

**Abstract of the Honor Council**  
**Case 50, Summer 2021**  
**November 13, 2021**

**Members Present:**

Matey Yanakiev (presiding), William Wang (clerk), Simon Yellen, Pedro Ribeiro, Caroline Brehm, Lynn-Chi Nguyen, and Jae Kim (observing)

**Ombuds:** Jack Fain

**Letter of Accusation:**

The Honor Council received a letter accusing Student A and Student B of collaborating on an exam for a lower level CHEM course. The Chair read the Letter of Accusation aloud in full.

**Evidence Submitted:**

- Letter of Accusation
- Revised Letter of Accusation
- Student A's written statement
- Student B's written statement
- Student A's exam
- Student B's exam
- Exam key
- Course Syllabus
- 10 Random Samples
- Student's evidence
  - Study guide (x2)
  - Worksheets (x2)
  - PowerPoint explaining reasons for mistakes

**Plea:**

Student A pled "Not in Violation."

Student B pled "Not in Violation."

**Testimony:**

Student A claimed the cause of her incorrect mechanism in Problem 1 was due to using what seemed to be an obvious approach from the worksheets that turned out to be wrong. She noted that a lot of her mistakes are common amongst other students and contested the fairness of some of the professor's accusations as they seemed to be nitpicking when the commonalities came from creating a study guide with Student B. Student A explained that the reasoning from her answers often came straight from this common source. This study guide was made by both students together and the same file was used by both students. She finally noted that studying together results in both students having very similar thought processes when creating mechanisms.

Student B corroborated that they used the same study guide they made together while taking the exam independently. She stated that rather specific mistakes came from finding very similar practice problems on their study guide.

**Verdict Deliberations:**

Council members believed that a preponderance of the evidence supported that a violation occurred because the substantial similarities between the two students' exams could not be adequately explained by anything short of impermissible collaboration. The Council considered that despite the study guide being exclusively in the handwriting of one student, both unanimously testified they had worked on its contents together. Since the syllabus was not specific enough on what constitutes one's "own notes," the Council did not agree unanimously whether the study guide violated the own-notes-only provision for the open-notes exam. Regardless, the Council did not feel that independent use of the same study guide adequately explained the substantial similarities between the two exams.

While the Council recognized a few instances where material from the study guide could have led to a similar answer content, information from the study guide could not explain several near-identical answers on the two students' exams. Even when the study guide included material relevant to the exam questions, the study guide never stated the content in a way that the two students could then have each individually used on their exams and so produce identical answers without active collaboration on the final. Yet the two exams shared several instances of near-identical logic, wording, notational style, and even visual placement on the page. Furthermore, the identical order in which both students strung together disparate information from various parts of the study guide could not likely be explained without impermissible collaboration on the exam itself.

Finally, there were near-identical sections of the exam not based on information from the study guide. Student A attributed her work in Problem 1 to synthesizing her answers from two previous worksheets. Student B, however, did not have access to Student A's worksheets (nor would these have been permissible materials to use on the exam), so the only plausible explanation for the two students' near-identical work in Problem 1 was impermissible collaboration.

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

Yes: 6+1  
 No: 0  
 Abstentions: 0

The Council then discussed whether each student committed a violation. Since there was presumed collaboration between the two, both were found in violation.

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

Yes: 6+1  
 No: 0  
 Abstentions: 0

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

Yes: 6+1

No: 0

Abstentions: 0

**Penalty Deliberations:**

Council members saw no aggravating or mitigating factors.

The CPS penalty for this case, based on the weight of the assignment, is a 3 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: 6+1

2 letter grade reduction: 0

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: 6+1

2 letter grade reduction: 0

1 letter grade reduction: 0

Letter of Reprimand 0

Abstentions: 0

**Decision:**

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

Time of testimony and deliberations: 2 hours and 45 minutes

Respectfully submitted,

William Wang

Clerk