

Abstract of the Honor Council
Case 39, Spring 2020
June 4, 2020

Members Present:

Sam Holloway (presiding), Izzie Karohl (clerk), Mark Cantu, Sree Yeluri, Saniya Gayake, and Clyde Xu

Ombuds: Dylan Glenn, Clay Siminski (observing)

Letter of Accusation:

The Honor Council received a letter accusing Student A of incorrect citations for an upper level Asian Studies course. The Chair read the Letter of Accusation aloud in full.

Evidence Submitted:

- Letter of Accusation
- Clarification to Letter of Accusation
- Student A's written statement
- Assignment Description
- Ungraded Final Paper Submission
- Graded Final Paper Submission
- Course Syllabus
- Previous Assignment Submission with feedback

Plea:

Student A pled "Not in Violation."

Testimony:

Student A explained that he had enrolled in the class purely for credit with the intention to Pass/Fail. When Student A received his midterm paper, which pointed out incorrect citations, he understood after reviewing it that his work generally needed correction and said that his takeaways were that he should try to construct a more complex final paper and not to reiterate the readings. He stated that this advice was the primary insight he gained from the instructor's commentary on the midterm paper, and that he did not pay much mind to the professor's feedback about citations.

He stated that once he returned home, he was unable to attend to many of the meetings for this course because of the pandemic circumstances. The student's Magister notified his professor of these circumstances, and the professor excused Student A from attending class. Student A said that under normal, non-virtual learning circumstances, there would have been an opportunity for the professor to emphasize the importance of correct citations in class, and that he would have paid more attention to citing correctly in his final paper.

The student said that he followed the final assignment instructions to the best of his ability given his circumstances. He included a bibliography to cite his sources, creating it

through the online platform “BibMe.” The student noted that “BibMe” was malfunctioning and not generating the correct URL in that portion of the citation, so he manually placed links to the articles into his citations, which happened to be the file path to the PDFs of these articles on his personal hard drive rather than the article’s place online. The student said he did not have online access to the materials readily which is why he used the personal hard drive download pathway. Student A argued that this action does not constitute a violation of the Honor Code, but rather poor workmanship.

Student A believed that assignment description, which required a shorter paper with an annotated bibliography, did not warrant in-text citations because it wasn’t a research paper; all sources he used were known and learned in class. He said everything in the paper is attributable to a source listed in the annotated bibliography. He was not familiar with the course syllabus requirement of using the Chicago Manual Style, although the syllabus included a clickable link to exact instructions on how the Chicago Manual of Style should be used.

The rubric of the paper penalized Student A for poor citations, and he believed this penalty was fair and warranted. However, he doesn’t believe that his work constitutes a violation. The “originality” grade on his paper rubric was high (70%), supposedly demonstrating that he did not intend to plagiarize, and thus is not in violation of the Honor Code.

The student closed by saying that he had used his own words, attributed his sources, and relied on what he thought he knew because extenuating circumstances precluded him from contacting with the professor. He believes the “0” on the citation and bibliography section of the paper’s rubric is effective punishment.

Verdict Deliberations:

Council members believed that a preponderance of the evidence supported that a violation occurred because under the Honor System and the Course Syllabus Honor Code, false and incorrect citations constitute a violation. The Course syllabus explicitly stated that all quotations need in-text citation or footnotes, which the student did not include, and that even unintentional mis-citations or improperly formatted citations violate the Honor Code. Furthermore, the Council believed that the professor adequately notified the student of his previous improper citations in the Midterm paper feedback and in the final paper draft feedback, and that the syllabus provided detailed guidance and resources about exactly what citation practices were required.

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. The Council concluded that Student A’s incorrect citations constitute a violation.

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

Yes: 6

No: 0

Abstentions: 0

Penalty Deliberations:

Council members opened by concluding that there are no aggravating factors.

The Council then discussed mitigating factors. The Consensus Penalty Structure (“CPS”) did not account for the extenuating circumstance of a virtual class environment which severely limited that particular student’s opportunity to attend class.

Furthermore, the CPS is designed to create a penalty that is effectively equivalent to receiving a “0” on the assignment and then taking off more of the grade as an additional penalty for violating the Honor Code. Because the student was already penalized on the assignment substantially for incorrect citations, the Council felt mitigation was necessary to implement a just penalty.

The Consensus Penalty Structure (“CPS”) penalty for this case, based on the weight of the assignment, is an F in the course and 1 semester suspension. The CPS also states that “The Council may recommend alternative penalties if warranted by the nature of the case.” The Council concurred that the mitigating factors detailed here warranted a lesser penalty than the one recommended by the CPS, based on the weight of the assignment.

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: 2

3 letter grade reduction: 4

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 a three letter grade reduction.

Time of testimony and deliberations: 1hr. 12 min.

Respectfully submitted,

Izzie Karohl

Clerk