

Abstract of the Honor Council
Case 1, Summer 2020
August 9, 2020

Members Present:

Sam Holloway (presiding), Amy Lin (clerk), Izzie Karohl, Syed Shams, William Wang, and Zac Zalles

Ombuds: Laura Li

Letter of Accusation:

The Honor Council received a letter accusing Student A and Student B of engaging in unauthorized collaboration on an exam for a lower level MATH 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
- Student C's written statement
- Student D's written statement
- Student E's written statement
- Student F's written statement
- Exams of all 18 other students in the course
- Student A's exam
- Student B's exam
- Student C's exam
- Student D's exam
- Student E's exam
- Student F's exam
- Professor clarification
- Course syllabus
- Exam questions
- Student A tutor statement
- Student B tutor statement

Plea:

Student A pled "not in violation."

Student B pled "not in violation."

Testimony:

Student A opened by stating that he understands that the lack of work on one of his exam problems was suspicious, but the reason why he did not include his work for that problem in his final submission was because he was familiar with the method used on that problem. Having taken the prerequisite math course three times and the current math course two times, he felt very comfortable with this specific method and did not write

down the corresponding work, which he regretted because he recognized that it may have made his exam seem suspicious. On another problem, where the professor said that the unnecessary steps shown were suspicious, he emphasized how difficult the course was for him and that he made a point to write out all of the steps on more challenging problems to make sure that he did not miss anything. In response to the professor's accusation that his choice to use two different variables on the two different parts of a problem was suspicious, he said that he made this choice because he did not want to get confused about the two separate parts of the question. On another problem, where the professor thought it was suspicious that he had only done half of it, he explained that the problem was very difficult for him and took a lot of time, so he moved onto the other problems, and when he went back to review this problem, he had forgotten that it was incomplete and mistakenly believed he had finished. He admitted to being in contact with two other students in the course while completing homework assignments, neither of whom were accused, but these interactions were all in an allowed capacity. He had asked one of them a few clarifying questions, and he had compared homework answers with the other one, only after individually completing the problem sets. He then stated that he had never met any of the other accused students, and even attending the IM was the first time that he had seen them. He generally explained how he learned the material over the course of the summer. He found the remote format of the course challenging, and he had a difficult time understanding the methods being taught in the course by the professor, so he directly went to the professor for help. He still had a hard time understanding the professor's methods, so he decided to work with his cousin in person, who taught him one-on-one and showed him methods that were different from what was in the course. Because his cousin learned math in a different country, the notation was different, and there were extra steps used for these different methods. In addition, he used popular online resources such as Khan Academy and Paul's Online Math Notes to learn the course material, noting that these resources were popular among his classmates when he took the course the first time. He emphasized that there was no possible way that he could have collaborated with other students on the exam. His cousin removed all of the devices from the room during the exam. He pointed out that because the class was quite small, estimating about 30 students, he thought that the population size was too small to definitively conclude that he cheated. He also noted that his score on the exam was not very good, and he should have done better if he really intended to cheat on the exam. Having failed the course the first time, he worked hard this time to get a good grade and did not want to jeopardize anything by cheating. He concluded by stating that he recognizes how his answers could be viewed as similar to the others, but there was ultimately no possible way that he could have cheated on the exam.

Student B opened by stating that he took the midterm with the full intention of following the Honor Code, which is why he did not collaborate with any other students at any point during the course. On one problem, he made a simple mistake that he had made on similar problems in the past. On another problem, he admitted that the professor was correct in pointing out that he had simplified the fraction even though the instructions had said that simplification was not necessary for full credit, but he had missed reading this part of the instructions and chose to simplify the fraction since his tutor had suggested that he do so on all problems to make sure that numbers were not lost in computation. On

another problem, where the professor found it suspicious that he did not complete the problem, he said that the problem was challenging and that he felt stuck on it, so he decided to skip it and come back to it, eventually running out of time. While he realized that there were some similarities to Student A's exam, they were only a few coincidental standard mistakes, and they both had unique work for the rest of the exam. He stated that it was not possible for him to have committed a violation during the exam because his parents were very strict and had taken away his phone and laptop during the exam, and they also required him to leave the door open as he took the exam at his desk. Moreover, he did not know anybody in the class, so there is no way he could have contacted any of his classmates during the exam. Throughout the course, he only worked with his tutor and occasionally the professor, although he did not reach out to the professor often since he was busy with other courses throughout the summer. He mostly learned directly from his tutor, although he also used online videos from Khan Academy sparingly at the beginning of the course. He concluded by emphasizing that he did not know any of the other accused students and that any similarities between their exam submissions must have been coincidental.

Verdict Deliberations:

Council members believed that a preponderance of the evidence supported that a violation did not occur because for all the accused problems, Council members saw that other students in the course who were not accused of violating the Honor Code had used similar methods. Combined with the testimony of the accused students and their tutors, the Council members believed that it was more likely than not that a violation did not occur.

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

Yes: 0
 No: 6
 Abstentions: 0

Decision:

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

Time of testimony and deliberations: 1 hour 30 minutes

Respectfully submitted,
 Amy Lin
 Clerk