

Abstract of the Honor Council

Case 46, Spring 2021

October 5, 2021

Members Present:

Angela Liu (presiding), Caroline Brehm (clerk), Kaitlyn Crowley, Kamal Tijani, Rodolfo Gutierrez, and Spencer Darwell

Ombuds: Neil Chopra

Letter of Accusation:

The Honor Council received a letter accusing Students A, B, C, and D of unauthorized collaboration on a final exam for an upper level ECON course. The Chair read the Letter of Accusation aloud in full.

Evidence Submitted:

- Letter of Accusation
- Student A, B, C, & D's written statement
- Course syllabus
- Students A, B, C, & D's final exams
- Exam .pdf
- Student A's review notes
- Student B's midterms 1 and 2
- Student B's review notes
- Student B's Lease agreement
- Student C's exam notes
- Student D's review notes
- WeChat message screenshot

Plea:

Student A pled "Not in Violation."

Student B pled "Not in Violation."

Student C pled "Not in Violation."

Student D pled "Not in Violation."

Testimony:

Student A said she decided to take the exam on May 11th because she had another exam on May 8th and needed time to prepare for the ECON exam. She reported she began working at 8:00 AM on that day to finish the exam early as it was her birthday. Student A mentioned that she and Students B, C, and D are all economics majors, so they consistently studied for classes together.

She said that they studied together by creating study notes together. Student A pointed out that her notes contained the same incorrect answer as the incorrect answer the professor flagged as a violation on the exam. Student A concluded by saying she copied notes from the other students, but she did not collaborate with others on the exam and only referred to her study notes on her iPad.

Student B stated she frequently worked with the other students since they were in the same major. She said the students all compiled notes and sought out practice problems from the internet to aid in study preparation. Student B mentioned that they likely made a mistake in their joint study notes and replicated that mistake on the exam. Student B asserts that the mistake they made was not as uncommon as the professor stated. She referenced how she made a similar mistake on her first midterm exam. She also explained that she took the exam at that time because it was after studying with the other students and before she had to move off-campus and begin an internship. Student B concluded by saying she completed the exam on her own, and her answer to the exam question looked similar to the other students' because they studied together.

Student C explained that the course was extremely difficult, so she met with the other students two weeks before the exam was due to create a study sheet. Since the professor did not provide any practice exams, the students used the homework, midterm exams, and internet sources to make a collaborative study guide. Student C mentioned that she took the exam on May 11th because there was an exam in a different class, in which two of the other students were also enrolled. Student C said that she texted a group chat with Students A, B, C, & D when she decided to take the exam. Student C recalled Student B said she would take the exam at the same time so Students B and D could discuss it afterward without violating the Honor Code. Student C referenced a screenshot of WeChat where they discussed when they would take the exam. Student C finished by saying she made that specific mistake on the exam because her notes contained a similar mistake, and she studied with the collaborative notes.

Student D stated that she took her exam alone in her dorm room with only her notes since the exam is open notes. She asserted that her answer was similar to the other students because they studied together and all wrote down the wrong answer in their study notes. Student D said she saw that Student B and C were taking the exam at the same time, so she decided to take the exam at that time as well. Student D mentioned that she screenshotted her notes and sent them to her study group chat, which the other students used to study for the exam. Student D said the collaborative study technique is what led to her and the other students applying an incorrect method to a test question. Student D concluded by saying she did not violate the Honor code and did not collaborate with the other students while taking the exam and only referenced her notes.

Verdict Deliberations:

Council members believed that a preponderance of the evidence supported that a violation did not occur because the similarities between the students' exam answers likely arose from collaborative studying and sharing of notes before the exam.

The Council first discussed whether they believed the students collaborated on the exam. Council members felt that the presence of the same mistake on the students' exams could be reasonably explained by the students studying together. The Council members noted that three of the students submitted study notes that contained the same error made on the exam. Since Students A, B, C, and D used those notes to study for the exam, the Council felt the similarities in test answers could have arisen without unauthorized collaboration.

The Council then moved on to discuss whether the students committed a violation by referencing notes during the exam. The exam directions stated that while the exam was open book, students were only allowed to reference Canvas materials when completing the exam.

Several of the students testified to using "notes" while taking the exam. Several Council members brought up how notes, specifically on an iPad, could refer to Canvas materials that the students' downloaded. Other Council members noted that in both the Canvas announcement, exam instructions, and Letter of Accusation, the professor never clarified if it was a violation for students to make their own notes on Canvas materials. Ultimately, the Honor Council concluded that the students' testimony of using "notes" on the exam was not sufficient evidence of a violation.

Finally, the Council discussed whether or not the "notes" referenced by the students contained material from outside sources. Per the exam instructions, referencing outside sources during the exam was an Honor Code violation. Some Council members brought up how the student's testified that they used outside sources to create a study guide to prepare for the exam. However, the Council found no evidence that those materials were used by Students A, B, C, and D while completing the exam. Ultimately, Council members decided there was a not preponderance of the evidence that the student referenced unauthorized materials when they took the exam.

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

Yes: 0

No: 5

Abstentions: 1

Decision:

The Honor Council thus finds Student A, B, C, and D "Not in Violation" of the Honor Code.

Time of testimony and deliberations: 1 hour and 53 minutes

Respectfully submitted,
Caroline Brehm
Clerk