

Abstract of the Honor Council
Case 34, Spring 2010
30th April 2010

Members Present:

Hilary Baker-Jennings (presiding), Adnan Poonawala (clerk), Kate Snyder, Kaleb Underwood, Jeff Worne, Trey Burns, Jessi Litman, Gabriela Lopez, Elizabeth Marks, Ben Brookstone (observing) & David French (observing)

Ombuds: Darren Li & Meghan Binford

Letter of Accusation:

The Honor Council received a letter of self-accusation from Student A for unauthorized collaboration on a final paper for an upper level science course.

Evidence Submitted:

- Letter of Accusation
- Student A's written statement
- Course Syllabus
- Student A email and attachment to group member
- Professor Deposition
- Third Party Deposition 1
- Third Party Deposition 2
- Model Paper
- Student A's final paper
- Student A's final paper draft
- Documents submitted by student A

Plea:

Student A pled "In Violation"

Testimony:

A member of Student A's lab group had sent Student A the draft of the introduction for the final paper for the class. Student A gave her lab group member a few general comments on the draft, and sent her own introduction draft asking for comments. Student A said her lab group member never responded to her email. The professor's Honor Code policy stated that students should not proofread each other's papers, and thus the student sent a letter of accusation the honor council.

The draft of the introduction was worth two percent of her grade. The professor's honor code policy, although disallowing sharing of papers for proof-reading, allowed sharing of ideas and concepts. The student assumed that this meant the professor had forbidden explicit corrections in terms of technical or grammatical errors but that she could give general comments to her lab group members if it was in the context of discussion of ideas. She realized later that this was an incorrect interpretation and decided to submit a self-accusation to the council. Student A said that the suggestions she gave to her lab

group member were based off the model paper given to the class for help. She said that she never received comments from her lab group member about her own draft, and all of her work was her own.

When asked if the student knew if any other students to whom the document was emailed may have seen the document, she responded that she never received a response for any group member regarding the document. Due to her lack of experience in the subject matter and tensions in the group, other students were less motivated to read her work. The student added that she had not discussed her work with any other students in the class.

Verdict Deliberations:

Verdict deliberations began with discussion on whether this case constituted an unprompted letter of accusation made in good faith. Council members felt that even though the accusation was prompted by another case, she had no reason to assume she was being accused and was in fact told in several correspondences that she was not under investigation. The council felt that the student took it upon herself to send in an accusation as soon as she realized her violation and thus made an unprompted self-accusation.

Straw Poll #1: Is the accusation an unprompted self-accusation made in good faith?

Yes: 9
No: 0
Abstentions: 0

The Council then discussed whether a violation had occurred. The Council felt that because the professor's Honor Code policy expressly forbid students reading each other's papers or sharing their own papers, a violation had occurred. Student A admitted to reading her lab group member's draft, and sending her own draft to the other student.

Straw poll # 2: Is there clear and convincing that a violation has occurred?

Yes: 9
No: 0
Abstentions: 0

The council members then discussed whether Student A committed the violation. Student A admitted to reading the other student's draft and sending her own, so she was in violation.

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

Yes: 9
No: 0
Abstentions: 0

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

Penalty Deliberations:

The Council then began the penalty deliberations phase of the hearing. Because the student made an unprompted self-accusation made in good faith, the starting point for deliberations and the maximum penalty was an F in the course. Council members mitigated heavily on cooperation shown by the student throughout the hearing, bringing in additional evidence and answered all of the council’s questions regarding the case. Council members mitigated on the nature of the violation considering the weight of the assignment, the misinterpretation of the code by the student and the fact that there was no malicious intent involved behind the violation. They felt that the violation was minor based on the very general comments that Student A made on her lab group members draft, and that she received no unauthorized aid on her own draft.

Council members saw no reason to aggravate for Student A.

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

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| F in the course: | 0 |
| 3 letter grade reduction: | 0 |
| 2 letter grade reduction: | 0 |
| 1 letter grade reduction: | 0 |
| Letter of Reprimand | 9 |
| Abstentions: | 0 |

Straw Poll #4 made binding.

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

Time of testimony and deliberations: 37 minutes

Respectfully submitted,
Adnan Poonawala
Clerk