

**Abstract of the Honor Council**  
**Case 23-4, Spring 2020**  
**04/13/2020**

**Members Present:**

Sam Holloway (presiding), Matey Yanakiev (clerk), Sanat Mehta, Syed Shams, Kaitlyn Crowley, Natalie Zur

**Ombuds:** Eliot Behr, Laura Li (observing)

**Letter of Accusation:**

The Honor Council received a letter accusing Student A and Student B of plagiarizing code from a formerly enrolled student for a lower-level CAAM course. The Chair read the Letter of Accusation aloud in full.

**Evidence Submitted:**

- Letter of Accusation
- Student A's written statement
- Student B's written statement
- RLA statement
- Student A and B's accused code
- Third student's code, alleged source for plagiarism
- Assignment instructions
- Student samples
- Relevant lecture materials
- Two additional explanations from student A
- One additional explanation from student B
- Student A and B's code from a previous assignment, relevant to code accused
- Class syllabus

**Plea:**

Student A pled "Not In Violation".

Student B pled "Not In Violation".

**Testimony:**

Student A claimed to have only used allowed sources to complete the accused assignment, including his own submission on a previous assignment. On that previous assignment, he had collaborated—permissibly—with student B; because this previous work was allowed as reference, student A claimed that he and B could have reasonably shared similar code in the accused assignment.

Furthermore, because students were provided a detailed pseudocode for the accused assignment, Student A said that similarities between students' work should be expected. Finally, Student A said he had utilized the suggestions of MATLAB's optimizing algorithm, as encouraged by RLAs and the professor. Student A said that if student B had done the same, similarities are to be expected.

Student B said that the entirety of his code is either original work or code given to him by the professor. As a beginner coder, student B explained that he took full advantage of the information provided by the instructor and the RLAs, which included a very detailed pseudocode that would produce highly similar solutions. Student B stated that he did not collaborate with student A on the project in question—only on a previous, unpledged assignment, as permitted—and that he did not use another student’s code from a previous semester.

Before submitting the accused assignment, student B used MATLAB’s suggestions to optimize the code—a feature that, being available to all students, may have contributed to similarities should student A have done likewise. Nevertheless, Student B claimed that differences in coding styles indicate that a violation did not occur.

### **Verdict Deliberations:**

Council members believed that a preponderance of the evidence supported that a violation occurred because of the similarities in the codes of Student A, Student B, and the student from a previous semester, similarities which exceeded what was to be expected had the students only collaborated in the previous project.

Council members began deliberations with the expert testimony of the RLA, which appeared to suggest substantial similarities between the students’ codes were reasonable on the accused assignment. Upon closer reading of the statement, however, the RLA anticipated reasonable similarities only in the section of code directly borrowed from a previous assignment. Though the Council found the section of code directly borrowed from a previous assignment to be similar, they also found thoroughly identical functional code in Student’s A, Student’s B, and the third student’s submission beyond this section: numerous word-for-word comments shared between student A and the third student and very similar comments shared between all three students.

Finally, the Council believed random student samples differed enough from the accused code and determined that the professor’s pseudocode was written in general language. These two findings convinced the Council that such extraordinarily detailed similarities in the accused code were highly improbable and could only be possible through impermissible collaboration on a pledged assignment.

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 and/or Student B committed the violation. On the basis of the similarities all three codes shared with one another, the Council concluded both Student A and B had committed a violation.

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

Yes: 6  
No: 0  
Abstentions: 0

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

Yes: 6  
 No: 0  
 Abstentions: 0

**Penalty Deliberations:**

Council members opened by discussing mitigating circumstances.

The Council found no mitigated circumstances.

Further, the Council found no aggravating circumstances.

Next, the Council turned to identifying the appropriate penalty for the violation at hand. The assignment weight placed the CPS-suggested penalty at between a 3 or a 2 letter grade reduction. The Council chose the lower of the two, reasoning that 2 letter grades annulled the assignment weight and still had a remaining penalty component. Consequently, it appropriately expressed the severity of violating the Honor Code without being overly punitive.

The CPS penalty for this case, based on the weight of the assignment, is an 3 or 2 letter grade reduction.

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: 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: 6  
 1 letter grade reduction: 0  
 Letter of Reprimand 0  
 Abstentions: 0

Vote #5: What is the appropriate penalty for Student B?

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: 6  
 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 a penalty of 2 letter grade reduction.

The Honor Council thus finds Student B “In Violation” of the Honor Code and recommends that he receive a penalty of 2 letter grade reduction.

Time of testimony and deliberations: 1 hour 55 minutes

Respectfully submitted,

Matey Yanakiev

Clerk