

## **Abstract of the Honor Council**

**Case 22-2, Fall 2020**

**March 23, 2021**

### **Members Present:**

Sam Holloway (presiding), Caroline Brehm (clerk), Zac Zalles, Kamal Tijani, Andrew Barber, and Sriya Kakarla

**Ombuds:** Eliot Behr

### **Letter of Accusation:**

The Honor Council received a letter accusing Student A of copying code from a previous semester 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
- Course Syllabus
- Project description
- Code comparison files
- Student A's code
- Student A's code output
- Previous student's code output
- Student A's supplementary code files
- Lecture slides
- Random student sample (x10)
- Student A's PowerPoint

### **Plea:**

Student A pled "Not in Violation"

### **Testimony:**

Student A began by saying she had never met the student she is accused of copying from. She stated that the similarities in the code arose from a similar approach to the project, not from an honor code violation. Student A presented a PowerPoint to outline her testimony. She explained the premise of the project and described her approach. Student A said she created multiple test files while working on the project to work through different strategies. Student A asserted that the test files demonstrate her understanding of the project.

Student A referenced the first test file, where she started her project by working on the pseudocode provided by the professor. She stated that her approach to this project was similar to her work on previous projects (using if/else/end statements). Student A mentioned that this structure was not a unique approach, so it is not suspicious that the previous code also utilized this structure. Student A emphasized that while her code and the previous code have similar notation and structure, the codes have very distinct execution. She showed the Council the output for each code and emphasized that her code returns different values than the previous code even though her code and the previous code were not able to be run for the same reason.

Student A pointed out notational differences between her test file code and the previously submitted code. She also pointed out that her code utilizes an ‘annealing structure’ while the previous student’s code did not have this structure. Student A attributed many similarities in the code to be using functions recommended by project description and MATLAB documentation. She said the professor-provided pseudo code had examples of comments, and she used this style of comments in her code, which is why some of her comments look similar to comments in the previous student’s code. Student A said that she made many test files with different approaches to the project, and she emphasized that it would be more work to start, copy, and rewrite code than it would be to complete the project on her own.

Student A concluded by stating that her code shows an original line of thinking and all of the similarities are superficial and circumstantial. She said that the implementation, structure, and notation of the code demonstrated that she fully understood the project and did not violate the Honor Code.

### **Verdict Deliberations:**

Council members believed that a preponderance of the evidence supported that a violation occurred because the level of similarities between the projects could not have occurred without unauthorized collaboration.

Student A’s final code and her test code had very similar structures and nearly identical approaches to the previous student’s code submission. While the project recommended students use a certain function, the project allowed for high levels of freedom in structuring the function. Student A’s code and the previous student’s code had the same statement ordering, same comments, and many lines of identical code. Both projects had the same structural issue and the same fail condition; this issue was not seen in any of the random student samples. Within the random samples, similar approaches to the project completed diverged from and were not written similarly to the previous student’s code. Therefore, the Council rejected Student A’s claim that the code similarities arose from the pseudocode provided in the project description.

This project was pledged, so students were not allowed to collaborate with anyone while writing their code. The Council ultimately decided it was highly unlikely that this level of similarity between the codes could exist with absolutely no collaboration. Additionally, Council members noticed a unique typographical error in both Student A's code and the previous student's code which the Council believed is highly indicative of copying.

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. Council members believed Student A committed the violation.

Vote #2: Does a preponderance of the evidence support that Student A is "In Violation?"

Yes: 6  
No: 0  
Abstentions: 0

**Penalty Deliberations:**

Council members opened by discussing mitigating and aggravating circumstances. The Council found no mitigating or aggravating circumstances.

The CPS penalty for this case, based on the weight of the assignment, is a 3 letter grade reduction.

Vote #3: 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: 6  
2 letter grade reduction: 0  
1 letter grade reduction: 0  
Letter of Reprimand 0  
Abstentions: 0

**Decision:**

The Honor Council thus finds Student A “In Violation” of the Honor Code and recommends that she receive a 3 letter grade reduction.

Time of testimony and deliberations: 1 hour and 13 minutes

Respectfully submitted,

Caroline Brehm

Clerk