

Abstract of the Honor Council
Case 17-4, Fall 2017
March 5, 2018

Members Present:

Stefano Romano (presiding), Matt Nobles (clerk), Talia Kramer, Bella Bunten, Sean Olsen, Peter Rizzi

Ombuds: Kenton Whitmire

Letter of Accusation:

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

Evidence Submitted:

- Letter of Accusation
- Student A and B's written statement
- Student submitted evidence
- Piazza post
- Random code samples
- Professor clarification
- Reference code
- Full code comparison
- Accuser supplemental evidence

Plea:

Student A pled "Not in Violation."

Student B pled "Not in Violation."

Testimony:

Student A: The student did not attend any TA sessions and only mentioned the project to other students when gauging general peer progress in the project. Student A stated common commit times were the product of common deadlines between Student B and himself. Walking through his thought process and code structure, Student A noted the success of his code in passing all tests and the intricacies of path finding procedures. The student said he could not think of a more direct solution to the problem. When referencing the similarity between Student B and his variable names, Student A said the variable names were simplistic and self-explanatory. The student drew on default names given in Java to name his variables. The student attributed his logic for last portion of his code to the necessities outlined in his function. Student A said he did not collaborate with Student B on this project, though he did ask for hints from a friend. He continued to say he does not prefer group studying or collaboration. He explained inconsistencies in operator selection from function to function as the result of the interchangeability between different operators and his indifference toward which to use. The student

attempted to demonstrate this concept on his computer. While the coding structure is unusual, Student A believed there were likely students in the class who implemented their functions similarly. The student closed by saying he did not receive nor provide any unauthorized aid on the assignment.

Student B: Student B said he did not consult anyone during this assignment aside from a brief interaction between a TA and himself. Student B said he only vaguely knows Student A and has never spoken to Student A. Student B walked through his commit history and attributed similar commit times with Student A to common deadlines for the assignment. The student explained the progression of his commits along with what was and was not omitted leading up to each commit. The student noted that his implementation was uncommon, but attributed the unusual implementation to his absence at lecture and a short TA discussion that encouraged this longhand method of implementation. Student B continued by saying he did not understand provided functions so he implemented based on his intuition. Regarding allegations about variable similarities, Student B explained that much of the code was given by professor. Student B said similar execution is due to the professor's hints and literal variable naming practices. Student B referred to a coding-styles write up to explain his coding behavior, and stated the professor's preferred method is Rice-specific and unusual in industry, where Student B has experience. Student B referenced his Java settings and shows the system replaces certain portions of code with other syntax. The student noted the foundations of his logic differs from that of Student A and claimed the similarities in this portion of the code occurred by happenstance. The student reiterated the point that implementing in a way separate and distinct from the ideal method is not a violation. Student B claimed his lack of uniformity in the use of certain operators was necessary for his implementation. Student B closed by saying he never received unauthorized aid nor did he collaborate with Student A.

Verdict Deliberations:

Council members believed that a preponderance of the evidence supported that a violation occurred because the stark similarity between the students' code along with the professor's expert testimony constituted a clear violation of the Honor Code.

Council members were initially split on whether a violation occurred. Some members felt a violation occurred because of the substantial similarities between the code as well as the unusual implementation relative to random sample code. Ultimately, similarities between two students' code and the professor's expert testimony convinced the Council that the similarities could not have occurred by chance and are therefore "In Violation."

Vote #1: 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 committed the violation. The Council agreed that a preponderance of the evidence suggested a violation had occurred considering significant similarities between the students' code.

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

Yes: 6

No: 0

Abstentions: 0

The Council then discussed whether or not Student B committed the violation. The Council agreed that a preponderance of the evidence suggested a violation had occurred considering significant similarities between the students' code.

Vote #3: 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 found no mitigating favors for either student. The CPS penalty for this case, based on the weight of the assignment, is a one letter grade reduction. The Council saw no reason why this would not be the most appropriate penalty for this case.

Vote #5: What is the appropriate penalty for Students A and 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

Letter of Reprimand 0

Abstentions: 0

The Council then learned that Student B was previously found "In Violation," for which the Council aggravated.

Vote #11: What is the appropriate aggravated 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: 4

3 letter grade reduction: 2

2 letter grade reduction: 0

1 letter grade reduction:	0
Letter of Reprimand	0
Abstentions:	0

The Council felt Student B's prior violation substantially differentiated the Student B's current violation from Student A's current violation. For this reason, the Council abided by the CPS for Student A's violation while aggravating substantially for Student B's violation.

Decision:

The Honor Council thus finds Student A and B "In Violation" of the Honor Code and recommends that Student A receive a one letter grade reduction and Student B receive an F in the course.

Time of testimony and deliberations: 3 hours

Respectfully submitted,
Matt Nobles
Clerk