

Abstract of the Honor Council
Case 25, Spring 2019
11/7/19

Members Present:

Virginia Xie (presiding), Sam Holloway (clerk), Diego Casanova, Kaitlyn Crowley, Sean Olsen, Adam Zawierucha

Ombuds: Laura Li, Jack Fain (observing)

Letter of Accusation:

The Honor Council received a letter accusing Student A of theft of examination materials for a lower level CHEM course. The Chair read the Letter of Accusation aloud in full.

Evidence Submitted:

- Letter of Accusation
- Student A's written statement
- Photographs of Student A's unfinished exam, taken outside of the exam room
- Professor Clarification
- Screenshots of Student A correspondence with another student in the class

Plea:

Student A pled "not in violation."

Testimony:

Student A explained that he entered the exam room with another friend, took the exam, turned it in, and left the class uneventfully. He said that he used the entire amount of time allotted to complete his exam. A week later, Student A says the professor handed back examinations to other students in the class, but he did not call Student A's name. When Student A asked what had happened to the exam, the professor said he could not find it in the stack of graded exams. Student A says he offered to retake the exam as a remedy, but the professor said he could just be given the class average exam score anyway. Both Student A and the professor agreed to this solution.

Student A says he received the Honor Code accusation notification and assumed that it concerned homework assignments in the class, but he later heard from a friend at another college that Student A's roommate had stolen his exam from the exam room and planted it in the shared room. Student A's roommate was not in this CHEM course. Student A explained that he and his roommate had major problems over the course of the semester, and Student A said he believes that his roommate plotted to steal the exam from the pile of finished exams in the testing room and planted it in their room as a way to sabotage Student A's academic career.

Student A explained that he asked a friend for photographs of that friend's copy of the exam in question as a study tool before taking the next exam in the course. He argued

that, if he still had his own copy of the exam as claimed in the accusation, he would not have needed to ask a friend for photographs of the exam.

Student A then told the Council that the photos of his exam were taken in his dorm room. He said that the exam was pictured in a location where he would never have actually put it, adding to his suspicion that his roommate put it there without his knowledge. Further, Student A heard from a friend over the summer (before attending his Investigative Meeting) that news of Student A's Honor Code violation accusation was spreading, and that people supposedly knew it concerned an exam being removed from the exam room in this course even though Student A had not yet seen the Letter of Accusation at that point.

Student A explained that a professor and a TA sit by the doors of the exam room to ensure that nobody removes materials from the exam room without authorization. However, he explained that he was in the class with two of his roommate's friends, and he hypothesized that one of his roommate's friends could have turned in their own exam and surreptitiously removed Student A's exam from the pile of submissions in one motion. Student A also explained that bags and backpacks were allowed to be brought into the exam room.

Student A closed by saying that if he had really committed an Honor Code violation, he would own up to it, and that to conceal such a violation is not in alignment with his character. He argued that the only substantial evidence against him was photographs of his exam outside of the exam room, and that there is no proof that he was the one who actually removed the exam from the exam room. He explained that removing the exam from the exam room would have resulted in him earning a zero and foregoing his opportunity to earn "redemption points" in the class later. Thus, he had no motivation to remove the exam – turning it in, even if he knew he would score poorly, would afford him the opportunity to earn redemption points later to repair his grade in the course.

Witness 1:

The Honor Council requested that the course teaching assistant testify. The witness explained that, on the day the exams were returned to students, Student A approached him to ask why he had not received a graded exam. The TA said that he and the course professor subsequently looked for the exam, consulted with each other and with colleagues in the CHEM department, and decided to offer Student A the class average grade for the missing exam as a tentative solution. The TA explained that, though he was present in the exam room as students were taking their exams, he was not paying attention to what people were doing as they left. He recalled that the course professor would often walk around the exam room as students were taking their tests.

The TA said he believed it would be "easily" possible for a student to leave the room with an exam during the testing session because exams happened in a large lecture hall, and there was little monitoring of students during the exam. However, once the exam was completed, he did not think it would have been possible for any of the exams to physically slip out of the pile since he and the professor carefully brought the exams from

the room directly back to their offices for grading. He said that it was plausible that other students could have removed completed exams from the pile in the exam room. Finally, someone technically could have also snuck into his office because it is often open and unlocked, but since he and the professor work in a shared office space, it is unlikely that someone could have stolen an ungraded exam from their offices without getting caught.

Witness 2:

The accused student requested that one of his friends testify. The witness explained that he was talking with a friend from another college when this friend said he had heard about Student A's Honor Code violation from Student A's roommate. The friend asked if the witness had heard anything about this incident. The witness said he had not, and his friend explained that he believed Student A's roommate had attempted to frame Student A by reporting this Honor Code violation. The witness opined that Student A's roommate was intentionally spreading information about Student A's Honor Code violation accusation as a way to damage his reputation. The witness said he believed that this conduct was a furtherance of Student A's roommate's sabotage attempt that began when Student A's exam was removed from the testing room.

Witness 3:

The accused student requested that another one of his friends testify. The witness explained that Student A frequently missed the class in question due to health problems that semester. He said the two would work on assignments for the class together, and that over the course of this work together, he had never seen Student A make any reference to committing an Honor Code violation in the class. The witness recounted that he never saw Student A leave any exam holding any kind of paper, including after taking the exam in question, but that he also never saw Student A actually hand in his exam paper.

Witness 4:

The accused student requested that another one of his friends testify. The witness explained that Student A originally chose his roommate upon coming to Rice, but the two developed conflict that reached its peak by the spring semester. The witness said that after having visited Student A's room several times, he did not ever notice any papers out in Student A's room. He stated that Student A would usually keep papers on his desk, on his bookshelf, and in his bag. The witness opined that Student A's roommate, as a result of conflict with Student A, would have motivation to sabotage Student A's academic career out of jealousy for Student A's academic success. The witness said he did not believe Student A would ever attempt to get ahead of other students in an unfair way such as committing an Honor Code violation, and he said he does not think it would make sense for Student A to take an exam from the exam room and then hold onto it such that it could later be discovered.

Verdict Deliberations:

Council members believed that a preponderance of the evidence supported that a violation occurred because there was photographic proof that the exam was removed from the exam room, which is a blatant violation of the course Honor Code.

Vote #1: Does a preponderance of the evidence support that a violation occurred?

Yes: 6

No: 0

Abstentions: 0

The Council then discussed whether or not Student A committed the violation. Based on the testimony presented, especially the TA's explanation that an exam could have been removed from the stack of completed work by anyone, the Council did not believe a preponderance of the evidence supported that Student A took his exam from the exam room rather than someone else taking it. The Council believed that student and witness testimony presented a plausible alternative series of events in which someone other than Student A could have removed the exam from the exam room.

Vote #2: Does a preponderance of the evidence support that Student A is "In Violation?"

Yes: 0

No: 6

Abstentions: 0

Decision:

The Honor Council thus finds Student A "Not In Violation" of the Honor Code.

Time of testimony and deliberations: 1 hour, 53 minutes.

Respectfully submitted,

Sam Holloway

Clerk