

Abstract of the Honor Council
Case 25, Spring 2011
April 7, 2011

Members Present:

Hilary Baker-Jennings (presiding), Trey Burns (clerk), Adam Hartman, Barbara Redeker, Abby Endler, Kelsey Zottnick, Kaleb Underwood, Kate Snyder, Brian Walker

Ombuds: Miranda Nadeau

Letter of Accusation:

The Honor Council received a letter accusing Students A, B, and C of unauthorized collaboration on a pledged take-home midterm exam for a lower level science course.

There were originally five students involved in this case, but two students (D and E) withdrew under Article XII.

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- Student D's written statement (withdrawn under Article XII)
- Student E's written statement (withdrawn under Article XII)
- Course Syllabus
- Exam Handouts
- Blank Exam
- Student A's exam
- Student A's pledge
- Student B's exam
- Student C's exam
- Student D's exam
- Student E's exam
- Professor depositions
- Expert depositions
- Sign in/sign out sheet
- Summary of exams and detailed analysis from professor
- Comparison Exam
- Exam Solutions
- Student A's original exam
- Student D's original exam
- Student E's original exam
- Additional statement from Student A

Plea:

Student A pled “In Violation.”

Student B pled “Not In Violation.”

Student C pled “Not In Violation.”

Student D withdrew under Article XII

Student E withdrew under Article XII

Testimony: *Note: In this hearing, the accused students gave testimony separately*

Student A’s Testimony Part I

Student A began by stating that he looked at Student B’s exam book which he had left on a table in an unlocked study room. He went on to say that he only did this to see how hard the exam was, but did not really read the exam closely and did not attempt memorize anything that he saw in the book. He also noted that the accused did not mention any similarities between his exam and Student B’s exam.

Student A told the Council that Student E admitted to copying off his exam, which was corroborated by Student E’s written statement.

Student A responded to the statement in the expert’s deposition that noted that portions of his exam were identical to the responses found in Student D’s and Student E’s exam by saying that he felt that his work was different from theirs. He explained how he did his work and came to his solutions in these sections. He explained similar or identical mistakes by saying he and the other students may have used the same method of solving the solutions.

Student A said that he wrote the pledge wrong on the front of his exam (“Oh! My Honor!” in place of “On my honor”) because he learned the pledge wrong when he arrived at Rice and didn’t realize his error until just recently.

Student A said that he picked up the exam and dropped off the exam on his own, and the fact that he and Student C picked up and dropped off their exams on the same days as mere coincidence.

Student A said that when he glanced at Student B’s exam in the library, we picked it up and flipped through it quickly, but did not look at any details and did not take in anything he saw. This occurred about ten hours before he began working on his own exam.

Student A said that he had worked with other students involved in this case for work in this course in the past because homework was open to collaboration. He said he usually contacted Student B if he was having trouble figuring out a solution to a problem, and sometimes would contact Student E. However, he said he had not studied or worked with Student C. He said this might explain why all five students involved made similar conceptual mistakes on parts of the exam.

Student A said that he took a nap after completing the exam, and did not hide his exam book. He said that Student E was in the area at the time, and that he slept for a few hours.

Student B's Testimony Part I

Before beginning his testimony, Student B presented the Council with the sources he used when working through the exam, including homework assignments. He said that this would help show that he did his own work and did not copy off of anyone else.

Student B began by saying that he did not show his work to anyone else. He said that he was not aware that Student A had briefly looked through his exam when he left it in the study room. He stated that the two went to the library together to work through a problem set for another course that they were taking together. When asked, he said he was not sure how long Student A was alone with his exam, but said it couldn't have been that long (going to buy a drink, using the restroom, etc.). He said that after he left the library, he immediately turned in his exam book.

Student B walked the Council through his process for portions of the exam which the depositions from the accuser and expert noted were identical or similar to solutions found in the other students' exam solutions. For one such issue, where the accuser said that there appeared to be a copy error, Student B said that the alleged mistake was a notation that he often used when solving this kind of problem. Student B said that there was a possibility that the other students copied off his exam, but that he did not knowingly allow anyone to look at his work.

Student B said that he worked on the first part of his exam in his room, but because things were rather noisy, moved to the library to complete the rest of the exam.

Addressing the accuser's statement that there was an identical conceptual error across the exams that involved using information not relevant to the question, Student B said that he had a tendency to write more that was needed on problems that he was working on in order to make sure that he got everything that needed to be said into his solution.

Student C's Testimony Part I

Student C had no opening statement, but did present further evidence to the Council. He brought the sources that he used to work on his exam.

In reference to the conceptual error in which all student included information that was not relevant to the question, Student C said that he wasn't completely sure how to work out this problem when he was taking the exam, so he included any information he felt pertained to the question in his solution.

He said that he made mistakes that were similar to mistakes in other students' exams because that is how he had learned to work that kind of problem.

Student C said that he did not believe that any of the other students would have had an opportunity to see his exam because once he was done with his exam in the library, he went home off campus. He said that when he came in for class the next morning, he turned in the exam before going to his classes.

Student C that he always went to the course professor's office hours every time he had them because he was not able to attend the course help sessions. He said that if he ever had issues with a problem or an idea, he would bring it up with the professor during this time. He said that he did not work with any of the other accused students on work for the course.

Student A's Testimony Part II

Student A said that he took his exam in the early morning of the day the exam was due.

He said that he did not study or work with Student C on any of the other work in the class.

Student A said that when he and Student E were together in the library, Student B was not with them or in the area.

In reference to the accuser's statement that he and Students B, D, and E expressed their solutions in a strange way, Student A said that this was the standard way of expressing such an answer in Chinese schools, so this is how he had learned to express it.

In closing, Student A said that he felt he violated the Honor Code when he looked at and flipped through Student B's exam. He reiterated that he did his work himself, and did not violate the Honor Code in any other way after this incident.

Student B's Testimony Part II

Student B said that one of her solutions had a similar wording to Student E's solution for the same problem because he felt that it was possible that Student E had copied off of his exam. He said that he did not feel Student E was proficient enough in the course material to answer all of the problems on the exam, and that Student E may have copied off of his exam in order to be able to answer the question. Student B said that he felt he had the ability to solve all the problems himself, and that this would mean he wouldn't have needed to copy off of anyone else. He added that he felt Student D may have also copied off of his exam, because he had access to Student B's room and thus his papers.

In closing, Student B said that he did all of his work on this exam on his own. He said that now that he realized that there were such grave similarities between his work and other students' work, he feels they must have copied off of him.

Student C's Testimony Part II

Student C said that he did his exam at 8p.m. on the day before the exam was due.

Student C closed by saying that everything in his exam was his own work.

Verdict Deliberations:

Council members believed that there was clear and convincing evidence that a violation occurred because it was obvious that collusion had happened from the evidence and the students' testimonies.

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

Yes: 9

No: 0

Abstentions: 0

The Council then discussed whether or not Student A committed the violation. Members states that his revised written statement included an admission to looking at Student B's exam, and this constituted a violation. They also felt that similarities between his exam and other student's exams helped show he was in violation.

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

Yes: 9

No: 0

Abstentions: 0

Members stated that it was harder to determine whether or not Student B was in violation. They stated that she completed her exam before the other students, and was able to explain her solutions to the Council. Despite this, some members said the entire situation made them uncomfortable.

Straw Poll #3: Does a preponderance of the evidence suggest that Student B is "In Violation?"

Yes: 0

No: 9

Abstentions: 0

Council members did not feel a preponderance of the evidence suggested that Student C committed a violation. They said that her testimony showed that he kept his exam more guarded, and that he was able to explain his answers in a way that suggested he did the work. Other members noted that whenever the accused mentioned that he felt Student C was may have committed a violation, it was a rather tenuous claim, and that the expert did not indicate that he felt Student C had done anything wrong.

Straw Poll #4: Does a preponderance of the evidence suggest that Student C is "In Violation?"

Yes: 0

No: 9

Abstentions: 0

Straw Polls #1, #2, #3, and #4 made binding.

Penalty Deliberations:

Council members opened by discussing mitigating circumstances for Student A. Members said that Student A was implicated in several of the problems in the accusation, but given that Student E admitted to copying off of him, it was unclear how big Student A's involvement was in this case.

Members said that Student A's cooperation might garner some mitigation, because what he said during testimony did help the Council determine what had happened in this case.

Members said they would not be mitigating for the weight of the assignment because, although it was only worth 10% of the grade, the assignment in question was a midterm exam.

Most members expressed concern over mitigating for the amount of the assignment that was in violation because it was very difficult to determine how much of the exam Student A had copied and how much he was involved in the collusion with Student E. Other members stated that they felt the Council should only take into consideration the parts of the exam where Student A's exam was similar to that of Student B, because that is what the Council found him in violation for. They said that this was a relatively small portion of the exam, and that they felt it deserved mitigation.

Members expressed no reasons that they felt aggravation was warranted.

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

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

Members who had not mitigated for cooperation said that they may come to mitigate for this factor, but they were not sure at this point.

Other members said that they did not feel that suspension was warranted in this case because of how unsure the Council was about how much of the exam Student A has copied and whether or not he was directly involved in the collusion with Student E.

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

F in the course and 2 semesters of suspension:	0
F in the course and 1 semester of suspension:	0
F in the course:	9
3 letter grade reduction:	0
2 letter grade reduction:	0
Abstentions:	0

Straw Poll #6 made binding.

The Honor Council thus finds Students B and C “Not In Violation” and finds Student A “In Violation” of the Honor Code and recommends that he receive an F in the course. A Prior Violation Flag is also attached to his record.

Time of testimony and deliberations: 2 hours and 30 minutes

Respectfully submitted,
Trey Burns
Clerk