

Abstract of the Honor Council
Case 7, Fall 2009
December 10, 2009

Members Present:

Jackie Ammons (presiding), Melissa Fwu (clerk), Kaleb Underwood, Austin Edwards, Matthew Diasio, Trey Burns, Andrew Patterson, Kate Snyder, Deian Tabakov, Jeff Worne (observing), Elizabeth Marks (observing)

Ombuds: Vivian Ban and Eric Harrison (observing)

Letter of Accusation:

The Honor Council received a letter accusing Student A of plagiarizing on an essay in a lower level humanities course.

Evidence Submitted:

- Letter of Accusation
- Student A's written statement
- Course syllabus
- Student A's paper
- Alleged Source 1
- Alleged Source 2
- Alleged Source 3
- Professor deposition
- TA #1 deposition
- TA #2 deposition
- Email from student to TA #2 with attachment
- Email from TA #2 to student
- Additional bibliography source

Plea:

Student A pled "In Violation."

Testimony:

Student A began his testimony by presenting additional evidence to the Council. The evidence included printouts of two of the sources used in the original essay, a revised copy of the essay in question with quotation marks and in-text citations, and an updated bibliography with all the sources Student A used in his essay.

The student explained that when the professor verbally introduced the essay in class, no written instructions were provided to the students, no specific format was given, and that the professor said that in-text citations were optional. The student also did not remember either the professor or TAs saying anything about needing to use quotation marks.

Student A explained that since he thought the professor said in-text citations were not necessary, Student A understood this to mean that he did not need quotation marks or to

distinguish between his own words and information from sources. He thought that since the professor said in-text citations were not necessary, the professor would know that the paper was a “mesh” between the student’s words and that of the sources. Student A noted that he had never before written a research paper without in-text citations. However, Student A said he understood that he was expected to give credit to all the sources with a bibliography.

Student A also addressed the fact portions of his paper were copied word-for-word from sources that were not in his bibliography. He stated that the omission was not intentional; instead, he was in a rush and did not realize that he had not included them in the bibliography. Also, Student A claimed that he did not cite one of the articles (Source #2 in Letter of Accusation) in his bibliography because he thought that he had already cited the “umbrella” website for that article. However, Student A said he forgot to cite the umbrella source and instead cited another article he used from the website.

Student A stated that he usually puts his papers through a plagiarism checker before he submits papers, but he did not do so with the paper in question.

Before the hearing, Student A submitted an outline he had written for the paper which included citations of some of his sources. The outline was an updated version of the one he emailed to TA #2 when he asked TA #2 for help on his essay. The outline submitted to the TA did not include the list of sources. The student explained he did not have time to list the sources on the outline he submitted to TA #2 but that he later added them to the revised paper outline prior to writing the paper.

In the letter of accusation, the accuser also mentioned that one of Student A’s sources was a free essay or “cheat” site. Student A clarified that he did not realize the website was a “cheat” site.

Student A explained that he pled in violation because he forgot to include three sources in his bibliography. A Council member asked if Student A was also pleading in violation because he had not differentiated in the essay between his own work and that of others with quotation marks and in-text citations. Student A replied that he assumed if no in-text citations were necessary, then he did not need to use quotations, and thus he did not need to differentiate. Student A added that if differentiating was necessary, then he supposed he would be in violation of that as well.

Verdict Deliberations:

The Council recognized that Student A believed that he did not need in-text citations or quotation marks within his paper. However, because of the professor’s testimony, TA #1’s testimony, TA #2’s testimony, and the requirements of the Honor Code, the Council agreed that Student A violated the Honor Code. The letter of accusation and the evidence submitted to the Council by the accuser showed that over half of Student A’s paper was taken word-for-word from online sources with no in-text citations, quotation marks, or other means of differentiating her words from that of the online sources.

Furthermore, per the revised paper submitted to the Council by Student A, it appeared that almost the entirety of Student A's paper was without proper in-text citations and quotation marks and went beyond the scope of the plagiarism described in the letter of accusation.

Straw Poll #1: Is there clear and convincing evidence that a violation occurred?

Yes: 9

No: 0

Abstentions: 0

The Council agreed that Student A committed the violation.

Straw Poll #2: Is there clear and convincing evidence that Student A is "In Violation?"

Yes: 9

No: 0

Abstentions: 0

Straw Polls #1 and #2 made binding.

Penalty Deliberations:

Council members opened by discussing mitigating circumstances. All members felt that mitigation based on Student A's cooperation was appropriate, as he gave full disclosure and even brought in additional evidence against himself. As described above, this additional evidence actually showed that a larger portion of the paper was plagiarized than originally described by the letter of accusation.

Council members would not mitigate based on the nature of the violation due to the fact that the paper comprised thirty percent of the course grade and, within the paper itself, almost the entirety of the paper was plagiarized.

Council members then discussed aggravating circumstances. Members aggravated based on the nature of violation since the paper was a significant portion of the grade (thirty percent) and almost the entire paper was plagiarized.

Council members decided they would not aggravate for discrepancies between Student A's testimony and the professor and the two TA's testimony regarding the citation requirements for the assignment because Council members believed these discrepancies were due to Student A's misunderstanding of the assignment, not deceit.

One Council member suggested the idea of aggravating based on attempt to conceal the violation because the student had felt rushed in writing the paper and had copied from the sources he accessed, trying to pass them off as his own. However, the Council concluded that this idea was encompassed in the violation itself and that aggravation was not necessary for this reason.

Straw Poll #3: 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:	5
F in the course and 1 semester of suspension:	3
Abstentions:	1

The abstaining member stated that he wished to further discuss the weight of the aggravating circumstances versus the mitigating circumstances.

A Council member who voted for one semester of suspension argued that Student A's level of cooperation was high because Student A brought in addition evidence which further incriminated him. Another Council member stated that even without the additional evidence Student A submitted, the Council could have still found the student in violation but that some mitigation for Student A's additional evidence was certainly warranted.

A Council member who voted for two semesters of suspension argued that the reason he believed two semesters was appropriate was that because of the heavy weight of the essay and large percentage of it that was plagiarized, the aggravating circumstances canceled out the mitigating circumstances of Student A's cooperation.

Straw Poll #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:	7
F in the course and 1 semester of suspension:	2
Abstentions:	0

The abstaining member in Straw Poll #3 explained that he decided to vote for an F in the course and two semesters of suspension because his aggravation based on the extent and weight of the violation canceled out his mitigation based on Student A's cooperation. The Council member who changed his vote to F in the course and 2 semesters of suspension explained that after hearing the Council's discussion, he felt that the nature of the violation, including the weight of the assignment and the extent of the violation within the assignment, canceled out Student A's cooperation.

Straw Poll #4 made binding.

The Honor Council thus finds Student A "In Violation" of the Honor Code and recommends that he receive a F in the course and 2 semesters of suspension. A Prior Violation Flag is also attached to his record.

Time of testimony and deliberations: 1 hour and 22 minutes

Respectfully submitted,
Melissa Fwu
Clerk