

Abstract of the Honor Council
Case 17-7, Fall 2020
May 2, 2021

Members Present:

Kaitlyn Crowley (presiding), Max Slotnik (clerk), Adam Zawierucha, Andrew Barber, Izzi Reynolds, and Mark Cantu

Ombuds: Dylan Glenn

Letter of Accusation:

The Honor Council received two letters accusing Student A and Student B of unauthorized collaboration on two separate projects for a lower level CAAM course. The Chair read the Letter of Accusations aloud in full. Due to the nature of the accusations, and the same students being involved, the two accusations were heard in the same hearing.

Evidence Submitted:

- Letter of Accusations
- Student A's written statement
- Student B's written statement
- Side-by-side comparisons of code for both project
- Class Syllabus
- Project descriptions
- Witness statement
- Random samples for both projects
- Pseudocode for both projects
- MATLAB files from lecture for both project
- Lecture slides from lecture for both projects
- RLA slides for Project B
- Student B presentation including code comparison, abstract presentation, and RLA testimony

Plea:

Student A pled "Not in Violation" for Project A

Student B pled "Not in Violation" for Project A

Student A pled "Not in Violation" for Project B

Student B pled "In Violation" for Project B

Testimony:

Project A:

Student A: Student A began by commenting on how he came into the course with programming experience. Thus, he has had previous exposure to this kind of class material. For Project A, he mentioned how Student B had missed the regular study group they work in. He asserted that all the work in his submitted project was his, and how Student B approached Student A for help

because Student B had missed the group meeting. Student A stated that he verbally explained concepts to Student B but, at times, showed Student B his computer to communicate his thinking regarding the structure and logic of the code. Student A also mentioned the vagueness of the Course Syllabus's Honor Code, and how there is a lot of room for interpretation, particularly on unpledged projects.

Student B: Student B began by commenting on how the assignment was not pledged, so collaboration was allowed and even encouraged. He discussed how he worked with more than one RLA for help, collaborated with many other peers other than Student A, and used MathWorks for guidance. He noted that for this project he had missed his weekly study group, so he had asked Student A for guidance on troubleshooting the code he had already produced. Student B said that Student A offered advice on how to better structure the code and recapped the advice arose from study group. Student B said he utilized approved resources, used them appropriately, and submitted code that he understood and wrote himself.

Student B emphasized how he and Student A worked in a similar fashion to how RLAs assist students when they collaborated on Project A. He asserted that there was no copying and pasting, but rather they engaged in formative conversations and relayed information from their weekly study group. Student B also sent an email to an RLA outlining how he and Student A collaborated specifically, asking if their collaboration fell within the bounds of the Honor Code as outlined by the Course Syllabus. The RLA said that their collaboration seemed to be acceptable and within the bounds of the Honor Code (this email was shown in the student-submitted presentation). Student B emphasized that Student A had only shown small sections of his code, and he explained how their collaboration never involved any copying and pasting of code.

Student B then walked through every flagged line of code and commented on how he developed those lines of code, whether that be from the project description, class lectures, RLA's, and/or from collaboration with Student A. Student B also referenced student samples that had similar lines of code. Furthermore, he highlighted the overall structure and length of his code and his functions, how it diverged from Student A's code, and how their codes had similarities to random samples. Student B also stated how his comments and Student A's comments were different. Lastly, Student B brought up previous cases and explained how the previous cases resembles his own case and that these cases concluded that no violation of the Honor Code had occurred.

Project B:

Student A: Student A began by commenting on how he turned in his assignment a week before Student B and how it was a pledged project, so he could neither receive nor give any aid. After turning in the project, Student A said that Student B approached him because Student B's MATLAB application had stopped working on his computer, and Student B wanted to see if he could use Student A's computer to code the project. Student A left his laptop for student B to use. Student A did not provide any warning to Student B about looking at his code, nor did he make sure that his code was not easily accessible. Rather, he just offered his computer for Student B to use without the intention of letting Student B reference his code. Student A mentioned how his Project B code was most likely open on the MATLAB application, and when

Student B opened the program to do his own project, it must have been visible. Student A believed that Student B did not intend to view or steal the code, but there was a miscommunication between the two. Further, Student A mentioned how he assumed Student B would just use the software to produce his own code without referencing Student A's, but Student B must have misunderstood and believed that he could use Student A's code for reference.

Student B: Student B began by commenting on how, due to specific academic and personal stressors, he had a lapse in judgment and violated the Honor Code. When he was completing his code, his MATLAB crashed and Student A offered to let him use his computer. He noted that Student A's code had already been completed. When Student A offered his computer, the code for Project B was still open on the application, and Student B admitted to looking at the code and referencing it when he completed his own. Student B stated that he did not believe that anything he did was aggravating or heinous. He asserted that he had no intention of stealing Student A's code, or of deceiving Student A, but he believed that Student A was allowing him to use his code, although he now realized that this was a miscommunication.

Verdict Deliberations:

Project A:

Council members believed that a preponderance of the evidence supported that a violation had not occurred because the Course Syllabus is particularly lenient, and the Council believed that Student A and Student B collaborated in a manner acceptable within the guidelines of the Honor Code.

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

Yes: 0
No: 6
Abstentions: 0

Project B:

Council members believed that a preponderance of the evidence supported that a violation occurred because Student B admitted to referencing and using code from another student in the class on a pledged assignment, which is not allowed per the Class Syllabus.

Vote #2: 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 believed that Student A did not commit the violation because he did not willingly offer up his code for Student B to use. Student A provided Student B with the computer with the belief that Student B would use the application to complete their own code and not reference his own. Thus, the burden of the violation does not fall on Student A, as he was unaware of Student B's actions.

Vote #3: Does a preponderance of the evidence support that Student A is “In Violation?”

Yes: 0

No: 6

Abstentions: 0

The Council then discussed whether or not Student B committed the violation. The Council believed that Student B did commit the violation, as he willingly and knowingly copied off of Student A on a pledged assignment.

Vote #4: Does a preponderance of the evidence support that Student B is “In Violation?”

Yes: 6

No: 0

Abstentions: 0

Penalty Deliberations:

Project B, Student B:

Council members opened by discussing mitigating circumstances and aggravating circumstances. The Council then discussed aggravating factors and the “heinous” distinction. The Council believed that Student B’s actions should be classified as heinous. The Council came to this conclusion due to that fact that Student B actively and intentionally utilized another student’s code during a pledged assignment without receiving permission to do so. Consequently, Student B violated Student A’s trust, considerably damaging the academic atmosphere of Rice University.

Vote #5: Does the Council believe the case classifies as heinous or not?

Yes: 5

No: 1

Abstention: 0

Because the Council members’ voting reached the 5 out of 6 member threshold for a “heinous” distinction, the violation is considered “heinous.”

In the discussion of mitigating factors, the Council believed that Student B’s substantial disclosure absolved Student A of wrongdoing. Student B offered information that aided the Council in their deliberations and was thus weighed as a potential mitigating factor.

The Council then learned that Student B has a previous Honor Code violation in the same course for the same semester. Previous violations are considered an aggravating factor. Furthermore, when a student is found “in violation” more than once for the same course in the same semester, the Council renders a penalty decision that encompasses the weights of both “in violation” findings to assign a final penalty for the course. This final penalty encompasses previous assignment weights and supersedes any previous penalties assigned.

The CPS penalty, based on the weight of the assignments found “in violation” from the prior accusation and from this one, is an F in the course. In weighing the totality of the factors involved—including the “heinous” distinction, Student B’s substantial disclosure during testimony, and presence of a previous violation—the Council believed the appropriate penalty would be to aggravate one penalty higher than that given by the CPS.

Vote #6: 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:	4
F in the course:	2
3 letter grade reduction:	0
2 letter grade reduction:	0
1 letter grade reduction:	0
Letter of Reprimand	0
Abstentions:	0

Decision:

The Honor Council thus finds Student A “Not In Violation” of the Honor Code.

The Honor Council thus finds Student B “In Violation” of the Honor Code and recommends that he receive an F in the course and 1 semester of suspension.

Time of testimony and deliberations: 4 hours and 16 minutes

Respectfully submitted,
Max Slotnik
Clerk