Abstract of the Honor Council
Case 33, Spring 2015
April 8, 2015

Members Present:
Alex Metcalf (presiding), Michael Jin (clerk), Mario Montalvo, Sam Kwiatkowski, Nick Conard, Katie Stewart, Jake Hassel, Josiah Grace, Isaac Batt

Ombuds: Carey Wang

Letter of Accusation:
The Honor Council received a letter accusing Student A, B, C, D, E, F, G and H of gaining an unfair advantage in a lower level natural science course.

Evidence Submitted:
- Letter of Accusation
- Student A, B, C, D, E, F, G and H’s written statement
- Slides from First Class of Semester
- Annotated Syllabus
- Statements from two randomly selected students in class
- Statements from four TAs
- Statements from two Instructors
- Online Response Records for Students B and E

Plea:
Student A pled “not in violation.”
Student B pled “not in violation.”
Student C pled “not in violation.”
Student D pled “not in violation.”
Student E pled “not in violation.”
Student F pled “not in violation.”
Student G pled “not in violation.”
Student H pled “not in violation.”

Testimony:
Student A did not go to class on date in question and several other days. He woke up late on the date in question and decided to answer online participation questions from his room. He does not believe his action constituted a violation as it was personal work and contributed to his understanding of the material to the same extent as it would have in class. As the online system recorded only questions with responses, Student A wanted the questions on his record to study later and therefore answered them.
Student B believed that there was a misunderstanding and that he showed up to class late on the date in question. Though there were days where there were multiple questions, he answered one question in class while sitting in the corner and left soon afterwards, which explained the fact that the TAs did not see him. He did not usually go to class and watched video lectures instead. He did not answer questions online on days that he was not in class. After analyzing his online question history, he ultimately realized that he did not attend class after all on the day in question.

Student C did not believe that the action he took was a violation as it was not listed specifically as a violation in the syllabus unlike answering the questions for another student, which was explicitly stated. There were multiple days where he did not attend class and answered the online questions alone in his room. It was unfair that the students did not know the number of questions in advance and was unable to participate physically in class when they wished to.

Student D did not believe that the syllabus explicitly forbid answering online questions without physically attending class. To him, “in-class” meant that the questions would be provided and must be answered “during class” but not “in-class.” The only time he answered remotely was on the date in question. Students should be penalized according to explicit guidelines rather than assumptions of Honor Code.

Student E did not wish to obtain participation points. He arrived late, opened the questions and answered one question by accident. The only time this mistake occurred was on the date in question. He did not attend class often. He also did not think the accident warranted reporting after class as he believed that the syllabus did not make it clear that answering online questions without attending class was an Honor Code violation. The student also provided his online response history.

Student F mentioned that one of the instructors admitted that the violation was a “technicality” that was not fully implied in the course Honor Code. He mentioned that what the syllabus stated as a violation was ambiguous on multiple occasions, and answered the questions in his room during the roughly one minute window they were available. He estimated that he answered the questions outside of class at least five times and was unsure if he needed to answer every question to obtain full participation. Questions were answered by directly selecting the response without confirmation and there was no option to check if questions were available without opening the question page. Online poll kept track of the questions answered with the specific date and time.

Student G was confused as to why the class did not continue to use iClicker to answer questions, opening the possibility of answering the questions remotely. He also believed that the syllabus was not explicit enough when it came to whether remotely answering participation questions was a violation of the course Honor Code. He usually went to
class and answered questions remotely two or three times, but did not hear from the instructors that the students were required to attend class to answer the questions.

Student H was home on the date in question and participated through his phone on his way to school. He did not believe it was a violation and only wished to know what material was in class. He also mentioned that the TAs and instructors could vouch for his presence in class and in the help sessions. The date in question was the only date he answered the questions remotely.

Verdict Deliberations:
Council members believed that a preponderance of the evidence did not support that a violation occurred because the course Honor Code policy could be interpreted in two ways that were not ambiguous on their own. Specifically, the sentence “You are responsible for creating your own Poll Everywhere account and for bringing a compatible web-enabled device to every class to participate” could be interpreted as saying the students, NOT the instructor, must provide their own electronic device, if the student were physically in class, to participate in the online questions. Based on this interpretation, there was no specific requirement that the students must answer the online questions while being physically present in class, and there was no reason that would cause the accused students to feel the need to clarify the course Honor Code policy with the course instructor.

Vote #1: Does a preponderance of the evidence support that a violation occurred?
Yes: 7
No: 2
Abstentions: 0

Decision:

Time of testimony and deliberations: 2 hours 30 minutes

Respectfully submitted,
Michael Jin
Clerk