

Abstract of the Honor Council
Case 6-4, Fall 2020
December 8, 2020

Members Present:

Sam Holloway (presiding), Matey Yanakiev (clerk), Max Slotnik, Zac Zalles, Rodolfo Gutierrez, Rishab Ramapriyan, and Sriya Kakarla (observing)

Ombuds: Dylan Glenn

Letter of Accusation:

The Honor Council received a letter accusing Students A and B of copying code on an unpledged assignment 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
- Student B's written statement
- Students' codes
- Relevant lecture materials
- 10 student sample codes
- RLA email to student with pseudocode
- Additional RLA materials
- Project instructions (2 files)
- Course syllabus

Plea:

Student A pled "Not In Violation."

Student B pled "Not In Violation."

Testimony:

Student A

Student A explained she worked together with Student B because both the syllabus and the RLAs strongly encouraged collaboration; therefore, their codes would naturally look very similar. Nevertheless, Student A said that they did not share code directly or go through their codes line by line; instead, they only discussed overarching ideas together. Student A said that structural similarities between the two students' codes traced back to the RLA's extensive materials for this project—her slides and pseudocode—which the students followed closely. Student A had also emailed the RLA for additional help (screenshots of email included in evidence), from which she shared insight with Student B verbally but without directly showing her the RLA's email and the code it contained.

Student A estimated about 80% of the code were derived from the RLA's materials. Student A said that she and the other student worked together, completing the assignment

at the last moment. Student A wrote her own comments. When asked, she could not remember helping Student B troubleshoot her code for errors in the final stages.

Student B

Student B explained she collaborated with Student A as permitted in the syllabus. The two did not copy each other's codes and did not look at one another's laptops; instead, they talked through the code out loud. Student B recalled that both she and Student A used the RLA's pseudocode to structure their codes. The RLA had emailed the slides to her students. Student B did not remember troubleshooting her final code and could not recall whether and why it had typographical errors preventing proper output. She wrote her own comments, based off a style she had picked up from a previous year with the same RLA.

Verdict Deliberations:

Council members believed that a preponderance of the evidence supported that a violation occurred. The Council began deliberations cognizant of the broad permission for collaboration in the course syllabus. Ultimately, however, Council Members felt the similarities between the two students' codes were likely a result of impermissible collaboration violating the syllabus's instructions that each student submit her own work.

Foundationally, Student A and Student B's codes were virtually identical, with only trivial differences to distinguish them (stylistic choice of spacing and the occasionally switched line order). From the overarching logical outline to the specific details within lines, the two codes were consistently and strikingly parallel. The Council saw no way to explain such extensively similitude in the absence of line-by-line collaboration, to the point where each student could no longer be said to have submitted her own individual work. Parallels in comments were particularly telling. Both codes included comments stating the same things in the same places, with only limited stylistic changes but identical logic. While the Council could conceive that some similarity in comments arose from permissible collaboration, the thoroughly systematic similarities in comments, combined with the practically identical main code, left no room for each student to demonstrate individual work and understanding of the assignment.

While the students both testified the RLA materials could account for similarities between their codes—with Student A estimating 80% of her code was essentially from the RLA—the Council found nowhere near enough detail in the RLA-provided materials to account for the line-by-line flow of the two students' codes. The Council also discussed the errors unique to Student B's code which prevented proper output. On close examination, the errors in question were typographical errors (leaving off the first letter of a variable name), which the Council believed hardly diminished the significance of the systematic similarities between the two codes.

Finally, while their testimony suggested the two students had worked on the project together close to the deadline, self-submitted screenshots of Student A's email to the RLA show her code fleshed out earlier in the day, suggesting the final, near-identical codes may not have been equal-handed collaboration but rather primarily the work of

Student A. In the end, the Council agreed the preponderance of the evidence pointed towards a violation.

Vote #1: 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 concluded the evidence suggested Student A was involved in the violation.

Vote #2: 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 concluded the evidence suggested Student B was involved in the violation.

Vote #3: 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.

The Council saw no reason to mitigate or aggravate.

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

Vote #4: 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: 6

1 letter grade reduction: 0

Letter of Reprimand 0

Abstentions: 0

Vote #5: 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:	6
1 letter grade reduction:	0
Letter of Reprimand	0
Abstentions:	0

The Council saw no reason to deviate from the CPS-recommended penalty for the case (no aggravating or mitigating factors).

Decision:

The Honor Council thus finds Students A and B “In Violation” of the Honor Code and recommends that they each receive a 2 letter grade reduction.

Time of testimony and deliberations: 2 hours

Respectfully submitted,
Matey Yanakiev
Clerk