

Abstract of the Honor Council
Case 23-3, Fall 2015
March 22, 2016

Members Present:

Katie Jensen (presiding), Kristin Sweeney (clerk), Allie Salter, Natalie Swanson, Jake Hassel, Ellen Diemert, Yash Takande, Haihao Liu, Owais Syed, Emily Wu (observing), Kevin Zhang (observing)

Ombuds: Carey Wang

Letter of Accusation:

The Honor Council received a letter accusing Student A and B of collaborating on an assignment for a lower level COMP course. The Chair read the Letter of Accusation aloud in full.

Evidence Submitted:

- Letter of Accusation
- Student A's written statement
- Student B's written statement
- Powerpoint from first day of class
- Course syllabus
- Discussion A from course discussion board
- Discussion B from course discussion board
- Example of course post
- Professor Clarifications
- Professor Explanation A
- Professor Explanation B
- TA Statements
- Students' Projects A
- Students' Projects B

Plea:

Student A pled "not in violation."

Student B pled "not in violation."

Testimony:

Student A:

Student A did not touch classmates' keyboards and believed this was supported by the TAs. Student A went through both projects and explained that similarities came from working in a large group, discussing allowed ideas with Student B, using course discussion boards and class materials, and working at TA sessions.

Student A did not clean-up code much before submitting usually.

Code similarities were due to material provided by the professor, i.e. the specific classes, that students were able to call and implement in their code.

Student A concluded that he did not share his code with Student B. Similarities are based on outlines from the professor and from limited options for writing the code. He also consulted course discussion posts extensively.

Student B:

In project 1, Student B believed that the identical code was from the professor's code from other labs. Codes of Student A and B were similar because they discussed how they were going to do the project. He did not think the code was similar enough to be cheating, but he believed the code accomplished the project in the simplest way possible. Similarities in objects were present because of the assignment requirements. Another similarity was due to coincidence. Student B committed his code irregularly, but, while working in groups, students would often remind each other to commit their code, which is the reason he thought the commit histories had overlap.

For project 2, students decided to use a design format together for part of the code. In other places, he had tried to implement one design unsuccessfully and then reverted to an easier format. Student B did not copy Student A, but was simply using methods that seemed most straightforward. He thought that discussing high-level code was permitted, as this is what took place in TA sessions.

Student B relied on the course discussion board to help him evaluate his own code and create his projects. He believed there was a disconnect between what the professor's syllabus stated and what was followed in the course discussion board and at TA sessions.

It was a coincidence that the commit times were similar with similar changes made at similar times. Students did ask each other what they were working on at various times and often reminded people in the group to commit at certain times, which might have been the reason for overlap.

Verdict Deliberations:

Council members believed that there was not a preponderance of the evidence to support that a violation occurred.

The Council discussed that evidence did not seem to support a violation. Students' testimonies suggested that they had discussed the high-level concepts within the boundaries of the Honor Code. The code seemed to follow the directions in the assignment line by line. Professors' accusations seemed to point out similarities that could have occurred by chance or were trivial. Some members did not believe that the

commit history was representative of collaboration. Although it seems that collaboration did occur, the Council did not feel confident that a preponderance of the evidence suggested that a violation did occur. The way students implemented their code did limit the ways they could write their code, so they appeared to be limited in possible approaches in how they could approach the project. The Council could understand why the codes were similar if they had discussed high-level ideas.

In contrast, other members believed that the time commits, the fact that students work together, as well as the overlap in the code suggested that a violation had occurred. While code is provided by the professor and some council members argued that this was the source of similarity, this would not make only two students' codes so similar. The code is similar, and Student B switched to Student A's format at one of the similar points in the codes. The naming of functions is also similar. Students could not reasonably have made the similarities in submissions and coding syntax without discussing. However, the members holding this opinion were in the minority.

In conclusion, members believed that there was not enough evidence to support that a violation occurred.

Vote #1: Does a preponderance of the evidence support that a violation occurred?

Yes: 4 (1 observing)

No: 5 (1 observing)

Abstentions: 0

Decision:

The Honor Council thus finds Student A and B "not in Violation" of the Honor Code.

Time of testimony and deliberations: 1 hour, 35 minutes

Respectfully submitted,
Kristin Sweeney
Clerk