

Abstract of the Honor Council

Case #5, Fall 2020

November 9, 2020

Members Present:

Ricky Robinson (presiding), Rohit Chouhan (clerk), Kefei Xu, Adam Zawierucha, Syed Shams, and William Wang

Ombuds: Oeishi Banerjee, Suravi Sarkar (observing), and Neil Chopra (observing)

Letter of Accusation:

The Honor Council received a letter accusing Student A and Student B of plagiarizing a homework assignment for a lower level ESCI 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
- Student A's homework submission
- Student B's homework submission
- Course Syllabus
- Original homework handout (without answers)
- Screen shot of email clarifying collaboration on homework
- Other pictures of scratch work for assignment

Plea:

Student A pled "Not in violation"

Student B pled "Not in violation"

Testimony:

Student A said he started the homework with Student B a few days before it was due and collaborated while working at the same table. For the math portion of the assignment, Student A wrote the equations down on paper, but the two worked on it together. When it came time to submit the assignment, Student B was able to sign up for the PDF editor while Student A was unable to sign up at the time. The students completed the rest of the assignment together and knew that collaboration was allowed via the course syllabus. When Student A was able to sign up for PDF editor, the two had already finished writing the homework, so Student A asked Student B to send his copy over. According to the Student A, this is why the homework assignments are the same.

Referencing the Honor Code clarification on Canvas, Student A did not believe he needed to rephrase anything because they did the problems together. Student A explained that one answer word-for-word because he and Student B had the same thought process. Student A's scratch work for one question showed differences between his and Student B's work. Student A also noted another question's notes and where they differed from Student B, but ultimately how the submitted answers were the same. Lastly, Student A demonstrated independent work he had done when trying to revise the collaborated homework, but that ultimately he submitted the assignment without such changes.

Student B said he collaborated on the homework assignment with Student A, noting that the professor encourages collaboration on homework assignments. Student B explains how he signed up for the PDF editor, and that when the two collaborated, Student A wrote the answers down on paper. Student B also said that the answers were fairly straight forward, so there was not much deviation between he and Student A's work. Student B shared the file with Student A after Student A was able to gain access to the PDF editor. He also notes that Student A's handwritten notes shows that Student A had completed additional work before submitting. Student B does not remember if he changed any answers after sending it to Student A, but he notes that Student A did rewords some of the answers.

Verdict Deliberations:

Council members believed that there was not a preponderance of the evidence supported that a violation occurred because the student have significant differences between the two submissions, suggesting that there were alterations that reflected the contributions of each student. While the Council recognized that the document was shared between the students, the Council did not believe the sending of the document constituted a violation because the students demonstrated their collaboration via their evidence of written work that corroborated their testimony. Since collaboration was encouraged on this assignment by the professor and there were no explicit statement prohibiting this degree of collaboration in the course Honor Code policy, the Council believed there was no violation in this case.

The Council members believed that the students clearly collaborated together on the homework. Some members believed that the fact the submissions were nearly identical constitutes a violation and that submitting nearly identical homework is not a valid collaboration. Some other members believed that this was not enough evidence to constitute a violation, especially due to the fact that Student A attempted to revise the answers he submitted. According to the testimony, Student A wrote the answers down while Student B typed it up, which shows sufficient collaboration.

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

Yes: 0

No: 4

Abstentions: 2

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

Yes: 0

No: 6

Abstentions: 0

Respectfully submitted,

Rohit Chouhan