Student B gave when sharing the steps he took when he accessed Student A's computer. Other Council members agreed that it took Student B a long time to explain why he accessed Student A's computer, but that, in the end, Student B gave an explanation.

Council members said that they would not mitigate based on the nature of the violation since the assignment was worth 20% of the course grade. Only one Council member said he would mitigate based on the weight of the assignment since the violation only encompassed a small portion of the assignment.

Regarding aggravating circumstances, most Council members said that they would aggravate based on the nature of the violation since Student B stole information. Council members believed that theft was a serious issue and damaging to the academic integrity of the University. Additionally, Student B compounded the seriousness of his violation by disseminating the images to another student. Only one Council member said that he would not be aggravating.

Council members brought up the possibility that Student B's violation was heinous and suggested that Student B's violation of "theft of another's work" might be "considerably damaging to the academic integrity of Rice University," as described by the Consensus Penalty Structure. Council members believed that the violation was serious and hurt the trust that students share. However, some Council members believed that Student B's violation was not "directly harmful to individual" (i.e. Student A) since Student A was found "Not In Violation."

Straw Poll #4: Was Student B's violation "heinous?"
Yes: 1
No: 6
Abstentions: 2

After further discussion, the abstaining members said that they believed that Student B's theft was a very serious violation, yet they saw no directly harmful consequences for Student A.

Straw Poll #5: Was Student B's violation "heinous?"
Yes: 1

No: 8
Abstentions: 0

Thus, since 8 out of 9 vote are needed to determine a violation to be "heinous," the Honor Council did not determine that Student B committed a "heinous" violation.

Straw Poll #6: What is the appropriate penalty for Student B?
F in the course and 3 semesters of suspension: 2
F in the course and 2 semesters of suspension: 6
F in the course and 1 semester of suspension: 1
F in the course: 0
Abstentions: 0

Straw Poll #7: What is the appropriate penalty for Student B?
F in the course and 3 semesters of suspension: 2
F in the course and 2 semesters of suspension: 6
F in the course and 1 semester of suspension: 1
F in the course: 0
Abstentions: 0

Straw Poll #5 and #7 made binding.

The Honor Council thus finds Student A "Not In Violation" of the Honor Code.

The Honor Council thus finds Student B "In Violation" of the Honor Code and recommends that he receive an F in the course and 2 semesters of suspension. A Prior Violation Flag is also attached to his record.

Time of testimony and deliberations: 2 hours and 29 minutes

Respectfully submitted,
Jackie Ammons
Clerk