

Abstract of the Honor Council
Case 22, Spring 2010
March 29, 2010

Members Present:

Lindsay Kirton (presiding), Justine Lin (clerk), Trey Burns, Sean Sessel, Adnan Poonawala, Kate Snyder, Deian Tabakov, Erin Waller, Jeff Worne, David Liou (Observing), Keenan May (Observing)

Ombuds: Lila Kerr

Letter of Accusation:

The Honor Council received a letter accusing Student A and Student B of collaborating on a final exam for an upper level Engineering course.

Evidence Submitted:

- Letter of Accusation
- Student A's written statement
- Student B's written statement
- Course Syllabus
- Student A's Exam
- Student B's Exam
- Accuser Deposition
- Originals of Student A's and Student B's Exams
- Final Exam Prompt (also included w/student's exams)
- Solutions to Final Exam

Plea:

Student A pled "In Violation."

Student B pled "Not In Violation."

Testimony:

Student A pleaded in violation after admitting that she looked at Student B's test. Due to the several months between the actual incident and the accusation email, she finds it hard to remember specific details, but stated that she wanted to answer all questions as thoroughly as possible. Student B pled not in violation, since she left her test with Student A before leaving for a flight and did not know what happened after giving her test to Student A. Student B clarified that when she left on Monday morning, she had already completed the test and needed Student A turn in the test for her since Student B could not access the building before her flight left on Monday.

When asked about the logistics of the copying, Student A stated that she didn't have her own test out while examining Student B's test. Student A did look over Student B's test before starting her own. Student A then completed her own test, but brought out Student B's test to double check answers after completing her own test.

According to Student A, she looked at Student B's test for a long time, and studied it thoroughly. However, the decision Student A made to cheat off Student B's test was developed fairly quickly, and was, for Student A, a spur of the moment decision.

Student A then testified that she turned in both tests on the due date in the afternoon between 3:00-4:00PM.

Student B pointed out that the syllabus provided differed slightly from the actual working syllabus in the class due to a couple of changes made by the professor during the semester. In the updated syllabus, the test weight changed from 30% to 20% of the final grade.

When questioned about which answers she copied, Student A said she didn't exactly remember which questions she copied, but did remember that because she had looked at Student B's test earlier, several answers were already formulated in her head and corroborated by Student B's answers. On the whole, Student A stated that she really wasn't sure exactly how much of the test she did on her own. She then specified that she completed number one herself, had a definition of number three on her cheat sheet, and probably copied number four. For the other questions, Student A stated she probably took the answers from Student B.

Student A said the first time she saw the exam was when she was studying Student B's completed exam. Student A also admitted to going back after finishing her own exam and once again, comparing answers to Student B's exam.

In the closing statements, Student A reiterated her plea of in violation of the Honor Code, stated that she knew this was a serious matter, and apologized for the inconvenience she caused. Student B reiterated her plea of not in violation because she had no knowledge whatsoever of this case or the copying until she was summoned for investigation.

Verdict Deliberations:

Council members believed that there was clear and convincing evidence that a violation occurred because Student A admitted to looking at Student B's exam and using this unauthorized aid to complete her own exam. Members also thought there were two parts to the violation: first, looking at Student B's exam before starting her own test and secondly going back after Student A had finished to check her final answers and work with that of Student B's.

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

Yes: 9
No: 0
Abstentions: 0

The Council then discussed whether or not Student A committed the violation, and since Student A admitted to taking Student B's exam and looking at it, there was a unanimous decision that Student A was in fact, in violation, and that Student B was not in violation.

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

Yes: 9

No: 0

Abstentions: 0

Straw Poll #3: Is there clear and convincing evidence that Student B is "In Violation?"

Yes: 0

No: 9

Abstentions: 0

Straw Polls #1, #2, #3 made binding.

Penalty Deliberations:

Council members opened by discussing mitigating circumstances. All members stated that they would mitigate on cooperation, since Student A did give a full and honest disclosure of all events, and her mindset during her actions. Others mentioned the amount of detail that she offered, and that even though there was a fairly large lag between the case and the incident, Student A voluntarily offered a lot of information, even information she knew might condemn her. Some members voiced the possibility to mitigate on nature, but in the end decided not to do so due to the large weight of the exam and the extent of the copying. Members agreed that although Student A couldn't remember exactly what problems she copied when she looked at Student B's exam, the knowledge of Student B's answers helped her on the entire test. Members also agreed that if it were not for Student A's disclosure and "In Violation" plea, the job of the Council to determine whether a violation occurred would have been much harder and more time consuming.

Then Council members discussed aggravating circumstances, and nature of the violation was what stood out most. Since 20% is a large portion of the final class grade, and the problems copied were a large portion of test, members decided to aggravate unanimously on nature. One member aggravated on nature because Student A's actions were not only harmful to the academic culture of Rice but also because they could have been potentially very harmful for Student B. One member brought up a similar past case in which the aggravation for this case potentially included the violation being deemed a heinous violation. However, Council members agreed that this violation was not heinous and that the mitigation for cooperation would cancel out some of the aggravation for nature. Additional discussion was brought up about the damage to the integrity of the other student, as well as the possible damage to the student body as a whole, since after this incident, the professor may be disinclined to give take-home exams. However, members brought up that the Council is here as a safeguard against attacks on personal and societal integrities and that the potential results of cases should not be used as either mitigating or aggravating circumstances.

Some members thought perhaps premeditation was involved as an aggravating factor, but according to Student A's testimony, he spent a minimal amount of time deciding whether to cheat, and a greater amount of time actually carrying through with his plan.

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:	2
F in the course and 1 semester of suspension:	6
F in the course:	0
Abstentions:	1

The member who abstained was between recommending an F and 2 semester suspension and an F and 1 semester suspension and was undecided about how much to mitigate/aggravate. More discussion occurred with main points being that, in essence, the entire test was copied, since although Student A did do the test without Student B's test open in front of her, she looked at it enough before taking her own exam that all of her answers were compromised. Additional discussion came up about cooperation, which still played a large part in the Council's recommendations and whether it deserved more than one semester of mitigation from members of the council than the one semester of aggravation based on nature.

Straw Poll #5: 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:	6
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 an F in the course and 1 semester suspension. A Prior Violation Flag is also attached to her record. The Honor Council finds Student B "Not In Violation" of the Honor Code.

Time of testimony and deliberations: Forty eight minutes

Respectfully submitted,
Justine Lin
Clerk