

Abstract of the Honor Council
Case 37, Fall 2011
September 7, 2011

Members Present:

Kaleb Underwood (presiding), Jeff Worne (clerk), Adam Hartman, Trey Burns, Jen Schafer, Kern Vijayvargiya, Brian Walker, Clinton Wilbanks, Gabriela Lopez, Sam Kwiatkowski (observing), Likeleli Seitlheko (observing)

Ombuds: Lila Kerr

Letter of Accusation:

The Honor Council received a letter accusing Student A of plagiarizing a paper for an upper level biology course.

Evidence Submitted:

- Letter of Accusation
- Supplement to the Accusation
- Student A's written statement
- Course Honor code policy
- Assignment prompt – "Instructions to Authors" and "Writing the Research Paper"
- Student A's final paper with comments
- Alleged source of plagiarism with comments
- Student A's paper with highlights
- Alleged source with highlights
- Student A's paper drafts with highlights
- Group members' final papers
- Correspondence re: Zhu paper available online
- Reference list for BIOC 311 students
- Model paper available to class
- Student A's lab notebook
- Student A's notes
- Study guide for reading assignments
- Course texts

Plea:

Student A pled "not in violation."

Testimony:

Student A began his testimony by stating that he used his own ideas for his paper. He stated he organized his paper in the manner he best saw fit. He also used the online lab manual to title section headings. He stated that he did see the alleged source of the current plagiarized work, but once he noticed it was similar to his current work, he closed the alleged source document.

The student walked the council through all of the alleged areas of plagiarism. The introductory paragraph to his paper was a summary from a source. The conclusion to the

introduction was a summary of everything done in lab. Continuing on to the “Materials and Methods” section, the student testified he wrote that section based on the provided lab manual. For the next section, he testified that he used the lab manual to structure it. The accuser pointed out that the accused student wrote that a particular gel was used in 2009, but a different one is currently used. However, student A’s lab report contains the name of the previously used gel. The student testified that he got the name wrong because he used a resource on OwlSpace for the old gel and failed to double check the name of the current gel. Additionally, information about the manufacturer of a device was not given to the students, and the accuser stated that it would have been available from the alleged plagiarized source. The student testified that he simply looked up the information online.

The student testified that he last looked at the alleged plagiarized source during his initial literature search early in the semester. He noticed that it was a former student’s paper and testified that he did not look at it again. The student also testified that he was putting final touches on the paper the night before it was due.

In the student’s draft, an error in the concentration of a chemical was present. The student pointed out that he had written that value down in his lab notebook, but that the value was incorrect.

Verdict Deliberations:

Council members believed that a preponderance of the evidence supported that a violation occurred because of the number of similarities that exist between the alleged document and the alleged plagiarized source. Content was frequently identical or similar, as was word choice and formatting. The volume of material that is alleged to be plagiarized seemed to be an important factor in deciding a violation occurred. Some council members felt that not every highlighted portion alleged to be plagiarized was in fact plagiarized, the majority of the document seemed to be unoriginal.

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. Based on the previous discussion, the council felt that Student A was the one that committed 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 did not see any reason to mitigate in this case. The weight of the assignment was seen as too large to mitigate. Additionally, the volume of plagiarized material was too great to consider any mitigating circumstances.

No council members felt strongly about aggravating the penalty 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:	9
F in the course and 1 semester of suspension:	0
F in the course:	0
Abstentions:	0

The council saw no reason to mitigate or aggravate so no one felt comfortable moving from the starting punishment. Additionally, the weight of the assignment and the volume plagiarized warranted suspension.

Straw Poll #3 made binding.

The Honor Council thus finds Student A “In Violation” of the Honor Code and recommends that he receive a F in the course and 2 semesters of suspension. A Prior Violation Flag is also attached to his record.

Time of testimony and deliberations: 1h 4min

Respectfully submitted,
Jeff Worne
Clerk