Abstract of the Honor Council
Case 35, Spring 2014
April 17, 2014

Members Present:
Hurst Williamson (presiding), Aaroh Parikh (clerk), Shantan Cheemerla, Nick Conard, Destiney Randolph, Helen Sharpless, Shayak Sengupta, Sam Kwaitkowski, Nicholas Shaver

Ombuds: Jayme Smith

Letter of Accusation:
The Honor Council received a letter accusing Student A, Student B, and Student C of unauthorized collaboration in an upper level engineering course.

Evidence Submitted:
- Letter of Accusation
- Student A’s written statement
- Student B’s written statement
- Student C’s written statement
- Course Syllabus
- Professor Clarification on Honor Code Policy
- Student A’s homework
- Student B’s homework
- Student C’s homework

Plea:
Student A pled “Not in Violation”
Student B pled “Not in Violation”
Student C pled “Not in Violation”

Testimony:

STUDENT A TESTIMONY
In Student A’s opening statement, he refuted the accusation of identical solutions. He discussed the lab sessions and TAs who meet before homework assignment are due, where the students worked on coding individually. He stated that although the final outputs agreed, the individual codes were different. He discussed the use of textbooks during the discussion sections. He stated that students would work together to create a collective solution. Each student was then responsible for putting that solution into the proper form for submission. The student stated that this course heavily relied on group work, to the professor’s acknowledgement. He stated that collective solutions would be sent out, and each student would then personalize the solutions in order to prepare them for submission. He discussed that the accused students have different preferences and personalization when turning in assignments.
During testimony, Student A said that there are two parts to the assignment: coding (answering the question statement) and discussing why results occur a certain way. Student A said that the accused students worked together on the coding part of the assignment. The student said that lab problems are done during the TA session. On Sundays, people work on the homework problems while on Wednesdays, the students work largely on lab problems. Student A said that the students worked on coding individually, but worked on the discussion section in a collaborative manner on one document, consulting various resources. The Student said that each student was designated to type up a particular problem, and those collaborative materials were then sent to each other. The student stated that he does not believe the sharing of those results constituted unauthorized collaboration because the contributions from each students were equal. He refuted the idea that one student wrote up a problem, and the other two students copied-and-pasted solutions. Student claimed that students are not in violation because they worked on the solutions together. Student A claimed that it was not an honor code violation to look at another student’s output, as opposed to the actual code. The student claimed that output was shared, but never code. Student affirmed that it would be possible to produce the same output without the same code. The Student pointed out a specific difference between the codes of the accused students. The student acknowledged that the sharing of ideas of results/output, but claimed that this was permissible under the Honor Code and encouraged by the TAs. He interpreted the Professor Clarification of Honor Code Policy as not expressly forbidding the sharing of ideas regarding outputs. The student claimed that the Professor acknowledged the necessity of team-work. The student stated that the TAs encouraged teamwork. Student acknowledged the possibility of an Honor Code violation, but stated that at the time, the students were not aware that their collaboration constituted a possible violation. Student said that all five questions in the assignment in question were the subjects of collaboration amongst the accused students. The student claimed that the discussion, despite being extremely similar, was not a violation of the Honor Code because the students contributed equally. Student stressed that a substantial amount of time was spent individually writing the code. The student recalled 8 homework assignments in the course. The student stated that the accused students described in the manner described above for the first 3 assignments. The student claimed that the code (half of the assignment) was his own work, while the discussion (half of the assignment) was collaborative.

During Student A’s closing statement, Student A reiterated that he does not believe the students are in violation of the Honor Code because of the policy on general discussion. Student claimed that it was appropriate to collaborate on discussion as long as the solution was not copied. Student reiterated that the solutions were produced with equal contributions from the accused students.

STUDENT B TESTIMONY

In Student B’s opening statement, he stated that the code was completed individually, but the accused students met to compare output and brainstorm solutions. The student stated that each person was assigned to type up notes for a particular problem. Each person would type up notes/solutions and then send them to the other students.
During testimony phase, the student claimed that the professor and TAs encourage team-work. The student also stated that the Homework Policy and the Professor Clarification on the Honor Code Policy are interpreted differently, and that he was not aware of the content present in the Professor Clarification. The student claimed that no outside solutions were consulted; the solutions were equal parts from each student. The student interpreted the Honor Code policy as only prohibiting the copying of another person’s work in its totality without any personal contribution. The student stated that the codes of the accused students are very different from one another. The student claimed that each student has his own preferences for wording the solution. The students would, on occasion, compare output and suggest alternative commands and strategies in the event of a discrepancy in outputs.

During Student B’s closing statement, Student B stated that the submitted codes were all different, and stressed the vagueness of the Honor Code policy for this course.

STUDENT C TESTIMONY

In Student C’s opening statement, he began by stating that the professor and TAs have encouraged collaboration. The student claimed that the codes were completed individually, and are only similar in structure. The student stated that the accused students would meet and compare outputs, and creating one collaborative solution on a single white-board. The student stated that each student was responsible for typing up a problem’s solution, but each student contributed equally to each solution. The student said that there were occasional edits in word-choice before submitting the assignment.

In the testimony phase, the student stressed the fact that all answers were produced with equal collaboration from the accused students. The student claimed that the collaboration was not a violation of the Honor Code because each student contributed equally to the production of solutions. The student stated that for each problem, a student would write down the collaborative solution.

During Student C’s closing statement, Student C reiterated the high level of collaboration in the course. The student emphasized that the solutions were produced with equal contribution from the accused students.

Verdict Deliberations:

Council members believed that a preponderance of the evidence supported that a violation occurred because of the verbatim discussion solutions and the production of one collaborative solution, and their subsequent submissions.

Honor Council members discussed the verbatim discussion solutions, the sending of written solutions between students, using the identical discussion answers for all students. In the view of the Honor Council, these collaborations exceeded the limit on “general discussion.”
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 Students A, B, and C committed the violation. The Honor Council had no further discussion on differentiating the three students.

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

**Penalty Deliberations:**
First, the Honor Council found that all students should receive the same penalty.

Council members opened by discussing mitigating circumstances. Honor Council members mitigated for weight of the assignment, unclear honor code policy, and cooperation.

Honor Council members considered no aggravating factors

Vote #6: What is the appropriate penalty for Students A, B, and C?
F in the course: 0
3 letter grade reduction: 0
2 letter grade reduction: 0
1 letter grade reduction: 8
Zero on the assignment: 1
Letter of Reprimand: 0
Abstentions: 0
Decision:
The Honor Council thus finds Students A, B, and C “In Violation” of the Honor Code and recommends that they receive a 1 letter grade reduction. A Prior Violation Flag is also attached to their records.

Time of testimony and deliberations: 117 minutes

Respectfully submitted,
Aaroh Parikh
Clerk