Abstract of the Honor Council  
Case 23, Fall 2014  
2/1/2015

Members Present:  
Hurst Williamson (presiding), Claire Bonnyman (clerk), Alex Metcalf, Michael Jin, Natalie Swanson, Sarah Frazier, Clark Zha, Mario Aragon, Maria Montavlo

Ombuds: Divya Bhat

Letter of Accusation:  
The Honor Council received a letter accusing Student A and Student B of plagiarism in a lower level BIOC course.

Evidence Submitted:  
- Letter of Accusation  
- Student A’s written statement  
- Student B’s written statement  
- Assignment instruction  
- Student A’s paper  
- Student B’s paper  
- 3rd Student’s report  
- Course Syllabus  
- Student B’s Provided Materials

Plea:  
Student A pled “not in violation.”

Student B pled “not in violation”.

Testimony:  
Student A described how they were told that they could collaborate on data analysis. There were no places in the syllabus or assignment that said that they could not collaborate. Their tables look the same because they went to the same TA sessions, which informed the students on how to format the tables. Student A then described how he and his lab partner gathered the data and that they used the same data that was provided by the instructor. One section of the data looks the same because they were lab partners and obtained the same data and the analysis involved one calculation, which caused them to have the same analysis. The tables also had different formatting, which suggested that they did not just copy and paste the tables. They were only together during the data analysis, which was allowed. To explain the fact that the 3rd lab partner had different figures, Student A said that the 3rd lab partner had a different program for data analysis.

A witness was sworn in. The witness confirmed that they all collaborated on the data analysis. He also confirmed that they did not plagiarize anything. The witness said that they worked on the data together weeks before the assignment was due so he had
time to change his figures during that period of time. The witness said that they worked
together when writing the figure labels.

Student B opened his testimony by reviewing the case before the Council. He
pointed out that the syllabus says that they can perform data collection together but when
they begin writing the paper, they should do it individually, which is what his lab group
did. Student B initially met with Student A and not with their other lab partner because he
was not available. During this time, they used what they learned in the TA sessions to
analyze the data. During the next meeting, Student A was not available so Student B and
the other lab partner met. During this time, Student B explained to the other lab partner
how he and Student A had analyzed the data. Later, the 3 lab partners met together to
review the data. They did the data analysis together at this time. They used the 3rd lab
partner’s computer to add labels to the image, which the instructor told them to do alone.
If Student B had done this on her own later, the only difference would have been spacing
but the information would have been exactly the same. The figure captions were the same
because the captions only had to do with the analysis and not interpretation. Student B
emphasized that they made their data tables individually but since they were using the
same data and went to the same TA sessions that taught them how to create the tables, the
tables appeared similar. Student B pointed out that the 3rd lab partner used the exact same
image with the same labels and nearly the same caption as Student A and Student B but
was not accused of an Honor Code Violation.

The witness returned. He further explained that his table looks different from
Student A’s and Student B’s because, though they were using the same bands and the
same formatting, he later decided that some of the bad were not relevant so he removed
them, which explains why his table looks different from the accused Students’ tables.

Student A closed by saying that he did not cheat on the assignment and
collaborated according to what was allowed by the professor.

Student B closed by saying that he did not commit plagiarism when writing the
paper.

Verdict Deliberations:

Some council members believed that a preponderance of the evidence supported
that a violation occurred because the figure captions were the same for Student A and
Student B. Other council members believed that a preponderance of the evidence
supported that a violation did not occur because they collaborated when it was allowed
and did their work individually when they were supposed to. Council members were
uncomfortable with the fact that the 3rd student had the same caption as Students A and B
but was not accused of a violation.

Vote: Does a preponderance of the evidence support that a violation occurred?
Yes: 0
No: 9
Abstentions: 0

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

Time of testimony and deliberations: 1 hour and 22 minutes.

Respectfully submitted,
Claire Bonnyman
Clerk