

**Abstract of the Honor Council**  
**Case 28, Spring 2010**  
**April 26, 2010**

**Members Present:**

Hilary Baker-Jennings (presiding), Jackie Ammons (clerk), Trey Burns, Melissa Fwu, Kaleb Underwood, James Hannah, Travis Smith, Kelsey Zottnick, Deian Tabakov, and Jessi Litman (observing)

**Ombuds:** Meghan Binford

**Letter of Accusation:**

The Honor Council received a letter of self-accusation from Student A in a graduate level management course stating that she had used an unauthorized source on an exam.

**Evidence Submitted:**

- Letter of accusation
- Student A's written statement
- Course syllabus
- Policy for third-party sources
- Student A's notes
- Emails between Student A and the professor
- Blank exam
- Web source
- Classmate depositions
- Student A's final exam

**Plea:**

Student A pled "Not In Violation."

**Testimony:**

While Student A admitted that she used an online source without citation within one question of her exam, Student A stated that she did not believe she committed a violation since the professor always encouraged the use of online sources. Student A said that she was not aware of this policy.

Student A said that she only used four exact words from the Internet source in the answer in question. Student A admitted that she did not cite this Internet source because it was a free online encyclopedia. Student A stated that the rest of her answer on this question came from the professor's slides. Students were allowed to use the professor's slides in their exams.

When asked why much of her answer was paraphrased from the Internet source, Student A claimed that she believed her answer was actually paraphrased from the professor's slides.

Student A turned herself into the Honor Council after looking at the exam key that was posted on OwlSpace after the exams were turned in. In the exam key, the professor stated that one or more students may have plagiarized a certain question. After speaking with the professor about her exam, Student A turned herself in to the Honor Council.

Witness 1 stated she understood that students were allowed to access the Internet and encouraged to do so on certain questions. Witness 1 said that she used outside sources but that she cited the URL and the author's name in her exam. She claimed that the course policy regarding citations was unclear, but she did not think further clarification was needed after reading the exam prompt. Both Student A and Witness 1 said the topic within the question was not common knowledge.

Witness 2 claimed the professor was unclear regarding the Honor Code for the course and that the professor never announced that the Internet was not allowed or gave any citation policy regarding using outside sources.

Witness 3 said that the professor recommended that students use the Internet during their exams, and Witness 3 did not believe that students were required to cite their sources.

Student A said a note regarding the subject in question on the slides included in the evidence was written after she became aware of the potential Honor Code violation.

**Verdict Deliberations:**

Council members believed that there was clear and convincing evidence that a violation occurred because Student A used a source on his exam without citing it. While the witnesses' and Student A's testimony showed that there was some confusion regarding the Honor Code policy for the exam, using sources without citations goes against the Honor Code policy.

While there was no clear citation policy in the professor's syllabus or exam prompt, the authorized sources were all listed in the exam prompt, and Student A did not use these authorized sources in the pertinent question. Because the Honor Council falls back on the Blue Book when a specific policy is not listed, Student A additionally did not follow the Blue Book citation policy.

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

Yes: 9  
No: 0  
Abstentions: 0

All Council members agreed that Student A committed the violation because she took the exam and turned herself in to the Honor Council.

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 whether or not this was an unprompted self-accusation made in good faith. Council members believed that Student A's discussion with the professor and seeing the note about the potential Honor Code violation on the exam key meant that the self-accusation was not unprompted. Additionally, Council members saw that Student A did not make her self-accusation in good faith, as shown by her plea of "Not In Violation."

Council members discussed the fact that Student A did not believe that she had committed a violation until she saw the exam key. However, Council members decided they cannot consider ignorance of a violation and that it was clear that Student A turned herself in after she talked with the professor.

Straw Poll #3: Did Student A turn in an unprompted self-accusation made in good faith?

Yes: 0

No: 8

Abstentions: 1

The abstaining member requested more discussion. The council repeated the reasoning for why the self-accusation was not made in good faith.

Straw Poll #4: Did Student A turn in an unprompted self-accusation made in good faith?

Yes: 0

No: 9

Abstentions: 0

Council members then discussed mitigating circumstances. Council members said that Student A was very cooperative and brought in relevant information in the form of witnesses and how Student A approached the professor.

Some members believed that since the exam was worth 60-80% of the course grade (depending on how students scored on the midterm) that they could not mitigate based on the nature of the violation. Other members said that because the part of the question including the Honor Code violation consisted of approximately 8-10% of the course grade and that they would mitigate based on the nature of the violation.

Some members said that they would mitigate based on the apparent confusion regarding the course Honor Code policy, but other members stated that they course policy was clear and, thus, they would not mitigate based on this factor.

Council members saw no aggravating circumstances.

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

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

Council members discussed that part of Student A's answer on the problem in question came from his own notes, not the web source, and might be considered as a mitigating factor.

Straw Poll #6: What is the appropriate penalty for Student A?

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

The abstaining member decided to mitigate based on cooperation and the weight of the assignment. Another Council member moved up to an F in the course from a 3 letter grade reduction because he believed that Student A's use of the Internet in the violated problem allowed her to understand the basis of that part of the question and thus influenced her answer to the entire question.

Straw Poll #7: What is the appropriate penalty for Student A?

F in the course and 1 semester of suspension:	2
F in the course:	6
3 letter grade reduction:	1
2 letter grade reduction:	0
1 letter grade reduction:	0
Letter of reprimand:	0
Abstentions:	0

Three Council members moved down from an F in the course and 1 semester of suspension to an F in the course in order to make a decision. One Council member moved up from a 3 letter grade reduction to an F in the course because Student A's use of the Internet in the violated problem allowed her to understand the basis of that part of the question and thus other parts of the question.

Straw Poll #7 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. A Prior Violation Flag is also attached to her record.

Time of testimony and deliberations: 2 hours and 18 minutes

Respectfully submitted,  
Jackie Ammons  
Clerk