

“EXTERNAL” EXAMINER’S REPORT GIVES LOW GRADES TO HUMANITY, UNIVERSITIES

Relativism cited as impediment to evolution of species

What began as a rather routine surveillance of subspace communication channels by *Forum* journalists in July has resulted in the discovery of a shocking document that could change the course of human history. The confidential report – reproduced in its entirety in this exclusive issue of the *Forum* – summarizes observations of humanity's evolution made by a galactic intelligence agent from the Pleiades star system. The agent, named “Inop Netti,” compares the evolution of “Therans” to that of two other galactic species that have been thoroughly studied by the Pleiadeans. The evolutionary paths of these two species, referred to as the “Ruffians” and the “Mohrons” by

The Pleiades star cluster in the constellation Taurus – the destination of the intercepted intelligence report.

Netti, are quite distinct and the agent “cannot predict which of the paths the Therans will take.” Netti acknowledges the Enlightenment as a positive influence on humanity. However, his report criticizes the departure of humanity from principles of Reason and the subsequent effects on education, in particular, the university.

Immediately upon its interception, the *Forum* distributed copies of the intelligence report to members of

the FAUW Board of Directors. As well, twenty-three UW faculty members selected from a variety of academic departments in the Faculties of Applied Health Sciences, Arts, Engineering, Mathematics and Science were asked for comments and criticisms of the document. To date, five faculty members replied and their reports appear in this special issue.

Given the gravity of the report, there
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MEDICAL AND DENTAL BENEFITS

Frank Reynolds, Statistics and Actuarial Science

Over the last few months, we have read in the *Gazette* that major cut-backs in our medical and dental plans are necessary due to 20-32% leaps in premia over the last two years. I, for one, would like more of an explanation. Why?

First of all, our medical and dental plans already appear not to be as

good as those of our major competitor institutions as can be seen from the table on page 11. Secondly, according to the *Gazette*, the overall increases for the medical plan since 1992 have averaged 8.5%, well below the typical cost increase for such benefits and below the 10% increase the Provost is quoted as saying is manageable.

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EDITORIAL

The reader is asked to condone the momentary departure from “scholarly protocol” on the front page of this issue. Sophomoric, you say? Perhaps, but a little humour may be the perfect aperitif for the feature article of this issue, which considers how an outsider might view current intellectual and educational life on Earth – and possibly even here at UW.

Besides, would you have even raised an eyebrow if the front page had a more “mission statement” look to it, e.g. “Attention: The purpose of this issue of the *FAUW Forum* is to stimulate academic discussion and debate across campus. Your contribution is valuable to us...”

I would first like to thank Prof. G. “Pino” Tenti, Department of Applied Mathematics, for writing the feature article at short notice. Sincere thanks also go to those UW faculty members whose replies appear in this issue. To those invitees who were willing yet unable to reply and indeed to all faculty members: Let the dis-

ussion continue! Comments or criticisms are most welcome, either as short articles or letters to the Editor. Pick up on any particular points raised by Pino or his colleagues. There are certainly enough of them, even before one begins to read between the lines.

However, if concerns about “relativism” or “students as customers” do not interest you at this time, then what about the issues of pensions and benefits or UW’s “Strategic Plan” for the Canada Research Chairs program? You will find some interesting questions raised by Frank Reynolds and Cathy Schryer, respectively, on these topics. Your responses are encouraged.

Let us see if we can make the *Forum* work as a medium for continued *scholastica disputatio*.

ERV

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EXAMINER'S REPORT

(continued from page 1)

are some serious questions for UW faculty members to consider over the next few months, including: “Is Netti correct in his assessment?”, “Where are we headed at the moment?” and “Do we care?” The *FAUW Forum* is committed to act as a vehicle for the discussion and debate of these and other relevant issues facing UW and, indeed, society in general.

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GALACTIC INTELLIGENCE REPORT

The Chief Intellect
Stardate: 2000.06.29
Pleiades HQ

Your Wisdom:

I'm forwarding this report with a heavy left heart and drooping antennae. For the news is not good from planet Thera. Psychohistorical analysis of recent data resulted in a probability of about 0.95 that the Therans will not achieve Wisdom, and Common Sense confirms it. It appears, therefore, that our hopes are going to be dashed yet again – what a pity!

Of course, I'm attaching all the datafiles for our Wisdom Council to pore over. However, I will summarize below my observations and deductions for your convenience.

1. As described in my previous report, the Therans' evolution over the past one megayear or so (Cf. Appendix 1 for the Theran system of units) has followed the pattern of most of the 1039 semi-intelligent species we have studied so far: A very long dwelling in the Stone Age in a constant struggle for survival, followed by the discovery of metals, agriculture, and writing. The rapid increase in numbers, and the improved living conditions brought about by the Age of Metals led, in turn, to the invention of Science and a vertiginous expansion of both the population and the technological prowess of the species in just a few hectoyears.

At this stage of their evolution, it appeared likely to me that the inhabitants of Thera would follow other primitive galactic civilizations in either one of two paths: total self-extinction on the model of the planet Ruffia (Cepheus/M-23), or gradual decay into sub-intelligence status as typified by the devolution of the planet Mohro (Draco/G-15).

2. In all honesty, however, I cannot predict which of the two paths the Therans will take. And I'm ready to relinquish my position of Galactic Observer (Second Class) if Your Wisdom can find someone more competent to do the job. In that case, however, I recommend that my replacement be prepared to deal with a species that defies Common Sense in the extreme; for they appear to follow both the Ruffians and the Mohrons at the same time. Let me explain.

The Therans – like the Ruffians – are pugnacious and mean, drifting frequently into base, sordid, and vile behaviour. Their history is an unending tale of misery produced by assault, exploitation, and war.

Their favourite instrument to draw boundaries between tribes is the cannon – as one of the few sane individuals among them pointed out over two hectoyears ago. It is clear to any being with a modicum of Common Sense that the future of such a species is self-extinction as soon as enough cleverly lethal weapons of mass destruction become available – such as the nuclear bombs which have been around on Thera for the last several decayears.

The Therans do have a relatively large number of individuals (about one in a million) whose brain activity manifests itself not just as cunning and cleverness, but carries genuine flashes of intelligence. (It was precisely this peculiarity that prompted me to sound hopeful in my previous report.) These philosophers, artists, and scientists have been around for a few kiloyears, and have dedicated their lives to try and understand themselves and the world around them. Although dimly, some of them realized that there is no point in denying the basic Ruffian nature of their minds. Instead, they insisted in encouraging their brethren to control their base instincts through the exercise of reason, either by direct teaching in Schools, or indirectly by means of the books they wrote. Remarkably, several of these teachers were able to gain the respect of their fellow beings. Their thoughts and insights were held in high esteem, and their books became a fixture in the education of the Theran youth. In particular, the stretch of time between four and two hectoyears ago (known as The Enlightenment, in Theran history) was characterized by a widely held belief in the power of reason, and by innovations in political, religious, and educational doctrine.

That was an exciting time, Your Wisdom! Oh, how my antennae quivered at the thought that the Therans might well be starting on the road to Common Sense. And how disappointing to observe their subsequent slide towards the Mohronic Way!

3. The few outstanding philosophers, artists, and scientists who fathered The Enlightenment were not Wise Beings by any means. But they had grasped one fundamental truth: Taming the base Ruffian nature of their species would require a long and arduous education of their youth. This would be the primary purpose of education. Along with it, of course, the youngsters were also supposed to develop some practical skills that would make them productive members of society – but that was secondary.

The plan to carry out the primary mission of education was based on two fundamental tenets: (a) Learn to tell apart good from evil, and to take responsibility for your actions; (b) never accept as truth opinions which are not backed by solid evidence. (As you can see, Your Wisdom, these principles sound very much like Common Sense.) Furthermore, these outstanding beings realized that such learning could not occur while engaged in practical activities requiring physical labour. That's why they created a special place of learning called "school", a word that means "activity of the spirit occurring in leisure time, free from toil".

At the end of the Enlightenment the schooling process was still clumsy, largely ineffective, and unfair. On the one hand the constant toil necessary to survive left the masses neither the leisure nor the strength to study; and, on the other, the Ruffian side of the Therans kept re-asserting itself through exploitation, tribal wars, and genocide. Nevertheless, thanks to the exponential growth of technology spawned by Science, conditions continued to improve – at least in a few regions of the planet. Nowadays every youngster is guaranteed to have leisure for the first quarter-lifespan, there are schools aplenty, and a large fraction of the wealth of each tribe is given to the education of the youth. Wisdom in sight? Sadly, no; for the purpose of education has been completely changed.

4. Several social forces are responsible for this change of focus. First, and foremost, there has been a revolt against the principles of The Enlightenment. One of these was the upholding of the scientific way of learning as the surest method to gain knowledge. This has now been replaced by Relativism, according to which there is no single knowledge, but as many knowledges as there are tribal cultures. Scientific knowledge is just one of them, but of no higher importance than the rest. As a corollary, of course, there is no single truth, but as many truths as there are groups of individuals holding a common set of beliefs. All these multicultural truths must be respected, and speaking up against any one of them may incur severe punishment.

It is quite obvious that this has drastic effects on the education of the Theran offsprings. For in these conditions the only thing they can be taught is uncritical acceptance of every group-opinion wrapped in the mantle of culture. This is called "tolerance", and the process involved in the settlement of differences of opinions "conflict resolution". Aside from the terminology, Your Wisdom will agree with me that this is precisely the philosophy of

the Mohrons.

Another important social force is the result of a confluence between relativism and Theran democracy. Each Theran belonging to a democratic tribe has the right to participate in the choice of their leaders simply by virtue of having been born. No test of competence is required. Normally, no argument is offered (or required) in justification of this weird practice. If pressed for one, the more articulate members of the tribe will point out that every youth spends a decayear or more in school, as a result of which he'll become a knowledgeable citizen perfectly capable of evaluating candidates for political office. But this, of course, does not happen at all. Imbued with the doctrine of Relativism, the Theran youngsters come out of the first cycles of schooling barely able to read and write. (Figures periodically released by the most prosperous Theran tribes show that about 40% of Therans are functionally illiterate.) Lacking the ability to think things through for themselves, they cannot muster the flood of information thrown at them by the

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marketing gurus - many of whom, incidentally, behave in accordance with strict Ruffian values.

Things are not much better for those who take the third educational cycle at university. These Highest Places of Learning were created in the spirit of The Enlightenment for the clear purpose of being the repositories of all accumulated knowledge and the main engines for the creation of new knowledge. An almost sacred duty of the scholars charged with the task was the dissemination of such knowledge among the Therans who were bright enough and diligent enough to learn at this level. As long as there was agreement about the existence of Truth and the attainability of Objective Knowledge of the world, the universities were able, by and large, to fulfill their mission, thanks mainly to one thing understood by everybody: The scholar's duty was to teach and research competently, and the pupil's duty to learn thoroughly. Those pupils who – for whatever reason – did not learn were advised to find another activity and rejected.

Currently, the formal structure of the university is still the same; its mission is still the same; and so are

"Consequently, the university has more and more of a vested interest in keeping the pupils in the system." (Photo courtesy of Information and Public Affairs, UW)

the duties of the scholars. However, the coming in fashion of Relativism has very much changed the pupils and their expectations. On an intellectual level, they do not consider it their duty to work very hard at learning what the scholar teaches, since they feel quite confident that their opinion on the subject – any subject – is just as valid. On a practical level, the pupils are very eager to learn vocational skills (usually involving computers, accounting, or marketing) which the Theran tribes hold in high esteem and reward with wealth. In a nutshell, universities are no longer expected to educate, but to train young people in specific skills as dictated by the marketplace. And this is not all. The tribe's willingness to shoulder the cost of the university has been waning for years, and more and more of the cost has been shifted to the pupil. Consequently, the university has more and more of a vested interest in keeping the pupils in the system. Thus the pupils have become customers, who must be pleased and made to feel good about themselves. This, of course, implies that the scholars' duty (and power) to assess learning and reject the pupils that fail has been effectively removed – albeit still piously proclaimed in official documents – either through self-censorship or by active intervention of the highest academic authorities in those few cases where a scholar refuses to comply. Failing an exam does not mean any longer that a pupil didn't work hard enough; rather, according to these high academic

authorities, it means that the exam was improperly set. And what is a properly set exam? Why, it's one whose outcome guarantees 95% customer satisfaction! (A 5% failure rate is desirable in order to keep up appearances.)

Your Wisdom, I'm not going to insult your Common Sense by detailing the Mohronic descent of the Therans into barbarism. Besides, the long and close observation of this species is starting to grate on my nerves, to the extent that for the first time in many kiloyears I'm actually experiencing a desire to punish the bastards. In short, Your Wisdom, I need a vacation. So if the Wisdom Council concludes from my report that these idiots should be observed further, please send a replacement. I'm already dreaming of Riza (Rigel/b-Orion).

CommonSensically yours,

Inop Netti
Galactic Observer (2nd Class)
Thera HQ, a-Quad/Spiral Arm

UW FACULTY MEMBERS RESPOND TO THE "EXTERNAL" EXAMINER'S REPORT

Jeanne Kay Guelke
Department of Geography

Thanks for printing Pino Tenti's sci-fi satire on contemporary society and university life. It's quite a subtle, clever piece. On first reading, I mistakenly thought that Pino (via his inter-galactic alias "Inop Netti") was quite critical of democracy and the academy. But on re-reading and reflection, I realized that Pino's charming alien observer is actually scripted as a kind of double agent; who by his exaggerated posturing as one of those tiresome, know-it-all, professorial reactionaries, has quite effectively lampooned the reactionaries themselves. Also, by simply scrambling the letters of his own name, Pino has shown himself to be a good sport, ready to tell a joke on himself.

The gists of Inop Netti's propositions superficially appear to be:

1. Intellectual life is down the tubes because of ignoramuses who willfully ignore the truths expressed by key (yet unnamed) Enlightenment philosophers, artists, and scientists. All of these immortals presumably were in complete alignment with the values of contemporary scientism as to the specific content and implications of the "power of reason."
2. Their wisdom, as well as Inop Netti's, consists of tacit or explicit opposition to the type of open democracy that exists in Canada today. It is dangerous to permit emancipation, or apparently, even independent opinions, among citizens bereft of an idealized education because they are susceptible to commercial advertisements.
3. Multi-culturalism and cultural relativism are bad and wrong because science and reason are the sole criteria of truth. The "M" words vs. science/reason are mutually exclusive. Both of the "M" words imply some kind of threatening anti-intellectual free-for-all. No inter-personal or inter-group messiness of the type that normally occurs in every-day life is permissible. Hegemony is the implicit and natural order of the day.
4. Students today are just a bunch of grade-grubbing, lazy whiners and complainers who seldom deserve to pass their courses.
5. Anyone who disagrees with these propositions is a "Mohron" [sic].

Professor Tenti's lampoon of "old-school" close-minded

professors is pretty clear. For example, the social and intellectual history of the Enlightenment reveals how many of its great thinkers in fact prodded a white male privileged class into more egalitarian attitudes towards visible minorities and their belief systems. Some of the Enlightenment's "best minds" argued for women's and poor men's congenital unsuitability for the franchise and education. The biggest irony is to consider what Pino's – or any of the Forum readers' – own lives might have been in like had we or anyone in a position of authority over us actually taken his key propositions seriously. So thanks for skewering those reactive, hyper-conservative beliefs that sometimes pass for wisdom in some quarters of this university. Maybe in a sequel essay Pino could add to his fictional "Therons" and "Mohrons" some new bits about another academic Earthling group, coyly named the "Ohld Fahrts" or "Mathe/dogmatics".

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Jan Narveson
Department of Philosophy

In the main, my response to Professor Tenti's Report is easy to state: he's right in his general drift, though I would dissent on a few details.

First, regarding "relativism": it is not very clear just what that is supposed to be. At the epistemological level, it is a nonsense doctrine, but its effect would certainly be as Tenti says. Why learn anything – indeed, how could we even define the notion of 'learning' – if we suppose that any opinion on anything is as good as any other? Even in English departments I don't suppose that doctrine is taken seriously, as it hardly can be. Tenti, however, does not quite mean that: he alludes to group opinion: "Relativism, according to which there is no single knowledge, but as many knowledges as there are tribal cultures." This is not true relativism, epistemologically, since the opinions of the tribe are presumably given some strong weighting by its members – but why do that? However, I think it is much more serious that so many beliefs, not only of students but their professors, are a function of what amounts to fascism – the view that what the Government says is Right.

Where he goes quite wrong is this: "The tribe's willingness to shoulder the cost of the university has been waning for years, and more and more of the cost has been shifted to the pupil. Consequently, the university has more and more of a vested interest in keeping the pupils in the system. Thus the pupils have become customers, who must be pleased and made to feel good about them-

selves." That simply doesn't correspond with reality. The proportion of the student's costs assumed by the public, already very high when I came here in 1963, increased as the years went by and has only lately begun to be eroded. Why should students who pay nothing for their education have any appreciation for what they're getting? I suspect that Tenti is a victim of student politicization, or perhaps the Canadian tribal predilection for thinking that everything good must come from the government – not a worthy attitude on the part of someone taking his general view of things.

He is also, in detail, I think, wrong about academic standards at this university, at least; my perception is that they have gone up, generally speaking. But he is right to say that students by and large look to University for job training rather than general wisdom. Considering what passes for wisdom in the public discourse nowadays, they probably show some perception in that. But it would be nice if students going to university expected, while there, to acquire a certain amount of intellectual culture, à la the Enlightenment. Most of them, probably, do not, at present. But some do, I think, and a good many on the staff have the same affection as Tenti's for the ideas of respect for scholarship and humanistic learning as well as technical and scientific knowledge and the intellectual rigour that goes with it.

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John Goyder
Department of Sociology

Pino refers to "common sense" more than once, but that concept is no more useful to social science than (I would speculate) it is to mathematics. Indeed if good old sturdy common sense could solve our problems, would there be need for such a thing as the university?

On my home intellectual ground of Sociology, certainly, we are in the counter-common sense business. "Conventional wisdom", a phrase from John Kenneth Galbraith's *The Affluent Society*, would be the usual synonym for common sense in Sociology. Sociological research looks to shoot down conventional wisdom, notwithstanding jokes about a sociologist being defined as a person who needs a \$50,000 research grant to discover what a brothel is!

Which brings me to Pino's points about "relativism", the privileging of "tribal cultures", and other such "multicultural truths". The whole post-modernist scene must be terribly frustrating to mathematicians. I sympathize; it can be frustrating for at least some of us sociologists as well. Put into context and perspective, however, such notions are not necessarily contrary to the objectives of good social science. Much of what we term

post-modernist is "not always as entirely original as it first appears" (Pauline Rosenau, *Post-Modernism and the Social Sciences*, 1992, page 5). One of the most powerful of these ideas is that location in a place and time can define what is "true". It's a disturbing, disorienting notion, as scholars such as Karl Mannheim realized as they explored these ideas in the 1930s.

Let's, however, consider one example of how such relativist notions can help overturn deeply-held conventional wisdoms that, with historical hindsight, later strike everyone as less taken-for-granted. I'll draw from my own childhood because the memories are still so vivid, and because some of the events were recently back in the news. In July 1954 I arrived as an eight year-old immigrant to Canada, landing in one of the outer suburbs west of Montreal. It was the Quebec of Maurice Duplessis, and we anglo kids in a Protestant school took it for granted that francophones left school early to be hewers of wood and drawers of water in the local community. Our English-speaking fathers, meanwhile, commuted up to Montreal each day to work at their corporate jobs. It was common sense; Catholic culture was poorly adapted to the business world. Even when another Maurice, the rocket-propelled one, was the focus of a riot in the winter of 1955, we anglo kids didn't question the injustice of Quebec society. We felt sorry for Clarence Campbell! By the time of the Rocket's death this past spring, the received truth about those distant times had quite changed. This year's Toronto press retrospectives on the Richard Riot would have read as ethnic-class treason in 1955. When Sociology works, it anticipates the judgement of history, and, while the past is still the present, supplies reasons for the revision. That is why books such as the study on French Canada that Everett Hughes published in 1943 (*French Canada in Transition*) gain enduring respect. A mathematician might reply that one anecdote does not prove a theorem. There are myriad other such stories and examples, however, ranging over all cultures and historical periods.

For social science to do its job, it has to remain almost painfully open-minded. That means accommodating to all the messiness of relativism and multicultural truths. Now Pino admittedly is right when he notes how easily students skim off a couple of ideas from postmodernism and get the wrong end of the stick, forgetting that there can be layers of meaning and reality. That's why every fall I jeopardize my course evaluation ratings by saying to students on the first day of Soc 101, "I don't care what your opinion is, and I don't care about your feelings, and you shouldn't care about mine. All I care about as a Sociologist is convincing evidence and logical argument."

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Prabhakar Ragde

On odd-numbered days I believe in Professor Tenti's vision. We academics are called upon to do so much – not only teach, but manage students and colleagues, sit in judgement on them, and disperse public monies. We can do these things, despite lack of formal training, because we know how to think, and spend our working hours teaching others how to think. But we are stymied at every turn, by bureaucrats, politicians, and the ignorant. We are forced to deal with hordes of unappreciative students, coddled by the primary and secondary systems to the point where they are unwilling to do any serious work, even if they were prepared for it. Politicians whose own educational experiences were limited and unsuccessful constantly cut the funds provided us to do our work, while dishing out largesse to the businessmen, lawyers, and lobbyists with whom they feel more comfortable. Society is so anti-intellectual that the few politicians with qualifications feel compelled to play them down, while those without proudly flaunt their "common sense". Everyone expects us to maintain quality and meaning in the credentials we provide, while decrying as elitist, restrictive and anti-democratic every measure we take to try to ensure this. Despite all this, we occasionally inspire loyalty and passion in a small handful of students, who continue to listen to us despite all systemic discouragements, and in whom we invest all our hopes. We hold the beacon high, no matter how far our feet sink into the mire.

On even-numbered days, quite a different vision possesses me. In this vision we are incompetent. On the basis of one piece of narrow, overspecialized research done in our youth, we arrogate to ourselves virtually unlimited abilities. In our classrooms, we cling to chalk and voice, blaming all lack of motivation and failure of communication on our listeners. We cannot explain our work or justify our methods to the rest of society, and whenever anyone challenges the unwritten axioms on which our rickety logics are built, our only responses are rejection, invective, and contempt. We label our own values and mores "apolitical" and "universal" so that we can dismiss others as motivated by self-interest, tribalism, and ideology, instead of "truth" and "objectivity". We demand scientific rigour from everyone else, but we take on faith the supposed correlations between what we teach our students and what they learn, what they learn and what we test, what we test and what they will apply outside the academy. The building blocks of our educational prisons - lecture, assignment, quiz, midterm, final – are used over and over, with only slight variation, to construct years of arcane ritual, whose only benefit seems to be to delay entry into the workforce until after hormones have subsided. Those students who manage to decipher the mysteries of this game and play along we label "good", while those who refuse to do so are "bad", and are denied our arbitrary credential. Thankfully, only

a few are seduced by the force of our personalities into unhealthy obeisance and slavish devotion. These hapless souls are so twisted by their misguided belief in us that the only thing they are good for is joining our pathetic fraternity, thereby keeping it on life support. We are truly "Voltaire's bastards", as John Ralston Saul put it, imprisoned in a cage of rationalizations and jargon, unaware that our eyeglasses are mirrored on the inside.

Somewhere between these two extremes lies the truth. On the cusp of midnight, moving between odd and even, I am for one infinitesimal moment in possession of that truth. A theorem of calculus, which Professor Tenti must set before the ungrateful masses each term, tells me that the moment exists. But the theorem gives me no clue as to how to identify the moment, let alone prolong it.

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Floyd F. Centore
Department of Philosophy, St. Jerome's University

Do Galactic Observers wear collars? If so, I can understand why Inop Netti is hot under his (do they have two sexes?). Over the centuries, has the intellectual risen higher on the scale of wisdom or has he regressed to the Stone Age? Are we today, as Einstein said, technological giants but moral pygmies? Is the modern professor now lower than the lowest uninformed peasant?

Any unwashed peasant person implicitly knows the meaning of terms such as being, good, true and real. When, for instance, the unsophisticated peon says that a story is a true story he means that the words of the story match up with the way the things referred to really happened. And when the vulgar one says that something is real, he means that the thing is there independently of his wishes or desires. Saying that the tree in the woods is real means that it has its own act of existing. The tree does not depend on the uncouth rustic to be, and, if the uneducated peasant should suddenly drop dead from overwork, the tree would go right on existing. Likewise in moral matters. It is not the job of the uncultured plebeian to invent his own rules of behaviour as he goes through life. The rules are already there. It is his job to find the rules and follow them.

I think that this is what Professor Tenti means by "common sense," something that seems to be in short supply, even in "higher" education. He then relates this to education. Educators are supposed to help people develop common sense into something more explicit, refined and precise, not destroy it. Science, for example, is not supposed to explain away the world of

ordinary experience, but to employ techniques for discovering truths about nature that are not so obvious that any untutored country boy can see them. Scientists are cautious people; they are not professional skeptics or proud ignoramuses.

In order to find people who take pride in their own ignorance, you have to go to the Arts Faculty. While scientists are making one discovery after another, people in the Arts are touting the glories of not being able to know anything at all with certainty. Is the moon made of green cheese? Well, what is *your* opinion about that? Like a Harvey's hamburger, you can have it any way you want it. Objectivity is out; subjectivity is in. It is all a matter of perspective.

If it appears that objectivity is needed, then a pseudo-objectivity is substituted for the real thing. So we learn that a huge leap of subjectivity, perhaps in the form of inter-subjectivity, will magically transmute into objectivity. We learn that a sufficiently large amount of soul searching will magically transform the killing of one's own child from something gruesome and hideous into something healthy and wholesome. Besides, who says that the existence of the tree does not depend upon human observers? Why can't the members of the group decide to attack the defenseless tree, as they do the helpless kid, and chop it down? That would teach it a lesson for daring to exist independently of the collective cultural consciousness. Of course, some obnoxious commoner might ask: Is it true that you really cut down the tree?

Fortunately for ordinary people, the new pseudo-sophistication is so devouring that it soon turns on itself. In one big bite it gulps down its own doctrine. Becoming as confused as a baby in a topless bar, it cannot stop until it has absorbed everything, including itself. Let us assume, just for the sake of argument, that everything human is the result of tribal social conditioning. The theory is that, from their earliest days, all human beings are amorphous lumps of clay, to be molded by the culture. As a result, some horrible things have occurred, such as paternalism. So far, so good. But then the tribal person proceeds to cut his own throat. He asks: Is that the way it should be?

The obvious question about this question is: What business does anyone have asking about the way things should be? Things are the way they are, and that is that. Whence the justification for wanting to change things for the better? What does it mean to demand progress in human behaviour patterns? How do we know that we are moving ahead if we do not know, in advance, the good goal to aim at? How can we know what is wrong if we cannot know, right now, what is fair, just and worthwhile?

Making a long story short, if it is true that everything concerning human thinking and behaving is the consequence of cultural conditioning, then the deconstructionist theory itself must also be an unnecessary and temporary social construct. Very conveniently for reasonable people, deconstructionism self-destructs. This means that if deconstructionism were true, we would never be able to know that it is true. We would be forever trapped within the cocoon of social conditioning, unable to view our own condition as it exists in itself or in relationship to anything else. It would be like someone who was born and lived forever in a submarine. He could never step outside of his situation and view the overall picture. So, as soon as a deconstructionist tells us that his position is the one and only true doctrine, we know immediately that deconstructionism is false.

The most the devotee of modern relativism might be able to say is that, well, if you do not care about staying connected with the real world, my theory is something to consider. For the artist, an active imagination is a wonderful thing. Fantasy is fine in novels, poems, the movies, science fiction writing and the like. Escapism, though, can hardly hope to stand up against the overwhelming experiences of ordinary human life. It will not work when called upon to deal with the real world and real human problems. Those who think that they can go on forever living in a fantasy world, a world in which wishful thinking substitutes for reality, are not long for this world. The Galactic Observer has indeed put his finger (do they have fingers?) on the pulse of modern "higher" education, and has found that it is very close to death.

The FAUW Forum is a service for the UW faculty sponsored by the Association. It seeks to promote the exchange of ideas, foster open debate on issues, publish a wide and balanced spectrum of views, and inform members about current Association matters.

Opinions expressed in the Forum are those of the authors, and ought not to be perceived as representing the views of the Association, its Board of Directors, or of the Editorial Board of the Forum, unless so specified. Members are invited to submit letters, news items and brief articles.

If you do not wish to receive the Forum, please contact the Faculty Association Office and your name will be removed from the mailing list..

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BENEFITS

(Continued from page 1)

It would appear that there were virtually no increases in cost over the period 1992 to 1998, followed by two major jumps. What is happening? Unfortunately, the Provost, uncharacteristically, is not providing an explanation. My suspicion is that three factors are involved. First, the premium stabilization reserves in 1992 were more than adequate and were used from 1992 to 1998 to avoid any premium increases. In 1998, this was no longer fully possible and with the new carrier in 1999, a demand was made that the rates not only be adequate for the current year but be sufficient to rebuild the now depleted premium stabilization reserves. If this is the case, the increases are a one time phenomenon which should be ignored. The second factor is deductible leverage. Our deductibles of \$104 (single)/\$208 (family) are much higher than those at our competitor institutions. As a result, any increase in claims inflation above the CPI inflation rate adds considerably to the plan's overall cost increase. Thirdly, in the last round of changes, modifications were made which should have increased costs considerably, e.g. the swipe card for drugs.

Given all of these factors, in the absence of complete information, my conclusion is cost increases are well in hand and there is no "crisis," i.e. no justification for major changes.

What about the proposed changes? The four major ones scare me. Flexible benefits will be presented as giving us the chance to tailor our benefits better to our needs. There is an element of truth in this but the big reason is to shift costs to us. If the premia increase 30% per year, and the administration increases its payments by inflation and pays the full cost in the first year, by the end of three years, we will be paying \$1325 and the university \$1311. The problem is that our payment will be out of post-tax dollars, so the real salary decrease is close to \$2790 or 3.6% for the average professor.

The second change is of even greater concern. Employee benefits have always been considered as serving the purpose of protecting the employee's paycheque. The

Administration wants to change this to "protecting the employee". In isolation, this change appears reasonable and merely another way of saying the same thing. It is not. For example, life insurance does not protect the employee (who is dead when the benefit is paid) but rather the employee's paycheque (and family). Health insurance would cover only the employee and not the employee's family. Coverage for them would have to be purchased at increased cost through the plan or privately (if available) and would not be available if a current dependent was ill. For a single mother with two dependent children a cost, three years after the plans was established, of \$4400 would be a reasonable projection.

The proposed change to "paying everyone the same" would have an interesting effect. The young single employees would have more cash in hand as they would not use all the money allocated them to purchase benefits. Older employees would not be able to purchase their current benefits with the allocated credits and might face a cost of as much as \$7600 pre-tax to replace current benefits.

The proposal to drop out of Canada medical coverage unless the trip is for University business will cause some real problems. Many of us go to a conference and then take a few days to visit friends or see the area. This later time would not be covered and expensive individual coverage would need to be purchased, if you can get it.

What are my conclusions?

1. Our benefits need improvement, not a slash, to be in line with our competitor institutions.
2. Flexible benefits will shift costs to us and increase the cost to the community. They are not tax efficient.
3. Employee benefits should continue to protect our paycheques.
4. The administration should continue to provide health, etc. benefits and not just a contribution toward them.

BENEFITS SUMMARY
(costs to Employee unless otherwise indicated)

	Waterloo 2000	Guelph 1999	McMaster 1999	Queen's 2000	Toronto 2000	Western 2000	York 2000
EXTENDED HEALTH CARE							
Premium	nil	nil	nil	35%	25%	nil	nil
Co-insurance	20%	nil	nil	nil	nil	nil	nil
Deductible	\$104/\$208	nil	\$25/\$50	\$25	\$25/\$25	nil	\$25/50
Semi-Private Hospital	20% first 5 days	nil	over \$110/day	nil	nil	nil	nil
Drugs	20%	dispensing fee \$5/Rx	\$5/Rx	nil	\$6.50 + 10%	nil	nil
*Vision	none	\$250/2yrs	\$150/2yrs	none	none	\$100/yr	\$375/2yrs
Out of Country Covered	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
DENTAL							
Premium	nil	2/3	nil	25%	20%	nil	nil
Deductible	nil	nil	nil	nil	nil		nil
Limit		\$2000/yr		\$3000/yr			
ODA Fee Schedule	2 yrs previous	previous year	previous year	previous year	current	current	current
Recall Frequency	5 months	9 months	9 months	6 months	9 months	9 months	6 months
**Basic	20%/\$1515 Y	nil	nil	nil	nil	20%	nil
**Endodontics / Periodontics	20%/\$1515 Y	nil	15%	nil	nil	20%	nil
**Major Restorative	50%/\$2285 Y	33%/\$2000 Y	50%/\$2000 Y	50%	20%/\$1500 Y	none	15%/\$3000 Y
**Orthodontics	50%/\$2285 L	33%/\$2000 L	50%/\$2000 L	none	none	none	25%/\$5000 L

Legend: Y=yearly; U= unlimited; L=lifetime

* Employer pays

** Employee pays x% of first \$n and 100% thereafter

UW FACULTY EXPRESSES AMBIVALENT REACTIONS TO CANADA RESEARCH CHAIRS PROGRAM

Catherine Schryer, Department of English

In an event sponsored by the FAUW, James Turk, Executive Director of the Canadian Association of University Teachers, and David Johnston, President of the University of Waterloo, met with about 75 faculty members to discuss the Canada Research Chairs Program (CRCP) and its impact on the University of Waterloo. According to the CRCP program guide (see the SSHRC web site), the program aims to “attract the best researchers in the world to Canadian universities, and to do so at a time when the U.S and other G-7 universities are combing the world for the best brains.”¹ The Federal government plans to accomplish this goal by dedicating \$900 million dollars to the funding of specific university chairs.

According to John Wilson, the President of the FAUW, who introduced the two speakers, the two speakers “gently disagreed” with each other regarding the implications of the CRCP. However, faculty attending this event witnessed a clear division of views, a division that perhaps signals the ambivalence that many faculty might experience as they learn more about the CRCP.

James Turk began by illuminating the background behind our current funding dilemma. In the last eight years, both the Federal and Provincial governments have substantially cut our funding. Universities have responded by shifting some of the cost burden to students and by a restructuring that has had three important consequences:

- Canadian universities are becoming increasingly differentiated. Most Canadian universities once shared similar standards. Now we resemble the American system as some institutions have been classified as “Have” universities and some as “Have not” universities.
- A narrower, more corporate, focus is emerging. Rather than celebrating the full range of expertise present in post-secondary institutions, current governments emphasize “selective excellence.” This new emphasis reflects short-term market concerns and is biased against the long-term excellence found in basic scientific research and in the humanities.
- The professoriate itself is becoming increasingly differentiated. A growing gap is developing between teaching and research as contractual appointments proliferate. At present, in the United States, only 41% of instructors have tenured positions. Evidence

suggests the same situation is developing in Canada.

In Turk’s view, the CRCP deepens the divisions created by chronic under funding in five ways:

- The CRCP exacerbates the differences between universities in Canada. Turk explained that the program creates what he calls the Matthew effect in that “to those who have more, more shall be given.” The funding formula is based on the current funding that universities receive from the three granting agencies – SSHRC, NSERC, and NRC (or CIHR). Consequently, 61% of the funding goes to universities that represent only 39% of total student enrollment. This formula particularly disadvantages the University of Waterloo as we have a history of securing funding from other sources such as industry. At present, the University of

Faculty attending this event witnessed a clear division of views, a division that perhaps signals the ambivalence that many faculty might experience as they learn more about the CRCP.

Toronto, under this plan receives 5 times the funding that the University of Waterloo does. If student enrollment had been used as the basis of the formula, Toronto would only receive 2.4 times more.

- The CRCP aggravates current imbalances within universities. The plan divides its funding into 45% for the Natural Sciences, 35% for Health Sciences and 20% for the Humanities and Social Sciences despite the fact that the majority of faculty and students are still in the Humanities and Social Sciences.
- The CRCP intensifies the discrepant treatment between the “stars”² and the rest of the faculty. In reality, the CRCP plan supports only the internationally top 5% in any field. Furthermore, the plan is quite unclear as to the infrastructure that will be provided for “stars.”
- The CRCP interferes with the traditional right of universities to hire their own faculty. The CRCP has the power to veto any research chair proposal and has declared that it intends to exercise this prerogative.
- The CRCP could disrupt university financing. At

present, funds are only committed for three years with a possible extension to five or seven years (depending on the nature of the appointment). A future government, such as one controlled by Stockwell Day, might have no commitment to the CRCP. The universities would be left to deal with expensive “stars.”

David Johnston next addressed the forum. He agreed with James Turk that the funding cuts during the last several years were “deplorable.” But, he asserted that he himself was a “fan” of the CRCP initiative because it brought new money into research funding. He agreed that it was an “elite” fund, but approved of the government’s efforts to “encourage the building of a critical mass of world-class researchers to help Canadian universities achieve their goals.”

President Johnston provided some historical background for the current situation. He noted that under the Canadian constitution, the provincial governments, not the federal government, had responsibility for education. In the past the federal government had shared responsibility for funding post-secondary institutions presumably to support research. However, because of huge deficits in the 1990’s, it cut back on its support. In his view the current efforts to provide more funding to the granting councils and the CRCP represent the federal government’s attempts to find ways to support universities.

He then reviewed the UW’s plans to respond to the CRCP program (see Office of Research web site for details). The university has identified five major “thrust” areas⁴: Information technology; Environment; Health; Materials and Systems; and Innovation, Society and Culture. It will deploy the 24 chairs that it can apply for as follows: 6 in Information Technology, 4 in Environment, 4 in Health, 5 in Material and Systems, and 4 in Innovation, Society and Culture⁵.

The university also has a hiring plan. It expects that 20% of the Chairs will be awarded to internal candidates, and that fewer than 30% will be offered to candidates at other Canadian universities. At least 50% will be offered to senior researchers from outside Canada and to new researchers.

In the question period that followed faculty members expressed their concerns. Several asked about the lack of secure infrastructure funding and the possibility that these chair positions could suck funding from already established research programs. Several questioned the stability of the plan and asked what would happen if the government withdrew its support and the university was left with expensive contracts.

One faculty member asked whether any consideration had been given to questions of gender equity. James Turk replied that CAUT believed that the plan, because of its funding pattern, would exacerbate the current hiring situation. CAUT expressed their concerns to the Ministry but were told that the Ministry was not concerned about this issue.

Other faculty asked whether the plan could cause “raiding” and “feeding frenzies” between universities and whether we could lose more researchers than we gain. Turk indicated that CAUT thought that such situations could develop, especially with universities like Toronto receiving such a disproportionate amount of funding. Johnston replied that the CRCP should be viewed as new money injected into the system. If we lose people, we’ll be able to hire others.

In his concluding comments, President Johnston stated that the CRCP was a good start, a place from which to build new federal funding initiatives.

James Turk, however, observed that the CRCP was a bad start because it was based on a faulty premise – that universities could develop strong research programs by importing expertise rather than by supporting and developing its own experts.

¹ Does anyone else find the mixed metaphor of “combing the world for the best brains” both hilarious and objectionable? The metaphor conjures up science fiction images of a giant comb searching through forests of growth for naked brains, encased presumably in think tanks. Also is contributing to the “brain drain” of other countries, especially third world countries, a worthy activity for the Canadian government ?

² Throughout the CRCP the metaphor of “stars” predominates. Does anyone else object to the invasion of Hollywood into academia?

³ They will certainly need their own dressing rooms.

⁴ A “thrust area.” This language also appears in the original CRCP document. What is a “thrust” area? Again the mixing of metaphors creates images of giant fists flailing about.

⁵ That means that only 4 chairs go to all of the Humanities and Social Sciences.

THE PENSION AND BENEFITS REPORT

Sandra Burt
Chair, FAUW Pension and Benefits Committee
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This is the first of my regular reports on the work of the university Pension and Benefits Committee.

The Faculty Association recommends three people for the Committee, which is formally a committee of the Board of Governors. Jock MacKay (Statistics and Actuarial Science) and I currently represent faculty interests on the Committee. A third member will be named soon.

For the past year, we have been discussing, among other things, the rising costs of the extended health care and dental plans. Those increases are outlined in the notice distributed the week of September 18 by Jim Kalbfleisch, the chair of the Committee. I urge you to attend one of the meetings that have been called to discuss planned and possible changes in these plans. These meetings will take place on:

Wednesday, September 27	3:00 - 4:30 p.m., PHY 145
	9:00 - 10:30 p.m., AL 116

Thursday, September 28	9:00 - 10:30 a.m., DC 1302
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In addition, you may wish to contact Jock MacKay or myself to express your views. It would be very helpful to us if you could consider the following: What is the purpose of extended health care and dental plans? What do you like and dislike about the current plans? Since it seems inevitable that there must be some cost reductions, are some parts of these plans more essential than others?

I look forward to seeing you at one of the meetings.



ANNOUNCEMENTS

SWIC

Fall Reception

The Faculty Association's Status of Women and Inclusivity Committee (SWIC) will host its annual Fall reception to welcome new female faculty Wednesday, October 26 from 4 to 6 p.m. in the Environmental Studies 1 courtyard. Invitations will be sent shortly to all female faculty. If we miss any women inadvertently, please contact Jeanne Kay Guelke, jkg@fes, for details.

Members Needed

The Status of Women and Inclusivity Committee (SWIC) of the Faculty Association is looking for a few good women and men to serve as new members. The committee advises the Faculty Association Board of Directors on campus matters of interest and concern to women and other protected groups, such as visible minorities and persons with disabilities. In recent years SWIC focussed on proposed changes to UW policies and the status of non-regular faculty members. The committee normally meets once a month, with a schedule set by committee members. If you would like to join SWIC, please contact Jeanne Kay Guelke immediately at jkg@fes, x6833, or the Department of Geography in ES1.

VOLUNTEERS SOUGHT

There are vacancies on the Academic Freedom and Tenure and the Pension and Benefits Committees. Association members interested in serving on one of these committees should contact Len Guelke (Chair AF&T ext. 3064) or Sandra Burt (Chair P&B ext. 3603).



The FAUW Website
has a new address:

<http://www.uwfacass.uwaterloo.ca>

CAUT PUBLICATION

CAUT is pleased to announce the publication of *The Corporate Campus: Commercialization and the Dangers to Canada's Colleges and Universities*, edited by James Turk.

The articles grew out of presentations made at CAUT's conference on commercialization of post-secondary education held October 1999. Authors include Ursula Franklin, Nancy Olivieri, Bill Graham, Paul Axelrod, David Noble, Bill Bruneau, Wanye Renke, Anne Clark, Maureen Shaw, Marjorie Griffin Cohen, Janice Newson, Claire Polster, Michael Conlon, Langdon Winner, and Michelle Brill-Edwards.

The Corporate Campus sells for \$19.95 and is available from bookstores or from the publisher by phoning 1-800-565-1975.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

John Wilson

Welcome to our first edition of the *Forum* under the editorship of Ed Vrscay, to whom we all extend out thanks for his willingness to take on the task. I want also to thank yet again Vera Golini for her several years of dedicated service at the *Forum* helm. We are all delighted that she will continue to join in the work of the Association.

We are back at work again, at our task of minding the store at Waterloo in those ways we were created to handle. The Association is proceeding on many different fronts this term – collegial, intellectual, managerial, and in pursuit of more secure working conditions for our members.

By the time this number of the *Forum* reaches you the special session with Jim Turk – Executive Director of the Canadian Association of University Teachers – dealing with some of the issues involved in the federal government's Canada Research Chairs program will have occurred. We are grateful to President David Johnston for his participation in this session.

Fred McCourt and his team hope to conclude this term their negotiations with the administration side over articles for addition to the Memorandum of Agreement dealing with redundancy, layoffs, and

economic exigency. The team we have nominated as members of the University's Pension and Benefits Committee – led by Sandra Burt – has contributed to a resolution of what a few months ago appeared to be a crisis in the management of our benefits package, and will continue to monitor developments in that area.

The Association Board is helping to support two opportunities during the term when faculty members can get to know each other. In October new women faculty members will meet, and at the end of the term we will hold again the reception for all new faculty members which has been so successful in the past.

In late November the fall meeting of the Council of Representatives will be held. Our hope is that every department and school will have a member on this group, but there are always opportunities to participate. If you are interested please let Pat Moore in the Association Office know. On the afternoon of Wednesday, December 6 the fall general meeting of the membership will occur, when there will be reports on the many different activities in which we are involved.

Our members on the Faculty Relations Committee – Cathy Schryer, Alicja Muszynski, Fred McCourt, Len Guelke and myself – continue to contribute to the development of new policies at Waterloo. After over a year at the task of rewriting promotion and tenure policy to establish the new policies 76 and 77, we have also come close to completing a very interesting discussion on the impact of the internet on teaching and employment conditions in the universities. Some proposals on this front will shortly be forthcoming.

People will notice that there is lots to do. We are always in need of volunteers to help in Association committees and to be our representatives on University committees. If you are interested in helping out in this way please either send me a message or let Pat Moore know, and we will get back to you as quickly as we can.