

Abstract of the Honor Council**Case 25-1, Fall 2023****04/04/2024****Members Present:**

Rodolfo Guitierrez-Garcia (presiding), Kamal Tijani (clerk), Dean Toumajian (Chair Observing), Pedro Ribeiro, Riya Yarlagadda, Anastasia Loiko

Ombuds: Phillip Seo**Letter of Accusation:**

The Honor Council received a letter accusing Student A, Student B, and Student C of unauthorized collaboration during multiple exams for a lower-level PHYS 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
- Random Samples from 3 Exams in the Class
- Communications with Professors for Additional Evidence
- Professor Exam Statement
- Witness Statements for 4 different Witnesses
- Notes Sheets from Students A, B, and C.
- Class Syllabus
- Student Accuser Witness Statement
- Three Exams from Student A's
- Three Exams from Student B's
- Three Exams from Student C's
- Students A, B, and C's Practice Exams and Materials
- Canvas Announcements about the testing room assignment

Plea:

Student A pled "Not In Violation"

Student B pled "Not In Violation "

Student C Pled "Not In Violation "

Testimony:

Student A was the first to give their opening statement, detailing that all work on the exam was done independently. Furthermore, they contend that they provided nor received aid on the exam. The student claims to have their testing materials spread out between two desks on both sides of them. Student A details being in a study group with Students

B and C for most of the semester. They agreed with the seating arrangement outlined in the Accusing Student's witness statement. They deny ever having passed papers. They remember hearing some whispering and general noise during the exam. Student A was the first of the 3 to leave the exam room.

Student B gave their testimony next and affirmed the seating formation outlined in the Accusing Student's witness statement. They stored their exam materials including notes and a calculator and finished the exam 30 to 45 minutes before the end time of the exam. They left the exam room second, after student A. They also described some distracting noise 30 minutes into the exam. Student B was in the same study group as the other 2 accused students and skipped class in favor of learning by themselves. They argue that the similarities between the mistakes on the first 2 exams support that they had the same understanding as proof of studying together. They achieved these scores despite being in separate rooms. Student B denies having collaborated in the manner described by the accused student's witness statement, which describes passing papers, looking at each other's testing materials, and writing on each other's papers. They argue that the validity of the accusing student's statement is weak since the accuser is also taking the exam which also subjects them to a very charged and stressful environment.

Student C gave their testimony last, describing that they were in a study group with the other 2 students. Student C stored testing materials in the same seat as Student A. They would then look over their testing materials to help them during the exam. Around halfway through the exam, Student C heard strange noises/shuffling and didn't pay any attention to it due to running out of time on the exam. They claim to have finished with 2 or 3 minutes left of the exam. For the first 2 exams, Student C entered and took the exam next to a witness who gave a statement.

Verdict Deliberations:

In general, the council ruled out a violation occurring during the first 2 exams for Students A and B. Student C's answers on their first 2 exams seem to change to match the other two students without an explanation through written work, but the council lacked the evidence to decide that a violation had occurred their primarily due to the student's last names placing them in different testing rooms. Students A and C were in the same testing room, but there was no evidence they collaborated since witness and accused student testimony placed them in vastly different parts of the exam room. Some members felt Student C still could have committed a violation on the first two exams, but the multiple-choice format did not require written work for every problem and other council members felt that the questions that lacked work could have been solved mentally or with a quick calculator entry.

The final exam was the most scrutinized. The council members were split on whether a violation occurred for sure on the final exam, as the sum of questionable occurrences all had plausible explanations. However, the council noticed a clear difference in explanations of written work on the exam between the students. The exam was multiple choice; therefore, the level of work shown wasn't part of the credit given for submitting an answer.

Student A showed a lot of work on the booklet to explain why he arrived at certain answers. Student B showed a lot of work as well but the council at times could not decipher why they chose a different answer to what the work showed. After discussion, the council reasoned that the final steps missing that would lead to a different answer could have been done on a calculator or mentally. Student C showed the least amount of work compared to the others, and the council felt that their responses to questions about their thought process were unconvincing. Furthermore, Student C's exam featured the most evidence of erasing an answer choice and changing it to be aligned with the other two students' answers regardless of if they were correct or incorrect. The council felt that their weak explanations and lack of work went beyond the threshold of mental or calculator work and therefore couldn't understand why Student C would change their answers without reworking the process.

There was little evidence to conclude that all three students gave or received unauthorized aid to each other. Council members were wary that their seating arrangement was a coordinated tactic to help each other without being spotted since all three students admitted there was enough space to spread further out and they weren't constrained to a single row. All three students sat a desk apart, with the order from left to right being Student B, Student A, and Student C. Student A sat in the middle and placed some testing materials on each of the two desks, allowing for Students B and C to view Student A's testing materials. However, there wasn't evidence of written communication on the submitted testing materials since no evidence of foreign handwriting was discovered on each student's notes sheets or pledge problems. That didn't rule out any communication, but the Council ultimately felt it lacked the evidence to affirm that the cheating occurred specifically in this manner.

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

Yes: 6
 No: 0
 Abstentions: 0

Straw Poll #2: Does a preponderance of the evidence support that Student A is "In Violation" for Exam 1?

Yes: 0
 No: 6
 Abstentions: 0

Straw Poll #3: Does a preponderance of the evidence support that Student B is "In Violation" for Exam 1?

Yes: 0
 No: 6
 Abstentions: 0

Straw Poll #4: Does a preponderance of the evidence support that Student C is "In Violation" for Exam 1?

Yes: 2
 No: 3

Abstentions: 1

Straw Poll #5: Does a preponderance of the evidence support that Student A is “In Violation” for Exam 2?

Yes: 0

No: 6

Abstentions: 0

Straw Poll #6: Does a preponderance of the evidence support that Student B is “In Violation” for Exam 2?

Yes: 0

No: 6

Abstentions: 0

Straw Poll #7: Does a preponderance of the evidence support that Student C is “In Violation” for Exam 2?

Yes: 2

No: 3

Abstentions: 1

Straw Poll #8: Does a preponderance of the evidence support that Student A is “In Violation” for Exam 3?

Yes: 2

No: 2

Abstentions: 2

Straw Poll #9: Does a preponderance of the evidence support that Student B is “In Violation” for Exam 3?

Yes: 1

No: 3

Abstentions: 2

Straw Poll #10: Does a preponderance of the evidence support that Student C is “In Violation” for Exam 3?

Yes: 6

No: 0

Abstentions: 0

Penalty Deliberations:

Council members opened by discussing mitigating circumstances. The Council felt there were no mitigating nor aggravating circumstances.

The CPS penalty for this case, based on the weight of the assignment, is an F in the course.

Straw Poll #11: What is the appropriate penalty for Student C?

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

The CPS severity starts at a baseline of severity level 2 (reprimand).

Straw Poll #12: What is the appropriate severity level for Student C?

Expulsion:	0
Suspension:	0
Reprimand:	6
Warning:	0
Abstentions:	0

Decision:

The Honor Council thus finds Student C “In Violation” of the Honor Code and recommends that they receive an F in the course.

Time of testimony and deliberations: 4 hrs 15 min

Respectfully submitted,
Kamal Tijani
Clerk