

Abstract of the Honor Council
Case 40, Spring 2010
May 12, 2010

Members Present:

Hilary Baker-Jennings (presiding), Lindsay Kirton (clerk), Trey Burns, Elizabeth Marks, Kate Snyder, Jackie Ammons, Amara Difrancesco, Jeff Worne, Jacqui Cacan

Ombuds: Eric Harrison

Letter of Accusation:

The Honor Council received a letter accusing Student A of changing an answer on a regrade request on an exam in a lower level science course.

Evidence Submitted:

- Letter of Accusation
- Student A's written statement
- Course syllabus
- Student A's original exam
- Student A's re-grade request
- Answer key
- Emails between Student A and professor
- Student A's original re-grade request

Plea:

Student A pled "In Violation."

Testimony:

Student A began by discussing the timeline of events regarding the violation. After taking the exam, the student submitted her exam for a regrade a week later on the last day allowed under the course policy. Student A admitted to changing a portion of one of her answers on the day she submitted the regrade request.

Student A emailed the professor asking about her final course grade, and later asked to have her regrade revoked. Student A stated that her original email to the professor at 12:07 p.m. was intended to notify the professor not to consider her regrade request. However, Student A stated that she did not bluntly ask the professor to not consider her email request until a later email sent at 10:21 p.m. that same day.

Student A stated she did not cheat on the exam at all while taking the exam. Student A stated that she had intended to put the correct answer down for a problem but did not, and thus changed that answer later for the regrade request. Student A then realized that her actions were wrong and asked the professor to revoke her regrade request. Student A stated that the professor never considered her regrade request because her grade never changed on OwlSpace.

Council members asked the student why she only asked the professor outright to revoke the regrade request after she had received the accusation from the Honor Council. Student A said that she believed her earlier email to the professor was a request to revoke the regrade. She stated she did not explicitly tell the professor she had changed an answer on her regrade because she believed that by asking to revoke it, this was an admission.

Student A stated that she had asked for regrades on earlier exams in the class, but she had never changed anything on those exams. Student A stated that she received the notification letter from the Honor Council before she had time to email the Honor Council a letter of self-accusation. Student A also thought her action of revoking the regrade made her original action of submitting her exam for a regrade null.

In her closing statement, Student A stated that she did alter one problem of her original exam and then submitted it for a regrade. Before receiving knowledge that she had been accused of a violation in this course, she had already emailed the professor asking her to revoke her regrade request. Student A stated that her first email to the professor was intended to talk about her course grade, and the student believed that the email conveyed to the professor not to consider her regrade request. Student A stated that in later emails she explicitly pointed out to the professor not to consider her regrade request. Student A stated that her actions were very minimal in terms of an honor code violation.

Verdict Deliberations:

Some Council members believed that there was clear and convincing evidence that a violation occurred because the student knowingly violated the course policy and changed an answer on her regrade request in an attempt to gain points that she did not earn. The student admitted in her testimony that she knew her action of changing her answer and submitting it for a regrade request was wrong. Other Council members considered the possibility that because the student tried to take back her request that she made her “violation” null and void and thus did not actually commit a violation. Other Council members said that it did not matter, because the act of changing the answer and turning in the exam constituted a violation.

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

Yes: 9
No: 0
Abstentions: 0

The Council believed based on the material evidence and testimony that Student A committed the violation.

Straw Poll #2: Is there clear and convincing evidence that Student A is “In Violation?”

Yes: 9
No: 0
Abstentions: 0

Straw Polls #1 and #2 made binding.

Penalty Deliberations:

A majority of Council members mitigated on nature of the violation because of the very small weight of the problem in question in terms of the overall exam and course grade. Some members decided to mitigate on cooperation because the student submitted copies of the emails between her and the professor which constituted bringing in relevant information before the hearing. Some members also mitigated on cooperation because they believed the student fully and truthfully disclosed her actions while others felt that the student did not fully and truthfully answer Council members' questions.

Council members discussed aggravating on deceit of the Council because the student's oral testimony conflicted with her written statement and the emails sent to the professor. However, other Council members felt that there was no solid evidence to support the belief that the student tried to deceive to the Council. A Council member raised the idea of aggravating based on premeditation but Council members ultimately did not believe there was evidence to support that the student's actions included premeditation.

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

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

Council members discussed their reasons for aggravating and mitigating. Most Council members mitigated on cooperation and nature of the violation but some members then also aggravated based on deceit of the Council.

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

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

A Council member raised the point that that the student only changed one answer on the exam even though she had the opportunity to change more answers. Other Council members felt that this was giving the student credit for not changing more of her answers.

Some Council members discussed that they felt the student’s testimony was intended to deceive the Council and thus warranted aggravation. Council members pointed out that there was no solid evidence to suggest that Student A deceived the Council. Other Council members felt that the type of violation was a particularly severe type of violation because of the explicit nature of the syllabus and the trust afforded to students by professors in offering regrade requests. Council members pointed out that the one question the student changed was a minimal portion of the final course grade.

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

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

Council members again discussed on what they chose to mitigate and aggravate on and how much for each they chose to do so for.

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

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

Straw Poll #6 made binding.

The Honor Council thus finds Student A “In Violation” of the Honor Code and recommends that she receive a 2 letter grade reduction. A Prior Violation Flag is also attached to her record.

Time of testimony and deliberations: 1 hour and 49 minutes

Respectfully submitted,
Lindsay Kirton
Clerk

