

Abstract of the Honor Council
Case 32, Spring 2010
5/2/2010

Members Present:

Hilary Baker-Jennings (presiding), Sean Sessel (clerk), Trey Burns, Lindsay Kirton, Jeff Worne, Brian Lucero, Adnan Poonawala, James Hannah, Kaleb Underwood

Ombuds: Vivian Ban

Letter of Accusation:

The Honor Council received a letter accusing Student A of answering a question on a take home final exam with an unattributed verbatim quote from an unallowed third-party website for a graduate level MGMT course.

Evidence Submitted:

- Letter of Accusation
- Student A's written statement
- Course Syllabus
- Student A's Exam
- Student A's Notes
- Web Source
- Professor deposition on internet use
- Student A's complete notes
- Email from professor
- Classmate depositions

Plea:

Student A pled "Not in Violation."

Testimony:

The accused explained that the material in question had been copied from a website into her notes around the time the subject had been presented in class, weeks in advance of the final exam. Subsequently, the accused stated that she copied the material from her notes onto the final exam weeks afterward without recalling the exact source (only that it was a website).

The accused stated that she attempted to prove that she had not used Google the night the exam had been taken, but Google's history did not go that far back.

The accused stated that although another student claimed concern that some students had been copying information from the Web and obtaining good scores, she herself had obtained good scores by copying from the professor's notes.

The accused presented evidence of the professor not citing and claims that this indicates that the professor did not set a trend for citation.

The accused stated that the professor has encouraged Internet use throughout the course and the material in question was not in the textbook or the Internet links given.

The accused cites Articles IX and X in “Conduct of Examinations” of the Blue Book and stated the professor did not meet these responsibilities. She also cites the “Honor Council Recommendations to Faculty.”

The accused stated that her ability to change the phrasing of the material in question is limited because of the technical nature of the material. Also, she stated that the material is public knowledge, analogous to Newton’s Laws, and referenced the section Article II of the “General Requirements for the Acknowledgment of Sources” regarding common knowledge.

The accused stated that the professor never banned Internet use on the instructions for the final exam. The accused then reiterated that the professor should clearly state the citation guidelines, this time referencing the “Honor Code Faculty Handbook,” and stated that the professor never did so.

The accused then stated that by researching the material in question in advance despite there being very little explained about this subject in class, she had expected she would be doing exactly what the professor wished.

The accused reiterated that the material in question had been researched and put in the notes much in advance; ergo, there was no use of unallowed sources while taking the exam. The accused also reiterated that the material in question is common knowledge; ergo, there was no citation requirement.

The accused stated that the professor had encouraged Internet use throughout the class without any citation policy and points out that one final exam problem specifically directed the students to do so.

The accused stated that the professor had never mentioned citation guidelines and that she had never asked the professor. She said that by including the name of the economist who first developed the idea, she was citing it and so did not need to cite the website that she took the definition from.

The accused stated that she did remember that the information came from a website. She also stated that the material was not available from the textbook.

The accused reiterated that the material is common knowledge in the relevant professional community.

The accused stated that the material might not have been present in the textbook due to the discretion of the author.

The accused stated that the material in question was referenced in the notes for January 8 or January 9 and that she looked up the material on the Web within a week of the material being referenced.

The accused stated that she never accessed journal papers.

The accused reiterated that the professor never banned any websites.

At this point, testimony from Witness #1 begins. Witness #1 was sworn in.

Witness #1 stated that Internet usage, especially Yahoo! Finance, is ubiquitous and expected in the class.

Witness #1 stated that the professor never stated whether web sources were banned on the instructions.

Witness #1 stated that sources allowed for consultation were mentioned in the professor's lecture slides that encouraged web usage.

Witness #1 stated that no citation policy was ever mentioned and noted that there is a substantial difference in what different departments expect for citation.

Witness #1 stated that she had attempted the question with the material in question and had received half credit. She also stated that the only way to get any information on the material was a 1-minute overview and external web research. Witness #1 also compared the material to laws of physics.

The accused clarified that Witness #1 was in a separate section.

Witness #1 stated that Google Finance was also recommended.

Witness #1 stated that the material in question had been presented over a very short amount of time in class.

Witness #1 stated that the material in question is common knowledge and referenced a conversation with a professional in the field saying as much.

Witness #1 stated that she is unsure if the material in question is common knowledge in wording or just concept.

Witness #1 stated that the rest of her team had copied and pasted the material in question from Google into their notes.

The accused stated she has had no prior discussion with the witness.

The accused stated that she had explained the material in question in her answer before quoting the material from Google.

Witness #1 reiterated that the material in question had not been brought up again after the initial class.

At this point, testimony from Witness #2 begins. Witness #2 was sworn in.

Witness #2 stated that she believed that students were allowed to use the Internet at all times and referenced a slide that encourages students to research terms they did not recognize.

Witness #2 stated that the final exam instructions specifically allow “work of your own,” which she understood to include any notes a student had copied down. Witness #2 also stated that they were only specifically forbidden in the exam instructions from using embedded spreadsheets.

Witness #2 stated that she thought it was acceptable to go online during the test.

Witness #2 stated that the question appears to be a question on which the answer should be directly copied.

Witness #2 stated that she could not comment on whether this was general knowledge in the field because she has no knowledge of the material in question whatsoever.

Witness #2 stated that the general perception of the Honor Code is limited to the pledge used on the exam, but that the professor had not referenced the Honor Code in any other way.

Witness #2 stated that they were forbidden from using notes from another student.

Witness #2 stated that a law of economics should be restated precisely, like a physical law.

Witness #2 stated that she would have used the paradox exactly as it was put on the Web without citation as well.

At this point, testimony from Witness #3 begins. Witness #3 is sworn in.

Witness #3 stated that the professor encouraged Internet usage and never prohibited any web sources.

Witness #3 stated that the material in question had been mentioned only briefly in class.

The accused clarified that Witness #3 is in the same section as the accused.

Witness #3 stated that she had received information about the material in question from a teammate who was a professional in the field, in which the material constituted common knowledge.

Witness #3 stated that the material in question has a precise definition rather than being a concept.

Witness #3 stated that she did not define the material in question but that she did not receive full credit for that problem.

Witness #3 stated that “citation” was never mentioned in the class and that citation does not apply to exam questions concerning definitions.

Witness #3 stated that the problem in question requires a definition of the material in question.

Witness #3 stated that there was never a specific exception to the Honor Code but that the professor defined the Honor Code policy on the front of the exam.

Witness #3 reiterates that no citation is expected on a short answer for an exam.

At this point, testimony from Witness #4 begins. Witness #4 is sworn in.

Witness #4 stated that this professor always encourages Internet usage without limitation.

Witness #4 stated that some other professors ban the use of the Internet.

Witness #4 stated that no instruction was provided concerning whether web sources were allowed.

Witness #4 stated that the professor had never mentioned citation policies.

Witness #4 stated that the material in question was only covered for 30 seconds in class and nowhere else.

Witness #4 stated that he would have gone online during the exam.

Witness #4 stated that the professor never gave specific exceptions to the Honor Code, but stated that citation would not be expected because the material in question is public knowledge.

Witness #4 stated that the concept of the material in question is common knowledge but the language is not necessarily the same.

Witness #4 stated that the students felt they could use the Internet during the exam for anything.

Witness #4 reiterated that the material in question is public knowledge but that there are multiple ways to convey it.

The accused clarified that Witness #4 is not readily familiar with the material in question.

Witness #4 stated that she feels the burden is on the professor to clearly state what can and cannot be used and that such action was not taken.

At this point, the Council continued questioning Student A.

The accused clarified that she did not discuss the case with the witnesses beforehand.

The accused stated that she had previously copied verbatim from the professor's notes and not been reprimanded.

The accused stated that the only source with the definition of the material in question came from the source that was quoted.

The accused reiterated that she had explained everything and then put the law in. The accused also reiterated that she was unable to find any other source that defined the material in question.

The accused provided a written account of the professor's accusations and her defenses against them.

The accused stated that the professor never gave a specific exception to the Honor Code but that the professor defined the Honor Code in a particular way for the exam.

The accused summarized:

1. She had not accessed the internet while taking the exam.
2. The material from the Internet was allowed and had been copied into her notes months in advance.
3. The material in question is in the public domain as an economic law equivalent to Newton's First Law, and thus the material in question did not require citation. Furthermore, the professor never specified a citation policy.

Testimony concludes.

Verdict Deliberations:

Council members believed that there was not clear and convincing evidence that a violation occurred. Some Council members felt that the material in question is common knowledge. Others feel that the material in question falls under the specifically allowed "work product," for which citation is not required under the policy of the class.

Council members see no evidence of the use of unallowed resources during the exam.

Discussion of improper citation followed. While the Council agreed that the concept of the material in question is public knowledge, the exact wording is a greater matter of controversy. However, the professor specifically allows “your own work product,” which some Council members feel includes verbatim definitions copied months in advance.

Some Council members thought paraphrasing is not necessary for definitions, because that would change the meaning. A Council member pointed out that paraphrasing is moot if the quote had been cited.

The policy for the course implied that a student is allowed to copy verbatim from his or her own work product without violating the Honor Code. The Council discussed whether the material in question copied from a website months in advance is the work product of the accused. The analogy is drawn to copying verbatim from the professor’s lectures as being the work product of the student.

Council members discussed if the exact wording of the material in question requires citation. The differentiation of concept versus exact wording is emphasized. Because the material in question is a definition, some Council members believed that there is an intimate linkage of the concept and exact wording.

Council members noted that as the professor specifically told students to do research, the product of their research is their own work product. Council members discussed whether citation would have been required for the online glossary recommended to the class by the professor.

The equivalence of the source used by the accused to provided resources was then discussed. The question was raised again of whether this constituted the student’s “work product”.

Straw Poll #1: Is there clear and convincing evidence that a violation occurred?

Yes: 0

No: 8

Abstentions: 1

Straw Poll #1 made binding by a favor of 8-1.

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

Time of testimony and deliberations: 3 hours, 43 minutes, 59 seconds

Respectfully submitted,
Sean Sessel
Clerk