

Abstract of the Honor Council
Case 43, Spring 2016
April 19, 2016

Members Present:

Katie Jensen (presiding), Claire Bonnyman (clerk), Dessy Akinfenwa, Sofia Yi, Hector Chaires, Mario Aragon

Ombuds: Carey Wang

Letter of Accusation:

The Honor Council received a letter accusing Student A and Student B of giving and receiving unauthorized aid 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
- Student A's code and written portion for the assignment
- Student B's code and written portion for the assignment
- Course syllabus
- Honor Code policy
- Student A's written statement
- Student B's written statement
- Assignment TA solution

Plea (Student A):

Student A pled "not in violation."

Testimony (Student A):

Student A opened by discussing information from his written statement. He emphasized that he did the written and coding portions of the assignment individually. He stated that his only interaction with Student B was answering questions Student B had after Student B missed classes due to illness. Student A stated that he only helped him by discussing the bigger idea of the project and did not discuss smaller details. Student A believed that his interaction with Student B was allowable by the course's Honor Code because he gave the same amount of help that a TA would have given. Additionally, Student A said that he did not discuss the written portion of the assignment with Student B; they only discussed the code. Student A also said that he finished the assignment before Student B asked for help. He finished the code before the written portion of the assignment. He said that he could not explain the similarities because he had finished the assignment before Student B asked for help and that he did not give any unauthorized aid. He said that he could not find a different way to explain the error in his code that appeared in both codes. Student A said that they discussed a better way to phrase that section of code but neither of them could think of anything. He planned to ask a TA for help but forgot and turned

the assignment in and assumed that Student B did the same thing. He said that he gave Student B detailed advice but never showed the other student his code on his laptop. He thought that their shared big idea on how to approach the question led to the similarity in their assignments. Student A stated that he studied with Student B throughout the semester, which could have led to similar approaches to the written portion of the assignment. Student A further addressed the similarities in the written portion because they adapted the text from the assignment. Student A closed by summarizing the case. He stated that he did every assignment in the course by himself. He said that his only discussion with Student B was to understand the assignment and to tell him how he should approach the assignment. He further emphasized that he finished his work before answering any of Student B's questions.

Plea (Student B):

Student B pled "not in violation."

Testimony (Student B):

Student B opened by discussing the letter of accusation, specifically where it mentioned the written portion of the code. He stated that they did collaborate on the coding section and believed that this was allowable by the course's Honor Code Policy. Since they collaborated, they had the same big idea for their code, which led to similar written portions. When he wrote his written portion, he got all the wording from his own code, not from Student A. The similarity in the directions of their written portions also related to the fact that they had the same big idea. He continued on to address the similarities in the code, specifically the common error in their codes. He said that they discussed whether there was another way to word that section of the code, but they did not find an alternate way. He emphasized that this was only one line of the code, which is allowed by the syllabus and they couldn't figure out a different way to phrase that section. Student B closed by emphasizing that he does not think he is in violation because, while the written portions were similar, the two students did not collaborate beyond what was allowed by the syllabus. They collaborated on the coding portion, which is allowed in the course syllabus, leading to the similar steps in the written portion of the assignment.

Verdict Deliberations:

Council members were split on whether or not a violation occurred. Some Council members stated that their testimony was realistic and that the similarities could have occurred within the course's Honor Code policy. Some felt that a preponderance of the evidence supported that a violation occurred because the code was so structurally similar. Council members took a closer look at the code and found that many portions of it were identical.

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

Yes: 6

No: 0

Abstentions: 0

The Council then discussed whether or not Student A and Student B committed the violation. It seemed that both students collaborated equally and neither was more “in violation” than the other, and that giving and receiving unauthorized aid were equally against the Honor Code policy.

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

Yes: 6

No: 0

Abstentions: 0

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

Yes: 6

No: 0

Abstentions: 0

Penalty Deliberations:

Council members opened by discussing mitigating circumstances. The Council members saw no mitigating factors. They also saw no aggravating factors. The Council decided that the accused students should receive the same penalty because they seemed equally in violation. Council members felt that a 1 letter grade reduction would be appropriate because it would invalidate the homework assignment and add an appropriate punitive aspect. They felt that a 2 letter grade reduction would be excessively harsh.

Vote: What is the appropriate penalty for Student A and 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: 6

2/3 letter grade reduction: 0

1/3 letter grade reduction: 0

Letter of Reprimand: 0

Abstentions: 0

Decision:

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

Time of testimony and deliberations: 1 hour

Respectfully submitted,

Claire Bonnyman

Clerk