

**Abstract of the Honor Council
Case 6-4, Fall 2019
11/21/19**

Members Present:

Sam Holloway (presiding), Ricky Robinson (clerk), Hannah Dryer, Abrar Mamun, Diego Casanova, Sean Olsen

Ombuds: Pierson Lund

Letter of Accusation:

The Honor Council received a letter accusing Student A of copying code from a previous student for a lower level CAAM course. The Chair read the Letter of Accusation aloud in full.

Evidence Submitted:

- Letter of Accusation
- Student A's written statement
- Course syllabus
- Relevant class slides
- Code comparisons between the student and the alleged source
- MATLAB files from lecture
- Additional evidence from the student
- Project description
- Additional student's code
- Random student sample

Plea:

Student A pled "not in violation."

Testimony:

The student began by explaining how she had never met or had any interaction with the student that she is accused of copying. She had attended both class and the RLA help session that week. The student then explained how she came up with her code line by line. She questioned the witness to provide further clarification of the circumstances surrounding the accusation. The student concluded by summarizing the points previously made.

Verdict Deliberations:

Council members believed that a preponderance of the evidence supported that a violation occurred because there were sufficient similarities between the two codes to suggest that a violation had occurred.

The Council first discussed the student's argument that similarities between the codes could be arbitrary, and that there was similar functionality between her code and random samples. The Council observed, however, that there were substantial syntactical overlaps

between the accused student's code and the alleged source code that did not appear in comparisons to any of the sample codes.

Even though parts of the accused student's code functionally did the same thing as sample codes, because all students were ultimately writing code that performed specific math to generate the same output, the Council believed this similar functionality would appear because of the constraints of the assignment and was not an indicator of whether or not unauthorized collaboration had occurred. Thus, in determining whether or not a violation occurred, the Council decided that the focus should be on the syntax rather than the functionality since all submissions of the project were required to complete the exact same goal, but how the students chose to implement their code and go about that should have been more variable if plagiarism did not occur.

Given that Student A's syntax did not differ from the alleged source, the Council believed that there was a preponderance of the evidence to conclude that unauthorized collaboration had occurred. While the randomly selected students also wrote code that reached the same outputs as the accused student's code, none of them wrote code that appeared as syntactically similar as the accused student's code and the alleged source code.

Vote #3: 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 found no reason to not believe that she committed the violation.

Vote #4: Does a preponderance of the evidence support that Student A is "In Violation?"

Yes: 6

No: 0

Abstentions: 0

Penalty Deliberations:

Council members opened by discussing mitigating circumstances. The Council brought up the possibility of mitigating for the amount of the assignment demonstrably not in violation. Since the projects were not exactly the same, there was no way for the student to copy all of the code. However, since the parts of the code that were similar provided data that was necessary for the remainder of the project, use of this data essentially violated a majority of the assignment. Thus, the Council saw no reason to mitigate.

The CPS penalty for this case, based on the weight of the assignment, is a 2-letter grade reduction.

Vote #7: 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:	4
F in the course:	1
3 letter grade reduction:	1
2 letter grade reduction:	0
1 letter grade reduction:	0
Letter of Reprimand	0
Abstentions:	0

The Council initially decided on a 2-letter grade reduction, but then it was revealed that the student had a prior violation. The Council then discussed what would be an appropriate punitive measurement. The Council believed a prior violation should constitute moving up two levels of the Consensus Penalty Structure, to an F in the course. However, since the prior violation was in the exact same course, and this violation was nearly identical to the prior violation, the Council found that a semester of suspension would be the most appropriate to allow for a time of reflection on the severity of violating Rice's academic environment.

Decision:

The Honor Council thus finds Student A "In Violation" of the Honor Code and recommends that she receive an F in the course and 1 semester of suspension.

Time of testimony and deliberations: 2 hours and 30 minutes

Respectfully submitted,
Ricky Robinson
Clerk