

Abstract of the Honor Council
Case 27, Fall 2014
February 4, 2015

Members Present:

Hurst Williamson (presiding), Helen Sharpless (clerk), Allen Hu, Yash Tarkande, Destiney Randolph, Sam Kwiatkowski, Billy Rothwell, Josiah Grace, Michael Jin

Ombuds: Carey Wang

Letter of Accusation:

The Honor Council received a letter accusing Student A, Student B, Student C, and Student D of unauthorized collaboration on a final exam for a lower level MATH course.

Evidence Submitted:

- Letter of Accusation
- Course Syllabus
- Comparison of course Answers
- Student A, B, C, D's Written Statement
- Student A, B, C, D's Additional Statement
- Student A, B, C, D's Exam

Plea:

Student A pled "In Violation."

Student B pled "In Violation."

Student C pled "In Violation."

Student D pled "In Violation."

Testimony:

Student A said in his opening statement about an hour and a half into the exam he received help on the exam. He received a concussion two weeks before the exam, and his friends helped him greatly. He broke the Honor Code and the trust inferred by the Matriculation pledge.

Student A asserted that most of the exam was his own work. He was given help on questions 9 and 12. He shared the steps of his solution to question 1. He was not seated immediately next to the other students involved in this case. Answers were obtained verbally and by looking onto the other student's papers. He believed that he was in violation for not reporting an Honor Code violation committed by another student not involved in this case.

Student B said in his opening statement that he received answers and gave answers to other students involved in this case.

Most of the exam was his own work. He received unauthorized aid on questions 9 and 11. He did not verbally give answers to other students, but rather allowed them to look off of his own paper. He does not know to what extent the other students involved used his exam for answers. They did not stand up or walk across the aisle to get answers. They were seated in close proximity. The decision to give or receive aid was not premeditated. The students studied together, but did not choose to share answers until taking the exam.

Student C started his opening statement with an apology to the Rice community. He did not receive any aid, but allowed other students to use his answers. He did not plan before the exam to give unauthorized aid to the other students.

Questions 9 and 10 were directly copied by other students. He knew that other students had copied because they were looking at his exam. He did not know the identity of the student in the turquoise shirt* mentioned in the accusation letter. He was sitting two seats over from Student A in the same row and Students B and D were seated in the row behind them.

Student D said in his opening statement that he studied very hard for this exam and went in feeling confident. He panicked in the middle of it and in that moment of weakness did something that he really regretted. He felt that he disrespected what Rice is about.

Most of the test was his own work and he did not provide any answers. He believed that the student in the turquoise shirt* mentioned in the letter of accusation was seated further away from the four of them. He did not verbally ask for answers to the exam, but communicated to the other students through a worried look. The other students were aware that he was using their exams.

Student A said in his closing statement that he was completely in the wrong. He destroyed the reputation of those around him as well as his own. In the moment, he made the wrong decision that reflected poorly on himself, the Rice community, and the other students involved.

Student B said in his closing statement that he broke the Honor Code and he apologized for giving Rice University a bad name.

Student C said in his closing statement that he apologized for his actions. He knew that he committed the Honor Code violation because he did not turn students in for receiving unauthorized aid.

Student D reiterated in his closing statement how deeply he regretted the decision he made on his test. In the future he can look back upon this experience and know that he does not want to do this again.

*the student in the turquoise shirt pertains to another case but was mentioned in the letter of accusation.

Verdict Deliberations:

Council members believed that a preponderance of the evidence supported that a violation occurred because of the additional statements from the students, the evidence in the exams, the summary of the similarities in the exams, and the accounts of the student who reported that the violation occurred during the exam in the letter of accusation. There is no evidence to the contrary.

Vote #1: 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, B, C and D committed the violation. There was no further discussion. Every council member found all four students in violation.

Vote #2: Does a preponderance of the evidence support that Student A is “In Violation?”

Yes: 9
No: 0
Abstentions: 0

Vote #3: Does a preponderance of the evidence support that Student B is “In Violation?”

Yes: 9
No: 0
Abstentions: 0

Vote #4: Does a preponderance of the evidence support that Student C is “In Violation?”

Yes: 9
No: 0
Abstentions: 0

Vote #5: Does a preponderance of the evidence support that Student D is “In Violation?”

Yes: 9
No: 0
Abstentions: 0

Penalty Deliberations:

Council members widely agreed that all students should receive that same penalty because there is no distinction between giving and receiving aid in the Honor Code and impossible to distinguish individual bilateral violations due to the collaboration between the students. The nature of the violation does not lend itself to have isolated incidents. All students were aware that the violations occurred and actively participated.

Vote #6: Should all four students receive the same penalty?

Yes: 9
No: 0
Abstentions: 0

Council members opened by discussing mitigating circumstances. Many members did not mitigate for any factor. Some did consider cooperation, but decided that the cooperation shown did not shed any new light that could not have been deduced from the evidence presented.

Council members then discussed aggravating circumstances. Council Members discussed whether or not to aggravate because the initial written statements were not true and that the first instinct of the students was to try and hide the violation. Council members eventually decided to not consider the submission of a second written statement because it was an attempt by the students to own up to their violation. However, no council member believed that the submission of a statement right before the hearing warranted mitigation either.

There was some discussion of considering this a heinous violation. But it was decided that the violation was not sufficiently damaging to the academic atmosphere to warrant moving beyond the standard penalty structure.

All members considered suspension. Members did not consider panic in the “heat of the moment” of the exam as lessening the severity of the violation. The factors considered were the weight of the assignment, the number of students involved in the violation, the blatant aspect of the violation (students in the second row heard the discussion of the students in the back row), and the damage to the trust of professors in not proctoring their exams. There was no ambiguity to the violation.

Members debated between 1 and 2 semesters of suspension. The additional statement does not overshadow the fact that they lied in their signed written statements. In the additional statement, they admitted to committing the violation, which they should have done in the first place, however council members agreed to not consider the timing of the second written statement, and just considered the nature of the violation and to assign the penalty accordingly. Some members considered the harsher penalty because this violation was also damaging to the academic atmosphere of Rice.

All agreed that suspension was warranted in the penalty. Those considering F and 2 were at that penalty because of the weight of the assignment and the fact that unauthorized aid was exchanged throughout the entirety of the exam. Those considering F and 1 moved up to an F and 2 based on precedents set by previous cases, although the Council is never bound by precedent. Historically, the Council had given two semesters of suspension for the amount of the assignment and the number of students involved, and the majority of council members believe the nature of the violation warranted a full year of separation from the university.

Vote #7: What is the appropriate penalty for Students A, B, C, and D?

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| F in the course and 3 semesters of suspension: | 0 |
| F in the course and 2 semesters of suspension: | 7 |
| F in the course and 1 semester of suspension: | 2 |
| F in the course: | 0 |
| 3 letter grade reduction: | 0 |

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| 2 letter grade reduction: | 0 |
| 1 letter grade reduction: | 0 |
| Letter of Reprimand | 0 |
| Abstentions: | 0 |

Decision:

The Honor Council thus finds Student A, Student B, Student C, and Student D “In Violation” of the Honor Code and recommends that they receive an F in the course and 2 semesters of suspension. A Prior Violation Flag is also attached to their records.

Time of testimony and deliberations: 1 hour 20 minutes

Respectfully submitted,
Helen Sharpless
Clerk