

Abstract of the Honor Council
Case 13, Fall 2011
1/11/2012

Members Present:

Kaleb Underwood (presiding), Andrew Patterson (clerk)

Ombuds: Lila Kerr

Letter of Accusation:

The Honor Council received a letter accusing Student A of plagiarism on an extra credit assignment for a Lower level CAAM course.

Evidence Submitted:

- Letter of Accusation
- Student A's written statement (1 and 2)
- Student B's written statement (1 and 2)
- Course Syllabus
- Homework Solution
- Pan Homework
- Lee Homework
- Expert Depositions
- Labbie Depositions
- Labbie Session Sign in Sheets
- Lecture notes with assignment prompt
- Other student's homeworks
- Original emails from graders
- IT Department Deposition
- Examples of Student A's previous assignment submissions
- Prepared opening statement

Plea: Student A plead "not in violation".

Testimony:

Student A started by reading a written opening statement. He outlined the letter of accusation and investigation that followed. He states that the code he saw at the investigation was not his own and he was surprised. He outlined the lab Friday and Sunday night TA sessions. He did not finish the entire assignment by Sunday night. By Monday afternoon, he had mad commetns but was still working on the extra credit code. He spoke with Student B and asked if he had completed the extra credit code. Student A showed Student B the code that he had written on his computer. Student B asked whether he could run the code on Student B's computer. He published and showed Student A his assignment on Student A's computer. Student A went back to his

computer and turned in Student B's work instead. Student A thinks that his computer overwrote his own code with Student B's code. He says he would never violate the Honor Code.

He said that the entire work is not his own work and probably came from Student B's file. He does not know why Eric Lee was not called out for having code that was similar to the professor's solution. The council examined his code and asked why there were differences between Student A and Student B's work. He did not know why there are differences, but he suspects that Student B may have changed his work after showing it to him. He does not have the file on his computer. When asked why the two files are named differently, he says that he cannot remember specifically changing the name but remembers doing this at some point. When asked why the two codes are different in length, he replied that the output was different for the two codes. He replied that his main code was done before speaking with Eric.

He repeated his interaction with Student B and repeated that at some point student B took his computer where he could not see it and modified Student B's code. He published it and showed it to Student A. He said that Student B must have removed code before submitting because it is different from his own.

He mentioned that students are allowed to collaborate on code and talk about it. They can look at each other's code and discuss their thought processes. Another member asked a question about Student A's first written statement and talked about why it mentioned that they did not work together. He responded that he was mistaken and that what he mentioned today is correct; Eric did see his code and they interacted over it. He mentioned that he did not go in and change Eric's code. What he has said today is what he says is the truth.

He says that Student B opened the file, but Student A did not know what to change. He never directly altered anything on the computer. He says that he does not remember changing anything himself. He mentions again that he did not remember correctly when writing the statement and what he mentioned in his opening statement was correct.

He checked the syntax with Student B.

When asked why his earlier statement was incorrect, he responded that he did not think clearly through it when he gave his first statement. He says he never had access to professors code. He only had access to Eric's code on his computer.

When asked about similar syntax mistakes which seem highly unlikely, he responds that the extra credit was not his own and he never checked his code again after submitting it.

He ran the code as he turned it in and it published. Although the expert witness mentioned that the code would not run as written, he says that the code did run correctly. The error was not caught when he published the code.

During the week he took notes in class, wrote a skeleton code, went to a Friday help session where everyone is helping each other, he also went to a Sunday night help session where he would usually finish the code.

He usually comments last when writing code. He wrote his header and name and turned it in after going to the gym without noticing that the code was not his own. When asked if Student B published his work on his computer he responded yes. He then went back and added a header and turned it in. When asked why Student B would change his code, he responded that he did not know.

A witness was brought in for questioning:

He is a TA from CAAM 210. He worked with Student A. He stated that they worked together and never gave Student A his answer code. Student A would usually work alone. He saw Student A doing his own work during the help sessions.

When asked about the TA session before the assignment in question was due, he replied that nothing extraordinary happened. He outlined what would happen when he was helping students at the help sessions. He mentioned that collaboration is allowed, but direct copying is not allowed. He says that it is typical that students work together and that students can publish the PDF with errors in it.

When asked if you can copy code he mentioned that they can look at each other's code but are not allowed to copy directly.

The witness looked at the code in question and Student B's code and commented on similarities and differences. The first code examined was Student B's. He mentioned that the two codes are derived from each other. He mentioned that he did not specifically remember seeing Student A's code or whether he had finished it. He said that he did not give help on the extra credit to anyone.

He mentioned that the assignment was worth roughly 5 to 6 percent of the total course grade. He mentioned that Eric looked at his code in the afternoon. He says that Student A never mentioned when he was going to submit his assignment.

An honor council member went through a sequence of events with Student A and asked him to correct if anything was wrong.

When he was asked when he changed his file name from socialdrive to socialdriver, he does not remember when the change took place. The name of the assignment is socialdrive. It was typical for him to add the r to the end of the assignment name.

The accused reviewed some of his submitted assignments and noted that many files ended with the word "drive." He did not remember changing the name of the file.

He stated that he believed that Student B's main code ran correctly but he was not sure about his extra credit code.

He mentioned that he usually was not very careful when checking his work. He said that the comments are not his own. When asked what tipped him off that the code was not his own. He said that because the issue was raised that the code was similar to the answer key, he knew that the code was not his own. He also knew from the comments that the code was not his own. He says he realized this at the investigation meeting.

When asked about the similarities between his syntax and the code in question, he says that he just writes what comes to the top of his head. He says that if there is a simple answer, then he just writes a short comment. When asked about the spacing of the percent sign, he was not sure but mentioned that the percent sign restricts the code.

He was asked about his comments again and why they are distinctly different, he mentions that Student B seems to have made his comments much longer than his own.

He was asked about the extra credit and that Student B's code was not publishing. Eric was able to make the file publish on his computer. He says that his code is longer because there is output.

He gave a closing statement and said that he would never knowingly commit an honor code violation. He thanked the council for coming and helping to resolve the situation and listening to him. He reiterated that he thought the code was his own when he submitted it. He thought that his submission was his own work and is therefore not in violation of the honor code.

Verdict Deliberations:

Based on the similarities between the professors solution and the two student's works an act of plagiarism has occurred. The parts that come from the extra credit session seem to have only been able to come from the professor.

One member suggests that Student A copied Student B's work, regardless of his intentions.

The works are too similar to have been coincidentally. There was a submission of another's work as his own, which constitutes an act of plagiarism.

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

Yes: 9

No: 0

Abstentions: 0

The Council then discussed whether or not Student A committed the violation.

None saw evidence to the contrary that Student A committed the violation

Straw Poll #2: Does a preponderance of the evidence support 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. A Member mentioned that it is difficult to define Student A’s intent.

Another is not mitigating for weight. The discussion of intent and cooperation were intertwined.

Members first discussed the weight and amount. Because the entire work was plagiarized, they decided not to mitigate on amount of assignment but many are mitigating based on weight. There was a discussion of the weight of the assignment and there was consensus that it was above 5% and a little higher.

A member states that there must be a discussion of the probability that this violation was unintentional. Given that there were large differences between the story given in the written statement and the story given today, it may be true that he intended to submit another student’s work.

Another council member spoke about the likelihood that there was deceit. He mentioned that there were discrepancies between his own statement about his work ethic and the story presented about his efforts on this particular assignment. Another member mentioned that his claim about what he could see when he submitted the assignment was strange. Another mentioned that this was reaching towards speculation. Another mentioned that it was improbable that there were drastic changes in the comments. A member mentions that when going line by line looking at the comments, Eric’s version is much expanded. The order exactly correlates. It seems possible that his is a primitive version of what Eric ultimately submitted. The comments are much shorter than what he usually turns in.

The comment evidence supports the argument that there was some sort of change in the comments but it is not apparent who made the changes.

It seems improbable that he did not notice that the code had been changed when he added his name. The samples submitted from other students are substantially different in formatting. He would have seen the top part of his code.

In the written statement he made several statements that were not consistent with his current recollection of events. Another member said it seemed more probable that the assignment in question was a rough draft of Student B's work.

It seems highly unlikely that Michael would have changed his file name by adding an r. In his statement he claimed that he added the "r" arbitrarily.

There was then a discussion of aggravating factors.

A member asked what factors would lead one to believe there was deceit beyond the change of file name and language similarities.

A member responded that it is improbable that Student A ever saw his own work and did not recognize that it was his own. Ombuds mentioned that there was something near the end of the assignment which indicated that it was not his own.

The language interpreted by Michael is sometimes confusing, and his understanding seemed to be somewhat flawed.

The council discussed whether suspension was warranted. One member believed there was deceit of the council and that this warranted suspension. Another member was unsure. Another member believed that if there was no deceit and the violation was accidental, then a letter of reprimand was warranted.

Another mentioned that an F and 2 was appropriate. Another believes that his credibility was impugned, but was unsure whether he intentionally submitted the assignment and thus a one letter grade reduction was warranted.

Two members believed that there was clear deceit of the council. The abstaining member mentioned that it was unclear whether there was deceit or not. Suspension does not seem to be warranted.

Finally, a member mentioned that his credibility was severely impugned by the change in story from the written statement to the opening statement. The member is unsure whether there was deceit. He was very confused. He mentioned that the penalty that seemed warranted would be something greater than a one letter grade reduction. A letter grade reduction seems necessary but would be more comfortable with an F in the course.

Straw Poll #3: What is the appropriate penalty for Student A?

F in the course and 2 semesters of suspension:	3
F in the course and 1 semester of suspension:	0
F in the course:	2

3 letter grade reduction:	0
2 letter grade reduction:	2
1 letter grade reduction	1
Abstentions:	1

The abstaining member does not feel comfortable going to suspension since he could not determine deceit. But feels that the violation was severe enough to warrant a three letter grade reduction.

Those voting for a two letter grade reduction did not feel that suspension was warranted.

Another mentioned that he believes that deceit occurred but cannot prove it. The fact that this was a significant violation warranted a two letter grade reduction. The strange change in stories was also suspicious.

Those who voted for F and 2 believed that there was deceit and hard evidence for it. He provided the evidence that the changing of the stories was suspicious. He could not determine which was more likely to occur.

A member argued that without the ability to show that another story was false he would not vote for deceit.

One member believed that there was deceit.

Straw Poll #4: What is the appropriate penalty for Student A?

F in the course and 2 semesters of suspension:	2
F in the course and 1 semester of suspension:	1
F in the course:	3
3 letter grade reduction:	1
2 letter grade reduction:	2
1 letter grade reduction	0
Abstentions:	0

Those that changed their vote from 2 letter grade reduction to three letter grade reduction primarily due to the severity of the violation.

Another member mentioned that he was willing to move down for the sake of consensus.

Those who voted for a letter grade reduction against an F voted because they did not believe that the assignment in question was that significant. A member moved from 1 letter reduction to F to show willingness to move to consensus. Another member is willing to move up in order to prevent suspension, although a clear majority does not support suspension.

A member was on the fence between F and 3 letter grade reduction. However, he feels that the student was lying and will vote for an F.

In further discussion, no members were vocally opposed to an F in the course.

Straw Poll #5: What is the appropriate penalty for Student A?

F in the course and 2 semesters of suspension:	1
F in the course and 1 semester of suspension:	0
F in the course:	7
3 letter grade reduction:	0
2 letter grade reduction:	1
1 letter grade reduction	0
Abstentions:	0

There was no further discussion.

Straw Poll #5 made binding.

The Honor Council thus finds Student A “In Violation” of the Honor Code and recommends that he receive a grade of F. A Prior Violation Flag is also attached to his record.

Time of testimony and deliberations: 3 hrs and 12 minutes

Respectfully submitted,
Andrew Patterson
Clerk