

Abstract of the Honor Council
Case 28, Spring 2019
3/23/19

Members Present:

Sam Holloway (presiding), Ricky Robinson (clerk), Emily Wang, Hugh O'Reilly, Matey Yanakiev, Riya Mehta

Ombuds: Michael Katona

Letter of Accusation:

The Honor Council received a letter accusing Student A and Student B of unauthorized collaboration and plagiarism on a homework 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
- Source paper
- Student A's homework
- Student B's homework
- Course syllabus
- TA's statement
- Student A's notes
- Student B's notes
- Facebook group chat screenshots
- TA session pictures
- PowerPoint from TA session
- Lecture PowerPoint

Plea:

Student A pled "not in violation."

Student B pled "not in violation."

Testimony:

Student A said that she is not in violation because collaboration on the homework assignment was allowed within the Honor Code of the course syllabus. The answers were discussed in a TA session, and one of the answers was given in class, which explains the similarities. Moreover, scientific concepts can only be explained in very defined manners, which is why there were similarities. She elaborated that the TA initially gave verbal information; she then worked on the problem in a group with Student B. She wrote all answers on her own after discussing the answers as a group. Since she was required to use primary literature, she assumed that she should use as much as possible from the primary literature when answering the question. There were no expectations set for the use of primary literature, and the paper was found independently and not provided by the

professor. Student A concluded that collaboration was encouraged for the problem sets and that the TA provided answers for most of the questions of the problem set. While the answers were discussed, any written answers were done independently.

Student B said that she discussed the problem set with a group, and for one answer, she used the exact words in the answers that she had written in her notes from a TA session. She found her article independently and used the information from a paragraph in that article to answer the questions. Student B heavily emphasized all work was done independently, and while they discussed the questions as a group, the work she submitted was written on her own. She reiterated that one of the answers was the same because the TA essentially gave them the answer in a TA session, which is why the answers looked similar. Student B concluded that for both answers in question, the group used notes from the TA session to formulate the answers, but all written answers were completed independently.

The witness stated that Student B led the discussion on the answers in the group, but she did not share her assignment with anybody else. No direct copying occurred on the assignment. Each answer was discussed before anything was written, and all answers were written independently. The witness said that the answers were likely similar as well because they worked from the same article. Lastly, the witness expounded that no cheating had occurred on this assignment.

Verdict Deliberations:

Council members believed that a preponderance of the evidence supported that a violation occurred because the answers to the second problem were nearly identical, which would suggest that the two answers were copied. There was a discussion as to whether or not the answers could have come directly from the TA session even though their notes did not match the answers written on the homework. The Council also discussed that on the fourth problem, both students identical statements from the article, and while there is an attempt at citation, it is not done properly, which could be considered a case of plagiarism or wrongful citation. Overall, the Council believed that there was overwhelming similarity in syntax and wording for both questions that provides strong evidence for collaboration that violated the class Honor Code policy.

Vote #2: 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 decided that Student A is in violation for the reasons stated above.

Vote #3: 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 decided that Student B is in violation for the reasons stated above.

Vote #4: 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. Some members believed that some of the assignment could have been proven as demonstrably not in violation, while others mentioned substantial disclosure. The Council ultimately decided not to mitigate because a sufficiently large amount of the assignment was in violation, and the students’ disclosure did not affect the Council’s ability to come to the decision.

The CPS penalty for this case, based on the weight of the assignment, is a 1 letter grade reduction.

Vote #6: 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: 5
 Letter of Reprimand 1
 Abstentions: 0

Vote #7: 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: 5
 Letter of Reprimand 1
 Abstentions: 0

Decision:

The Honor Council thus finds Student A “In Violation” of the Honor Code and recommends that they receive a 1 letter grade reduction.

The Honor Council thus finds Student B “In Violation” of the Honor Code and recommends that they receive a 1 letter grade reduction.

Time of testimony and deliberations: 2 hours and 6 minutes

Respectfully submitted,
Ricky Robinson
Clerk