

**Abstract of the Honor Council**  
**Case #1, Fall 2020**  
**October 12, 2020**

**Members Present:**

Sam Holloway (presiding), Virginia Xie (clerk), Rohit Chouhan, Adam Zawierucha, Caroline Brehm, Hanah Dryer, Kamal Tijani (observing), and Rodolfo Gutierrez-Garcia (observing)

**Ombuds:** Jean Choi

**Letter of Accusation:**

The Honor Council received a letter accusing Student A of copying homework solutions from a solution manual for an upper level CEVE course. The Letter of Accusation described similarities between Student A's solutions on HW 1, 2, and 3 compared to the those in the solution manual. Specifically, the letter mentioned how Student A always had dimensional analyses in the same order as the solution manual and lacked additional information other students used such as diagrams or additional explanations. The letter also highlighted one specific example where Student A arrived at the same wrong answer that the solution manual had. The Chair read the Letter of Accusation aloud in full.

**Evidence Submitted:**

- Letter of Accusation
- Student A's written statement
- Syllabus
- Professor clarification on honor code policy
- Student A's homework 1, 2, and 3
- Homework 1, 2, and 3 solutions
- Additional student material
- Other students' homework solutions (for homework 1, 2, and 3)

**Plea:**

Student A pled "not in violation."

**Testimony:**

In his opening statement, Student A went through the letter of accusation and provided counterarguments for every point. He provided examples within the student samples to show how other students solved questions in similar ways for HW 1, 2, and 3. For some questions, he also explained how he followed the material presented in class to arrive at the solution.

Student A also explained that the reason his dimensional analyses were always in the same order as those in the solution manual was because he tended to do his work in the most straightforward and intuitive way. Student A referenced work from his notes and previous CEVE class as evidence.

Student A explained that he didn't have additional information, such as diagrams, in his work because they are usually provided in the homework document and not required as part of the solution. Student A also referenced student samples to show that there were other students who did not include diagrams.

Student A stated that he arrived at the same incorrect answer in the solution manual because he read the problem incorrectly, thus choosing to follow a different method that was taught in class. Student A also highlighted other areas in the homework sets where he solved a problem incorrectly, which would be unlikely if he copied from the solution manual.

Student A concluded by saying that he had no incentive to cheat because the homework is graded on completion rather than accuracy. The student also said that the syllabus did not explicitly forbid using the solution manual. The student said that all of his work was his own and that he never copied anything from the solution manual.

### **Verdict Deliberations:**

Council members believed that a preponderance of the evidence supported that a violation occurred because a comparison of Student A's homework solutions with those in the solution manual revealed a high degree of similarity that was not found in most of the student samples.

The Council examined each homework set in detail and found that in HW 1 and HW 3, Student A approached the questions the same way the solution manual did and had nearly identical set-up for many of the questions. After comparing Student A's solutions to those of all of the student samples, the Council observed that these similarities were not found in the majority of the samples, which tended to organize their work differently even when arriving at the same answer. Student A argued that he laid his work out in the most logical way, but Council members believed that if this argument was correct, there would be much less variation in how other students structured and wrote their thought processes on the same problems. The Council thus found that it was more likely than not that Student A had consulted the solution manual for HW 1 and 3.

After examining HW 2 in detail, the Council found that although Student A's solutions were very similar to those in the solution manual, many of these similarities were shared by other student samples. The Council thus decided that it could not conclude that Student A had more likely than not used a solution manual to complete HW 2.

Additionally, in both the written statement and the verbal testimony, Student A admitted to referencing the solution manual to check an answer for one question on HW 3. The Council believed that consulting the solution manual was a clear violation of the Honor Code. The syllabus stated that "possessing, consulting, or studying with old homeworks...will be considered as a serious violation of the honor code." Thus, it was implied that consulting homework questions in the solution manual was also a violation of the Honor Code. In a clarification email about the Honor Code policy for the course,

the professor also confirmed that it was a violation of the course Honor Code to reference the solutions manual for homework assignments. The syllabus did not explicitly state whether accessing homework solutions was allowed, but the Honor System constitution to which all students agree when matriculating at Rice says the following: "...it is the student's responsibility to understand how the Honor System applies to each individual assignment and any questions should be raised with the instructor before submitting the assignment." The Council thus ruled that it was Student A's responsibility to clarify any ambiguity about what behavior was permissible before completing his assignment, rather than assuming the use of a solutions manual on homework assignments to be permissible when the syllabus did not explicitly address that issue despite its blanket ban on plagiarism.

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

Yes: 6 + 2 observing

No: 0

Abstentions: 0

The Council then discussed whether or not Student A committed the violation. The Council concluded that Student A committed the violation.

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

Yes: 6 + 2 observing

No: 0

Abstentions: 0

### **Penalty Deliberations:**

Council members opened by discussing mitigating circumstances. The Council did not find any mitigating or aggravating circumstances.

The CPS penalty for this case, based on the weight of the assignment, is a 1 letter grade reduction.

Vote #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: 0

F in the course and 1 semester of suspension: 0

F in the course: 0

3 letter grade reduction: 0

2 letter grade reduction: 0

1 letter grade reduction: 6 + 2 observing

Letter of Reprimand: 0

Abstentions: 0

Since the percentage of the homework sets in violation (HW 1 and HW 3) corresponded to a 1 letter grade reduction and there were no mitigating or aggravating circumstances, the Council decided that a 1 letter grade reduction was appropriate.

**Decision:**

The Honor Council thus finds Student A “In Violation” of the Honor Code and recommends that he receive a 1 letter grade reduction.

Time of testimony and deliberations: 1 hour 30 minutes

Respectfully submitted,  
Virginia Xie  
Clerk