

**Abstract of the Honor Council****Case 49, WI 2021****10/05/2023****Members Present:**

Pedro Ribeiro (presiding), Olivia Thom (clerk), Dean Toumajian, Rodolfo Gutierrez-Garcia, Caroline Snider, Lynn-Chi Nguyen, McKenzie Jameson (clerk observing)

**Ombuds:** Ammar Siddiqi**Letter of Accusation:**

The Honor Council received a letter accusing Student A, B and C of unauthorized collaboration (defined as plagiarism) in an assignment for a Glasscock School of Continuing Studies 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 C's written statement
- Answers to Investigator Questions from IM
- Audit of Assignments under Suspicion (previously conducted by external sources not employed by the Council)
- Collaboration Clarification
- Bootcamp course syllabus
- Analysis email findings sent to Student B
- Assignment instructions
- Letter of Accusation Clarification
- Reply to the analysis finding
- Sequence of events
- Enrollment agreement of Student B
- Limited documents of Students A's, B's and C's assignments
- Clarification videos about collaboration policy with instructors

**Plea:**

Student A pled "not in violation."

Student B pled "not in violation"

Student C pled "not in violation"

**Testimony:**

Student A joined a Continuing Studies course and was encouraged by a counselor that this course would require peer collaboration. Student A, B and C all share a familial connection and all students joined the course together. Early on, this group of students' work was pinged for plagiarism under the course's policy. Student A described that the

student worked within a larger study group. However, they were all on their separate machines, but there was only one correct way to get correct output. The class and the study group meetings were all on Zoom and involved taking virtual screenshots and sharing screens. Student A was sharing a screen and peers helped them through the project. The assignment, which was an earlier assignment in the course, was pinged as plagiarism towards the latter half of the course. Student A asked for comparison to the rest of the class, which was conducted. Student A felt that the course hyper focused on this accused group of students' work. Student A stated that no code was copied and pasted but did use Google to find different codes. Student A with the other students, googled workarounds and troubleshooting questions. Student A met with a course instructor and a TA multiple times to be informed that their code was pinged for plagiarism prior to this accusation. Student A did not cite the use of peer work on the assignment and did not express a knowledge of this procedure.

Student B stated they were encouraged to work together and did so within a study group with more than just the accused. The assignment in question was worked on within this study group. Student B called attention that the similar submission times were due to the fact that the study group met close to the deadline and therefore turned them in at similar times. Student B stated that they wrote code on one platform and copied and pasted their finished work into the preferred platform. Student B felt that they were always encouraged to work together and the instructor explicitly told the students over Zoom that they could share code during the final project (after the accused assignment). Student B said that this assignment was the first coding assignment, so they used the code that was given in the presentations as they would not know how else to write this code. Student B felt that the group of accused students was being targeted due to their familial relationship. Student B stated that the course assignments were on the internet but they did not use these resources. Student B was told by a course instructor that their assignments were being flagged as similar to other students' in meetings prior to the accusation. Student B Googled answers within class with full knowledge from the professor; some assignments did have answers online and this Googling was encouraged. Student B felt that there was only one way to get the code output. Student B did not cite the use of peer work on the assignment and did not express a knowledge of this procedure.

Student C stated they were new to the course content and was encouraged by an advisor to take the course together with Students A and B. Student C found the course fast-paced and not beginner-friendly, and therefore would join a study group with 10 or 12 other students (including the accused students) on Zoom. Student C stated that they were encouraged to work together and to Google and find the answers. Student C and the study group used their own computers and own virtual machines. Student C said they were new to coding and therefore just used the code which was taught and then referred to an internet search if they could not find the answer in the class material. Student C felt that if this was a violation, then not just the three students should be accused. Student C also did

not cite use of peer collaboration on the portion of the assignments and were never aware of a need to do so.

Witness A:

A Witness was called by the accused to testify. The witness was also a student of the course and stated that the course was not true to its beginner nature and therefore did require collaboration, which was encouraged. This collaboration occurred on Zoom meetings throughout the weekend with 9-12 students. The instructor encouraged the use of Google and peers for help on questions because the timing of the course was too short. The instructor did encourage students to screenshot each step of the process. The Witness stated that when the instructor's materials were used, then the students would use the code and if not, then the Witness would Google it and have it explained later. Codes which were found online were often different from the answers which were explained after the assignment was completed. The Witness said that everyone would have the same code if the students used the same resources, but variations were definitely possible. The Witness also did not cite when they used code from peers.

**Verdict Deliberations:**

Council members believed that a preponderance of the evidence supported that a violation did not occur because the Council felt it could not make a truly informed decision because of a lack of evidence and, therefore, all members abstained.

The Council discussed whether or not a violation has occurred on the basis of the possible code similarities between the accused students. While the students acknowledged parts of their code were the same, Council members thought that since we had no access to the code itself, it was impossible to determine whether their collaboration passed the bounds of acceptability. Council members did express some concern over the written instruction which seemed to contradict the collaboration expectations given by the instructor in their deposition.

Council members considered whether the syllabus policy of crediting group work would mean the students were in violation. While the instructor's syllabus and assignment were clear that work was not allowed to be identical and must be cited when peer code resources were used, the witness brought in also did not cite her study group. Furthermore, the students were sufficiently transparent about their working together with a group on all assignments, and since no other assignment was flagged for this, the Council deduced this policy was not enforced.

Ultimately, the whole Council resigned to abstention, due to not being able to get the assignments in full submitted by the accused students (only the outputs were submitted to us). This was despite an effort by the Council to get the original codes submitted by the students as well as explanation of said code from a course professor. The Council finds that in order to make a truly informed decision based on a preponderance of evidence, the

evidence in full must be presented to the Council. The Council cannot fully rely on a discernment of the evidence by a third-party.

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

Yes: 0

No: 0

Abstentions: 6

**Decision:**

The Honor Council thus finds Student A, B and C “not In Violation” of the Honor Code.

Time of testimony and deliberations: 2 hours and 30 minutes.

Respectfully submitted,

Olivia Thom

Clerk