

Abstract of the Honor Council**Case 10, Fall 2018**

4/2/19

Members Present:

Matt Nobles (presiding), Amy Lin (clerk), Talia Kramer, Matey Yanakiev, Caroline Brehm, Allie Rozich

Ombuds: Sam Morimoto**Letter of Accusation:**

The Honor Council received a letter accusing Student A of collaborating on an assignment for an upper level BIOC 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
- Random student sample solutions
- Student A arguments
- Student B arguments
- Supplemental evidence
- Lecture slides
- Grading information
- Textbook section
- Assignment solution
- Assignment description
- Student A solution
- Student B solution

Plea:

Student A pled "not in violation."

Student B pled "not in violation."

Testimony:

Student A stated that she put little effort into this assignment since she had done well on all previous graded assignments, which is why her grade was unusual compared to normal. The professor's grading policy from the beginning of the course was that if a student received an A on both exams, they would only have to do well on one of the two take-home assignments, and since she had received an A on the previous work in the course, she decided to spend less time on this assignment. Student A also stated that the fact that the papers were next to each other in the stack is irrelevant, since she turned in the paper on her own, and no conclusions should be drawn from the placement of the assignments. All problems were solvable using mechanisms described in class, which is why their answers overall were similar. Three of the students in the random sample all

had a similar error on the first problem. On the second problem, she used a mechanism that she had commonly used to solve previous problems in the course. This mechanism was used on her second exam, taught in class on the whiteboard, and typed out in a handout to study for exams that was provided by the professor. Moreover, the letter of accusation indicates that this method was generally correct, just not fully implemented properly. On the third problem, the error was shared among many students in the course, and she attributes this to how the problem is written; it never explicitly asks students to explain the reasoning behind their solution. The assignment also includes a section stating that the data should be self-evident, which is why many students in the class omitted an explanation. Next, the solution for the fourth problem begins with a sentence that is present in the random student samples as well as the professor's provided solutions. Also, Student A received full credit on the solution, whereas Student B received no credit, so there is no reason why they would have been copying off each other. Student A's solution was unique among all of the random samples, but it directly matches the solutions provided by the professor, which is why she received full credit. On the fifth problem, the error was again shared among many students in the course, and parts of the explanation were omitted because the problem was very difficult. In addition, both students using the wrong term was due to the miniscule difference in meaning, and because the professor had used the two terms interchangeably throughout the course and in the provided solution. The use of the wrong term can also be found in the random student samples. On problem six, both students specified the right side since the diagram clearly showed this, and the specification of the right side is included in the professor's provided solution. The wording of their solutions is very similar to the professor's provided solution and the random student samples. She thinks that bias may have come from the fact that the papers happened to be in the same part of the stack.

Student B opened by stating that many other students made similar mistakes, so there is not sufficient evidence for collaboration between Student A and Student B. In the assignment, the professor states that more points will be given for answers that utilize familiar mechanisms from the class lectures, so she chose to use mechanisms explained in the course. On the first problem, she made a mistake because she misread or disregarded a certain section of the assignment, and it was not due to any collaboration with the other student. On the second problem, the mechanism used by Student B was a concept that the class had just covered for the second exam, which directly preceded the assignment in question. Moreover, this concept was explained in a study handout provided by the professor for the exam. The claim that the students had previously excelled in the course and thus should not be making mistakes is not sufficient to prove collaboration for the third problem. This assignment has the hardest one in the semester by far, and Student B had always found the course difficult. In addition, given the timing of the assignment at the end of the semester, she was likely working on exams and assignments for other courses. Since the instructions never explicitly asked for an explanation, both students omitted this explanation. On the fourth problem, the students had different answers, so there is no reason why collaboration would have occurred; Student B got points off on this solution, while Student A got full credit. On problem five, many students had also made the same incorrect omission. The reason why their omissions may have been suspicious was because when the assignments were graded,

there was direct comparison between the student's solutions and the provided correct solution, rather than reading Student B's answer in its entirety and considering the errors in the context of the mechanism chosen. In addition, using the two terms interchangeably is a common error that is made, and this misuse of a term is also present in the solution for a student from the random sample. On problem six, she used the explanation of the right side because a document linked in the assignment instructions strongly suggested that there would be movement from one cell to another, and the image showed that the protein would come from the right. This explanation was also used by another student from the random sample and in the provided solution. In addition, the fact that the papers being next to each other in the stack should have no influence on the decision since this was arbitrary and she handed the paper in on her own. This may have caused bias that resulted in belief that the students collaborated.

Verdict Deliberations:

Council members believed that a preponderance of the evidence supported that a violation did not occur because their answers were similar to the provided solution and the random student samples. The mistakes that they had made were also made by other students in the course.

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

Yes: 0

No: 6

Abstentions: 0

Decision:

The Honor Council thus finds Student A and Student B "Not In Violation" of the Honor Code.

Time of testimony and deliberations: 2 hours

Respectfully submitted,

Amy Lin

Clerk