

Abstract of the Honor Council
Case 42, Spring 2014
March 31, 2014

Members Present:

Hurst Williamson (presiding), Mitchell Massey (clerk), Claire Bonnyman, Allen Hu, Mario Aragon, Shantan Cheemerla, Shayak Senupta, Jake Hassell, Michael Jin, Issac Batt (Observing)

Ombuds: Natalie Danckers

Letter of Accusation:

The Honor Council received a letter accusing Student A of plagiarism for an upper level CAAM course.

Evidence Submitted:

- Letter of Accusation
- Student A's written statement
- Course Syllabus
- Expert Deposition
- Student A's Homeworks
- Homework Solutions
- M. Files for MATLAB Codes

Plea:

Student A pled "Not in Violation."

Testimony:

In her opening statement Student A said that she did not intend to commit Violation. She had taken first portion of the class in the previous semester. She fundamentally disagreed with professor's comment on indentation, and claimed that it is normal to delete comments and spaces and to forget indentation. She said that she actively attended multiple office hours and engaged in discussion sessions. Student A said it was a coincidental error, that she had asked the professor to review answers before submission. The professor's letter of accusation hinted confusion due to one single suspicious line in code and other coincidental matches followed. In the course, he had posted the Npower code as resource, and there may be some similarities linked to that. She often had the professor re-grade assignments. She was not sure if she officially registered the previous semester, but she did not receive course emails from professor in the spring. She had access to the spring solutions code, but she claims she did not download or view it. Student A claims to have not known the proper notation for the Un or Umn items in the code, yet the problem asked for the items in a specific notation. She suggested there may be confusion due to items in the professor-provided M files. She stated that all solutions from Spring 2013 were publicly available online, but no solutions were posted on the

OWL-Space page for the Fall section. She did look at homeworks and solutions in a previous section.

In her closing statement Student A said that she thought that the investigation revolves around suspicious h^2 line, and delineates other errors from there. She said that she might recall code from previous entry in class. She declared that it is not a fair conclusion to draw an accusation from indentation. She thought that the code is very similar amongst students, as the problems are pretty narrow. Additionally, she claimed to have attended several homework sessions and asked professor for help, and she repeated that it was not her intention to violate honor code. She did believe that the council should consider that the homework is equivalent to 6% of the grade total. She said that she clearly understands impact of honor code.

Verdict Deliberations:

Council members believed that a preponderance of the evidence supported that a violation occurred because the elaborate letter of accusation from the professor outlines a high number of code similarities across multiple homeworks, which are highly suspicious and not clearly absolved by the student's testimony. She was unable to explain multiple answers that were graded correct but with typos or with unnecessary additions, as in the case of u and h^2 .

Some council members discussed their hesitance. However, the rest of the Council pointed out that we are not bound to determining the path that the violation occurred on. The missing pi and other u notation are clearly typos, yet the zlim and indentation are observed to be incidental. Yet another council member noted that these typos clearly map to typos in the Spring 2013 solutions posted online. The homework problem containing $A_{j,k}(t)$ contains redundant code from the old solutions. The h^2 line is still fuzzy in origin. The aggregate of the unexplainable errors that appear as verbatim lines from the solutions appears to be evidence of plagiarism.

The council then discussed the systematic nature of the errors, which lead to some opinion changes, yet some errors are still being ignored – the axis snippet before zlim. One member said that the “strange” occurrence of redundant code and unnecessary errors from the problem sets, like the unnecessary h^2 convergence and the “superscript M”. The chair noted that the council does not have to determine that all pieces of the accusation later are violations. Yet, it does need to see that the preponderance suggests that there is a violation.

Straw Poll #3: 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. No one saw anything to the contrary.

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

Yes: 9
 No: 0
 Abstentions: 0

Penalty Deliberations:

Council members opened by discussing mitigating circumstances:

Some members are mitigating for weight as the equivalent weight is 6% .

Some members mitigating for amount due to the small portion of each assignment in violation. Some members speculated that the errors and violations were systematic enough to not mitigate for anything. No members mitigated for unclear HC policy or cooperation.

There were no Aggravating Factors.

Most council members after discussion leaned towards a 1-2 letter reduction.

After further discussion, the council voted on the appropriate penalty.

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

F in the course and 3 semesters of suspension: 0
 F in the course and 2 semesters of suspension: 0
 F in the course and 1 semester of suspension: 0
 F in the course: 0
 3 letter grade reduction: 0
 2 letter grade reduction: 0
 1 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 single letter grade reduction for CAAM 336. A Prior Violation Flag is also attached to her record.

Time of testimony and deliberations: 02:07:00

Respectfully submitted,
 Mitchell Massey
 Clerk