

Abstract of the Honor Council
Case #8 Fall 2011
October 7, 2011

Members Present:

Kaleb Underwood (presiding), Abby Endler (clerk), Adam Hartman, Hurst Williamson, Leah Brown, Likeleli Seitlheko, Ed Tsai, Matthew Diasio, Isabelle Lelogeais

Ombuds: Alec Lignitz

Letter of Accusation:

The Honor Council received a letter accusing Student A of plagiarizing an essay for a lower level Humanities course.

Evidence Submitted:

- Letter of Accusation
- Student A's written statement
- Course Syllabus
- Student A's paper and alleged source, with professor's and investigator's notes
- Course text

Plea:

Student A pled "in violation."

Testimony:

Student A used their written statement as an opening statement. The student said that she looked at the source while writing the paper, but did not intentionally copy the source. The student said that she only took one line verbatim from the article, and the rest of the similarities between the article and the paper result from her reading the article and taking notes on it while reading. She took notes on a Word document while reading the article, but did not copy anything from the article directly into her notes. With regards to the lack of any citations in her paper, the student said that she was running out of time and did not think that citations on such a minor assignment were crucial. She said that because these assignments are so minor, her papers for these assignments usually rely on class discussion and the text, which is why she did not think to cite the outside source used on this paper. The assignment for this paper called for "personal reflection," and the student said that she consulted an outside source on this assignment to gain more insight into the topic of the paper. The student felt that her textbook did not leave much room for interpretation, and by consulting an outside source she had hoped to be able to elaborate more on her response for this assignment. The student showed the Council how the textbook does not provide much outside information for her to respond to, which is why she wanted outside information to complete the assignment. In her written statement, the student referred to a "plagiarism-checking software" which she used after being made aware of the plagiarism accusation, because she recalled handing in the assignment without citations, and wanted to see if she had unintentionally committed plagiarism on the assignment. The student said that part of the reason that her paper is written the way

that it is written is because part of the assignment was for her to summarize a story, and to then reflect upon it. The student said that a lot of the assignment was her own thoughts, but she used the source to help her summarize the story and the important concepts it presented. She pointed to different ideas and interpretations that she had come up with on her own, without the use of the textbook or the outside source. She said that the paper is very true to her writing style. Even though the paper closely follows both many of the wording and the general presentation of information in the outside source, the student maintained that this paper is largely her own thought. She pointed to specific ideas and theses that she came up with on her own, and that she did not rely on the outside source while writing. The student said that she was not aware that specific ideas found in her paper also appeared in the outside source that she read. In reading the outside article, she said that she did read the whole article, which she said that she found online from Google. She said that in writing the paper, there were other websites that she looked at, but most of those sources were not used for her paper (she relied most on this outside source). The student said that her professor did not limit the sources that they could use for these assignments.

In her closing statement, the student said that her plagiarism was not intentional, and that she takes both the class and the assignments seriously.

Verdict Deliberations:

Council members believed that a preponderance of the evidence supported that a violation occurred because of the exact replication of wording from the outside source in the student's essay. The Council mentioned that the professor did not seem to have a clear policy on outside sources, but concluded that the student's work still

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.

The Council saw no reason that Student A did not commit 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. The Council discussed the weight of the assignment as a mitigating factor, because the assignment in question was such a small percent of her course grade.

The Council discussed that the student was cooperative, but that her cooperation did not necessarily bring in information that helped the Council reach its decision, and that therefore they would not mitigate for cooperation. With regards to the amount of the assignment, the Council agreed that this was not a relevant mitigating factor, as the amount of the assignment that was plagiarized was substantial. The Council discussed the professor's unclear policy regarding outside sources, but discussed the fact that many of the assignments in the course are based upon personal reflection, and therefore perhaps the professor did not think a policy regarding outside sources was necessary. Regardless of the course policy on outside sources, the Council emphasized that plagiarism from outside sources is never permitted.

The Council did not see any reason that aggravating factors apply in this case.

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:	0	
F in the course and 1 semester of suspension:	0	
F in the course:	5	4
3 letter grade reduction:	2	4
2 letter grade reduction:	0	0
1 letter grade reduction:	1	1
Abstentions:	1	0

In discussion of the appropriate penalty, the Council began by discussing whether or not suspension was an appropriate penalty. The Council was divided over whether or not suspension was appropriate. The Council members who did not believe that suspension was appropriate pointed to the fact that the weight of the assignment was very small. The members agreeing with this opinion felt that suspension was too harsh a punishment for an assignment with this weight, especially with a consideration of precedence. Council members, arguing that suspension was appropriate, pointed to the fact that so much of the assignment itself was plagiarized. These Council members said that they felt that the fact that so much of the assignment was copied verbatim from the outside source made suspension warranted. In this discussion, the Chair reminded the Council that the purpose of suspension was both punitive and rehabilitative.

The member who abstained from Straw Poll 3 explained that they were between a 3 and 2 letter grade reduction – unsure about whether or not the student's uncertainty that they were plagiarizing should factor into their penalty decision. The member who voted for a 1 letter grade reduction in straw poll 3 said that they did not feel comfortable giving the student a penalty higher than a 1 letter grade reduction due to the small weight of the assignment.

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:	0
F in the course and 1 semester of suspension:	0
F in the course:	4
3 letter grade reduction:	4
2 letter grade reduction:	0
1 letter grade reduction:	1
Abstentions:	0

After straw poll #4, the council discussed the difference between an F in the course and a 3 letter grade reduction. Because an F in the course and a 3 letter grade reduction are such close penalties, the Council discussed that the key in the distinction between the two is whether or not the student deserves to receive credit in the course. The Council first discussed the student's intent in plagiarism. A Council member pointed to the fact that the plagiarism in the student's paper was nearly verbatim with the outside source as a reason that an F in the course was an appropriate penalty. Another Council member said that the student's plagiarism pointed to a lack of respect for the academic environment as reason for an F in the course. This member emphasized that in an academic community, plagiarism of an assignment to the extent that this assignment is plagiarized is a serious offense. Another Council member said that because the student put very little of her own words into the paper, she should not receive credit in the course. The Chair discussed that the student's paper follows the outside source nearly exactly, the student copied much of the wording of the paper – because of this, they felt that an F in the course was called for. A council member pointed out that it's important to distinguish between degrees of violations of academic integrity. A council member also pointed out that the fact that this is the student's major is significant, because this is her chosen field.

Straw Poll #5: 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:	7
3 letter grade reduction:	1
2 letter grade reduction:	0
1 letter grade reduction:	1
Abstentions:	0

Straw Poll #5 made binding.

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

Time of testimony and deliberations:
Testimony: 26 minutes
Deliberations: 53 minutes

Respectfully submitted,
Abby Endler
Clerk