

Abstract of the Honor Council
Case 26, Spring 2015
February 9, 2015

Members Present:

Hurst Williamson (presiding), Shayak Sengupta (clerk), Michael Jin, Alex Metcalf, Komal Agarwal, Isaac Batt, Anika Zaman, Owais Syed

Ombuds: Jayme Smith, Katie Jensen (observing)

Letter of Accusation:

The Honor Council received a letter accusing Student A and Student B of unauthorized collaboration and plagiarism for an upper level natural sciences course.

Evidence Submitted:

- Letter of Accusation
- Student A's written statement
- Student B's written statement
- Course Syllabus
- Email correspondence between instructor and Student A
- Student A final exam with instructor annotations
- Student B final exam with instructor annotations
- Abstract of scientific paper
- Powerpoint slide of lecture notes
- Page from course textbook
- Evidence analysis by Student B
- Witness deposition 1
- Witness deposition 2
- Witness deposition 3
- Student B first exam

Plea:

Student A pled "not in violation."

Student B pled "not in violation."

Testimony:

Student A described that she did not know the other accused student well, so it was impossible for her to have shared information with the other student. The exam in question was Student A's last final exam, and she completed the exam independently at home on December 17, 2014. The student then discussed that the exam was closed-book, and the instructor of the course described this requirement during the last week of class. Student A forgot to write the Honor Code pledge at the top of his exam (as he did not know it), but after receiving a reminder from the instructor to do this, the student subsequently searched the Internet for the Rice Honor pledge and wrote it at the top of his exam. The instructor accused Student A of copying material on the exam from lecture

slides and other course material. Student A gathered all relevant material needed to study for the exam, and studied this material before opening the exam folder online to take the exam. She then showed the Council the other slides of the powerpoint from which the slide submitted as evidence came. This complete presentation lacked large sections of text. Rather, it consisted mostly of diagrams and other pictures with course material. Student A also said that throughout the semester, she did not take good notes during the semester. Given the lack of large sections of text in the powerpoint slides, she prepared for the exam by referring to the course textbook, written by the instructor. The course material mainly came from this textbook. Student A went to describe how the order of exam questions largely followed material from the textbook. In summary, Student A explains that the large similarities between course materials and her exam responses come from her very good memory and ability to memorize text. To support this assertion, Student A began to list grades from her undergraduate courses from a transcript that she brought. The Council is specifically barred from considering this information.

Student A stated the instructor gave the range of topics on the exam, so given this list, she used the textbook to find specific sections from which she needed to memorize. She also said that she read and studied the scientific paper submitted as evidence before the exam. Student A described the techniques she used to memorize the course information found in the exam. She first highlighted relevant text and then read the highlighted text several times, by paragraph. She either read in English or translated the text into another language. She subsequently dictated the information by hand. In all, the student took about a week to study for the exam, memorized the information in question for two days, and memorized about two pages of information from the textbook. She estimated that she memorized about 90% of her exam responses.

Student A's roommate then came as a sworn witness. The witness stated that both she and the accused student did not leave their apartment for the two days during which she studied for the exam. Furthermore, the witness stated that Student A did not know Student B. The witness had not seen Student A memorize material for the exam, but had seen him study for as well as take the exam.

Student B opened by stating that she did not know the other accused student. She supported this by showing witness deposition of a classmate. Student B then described the list of topics covered by the exam, and explained that this course was heavily paper-based: course material came heavily from published scientific literature. Student B subsequently described how she prepared for the first exam in this class, by memorizing large amounts of information. After the first exam (closed-book), Student B started reading the course textbook heavily as well as recorded lectures by the instructor. She would also transcribe these recordings. The student also stated that she worked 30 hours a week at an internship during the semester, but took two weeks off from work to prepare for her final exams. For the final exam, Student B made a final preparation sheet, a summary of topics on the exam to study, a technique she uses for other courses and the first exam of this course as well. For this preparation sheet, she used course material/sources along with the list of topics given by the instructor. Throughout this preparation sheet, she references course materials. Therefore, any text in the powerpoint

was very important for the course. Consequently, Student B used her preparation sheet to memorize key words for the exam. She then linked these key words when writing her exam. While studying, she also had the help of a previous mentor to memorize information. In all, Student B studied for ten days and took the exam over the course of four days. Student B also stated that she wanted to receive a good grade in the course to impress the instructor and eventually join the instructor's research group.

Verdict Deliberations:

Council members believed that a preponderance of the evidence supported that a violation occurred. Council members discussed evidence of plagiarism given the verbatim sections of text in both students' exams and the referenced course materials. While members thought it unlikely that the students collaborated, many members had a hard time to believe that the students memorized the large portions of text. Citations are generally not required for closed-box exams, but both students lacked a voice in their responses. The exam responses lacked paraphrasing and any independent analysis or thought. Given this evidence, members largely thought a violation did occur.

Vote #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. Given the identical copied sections of text from outside sources, members believed Student A is in violation.

Vote #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. Given the identical copied sections of text from outside sources, members believed Student B is in violation.

Vote #3: Does a preponderance of the evidence support that Student B is "In Violation?"

Yes: 9
 No: 0
 Abstentions: 0

Penalty Deliberations:

Council members believed that both students should receive the same penalty.

Council members opened by discussing mitigating circumstances. Some Council members mitigated for substantial disclosure and cooperation through the evidence both students presented.

The Council found no aggravating offenses.

Members initially thought appropriate penalties should range from an F in the course to an F in the course with two semesters of suspension because large portions of both students' exams were plagiarized and the large portion of the course grade to which the exam contributed. Although the Council strives to take students on their word, regardless of whether or not both students were able to memorize thousands of words of text, the evidence shows that the work submitted are not in the students' own words. While discussing the appropriate penalty, members discussed their reasoning for two semesters of suspension versus one semester of suspension. Council members believed that because both students submitted large sections of verbatim text as the vast majority of their responses to exam questions, this warranted two semesters of suspension as neither student completed the course with through own academic process and demonstrated a lack of understanding of the Honor Code. Members viewed this attitude as damaging to the academic atmosphere of Rice.

Vote #4: 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:	6
F in the course and 1 semester of suspension:	3
F in the course:	0
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 and Student B "In Violation" of the Honor Code and recommends that they both receive an F in the course and two semesters of suspension. A Prior Violation Flag is also attached to both of their records.

Time of testimony and deliberations: 2 hours 31 minutes

Respectfully submitted,
Shayak Sengupta
Clerk