

Abstract of the Honor Council
Case 32, Spring 2013
May 6th, 2013

Members Present:

Adriana Bracho (presiding), John Cavallo (clerk), Seth Lauer, Clinton Willbanks, Michael Jin, Pedro Santacruz, Likeleli Seitlheko, Ibrahim Akbar, Mitch Massey

Ombuds: Gabriel Breternitz

Letter of Accusation:

The Honor Council received a letter accusing Student A and B of unauthorized collaboration for an upper level Ecology and Evolutionary Biology course.

Evidence Submitted:

- Letter of Accusation
- Student A's written statement
- Student B's written statement
- Course syllabus
- Student A lab report with Professor comments
- Student B lab report with Professor comments
- Lab guide
- Professor Deposition

Plea:

Student A pled "In Violation" and Student B pled "In Violation."

Testimony:

Student A began testimony by describing the circumstances of the potential violation. She was working alone on an assignment and called Student B to ask about the lab report due in their class. After a while, Student A asked Student B about a specific question for the lab report. Student A was having trouble analyzing some lab data and asked Student B for her lab report to look at. However, looking at Student B's report didn't help as much as she would have liked. Student A then copied Student B's graph for her lab report. She states that she had finished most of the discussion portion of her lab before receiving and copying Student B's lab report and graph.

When asked about the similarity in sentences between the lab reports, Student A said that the structure between the two lab reports stems from a methodical approach to describing graphs which she copied from Student B. She assumes that the similarity can also be seen with other students in the class since they received a sample lab report from the professor that included questions to answer.

Student A didn't feel that verbal collaboration for the completion of lab reports was not against the course's Honor Code policy and that conversations between the two accused

was anything out of line. However, she feels as though she violated the Honor Code by copying Student B's graph.

When asked about the amount of work completed on her own, she went through her lab report indicating which portions were completed without looking at Student B's work. The total amounted to a graph and two paragraphs.

Student B began her testimony by describing the work she was doing with her separate lab group she met with. After she had completed her lab report, Student A called her to discuss the results of her lab. She claimed that it was understood between the two that they were following the Honor Code outlined for the course. She maintained that their collaboration via the phone was similar to what she had done with her lab group. However, according to an explanation from the professor, conversations between students should have been cited as it pertained to the topics and works discussed. She said she was unaware of this clarification of the course's Honor Code. Student B felt as though she was in violation of the course's Honor Code when she sent her lab report for Student A to look at.

Verdict Deliberations:

Council members discussed the different potential violations committed by Students A and B. It was believed that the discussion between the two accused students was permitted under the course's Honor Code. However, the copying of a graph from one report to another was seen as a violation. In regards to not citing personal communication as the professor had asked, members did not feel it was necessary to do so in this case.

Discussion shifted to whether sending one's lab report to another in the class went against the Honor Code policy. There was some dissension on this point as the two students could have easily decided to work together on the lab and thereby showing the lab report to Student A. Since collaborating to complete an assignment with other students in the class was not explicitly prohibited, it was not understood as a violation. Furthermore, in the course's Honor Code policy, collaboration amongst students was encouraged so long as individually typed and completed reports were turned in.

Additionally, a member brought up that the professor made assumptions about the understanding of her Honor Code policy that may not have been apparent or clear to the students involved in this accusation. Many members agreed with this point but maintained that there was a violation in regards to copying another person's work.

Council members believed that a preponderance of the evidence supported that a violation occurred because Student A admitted to asking for another person's work and copying a graph from the lab report. Further inspection showed that the lab reports were similar in regards to the presentation of the graph and discussion of it. All members were in accordance with this point but not as much with the point of unauthorized verbal collaboration.

Vote: 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. A majority of the council felt that Student A violated the Honor Code based on their reasons from the discussion of whether or not a preponderance of a violation occurred. However, when discussion shifted to Student B, the council members were divided on whether or not she violated the Honor Code.

Vote: Does a preponderance of the evidence support that Student A is “In Violation” of plagiarism?

Yes: 9

No: 0

Abstentions: 0

Vote: Does a preponderance of the evidence support that Student B is “In Violation” of sending her work to another student?

Yes: 4

No: 5

Abstentions: 0

Vote: Does a preponderance of the evidence support that Student A is “In Violation” of not citing collaboration?

Yes: 0

No: 9

Abstentions: 0

Penalty Deliberations:

Council members opened by discussing mitigating circumstances. Members brought up the course’s unclear Honor Code policy, the amount of the assignment in violation, and Student A’s co-operation. If students were indeed allowed to collaborate and discuss the results of labs, it was seen that they should be able to show others their reports so long as it stopped short of doing the assignment for someone else. The amount of work Student A plagiarized was such a small portion of the final report that it was seen as something that deserved a lesser penalty.

A member brought up that plagiarism is always a clear violation of the campus wide Honor Code policy regardless of how the professor defines it in his class. Some members felt that the student’s testimony helped the council reach its decision and their understanding of the directionality of the collaboration.

Council members felt that there were no aggravating factors relevant to this case.

Vote: What is the appropriate penalty for Student A?

1 letter grade reduction:	0
2/3 letter grade reduction:	0
1/3 letter grade reduction:	9
Letter of Reprimand	0
Abstentions:	0

Decision:

The Honor Council thus finds Student A “In Violation” of the Honor Code and recommends that she receive a 1/3 letter grade reduction. A Prior Violation Flag is also attached to her record.

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

Time of testimony and deliberations: 2 hours and 10 minutes

Respectfully submitted,
John Cavallo
Clerk