

Abstract of the Honor Council
Case #38-4, Spring 2020
May 27, 2020

Members Present:

Sam Holloway (presiding), Izzie Karohl (clerk), Virginia Xie, Matey Yanakiev, Syed Shams, and William Wang

Ombuds: Jean Choi

Letter of Accusation:

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

Evidence Submitted:

- Letter of Accusation
- Students' Written Statements
- All Students Submitted Code
- Code Comparisons
- Random Student Samples
- Lecture Material containing accompanying sample code
- RLA testimony
- RLA office hour video recording and accompanying slides
- Academic Fellow testimony
- Student-submitted powerpoint of code explanation
- Course Syllabus
- Assignment Description

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."

Student E pled "not in violation."

Testimony:

Student A stated that she had collaborated with the other students for all unpledged projects. She explained that all but one group member would attend a certain RLA's office hours on Friday where they received skeleton code to begin working on the project. During the remote transition, the RLA put the group in the same "Breakout Room," recognizing them as a team of collaborators. In the "Breakout Room," Student A stated that they discussed their approached to needed functions with help from the RLA. Student A said that on Saturday, the group met before office hours to discuss code and verbally help each other make progress. She stated that the group collaborated in this way

all semester. She said that when collaborating, she asked conceptual questions similar to how RLAs lead student through projects. Student A attributes similarities to using the same skeleton code, lecture slides and assignment description instructions. She stated that she also attended other RLA office hours and worked on the project individually for a substantial period of time. Student A referenced both the RLA and Academic Fellow testimony that support the idea that the group collaborated within honor code bounds. Lastly, she noted that she never copy and pasted code.

Student B began by citing the course syllabus which encourages group collaboration and troubleshooting on unpledged assignments. She explained that no group member had prior experience with coding which meant that the group heavily relied on given materials, including RLA skeleton code and course slides. Student B noted that comments between codes differed substantially because each person wrote and understood their code. Student B showed the Council a Powerpoint that explained each alleged similarities and explained where each similarity came from—whether from the assignment description, class materials, or RLA slides. She then said that function order differed between codes, as did the spacing, illustrating intendent work and avoidance of copy-paste. Student B explained the group’s process of collaboration: telling each other what to reference, what to adapt, and how functions work conceptually. She said that they discussed the project in Zoom breakout room and over the phone because not everyone would be able to make certain RLA sessions.

Student C said that neither group member had any previous coding experience so they formed a five person team to collaborate for the entire semester. She explained how one group member would attend an RLA session and distribute the slides and materials to the rest of the group. Student C said the group often discussed the skeleton code, which they also used heavily for the accused project. Student C stated that each person worked independently on Friday night and consulted an Academic Fellow on Saturday. Both the RLA and Fellow statement attest to their honest collaboration without cheating. With their projects, they would meet up to check the code and solve problems. Student C explained that at no time did any person screen share, and that even when helping Student E debug her code, she did so over the phone and checked it verbally line-by-line. They went line-by-line because Student E assumed the mistake in the code was a spelling error because MATLAB wasn’t highlighting it. Student C also referenced the powerpoint and explained that similar variable names were necessary to more easily collaborate via phone call.

Student D explained the group frequently attended RLA sessions, individually and as a group. She referenced the project description, class slides, help in RLA office hours, and RLA sessions—specifically the one the group attended for this project. Student D said that the powerpoint showed that all the similar sections of code come from class resources. She showed specific slides to show how the pseudo code structured all of their submitted codes. Student D explained that their lack of experience evidenced the difference between their code and some random samples. She referenced the RLA statement that beginner coders may have not had time to move away from skeleton

coding and develop individual style. Student D reaffirmed that the group did not cheat but rather embraced the collaborative spirit of the class.

Student E stated that the group worked together on every unpledged project. She stated that she would often attend the first RLA session of the weekend and distribute the slides to the group. Student E said she started working on her own after that RLA session before working with the group. Student E explained that the group verbally worked on the project but never shared their screens or asked each other to look at their code. She mentioned the bug that Student C helped her with and how they talked via phone to debug it, line-by-line. Student E concluded by stating that differing descriptions and comments show that each student individually understands their submitted code.

Verdict Deliberations:

Council members believed that a preponderance of the evidence supported that a violation did not occur. The expert opinions of both the RLA and Academic Fellow demonstrated that similarities in the students' final code submissions likely arose from authorized collaboration. Considering the students' lack of previous coding knowledge, the Council believed that reliance pseudo/skeleton led to the similarities present. The student-submitted powerpoint adequately explained each code section's origins in course material—whether class slides, RLA slides, or in the assignment description.

Furthermore, the Council did not believe that, on the whole, the codes submitted were similar enough to suggest a violation. The Council was slightly concerned by the line-by-line debugging process as seemed in the spirit of directly looking at each other's code, but the Council did not believe that this constituted a violation. The Council also noted the syllabus' encouragement of collaboration and the explicit prohibition of copy-paste were upheld by the group; thus, the Council deemed the students not in violation.

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 Students A,B,C,D, and E “Not In Violation” of the Honor Code.

Time of testimony and deliberations: 2hrs. and 6 min.

Respectfully submitted,
Izzie Karohl
Clerk