

Abstract of the Honor Council
Case #14, Fall 2011
1/12/12

Members Present:

Kaleb Underwood (presiding), Kate Snyder (clerk), Andrew Patterson, Isabelle Lelogeais, Gabriela Lopez, Brandon Hault, Jeff Worne, Matthew Diasio, David Kim, Mick Pryor

Ombuds: Lila Kerr

Letter of Accusation:

The Honor Council received a letter accusing Student A of taking other students' assignments out of a publicly accessible submission box for her use on her assignment for an upper level engineering course.

Evidence Submitted:

- Letter of Accusation
- Student A's written statement
- Student A's homework
- Other student's homework

Plea:

Student A pled "not in violation."

Testimony:

Student A does not think that this action was a violation because she took her homework out of the submission box a few hours after turning it in without being prompted to do so in order to receive a zero on the grade after learning that the professor had seen the other student's papers in her possession. She did so because she realized what she did was not polite to the other students. She further does not believe it was a violation since the students whose assignments were taken from the box were not hurt by her actions. She believed her actions may have been personally wrong, but are not a violation under the Honor Code. She also said that many students, in her experience, always permitted her to borrow their homeworks, so the fact that she didn't have their permission this time isn't a problem. Further, she has seen a friend also take other students' assignments out of a submission box for another class. All of the homeworks counted towards the final grade, with each homework counting for (30/13)% of the final grade. She was finished with her homework when she looked at the other student's homeworks and did not make changes after checking her answers with the other students'. She resorted to taking others' assignments from the submission box because she could not find anyone to ask to borrow theirs. She did not try to conceal the fact that she had other students' assignments from the professor when he came over to her while she was working. The professor never said anything against the taking of others' assignments out of the assignment box, so it is allowed. Also, the format for turning in take-home exams is more private, so it is

understood that turning in homework is not private. Student A does not know if the class was curved. She selected the homeworks out of the box randomly.

Verdict Deliberations:

Council members believed that a preponderance of the evidence supported that a violation occurred because of Student A's admission both to the professor and the Council. While it is not a violation of the professor's Honor Code policy, it is a violation of the trust placed in students through the Honor Code.

Straw Poll #1: Does a preponderance of the evidence support that a violation occurred?

Yes: 9
 No: 0
 Abstentions: 0

The Council then discussed whether or not Student A committed the violation.

Straw Poll #2: Does a preponderance of the evidence support that Student A is "In Violation?"

Yes: 9
 No: 0
 Abstentions: 0

Straw Polls #1 and #2 made binding.

Penalty Deliberations:

Council members opened by discussing mitigating circumstances. Intent could be a mitigating factor due to the fact that Student A saw other students in the past take others' work out of submission boxes, and may have thought this action was a common occurrence. Weight of the assignment could be a mitigating factor because the homework was worth only 2.3%, and amount of the assignment is minimal since the homeworks were only used to check answers. Some do not think the nature of the assignment is relevant since the act of taking submitted work is the primary violation. Cooperation was suggested as a mitigating factor since he answered all questions, but some thought that it wasn't relevant because Student A did not bring anything new, relevant, and useful to the table.

Some thought that Student A attempted to conceal the violation by telling the professor that the homeworks that he took from the box were loaned by the original authors willingly. Deceit of the Council was brought up due to some seemingly misleading conjectural testimony, but was dismissed since the testimony's logical quality does not equal deceit.

Possibly considering this a heinous violation was discussed, but ultimately the council did not think that the violation damaged the atmosphere at Rice University significantly more than any other violation.

Straw Poll #3: What is the appropriate penalty for Student A?

F in the course and 3 semesters of suspension:	1
F in the course and 2 semesters of suspension:	1
F in the course and 1 semester of suspension:	3
F in the course:	4
3 letter grade reduction:	0
2 letter grade reduction:	0
1 letter grade reduction:	0
Letter of reprimand	0
Abstentions:	0

Straw Poll #4: What is the appropriate penalty for Student A?

F in the course and 3 semesters of suspension:	0
F in the course and 2 semesters of suspension:	2
F in the course and 1 semester of suspension:	7
F in the course:	0
3 letter grade reduction:	0
2 letter grade reduction:	0
1 letter grade reduction:	0
Letter of reprimand	0
Abstentions:	0

Straw Poll #5: What is the appropriate penalty for Student A?

F in the course and 3 semesters of suspension:	0
F in the course and 2 semesters of suspension:	2
F in the course and 1 semester of suspension:	5
2 letter grade reduction and 1 semester of suspension	2
F in the course:	0
3 letter grade reduction:	0
2 letter grade reduction:	0
1 letter grade reduction:	0
Letter of reprimand	0
Abstentions:	0

Straw Poll #6: What is the appropriate penalty for Student A?

F in the course and 3 semesters of suspension:	0
F in the course and 2 semesters of suspension:	0
F in the course and 1 semester of suspension:	6
2 letter grade reduction and 1 semester of suspension	3
F in the course:	0
3 letter grade reduction:	0
2 letter grade reduction:	0
1 letter grade reduction:	0
Letter of reprimand	0
Abstentions:	0

The members voting for suspension thought that the act of taking work out of a box in which students should be able to trust that their work will be safe is egregious and deserving of the highest punishment. In addition, professors should be able to place a box for their course outside their office and trust that it will not be touched by anyone in an unauthorized way. Many of those that voted for an F in the course made that decision based on the low weight of the assignment, but decided that time away from Rice would be beneficial both to give the student an opportunity to consider her violation and as a punitive measure.

The penalty of one semester of suspension and a letter grade reduction was suggested since the potential academic gain was so small, but in the interest of having precedent, it was an egregious violation of community trust. Even with the small weight if the assignment, council members determined that suspension is appropriate.

Straw Poll #6 made binding.

The Honor Council thus finds Student A “In Violation” of the Honor Code and recommends that she receive F in the course and 1 semester of suspension. A Prior Violation Flag is also attached to her record.

Time of testimony and deliberations: 1hr 50min

Respectfully submitted,
Kate Snyder
Clerk