Abstract of the Honor Council
Case 59, Spring 2014
9/10/2014

Members Present:
Hurst Williamson (presiding), Shantan Cheemerla (clerk), Nick Conard, Alex Metcalf, Josiah Grace, Caesar Udave, Sarah Frazier, Katie Jensen, Owais Syed

Ombuds: Divya Bhat

Letter of Accusation:
The Honor Council received a letter accusing Student A and Student B of UNAUTHORIZED COLLABORATION for a LOWER level CAAM course.

Evidence Submitted:
- Letter of Accusation
- Student A’s written statement
- Student B’s written statement
- Course Syllabus
- TA Email Chain
- Student B/TA Texts
- Student A’s Code
- Student B’s Code
- Witness for Student A

Plea:
Student A pled “NOT IN VIOLATION.”
Student B pled “NOT IN VIOLATION.”

Testimony:
Student A stated that this accusation concerned the final two assignments. The lower grade would be divided by three and added onto the higher grade. The course’s Rice Learning Assistant (RLA) told Student A that he could use previous code from the semester. Student A asked for and received this code from his RLA. Student A then studied this code to completely understand it, and submitted this code as part of the second of his final project. Student A noted that the TLA only offered to email the students codes for this final project. Student A noted that students would likely have similar codes. Student A noted that he submitted code that had been slightly altered, but that it was not significantly different from the code given by the RLA. Student A did not consider his submission a finished project. The code given to Student A was understood by the student to be solution code to a previous project, given to the RLA by the professor. Student A noted that he had never seen Student B before the Honor Council proceedings. Student A noted that he did not believe that he needed to credit the RLA for collaboration in his code, since this code was thought to be given from the professor.
Student A brought in a witness. The witness noted that the RLA had written the code solutions and asked that students email him in order to receive finished code to help with the following code. This was not an isolated incident where the RLA provided code to the students.

Student B expressed surprise that someone he had never met before – Student A – had copied his code verbatim. Student B stated that he had submitted his code from the previous semester to one of the course’s RLAs’s. This RLA wanted this code to use in grading projects. Student B had submitted this code in Spring 2014, 6-7 months after he had completed his project for the class in Fall 2013. Student B speculated that Student A might have been given his code by the course RLA. Student B noted that the professor had no interaction in his decision to give his code to the RLA. Although the RLA had not specified why he needed Student B’s solution, Student B assumed that the RLA wanted it to help grade. Student B noted that part of his solution was not included in the Spring 2014 course, and that it would have simply constituted extra credit for Student A. Student B noted that when he took the course in Fall 2013, there were projects that built on previous projects. In this case, the TAs provided a solution. The TA solution was written on a board. Student B said that it was understandable for the RLA to have asked for his solution code if the professor had not provided them with the solutions. Student B stated that a single RLA group would consist of approximately 10 students. Student B noted that as he was not expressly told not to share code with the next semester’s TAs, he believed himself to not be in violation.

Verdict Deliberations:
Council members believed that a preponderance of the evidence supported that a violation occurred.

Council members discussed whether a violation occurred. Some members stated that a violation had occurred due to the similarity of the code and even the comments in the two students’ code. The course’s honor code is explicit in that submitted code from previous semesters or other students would not be tolerated. Other members noted that a violation had not occurred because the code might have been understood to have come from a professor, the slight changes in the code indicate that the student submitted his own work. The code would look similar to the previous code, but it would not be considered plagiarism. Council members ultimately decided that because Student A’s code is similar to Student B’s code – a similarity explicitly forbidden in the course’s Honor Code – the preponderance of the evidence supported that a violation had occurred.

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 committed the violation. Some members believed that Student A was in violation of the Honor Code because of the little work he had done on the submitted code that he had obtained from his RLA. This action, where Student A submitted essentially the code given him, might be considered grounds
for a violation. However, other members suggested that Student A was not in violation because the student’s changes suggested that he had attempted to work on the code given to him. The similarity of the student’s code with Student B’s code was due to the code given Student A by the RLA. Members also noted that the course’s honor code policy is not especially clear.

Vote #2: Does a preponderance of the evidence support that Student A is “In Violation?”
Yes: 0
No: 9
Abstentions: 0

The Council then discussed whether or not Student B committed the violation. Council members saw no reason that Student B would be in violation.
Vote #3: Does a preponderance of the evidence support that Student B is “In Violation?”
Yes: 0
No: 9
Abstentions: 0

**Decision:**
The Honor Council thus finds Student A “NOT In Violation” of the Honor Code.
The Honor Council thus finds Student B “NOT In Violation” of the Honor Code.

Time of testimony and deliberations: 70 minutes

Respectfully submitted,
Shantan Cheemerla
Clerk