

Abstract of the Honor Council
Case 30, Spring 2011
April 19, 2011

Members Present:

Kaleb Underwood (presiding), Jeff Worne (clerk), Hilary Baker-Jennings, Adam Hartman, John Cavallo, Abby Endler, David French, Kate Snyder, Barbara Redeker

Ombuds: Alec Lignitz

Letter of Accusation:

The Honor Council received a letter accusing Student A of gaining academic advantage under false pretenses for an upper level ELEC course.

Evidence Submitted:

- Letter of Accusation
- Emil and Chat Conversations between Student A and the Accuser
- Student A's written statement
- Student A's second written statement
- ELEC 305 course syllabus
- ELEC 394 course syllabus
- ELEC 394 project assignment description
- Rough presentation outline written by Student A
- Owl-Space message regarding exam reschedule
- Professor deposition 1
- Professor deposition 2
- Professor deposition 3
- Professor statement regarding conference
- Accuser deposition
- Group member deposition
- Student A deposition

Plea:

Student A pled "Not in Violation."

Testimony:

The student began her testimony by describing a time line of events. The conference was originally scheduled to occur during her scheduled class presentation and exam. The conference was subsequently canceled, and the student was also notified of a family emergency. Instead of trying to obtain visas and dealing with airlines, the student decided to maintain the idea that she was traveling to the conference but instead remained on campus. The student also claimed that one of the accusers "had it out" for her.

The student used the time that they claimed they were in Dallas to communicate with family members. She was working on airline and visa issues to see if she could go home earlier to deal with her family emergency.

The student admits to the fabrication of attending the conference and knew that the conference was canceled when stating she was going to Dallas. The student felt that the time she gained by claiming to be in Dallas was beneficial to her in preparing for her later exam. She also tried to do what she could by providing a recording of her voice to be used during part of the presentation.

The student testified that she wouldn't be able to contribute significantly to the group presentation given her time commitment in dealing with the family emergency and emotional state.

Verdict Deliberations:

Council members believed that a preponderance of the evidence supported that a violation occurred because the student gained extra time in an unauthorized way based on her claim that she was traveling to a conference, and that it was a lie.

Other members of the council stated that the student both had a valid reason (family emergency) for missing her presentation and rescheduling her exam and also gave a valid reason for missing both (the conference).

The council seemed divided over the two assignments. Members of the council felt that extra time was gained for the exam by providing an excuse that was not valid (the conference). Members of the council felt that the presentation was more of a grey area and that the student probably didn't gain any academic advantage by using her excuse of the conference. However, the council also discussed the point that the student would only receive credit should the presentation team do well. The council discussed the point that the student misrepresented herself to the professor based on her excuse and that she gained advantage because her team changed the presentation and did not use her materials.

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

Yes: 8
No: 1
Abstentions: 0

Straw Poll #2 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 regarding the exam. The council felt that Student A committed a violation by giving a false excuse

for missing the exam and it allowed her to reschedule her exam under false pretenses. This gave her academic advantage by allowing her extra time to prepare for the exam.

Straw Poll #3: Does a preponderance of the evidence support that Student A is “In Violation” on the exam?

Yes: 9
No: 0
Abstentions: 0

The Council then discussed whether or not Student A committed a violation regarding the presentation. The council stated that the false pretense for Student A allowed her to gain advantage in the presentation and that she lied about how much work she did in the presentation, and that she actively deceived the professor.

The council also stated that Student A did contribute partly to the group and that she did not deceive the professor by stating accurately the amount of work that she did. In addition, lying is not strictly an honor code violation, and that lying about her whereabouts did not constitute academic advantage.

Straw Poll #4: Does a preponderance of the evidence support that Student A is “In Violation” on the presentation?

Yes: 5
No: 3
Abstentions: 1

The abstaining member mentioned that the student did not seem to gain any academic advantage by lying about her whereabouts. Other members voting yes simply reaffirmed their previous comments.

Straw Poll #5: Does a preponderance of the evidence support that Student A is “In Violation” on the presentation?

Yes: 5
No: 3
Abstentions: 1

Straw Polls #2, #3 and #5 made binding.

Penalty Deliberations:

Council members opened by discussing mitigating circumstances for only the exam. The council felt that they could mitigate based on the percentage of the course grade for the exam. The council also felt the student was cooperative. Other members however felt that the student’s cooperation was not particularly helpful. The council discussed that the uncertainty surrounding the case was a mitigating factor. The “nature” of the case seemed to be an important mitigating factor as well.

One aggravating circumstance mentioned that the student perpetuated his lie, but given that the student was not found in violation for lying about her whereabouts for her presentation or about her amount of work contributed, it was not considered.

The council then discussed penalties. The council did not discuss suspension, but some members felt that the deception involved warranted a several letter grade reduction. Others felt that the deception was not significantly egregious to warrant a significant grade reduction. It was also discussed that the student claimed the reason for lying was to protect his privacy and was seen to reduce the severity of the penalty.

The council further discussed the student's right to privacy and what his other options may have been. The council felt that the student had sufficient ways to protect his privacy and to do so without lying.

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

F in the course:	0
3 letter grade reduction:	1
2 letter grade reduction:	0
1 letter grade reduction:	7
Letter of Reprimand:	0
Abstentions:	1

The abstaining member was between a two letter and one letter grade reduction. The one letter grade reduction roughly corresponded to the weight of the assignment in the course and gave a numerical punitive punishment. However, the fact that the student lied about her whereabouts was significant.

Straw Poll #7: What is the appropriate penalty for Student A?

F in the course:	0
3 letter grade reduction:	1
2 letter grade reduction:	1
1 letter grade reduction:	7
Letter of Reprimand:	0
Abstentions:	0

Straw Poll #7 made binding.

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

Time of testimony and deliberations: 2h 20m

Respectfully submitted,
Jeff Worne
Clerk