

**Abstract of the Honor Council**  
**Case 12-4, Fall 2017**  
**April 20, 2018**

**Members Present:**

Stefano Romano (presiding), Sam Holloway (clerk), Bella Bunten, Sree Yeluri, Rohit Chouhan, Grace Coleman, Austin Hwang (observing)

**Ombuds:** Laura Li

**Letter of Accusation:**

The Honor Council received a letter accusing Students A and B of unauthorized collaboration on a project in a lower level COMP course. The Chair read the Letter of Accusation aloud in full.

**Evidence Submitted:**

- Letter of Accusation
- Full explanation of class procedures for projects
- Assignment description
- Class syllabus
- Student A's written statement
- Student B's written statement
- Reference code
- Full code comparison
- Randomly selected peer submissions

**Plea:**

Student A pled "not in violation."

Student B pled "in violation."

**Testimony:**

Student A:

Student A stated that Student B asked her for advice on completing the project, which she provided via text messages, drawings, and occasional phone calls. Student A said she never shared a complete code solution with student B, and she argued that the nature of the students' collaboration was permitted under the course Honor Code policy. She said that she did have her old code visible while in contact with Student B so that her explanation to Student B would be more effective, but she stated that she did not send any code segments or necessarily numerical values directly from her prior work to Student B. Student A stated that any resemblance in numerical values between herself and Student B purely originated from coincidence, and that any similarity in coding syntax arose because there are only a certain number of syntactical structures possible in the coding language used for this project.

Student A directed Council members to look at randomly selected code snippets from other students, which she asserted to be similar to the solutions ultimately submitted by

herself and Student B. Student A also noted numerous places within her code that she argued to be structurally dissimilar to Student B's code.

Student A observed that the course instructor considered only a small proportion of the assignment to be notably similar between the two students. She also told the Council that she is presently on a leave of absence from the University, and she noted that the University had already accepted her withdrawal at the time she and Student B were accused of an Honor Code violation in this case; she claimed the accusation, therefore, to be unfair because she should not have been able to complete her withdrawal if an investigation was pending against her.

In her closing statement, Student A agreed that similarities are visible between the codes, but she said any assistance she provided to Student B was done in good faith exclusively to promote Student B's knowledge. She reiterated that the similar portions of code amounted to under 10 percent of the total code submitted for the assignment in question.

#### Student B:

Student B stated that she committed an Honor Code violation for this assignment. She said the actual violation that she committed, however, is not as extensive as the course instructor claimed.

She said she did consult Student A about this assignment in abstract, a type of collaboration that she said the class instructor encouraged. However, she said she consulted Student A in explicit regard to two of the four functions in the accused segment of code, asking Student A what hard-coded numerical values would make those functions work correctly. Student B said Student A did provide her these numerical values, which were essential to the correct operation of the project code. Student B said that she used her own design for the actual structure of the code, but that she did consult Student A for the hard-coded values necessary for the code to work properly.

Student B mentioned that some of the randomly selected sample solutions to the assignment followed a similar problem-solving approach to herself and Student A's solutions. Student B said that she did have her own code open and visible while Student A was providing hard-code values, but that she did not have time to enter these values and test them in real time during her conversations with Student A. Student B said she used some code in this assignment that she had previously written for a similar function in a previous project; she got the code for that solution from reference material provided by the course instructors.

Student B said that the course allowed students to drop their lowest project grade, and that she did not complete the second half of this project because it was difficult and she knew that a poor score would not actually harm her class grade in the end. Student B still committed code for this incomplete portion of the assignment because she had already written it, and the course instructor previously encouraged students to commit whatever code they had (no matter how incomplete).

In her closing statement, Student B again argued that the extent of the violation she committed is less than the course instructor claimed. On two of the four functions, she said she did collaborate with Student A, but on the other two functions, Student B argued that fundamental dissimilarities existed between her code and Student A's code. Student B reminded the Council that her code for one function originated from instructor-provided reference code for a previous assignment. Student B asked the Council to consider the very small amount of code in question as a mitigating factor.

### **Verdict Deliberations:**

Council members believed that a preponderance of the evidence supported that a violation occurred.

One Council member argued that because Student A's code would have been nonfunctional without the hard-coded values provided by Student B, the sharing of these values constituted collaboration between the two students on an integral component of the project. The rest of the Council agreed with this assessment.

Furthermore, another Council member noted that Student A said she had her old code open on her computer while discussing the project with Student B, who separately told the Council that she also had her computer open during their discussion; this practice was explicitly in violation of the Honor Code policy for the course.

Another Council member observed that even in a part of the code on which the students said they did not collaborate, the two students ordered certain code elements in the same way; no other students shared this ordering, and the order used by the two students did not appear in any of the reference materials for the project.

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 a violation.

In light of prior discussion, the Council saw no reason why Student A was not in violation.

The Council then discussed whether or not Student B committed a violation. Again, the Council saw no reason why Student B was not in violation.

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

Yes: 6

No: 0

Abstentions: 0

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.

One Council member noted that Student B provided thorough explanations that aided the Council's understanding of the case; other Council members, though they agreed that Student B's account was useful, did not believe that these explanations altered their thinking about what verdict would be appropriate. The Council, therefore, did not mitigate for this reason.

Various other Council members discussed the merits of mitigating based on the small amount of the assignment under consideration. Most members, however, agreed that neither student successfully proved the remainder of the assignment not to be in violation; the Council also did not mitigate for this reason.

The Council then discussed aggravating circumstances. The Council saw no reason to aggravate its penalty for either student. The Council also did not see any reason why Students A and B should not receive the same penalty.

Because the project in question had two submission deadlines that were worth separate grades, and Student B's code in both submissions bore similarities to Student A's code (even if Student B did not intend for her incomplete second deadline submission to be considered for grading), the Council chose to view the overall project as two assignments for purposes of deciding a penalty. The CPS penalty for this case, based on the decision to view the project as two separate assignments, is a 2 letter grade reduction.

Vote #4: What is the appropriate penalty for Students A and B?

F in the course and 1 semester of suspension:	0
F in the course:	0
3 letter grade reduction:	0
2 letter grade reduction:	6
1 letter grade reduction:	0
Letter of Reprimand	0
Abstentions:	0

After agreeing on this penalty, the Council learned that Student B was accused of an Honor Code violation on a previous assignment in this same course. Because the first case had not been decided by the Honor Council at the time Student B was accused in this second case, the ultimate finding of "in violation" for Student B's first Honor Council case in this course was not counted against her as a prior violation. The Council, therefore, did not aggravate the severity of its penalty in this second case.

However, because Student B had been found in violation of the Honor Code twice in the same course, the Council decided to combine the penalties dealt in the two cases to create one overall penalty that would encompass both of Student B's Honor Code violations in this class. The Council, in Student B's first Honor Council case for this class, recommended a 1 letter grade reduction. Therefore, to combine the penalties for the two cases, the Council found it appropriate to simply add the two previously-decided penalties to give Student B an overall penalty of 3 letter grades' reduction in the course.

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

F in the course and 1 semester of suspension:	0
F in the course:	0
3 letter grade reduction:	6
2 letter grade reduction:	0
1 letter grade reduction:	0
Letter of Reprimand	0
Abstentions:	0

After agreeing on this second penalty, the Council learned that Student B was also found "In Violation" in a separate lower-level COMP course for which she received a one-letter grade reduction. This verdict does count as a prior violation for purposes of aggravation because the Council reached its decision in that case before the present case ever came under our purview.

Because the student's first Honor Code violation was for an assignment that only constituted a small portion of her grade in the course, some Council members thought aggravating by two levels of penalty would be appropriate. Other Council members noted that Student B's prior Honor Code violation was for a violation of very similar nature to the instant case, meriting an additional aggravation on top of the aggravation already being applied for the existence of a prior violation.

Vote #8: What is the appropriate penalty for Student B, in light of her prior Honor Code violation?

F in the course and 3 semesters of suspension:	0
F in the course and 2 semesters of suspension:	6
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:	0
Letter of Reprimand	0
Abstentions:	0

### **Decision:**

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

Council also finds Student B “In Violation” of the Honor Code and recommends that she receive an F in the course and two semesters of suspension.

Time of testimony and deliberations: 1 hour, 55 minutes.

Respectfully submitted,  
Sam Holloway  
Clerk