

Abstract of the Honor Council
Case 33, Fall 2013
March 10, 2014

Members Present:

Adriana Bracho (presiding), Seth Lauer (clerk), Claire Bonnyman, Michael William-Hart, Lynn Fahey, Komal Agarwal, Shantan Cheemerla, Tanvi Nagpal, Mitch Massey

Ombuds: Ira Shrivastava

Letter of Accusation:

The Honor Council received a letter accusing Student A of plagiarism on a lab exercise and paper for a lower level Anthropology course.

Evidence Submitted:

- Letter of Accusation
- Student A's written statement
- Course Syllabus
- Assignment Prompt
- Student A Observation Notes
- Student B Observation Notes
- Student A Essay
- Wikipedia Article
- Professor Deposition and Testimony
- Sample Student Pair Work
- Email Between Student and Professor

Plea:

Student A pled "Not in Violation."

Testimony:

Student A opened by discussing the alleged plagiarism of a Wikipedia article. He referenced the assignment description, which states students are required to read the article before beginning the assignment. He attributed similarities to his eidetic memory. He stated that all of his resources in his paper were cited from appropriate sources, not Wikipedia. He believed that the similarities between Student B and his own notes were due to the fact that they were both observing the same animal at the same time. He attributed any similarities to simply being the proper scientific way of saying things and those types of similarities would be found between any two people observing the same object. Student A stated that he never saw Student B at the Zoo even though they were there at the same time and he never saw Student B's notes.

Student A explained that his hard drive had been damaged and therefore was unable to turn in his essay when it was due. In the letter of accusation, the accuser stated that he found it unusual that the student did not request his notes back to write the paper. The

student believed he was able to re-write because of his memory and by using his browser history.

In writing his essay, Student A read the Wikipedia page and other sources. He then made some additions and changes to the words and cited the sources he used with footnotes. The student believed that most of his essay was in his own words.

Verdict Deliberations:

Council members believed that a preponderance of the evidence supported that a violation occurred because by comparing the Wikipedia source to the student's paper and by the student's description of how he wrote his paper, it was clear that the student plagiarized the sources rather than paraphrased the source in his own words. Additionally, council members felt the similarity between the two student's lab reports in both content and structure provided evidence of a second violation.

Vote: Does a preponderance of the evidence support that a violation plagiarism in Student A's essay occurred?

Yes: 9

No: 0

Abstentions: 0

Vote: Does a preponderance of the evidence support that a violation of unauthorized collaboration occurred?

Yes: 9

No: 0

Abstentions: 0

The Council then discussed whether or not Student A committed the violation. Council members found no evidence to suggest that anyone except Student A committed that plagiarism violation. However, there was not evidence to suggest that Student A was in violation of copying Student B's lab reports.

Vote: Does a preponderance of the evidence support that Student A is "In Violation" of plagiarism on his essay?

Yes: 9

No: 0

Abstentions: 0

Vote: Does a preponderance of the evidence support that Student A is "In Violation" of unauthorized collaboration on his lab report?

Yes: 0

No: 9

Abstentions: 0

Penalty Deliberations:

Council members opened by discussing mitigating circumstances. Council Members found no mitigating factors. The lab write-up was a substantial portion of the assignment which accounted for 10% of the course grade. The Honor Code policy in question is the general Rice University policy on plagiarism, which is a clear policy.

Council Members believed that the violation warranted a penalty with a punitive aspect.

Vote: 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:	0
F in the course and 1 semester of suspension:	0
F in the course:	9
3 letter grade reduction:	0
2 letter grade reduction:	0
1 letter grade reduction:	0
Letter of Reprimand	0
Abstentions:	0

Decision:

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

Time of testimony and deliberations: 1 hour and 15 minutes

Respectfully submitted,
Seth Lauer
Clerk