

**Abstract of the Honor Council**  
**Case 31, Spring 2011**  
**April 28, 2011**

**Members Present:**

Kaleb Underwood (presiding), Kate Snyder (clerk), Trey Burns, David French, Hilary Baker-Jennings, Kern Vijayvargiya, Jeff Worne, Sean Sessel, Matthew Nanes

**Ombuds:** Daniel Stark

**Letter of Accusation:**

The Honor Council received a letter accusing Student A and Student B of collaborating on a homework assignment for a lower level social sciences course.

**Evidence Submitted:**

- Letter of Accusation
- Student A's written statement
- Student B's written statement
- Course Syllabus
- Assignment Prompt
- Student A's HW 8 (submitted to OWL-Space)
- Student B's HW 8 (submitted to OWL-Space)
- OWL-Space Documents IT Report
- Student B's "Original" HW 8
- Student B's "Original" HW 8 – IT Report
- Email from Student A to Student B
- Email Attachment (Class Notes) – IT Report
- Student A's HW 8, Class Notes, and Test 2 Notes IT Report
- Email Correspondence with IT
- Professor Deposition
- TA Deposition
- IPA Character Picker
- Student A's Additional Homeworks
- Student A's Class Notes (from email to Student B)
- Student B's Additional Homeworks
- Random Samples of Homework #8

**Plea:**

Student A pled "In Violation."

Student B pled "In Violation."

**Testimony:**

Student A: Each homework is worth 5% of the total grade. Student A and Student B exchanged their electronic homeworks before turning them in to see what the other had done. At this point, Student A had finished all of one section and part of another. Student

A was not aware that Student B would use all of that work in his assignment. Student A looked briefly at what Student B sent him, but did not change any of his homework. Student A thinks that Student B's "Original" homework looks like what he originally sent Student A. Student A does not have any explanation for why the parts that he hadn't finished before the exchange are identical between the two students. The students would collaborate on class notes and compare homeworks after they were graded, so they had a similar understanding of the class material. Student A does not remember when the email exchange between Student A and Student B occurred.

Student B did collaborate on the homework in question. He did not intend to take the whole assignment word for word, but wanted something to reference, which he realizes is a violation. He copied the first of two sections into his homework but did not intend to submit that document. He may have accidentally submitted the copied homework by attaching the wrong file to OWL-Space. Student B is also not sure when the email exchange between him and Student A took place, but thinks it was probably earlier in the week. Honor Code was expressed the first day and in the syllabus, but was not stressed. In one of the sections in question, Student B's work appears in Student A's work, but not in Student B's, for which he does not have an explanation.

Student A admits that it looks like he copied a section of Student B's in one of the sections in question, which he does not have an explanation for. He thinks it is possible that another section in question in Student B's homework could have come from something Student A sent. The professor's messages accompanying the homework assignments all restate the honor code policy. He says that there is no excuse for this violation. He says that some parts of his homework were copied from Student B's.

Student B says his document that had Student A's work was never intended to be submitted. The fact that the whole section is nearly verbatim can bolster this statement. Student B completed the second section first because it was easier than the first section. He is in violation of collaborating, but he did not intend to plagiarize.

**Verdict Deliberations:**

Council members believed that a preponderance of the evidence supported that a violation occurred because the similarities between the assignments are very significant, as well as the fact that both students admitted to giving and receiving aid.

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. No one saw any evidence to the contrary.

Straw Poll #2: Does a preponderance of the evidence support that Student A is “In Violation?”

Yes: 9  
No: 0  
Abstentions: 0

The Council then discussed whether or not Student B committed the violation. No one saw any evidence to the contrary.

Straw Poll #3: Does a preponderance of the evidence support that Student B is “In Violation?”

Yes: 9  
No: 0  
Abstentions: 0

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

### **Penalty Deliberations:**

Council members opened by discussing mitigating circumstances. Some council members believed Student A and Student B were both cooperative in the sense that they were able to help the council determine how the collaboration occurred. Also, the weight of the assignment was fairly small at 5% of the total course grade, and council members will be mitigating based on that.

A council member believes that Student B may not have been truthful because the council member does not think it is possible for the student to accidentally submit the wrong document. Others believe that that doesn't matter because they can't determine that he lied for sure, and would give him the benefit of the doubt.

A council member believes that the fact that Student B did not intend to submit the plagiarized version of his homework assignment, whereas Student A did intend to submit copied parts in his assignment, so the council member may mitigate more for Student B. Others countered that because the violation was collaborating at all, it is irrelevant, and will not be mitigating on intent.

Some council members believe there may have been deceit because the time stamps on Student B's original assignment and submitted assignment are the same, which show that the work from Student A was copied directly into his assignment. Based on the possible incongruences in testimony and evidence, they may not mitigate on cooperation. However, further discussion of the possible timeline shows that there are possibilities that are congruent with his testimony.

Some council members believe there may have been deceit on the part of Student B but they don't have evidence that strongly suggests it, so no one will be aggravating.

Student A has had a previous violation, which most council members will be aggravating for. No one saw any other reason to aggravate. Council members are undecided how much to aggravate for this factor. Some will consider suspension, even though the violation itself does not warrant it, but the fact that this is the second violation is very serious.

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

|  |   |
|--|---|
| F in the course and 3 semesters of suspension: | 1 |
| F in the course and 2 semesters of suspension: | 2 |
| F in the course and 1 semester of suspension:  | 5 |
| F in the course:                               | 0 |
| Abstentions:                                   | 1 |

Abstaining member wanted to hear more discussion, but does think suspension is warranted. The F+3 voting member mitigated for cooperation but aggravated significantly for the second violation. An F+2 voting member says that F+2 should be the lowest penalty given for a second violation, though he is not willing to say that it shows a blatant disregard for the honor council, given her cooperation. The other F+2 voter believes that the starting point is an appropriate penalty for two violations of this nature. Two F+1 voters will be moving up to F+2 based on this discussion. Other F+1 voters are either unsure of whether they would stay at an F+1 or are comfortable there because of the extensive cooperation in both cases. Some say that though neither violation warranted suspension in and of itself, the combination warrants substantial suspension, but the council is undecided how much suspension is warranted. A council member brought up the possibility that the two violations show a pattern of escalation since the first one was a self-submitted accusation. He also said that being found in violation twice at this institution and receiving only a total of one semester of suspension being an unjustifiably lenient penalty.

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

|  |   |
|--|---|
| F in the course and 3 semesters of suspension: | 1 |
| F in the course and 2 semesters of suspension: | 7 |
| F in the course and 1 semester of suspension:  | 1 |
| F in the course:                               | 0 |
| Abstentions:                                   | 0 |

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

|  |   |
|--|---|
| F in the course and 2 semesters of suspension: | 1 |
| F in the course and 1 semester of suspension:  | 0 |
| F in the course:                               | 6 |
| 3 letter grade reduction:                      | 1 |
| 2 letter grade reduction:                      | 0 |
| Abstentions:                                   | 1 |

The F+2 voter did not consider cooperation nor deceit and did not consider weight of the assignment, so did not move from the starting penalty. Some voting for F in the course did not think they were intentionally being given different stories and thus have no reason

to aggravate. They mitigated for cooperation and weight of the assignment. Abstaining voter was between F and 3-letter grade reduction and after discussion decided that an F in the course was appropriate.

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

|  |   |
|--|---|
| 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:                      | 1 |
| 2 letter grade reduction:                      | 0 |
| Abstentions:                                   | 0 |

Straw Poll #5 and #7 made binding.

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

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

Time of testimony and deliberations: 2 hours 15 minutes

Respectfully submitted,  
Kate Snyder  
Clerk