

Abstract of the Honor Council
Case 23-2, Fall 2015
Thursday, March 17, 2016

Members Present:

Alex Metcalf (presiding), Katie Jensen (clerk), Reece Rosenthal, Nick Conard, Natalie Swanson, Claire Bonnyman, Owais Syed, Yash Turkande, Komal Agarwal
Observing: Dessy Akinfenwa

Ombuds: Carey Wang

Letter of Accusation:

The Honor Council received a letter accusing Student A and Student B of disallowed collaboration on a homework assignment for a lower level computer science 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
- Professor explanations and clarifications
- Homework assignment
- Class Powerpoint slides
- Course syllabus

Plea:

Student A pled "Not In Violation."

Student B pled "Not In Violation."

Testimony:

Student A:

Student A collaborated on the homework assignment with Student B. They discussed high-level approaches to the homework assignment. However, Student A looked at the computer screen of Student B.

Student A considered the Honor Code policy for the class to be extremely unclear. He believed that he was following the Honor Code policy when he completed the assignment.

A TA for the class was brought in as a witness. The witness stated that collaboration was encouraged amongst students in the class. The witness was not educated in the rules of the course Honor Code policy by the professor at any time during the semester, and believed that the collaboration he observed in TA sessions was permissible.

Student B:

Allowed Student A to view code on his computer screen. He completed the assignment by himself before collaborating with Student A. The students discussed the code at a high-level, but when time ran short, Student B showed his code to Student A.

Student B believed this to be an acceptable level of collaboration given his experiences at TA sessions, when students were encouraged to work together and ask each other questions.

Student B cited external stresses as a reason for showing Student A his code. He did not have enough time to flesh out the problems, and thus showed Student B his code. He did not think this collaboration violated the course Honor Code policy, he believes the syllabus was poorly written and his case falls within a gray area of the Rice Honor Code policy.

Student B called in the same witness as Student A. There were no additional questions for the witness at this time.

Verdict Deliberations:

Council members believed that a preponderance of the evidence supported that a violation occurred because Student A and Student B openly admitted to looking at each other's code, violating the course Honor Code policy.

Though both students claimed an unclear course Honor Code policy, it was the responsibility of the student to clarify on any Honor Code policy questions with the instructor. The failure of the students to clarify the course Honor Code resulted in an Honor Code violation.

Furthermore, the course syllabus stated that students may not share any code that is not a general purpose API. The students in this case shared code that was not a general purpose API, thus violating the course Honor Code.

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.

Student A looked at the code on the computer screen of Student B as a guide to write his own code. This was a violation of the course Honor Code policy.

Vote 2: Does a preponderance of the evidence support that Student A is “In Violation?”

Yes: 9

No: 0

Abstentions: 0

The Council then discussed whether or not Student B committed the violation.

Student B allowed Student A to look at his code, assisting Student A in the completion of his homework assignment in such a way that violated the Honor Code policy of the class.

Vote 3: Does a preponderance of the evidence support that Student B is “In Violation?”

Yes: 9

No: 0

Abstentions: 0

Penalty Deliberations:

Council members opened by discussing mitigating circumstances.

Council members considered the amount of the assignment in violation as a mitigating factor. They also mentioned the failure of the professor to train course TA’s in the course Honor Code policy and acceptable levels of collaboration in TA sessions.

No aggravating circumstances were considered.

Vote 4: What is the appropriate penalty for Student A?

F in the course and 3 semesters of suspension: 0

F in the course and 2 semesters of suspension: 0

F in the course and 1 semester of suspension: 0

F in the course: 0

3 letter grade reduction: 0

2 letter grade reduction: 0

1 letter grade reduction: 9

2/3 letter grade reduction: 0

1/3 letter grade reduction: 0

Letter of Reprimand: 0

Abstentions: 0

Vote 5: What is the appropriate penalty for Student B?

F in the course and 3 semesters of suspension: 0

F in the course and 2 semesters of suspension: 0

F in the course and 1 semester of suspension: 0

F in the course: 0

3 letter grade reduction: 0

2 letter grade reduction: 0

1 letter grade reduction: 9

2/3 letter grade reduction	0
1/3 letter grade reduction	0
Letter of Reprimand	0
Abstentions:	0

Given the weight of the assignment in the overall course grade and the necessary punitive aspect, the Council decided that a 1 letter grade reduction was the most appropriate penalty for the case.

Decision:

The Honor Council thus finds Student A and Student B “In Violation” of the Honor Code and recommends that they both receive a 1 letter grade reduction. A Prior Violation Flag is also attached to their records.

Time of testimony and deliberations: 1 hour 30 minutes

Respectfully submitted,
Katie Jensen
Clerk