

Abstract of the Honor Council
Case #26, Spring 2020
April 21, 2020

Members Present:

Sam Holloway (presiding), Izzie Karohl (clerk), Adam Zawierucha, Hannah Dryer, Ricky Robinson, Riya Mehta

Ombuds: Eliot Behr

Letter of Accusation:

The Honor Council received a letter accusing Students A, B, C, and D of unauthorized collaboration on an unpledged assignment in a lower level Computational Applied Mathematics course. The Chair read the Letter of Accusation aloud in full.

Evidence Submitted:

- Letter of Accusation
- Email Communication Between Students
- Email Communication Between Former Student and Professor
- Previous Course Syllabus
- Updated Course Syllabus
- Professor Syllabus Clarification
- Students A, B, C, and D submitted code
- Students A and B pdf output (including graphs)
- Students A, B, C, and D written statements
- Student B's Email Confirming Regular RLA attendance
- Relevant Lecture Slides
- Project Description
- Random Student Samples
- RLA Testimonies (2)
- External Testimonies (2)

Plea:

Student A pled "Not in Violation."

Student B pled "Not in Violation."

Student C pled "Not in Violation."

Student D pled "Not in Violation."

Testimony:

Student A: Student A stated that she and Student D had together gone to an RLA session the day before the project was due, where they received advice about how to structure the code section in question. She explained that after the RLA session, she and Student D worked on the code individually, as did Students B and C, before all coming together the following day to collaborate. She stated that Student D's results were performing the best for the section in question, so as a group they decided to base

that section on Student D's progress. At this point Student D sent an email of her code section to the group. Student A asserted that the emailed code was for reference when working and not intended for copy-paste. Student A further explained that after the email, each member verbally collaborated on the assignment as encouraged by the RLAs and the course syllabus. Finally, Student A stated that emailing the code was necessary because the code section was incredibly sensitive to input values and thus the email ensured that all group members were using the same input values in the function to optimize results.

Student B: Student B stated that collaboration on unpledged assignments was encouraged, citing RLA testimony. Student B referenced a document where she highlighted differences between her code and other students. Differences included code spacing, commenting, and certain structures. She then reminded the Council that the emailed code was not posted on a public platform and that she believed this complied with the syllabus' policy. Furthermore, Student B explained that the emailed code section was very different from the code submitted by each student. She then cited two witness testimonies that recalled the group of Students working aloud without copy-pasting code. The student emphasized that each student equally contributed to building the code and fully understood their submissions. She then pointed to the pdf versions of her and Student C's code which had different graph outputs (different axis labelling, different comment explanations). She stated that these different outputs are evidence that the two did not copy-paste code because the graphs' dissimilarities surpassed the slight random differences that might be expected due to the random situation being modeled. She concluded by stating that she and Student C attended an RLA session the day prior and the pseudocode they received explains similarities in their code, including a term the professor said evidenced their unauthorized collaboration.

Student C: Student C asserted that the group did not copy-paste emailed code into their files and followed all collaboration guidelines. She said that their final code submissions differed markedly from the emailed code as evidence that the email was meant for collaboration purposes only. Student C stated that the RLA gave her substantial help on the section in question, a potential explanation as to why her code was similar to that of student B. She stated that the final code structure is similar because in their collaboration they had developed a similar strategy. Student C explained that long, differing comment sections showed that each student fully understood their submission independently. She reiterated that all steps of collaboration were within the bounds outlined by the syllabus, the new syllabus with more stringent rules was uploaded after the project was submitted, and that the witness testimony supported that they collaborated verbally. Finally, Student C concluded by explaining that the section in question is incredibly sensitive to input values by referencing the emailed code and her code submission, which is why, she said, the email was necessary in the first place.

Student D: Student D said that all members carefully followed the syllabus when collaborating. She said that each member fully understood the code and explained that

numeric input similarities arose from verbal collaboration. Student D said that she sent the email because after individual work, she had come the closest to developing the correct code. She explained that she employed the specific strategy that she and Student A had learned at the RLA session the previous day. Student D pointed to different variable names, comments, and other sections of the code, emphasizing that they were particularly different from Student B and Student C's code submissions. She said that there was no evidence of copy-pasting and that the continuous encouragement to collaborate explains similarities in code.

Verdict Deliberations:

Council members believed that a preponderance of the evidence supported that a violation did not occur. Council members believed that the students did closely collaborate on their code, but they believed that this collaboration would have been permissible according to the syllabus. Council members also observed differences in each student's comments, and some differences in code structure, suggesting that each student did submit work they fully understood. The council members cited that RLA testimony sufficiently explains differences in code. One council member initially disagreed, bringing up the argument that differences in spacing and variable names does not necessarily evidence the absence of copy-pasting given that students are able to change code after copy-paste. They cited high levels of similarities in the code, particularly in Student B and C's code, and the fact that witness testimony is irrelevant because it cannot prove whether copy-pasting occurred or not. The Council agreed with such reasonings but ultimately concluded that it was not possible to prove whether or not a violation occurred given the "preponderance of evidence" standard. The high level of collaboration encouraged by the syllabus, the RLA testimony, and the professor clarification all pointed to the fact that the students could have arrived at their final codes within the bounds of authorized collaboration. The students' code was very similar, but there were enough minor differences to suggest that this could have happened without an Honor Code violation having occurred.

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

Yes: 0

No: 6

Abstentions: 0

Vote #2: Does a preponderance of the evidence support that a violation involving Student B occurred?

Yes: 0

No: 6

Abstentions: 0

Vote #3: Does a preponderance of the evidence support that a violation involving Student C occurred?

Yes: 0

No: 6

Abstentions: 0

Vote #4: Does a preponderance of the evidence support that a violation involving Student D occurred?

Yes: 0

No: 6

Abstentions: 0

Decision:

The Honor Council thus finds Students A, B, C, and D “Not In Violation” of the Honor Code.

Time of testimony and deliberations: 1hr 51 min

Respectfully submitted,
Izzie Karohl
Clerk