

## **Abstract of the Honor Council**

**Case 17-3, Fall 2020**

**February 28, 2021**

### **Members Present:**

Izzie Karohl (presiding), Caroline Brehm (clerk), Andrew Barber, Max Slotnik, William Wang, and Kamal Tijani

**Ombuds:** Thelo Lewis, Oeishi Banerjee (observing)

### **Letter of Accusation:**

The Honor Council received a letter accusing Student A and Student B of unauthorized collaboration 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
- Student A's code submission
- Student B's code submission
- Course syllabus
- Project Description
- Project Bonus Description
- Student A's and Student B's time-stamped submission receipts
- Time-stamped text conversation
- Random student samples (x10)
- Lecture slides
- Instructor-provided code
- RLA slides and provided code
- RLA statement

### **Plea:**

Student A pled "Not in Violation."

Student B pled "Not in Violation."

## **Testimony:**

### *Student A*

Student A opened by stating that he was a hard working student. He explained that for unpledged projects students were allowed to collaborate, and he stayed within the bounds of the Honor Code when completing the project. Student A said that he never copied code from any source, but he did help Student B with fixing small errors in their code. Student A said that Student B was struggling on a topic, so Student A sent a photo of a section of his code on Snapchat. Student A asserted that Student B would not have copied that code since Student B only asked for help with changing an input value.

Student A referenced timestamped screenshots of a text exchange between him and Student B. Student A said that he completed this project 20 minutes before Student B texted him as evidenced by the timestamps. In the conversation, Student A advised Student B to look at RLA slides to help with structuring his code. Student A explained that he wrote the comments on his project using language found on the slides given by the RLA. Student A pointed out that a section of code that was flagged was pulled directly from the project description and the RLA slides. Therefore, since Student A advised Student B to use the same RLA slides, it makes sense that their codes have similar comments and variables.

Student A explained differences in their codes. Student A also pointed out how the core structure of his code was very different from Student B's code. Student B used function handles to organize his code, while Student A used function drivers. Student A pointed out that his RLA submitted a written statement saying that the similarities in code could have arisen without copying. Student A concluded by stating he was not in violation because all of his collaboration was permitted by the course Honor Code.

### *Student B*

Student B referenced the course syllabus where it says that students are not permitted to copy code or use code from previous semesters, but students are encouraged to collaborate with other students taking the course at that time. Since he did not copy code, Student B said he is not in violation of the honor code.

Student B outlined how his code was structurally distinct from Student A's code. Student A stated that he redirected Student B to the RLA slides when Student B was struggling, so Student B's code drew heavily from the RLA-provided pseudocode. He referenced RLA slides where function handles were used during the code. Student B pointed out how the majority of the code

flagged as potentially “in violation” were comments, and the language and structure of those comments were derived from the available RLA slides. This explains why the code is structurally distinct but the comments are semantically similar.

Student B said that COVID restrictions prevented him from collaborating in person with Student A, so Student B sent a photo of a small section of his code so Student A could help find the bugs in the code. Since no code was copied, this collaboration is still within the bounds of the course Honor Code, especially during the pandemic. Student B concluded by stating that all of the similarities between his code and Student A’s could be explained because they both used the RLA slides.

**Witness Testimony:**

The witness was sworn in by the Clerk. The witness stated he worked on the project with Student A. The witness stated that the RLA gave the students most of the code. The witness said he collaborated with Student A over Zoom on the project together, but Student B did not work with them.

Student A asked the witness to describe the nature of Student B’s collaboration with the two of them. The witness said Student B had no involvement in their collaboration, which is where Student A wrote the majority of his code.

Student B had no questions for the witness.

**Verdict Deliberations:**

Council members believed that a preponderance of the evidence supported that a violation did not occur because code similarities more likely than not arose from authorized collaboration. The Council believed the students demonstrated that the majority of similarities in the code arose from pseudocode, variables, and approaches provided by the project description and the course RLA. The Council found no unexplained instances of code that had likely been copied.

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

Yes: 0  
No: 6  
Abstentions: 0

Time of testimony and deliberations: 1 hour and 5 minutes

Respectfully submitted,  
Caroline Brehm  
Clerk