

FAUW Forum

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OPEN DISCUSSION AND RATIONAL DEBATE: *Requiescant In Pace?*

Two UW philosophers examine the status of discourse, reason and political correctness on campus

Last July the *Forum* sent invitations to all members of UW's Department of Philosophy (including faculty at Conrad Grebel College and St. Jerome's University, for a total of 24 invitations) to solicit articles for a special "philosophical" issue. As of the end of September one article was received. In "Whatever Became of the Common Room?" (beginning on Page 2) Floyd Centore of St. Jerome's University laments the decline of open academic discussion and debate at universities.

Very recently, the *Forum* received a contribution

from Joseph Novak of UW's Department of Philosophy. His article, originally submitted to the *Imprint* and then to the *Gazette*, is a response to the 12 September memo from the Federation of Students regarding the terrorist attacks in the US. According to the *UW Daily Bulletin*, faculty members were asked by both the Associate Provost (Human Resources and Student Services) and Faculty Deans to read the Federation message to their classes. The memo along with Prof. Novak's response are reprinted in this issue, beginning on Page 3.

THE FAUW'S CONTINUING EFFORTS TO ADDRESS THE ISSUE OF GRADE-CHANGING

In her President's Message (Page 16), Catherine Schryer outlines the FAUW's ongoing efforts to negotiate with UW's administration a procedure for the changing of grades assigned by an instructor. She summarizes a proposal by the FAUW Board of Directors that could not be negotiated in the Faculty Relations Committee. At this point, the FAUW seeks advice and comments from faculty members on the proposal as well as on the grade-changing issue in general.

PROF TO STUDENTS: "I DO NOT LOVE YOU ... I DO NOT NEED YOUR LOVE"

Thus confesses author and translator Michael Blumenthal in a letter to his creative writing class at Santa Clara University earlier this year. He also warned his students that they were neither nurtured nor loved by "certain teachers who have been far more popular...." but, rather, "lied to and betrayed." Reprinted from the *Chronicle of Higher Education* on Page 12.

LIPSHITZ RESPONDS

Prof. Stanley Lipshitz replies to three letters that have appeared in the *Forum* regarding the "grade-changing" incident and the arbitrator's report (Page 9).

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WHATEVER BECAME OF THE COMMON ROOM?

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

The world outside the university is filled with interesting discussions and debates. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said about life within the university. Regardless of what might be going on in the dormitories, there is not a great deal of intellectual cross-pollination in the university. This is not the way things are supposed to be. Some years ago, the American political scientist Allan David Bloom (1930-92) became world-famous for his critique of twentieth century American university education entitled *The Closing of the American Mind* (1987). In some quarters, when Bloom pointed out how the universities had been politicized by radical modern feminists and left-wing Marxists, he was taken to task as a narrow-minded, regressive, right-wing fanatic. Nevertheless, his main point is well taken. The university is not supposed to be a hotbed of political turmoil and intrigue.

In contrast to being a base for bashing people, a university is supposed to be an oasis of research and discovery, accompanied by never-ending rational discussion and debate among those who have devoted themselves to the study of their own particular disciplines. In addition to whatever private interests people may have, there should be a common room at the center of the university, a place where people actually talk to each other. This notion is sometimes endorsed as a worthy ideal, but one that is honored more with lip service than in practice. We seem to have forgotten that seeing to administrative policies and details, although highly important to the efficient operation of a large organization, is nevertheless still only a means to an end, not the end itself.

Off-campus, however, things are different. Watching a TV program such as *Crossfire* on CNN gives you a much greater sense of vibrant debate than you are likely to find in the university. True, there are letters to the editor of the faculty-staff newspaper and sometimes the student newspaper will attempt a discussion of some current issue of great moral and social significance. All too often, though, the student level of debate hardly rises above adolescent snipping and games of one-upmanship. In contrast, a program such as *Crossfire*,

although also often lacking in scholarly content, at least gets down to brass tacks.

What do you think of embryonic stem-cell research? One side says that, in view of the many cures that may result, it is a wonderful thing and should be pursued in a vigorous manner without any government or religious interference. Then the other side says something like, "Thank you, Dr. Josef Mengele (1911-79)." How soon we forget. Not so long ago thousands of young men died fighting a war aimed in large part at defeating the notion that achieving a good end justifies the use of evil means.

The tangle of biomedical issues is only one topic out of many that are currently of great significance in our society. Judging from the news media, other issues would include racism, child pornography, and the role of government in education. What are the roots of racism? To what extent is contemporary thought, say in the form of Darwin's theory of common descent with modification, a source of racist thinking nowadays? If adult pornography is perfectly legal, and even fostered by the government and the popular media, why should we be so intolerant of child pornography? After all, fun is fun, right? To what extent should the government have a monopoly on K-12 education? Why should any tax money at all be collected for the purpose of education? Why not let parents decide where their education money will be spent? Or is it the case that all children are really the wards of the state, thus giving the state the right to decide how they are to be educated, even in religious matters? Is it not true that all education inculcates religious values of one sort or another?

At the present time, the university, divided up into small groups, each doing its own thing, seems to be set up so as to discourage such debates from taking place. This has not always been the case. In the past, disputed questions were argued out in front of the whole university. In many of the older universities the common room acted as a forum wherein people from different disciplines could meet and openly discuss both the niceties of their own areas of special knowledge as

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WHATEVER BECAME OF CRITICAL DISCOURSE?

Joseph A. Novak
Department of Philosophy

The following memo was sent from the Federation of Students on Wednesday, September 12. After the memo is a response that I first submitted to the *Imprint* and then to the *Gazette* refused for publication. Both newspapers declined to publish the response on the grounds that, as a Letter to the Editor, it was too long.

Tuesday's disturbing events are still foremost in our thoughts and likely will be for some time. It is important to realize that we are here in Waterloo together, all sharing the same emotions of this experience: shock, fright, worry and anger. We ask that all members of the UW community not bring this anger to bear on those who were not involved in the attacks.

Many Muslim students have been made to feel uncomfortable and afraid both on and off campus by remarks made to them. Please remember that they are no more associated with Tuesday's events than you are and spreading hatred only helps the terrorists to achieve their goals.

In difficult times such as these, we must work to build our community rather than help others to tear it down through fear and speculation.

Counselling Services (x2655) and the UW Chaplains (x3633) are available to help students deal with the strong emotions surrounding this incident.

Yaacov Iland Brenda Beatty
President Vice-President, Student Issues
Federation of Students Federation of Students

Regarding the Federation of Students Memo on the World Trade Center Bombing

by Joseph A. Novak

In a fashion not atypical of the political correctness that has dominated many a university campus over the last decades, a note from the Federation of Students was sent to professors with a preface from the Administration requesting that the note be read in all classes. The note dealt with the World Trade Center bombing and spoke of the event as “disturbing” and

productive of “shock,” “anger,” “fright,” and “worry.” It spoke of Muslim students being “uncomfortable” and “afraid.”

My first reaction to the note was to think, “How do you administrators imagine the people at the WTC felt as they were plummeting to their deaths in flames? ‘Uncomfortable?’”

My second reaction to the note was to observe how the language was so indicative of an amoral politically correct mindset that is sold out to psychologizing human events and actions. The memo was framed within the usual psychological perspective and language that the present 21st century seems to carry as so much of an ill inheritance of the 20th century. There was no mention of the “evil,” “vicious,” “wicked,” or even “demonic” aspects of the whole event itself. There was no mention of the “injustice” of the action or the “deliberate malice” of the people who perpetrated the act. In short, the note was another missive from the administration instructing faculty to continue to foster the “be nice” attitude that has become the categorical imperative of the marshmallow-minded baby boomers whose thoughts resonate to the tune of John Lennon’s “Imagine” and to nourish the relativism of post-baby boomer generations who pretty much believe that “good” and “evil” are assigned simply on the basis of what you feel.

That one must not bring “anger to bear” on those “not involved in the attacks,” as the memo notes, is certainly the case. However, it must be asked how wide a net of involvement spreads. Let me illustrate.

Having Polish grandparents who were immigrants, I was raised as a Roman Catholic and continued in that church till I found that the ignorance, duplicity, bigotry, and sheer wickedness perpetrated by that organization was something I could no longer support by any affiliation with it. Every dollar dropped in the collection basket and every fulfillment of a so-called “religious obligation” was simply giving support to actions of others that were harmful to people, spiritually, mentally, and even physically. There was ultimately no option but to sever my ties with Catholicism and all it represented.

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THE COMMON ROOM (Continued from page 2)

well as the hot topics of the day. Alfred North Whitehead (1861-1947), for instance, in the autobiographical first part of his *Essays in Science and Philosophy* (1947), recalls how his exclusively mathematical education in Trinity College, Cambridge, had to be balanced with regular meetings of an interdisciplinary discussion group called "The Apostles." As Whitehead expressed it, the group would meet from Saturday evening until anytime the next day.

But not any more. Today, faculty members and students would not be caught dead informally meeting together to discuss anything. The senate and central committees of the university avoid such discussions as if the issues were contaminated with the plague. Nowadays, the only hot topics are exciting administrative procedures and details concerning which files go into which file drawers. Or should I say, concerning which keys to push on which computers?

In addition to issues affecting society as a whole, there are issues more peculiar to the university. Why should all faculty members be paid according to the same pay scale? Should not those who bring in more money, as, for instance, in the form of research grants, be paid at a much higher level than those who do not? Also, why should the official university way of speaking be dictated by the feminists? If someone wants to take "chairman" to mean "chairmale," that is his problem. Why should everyone be forced to alter his ordinary English way of speaking in order to accommodate the linguistically confused? I also wonder why there was never any real debate over coercing people into financially supporting the local "labor union." Moreover, when and where will the morality and justice of going out on strike be discussed? As rational beings, should not this issue be resolved before a situation arises in which we are faced with a possible strike? Moreover, why is logic not a required course for all university graduates? How can someone claim to be a properly educated university person if he has not taken to heart at least one course in basic logic?

As the highest academic body in the university, would not Senate be a good place to carry on such discussions? At the same time that I ask this, though, I also realize that there might be reasons for not opening up such cans of worms. One is fear. How long would it be, one might

wonder, before we forget our status as rational beings and start throwing punches at each other? When you start calling a spade a spade, someone might decide that the best way to resolve the problem is to hit you with one.

Then again, some might think it highly impolite to publicly criticize someone's view of something. Whether in or out of the classroom, it isn't cricket to make anyone feel uncomfortable, which is exactly what might happen if people had to think too much. Instead of being an oasis of rationality I we seem to be living during a time of organized irrationality in the university. According to our present-day pseudo-liberal creed, you are allowed to hold your own position as true, but you cannot say that someone else's position, even when it directly contradicts yours, is false. Does being polite really mean turning irrational by denying the principle of non-contradiction? Does being irrational really make someone a better teacher?

According to a recent issue of the *Chronicle of Higher Education* (18 May 2001; reprinted in the September 2001 issue of the *Forum*), the majority of the members of the faculty senate for the 2000-2001 academic year at the University of Notre Dame experienced a great deal of angst similar to what I have been describing above. They became so discouraged about their ability to be anything more than a machine for processing paper that they voted to dissolve the useless thing. What need is there for an august academic body such as a faculty senate when university and departmental administrators, sitting in their own individual offices and occupying their own turf in splendid academic isolation from one another, could easily sign all of the right forms in all of the right places as if the faculty senate did not exist? The report goes on to tell how a majority of the members for the 2001-2002 academic year, thinking that cutting off your nose to spite your face is not such a wise thing to do, voted to reverse the earlier vote.

The present situation raises a more general issue concerning the feasibility of any sort of interdisciplinary program or course of studies. Who has any interest in what anyone else is doing? Does anyone in one course or set of courses really contrast and compare what is going on in some other course or set of courses? If some course teaches that the human mind is the same thing as the human brain, where would someone go to learn that the human mind could not possibly be the same thing as

the human brain? Why are all of the really interesting parts of the social sciences the philosophical parts? What is science anyway? What good is mathematics when you are looking for the roots of racism? And, by the way, *precisely* what is wrong with being a racist?

The current situation does not bode well for the future. If the highest academic body of the university is incapable of carrying on discussions of academic issues in such a way as to change the character of university education, I do not see that there is much hope for such

changes at the lower levels of university academic life. Where is the good example for others to follow? Well, maybe it is better to let sleeping dogs lie. But then again, maybe some rousing fisticuffs on the floor of the senate is just what the university needs in order to convince students that there is more to the meaning of life than sitting fixated in front of a computer monitor for fourteen hours a day. After all, what is a computer? A dummy with a long memory; merely a mechanical slave, completely lacking in any kind of human intelligence, will and compassion, right?

CONGRATULATIONS!

The Faculty Association extends congratulations to the following faculty members who were awarded tenure and/or promotion effective July 1, 2001.

AWARDED TENURE

Timothy Chan, Computer Science
 Trevor Charles, Biology
 Dov Cohen, Psychology
 Michael Power, Biology
 Scott Taylor, Chemistry
 Sherman Shen, Electrical & Computer Engineering
 John Wright, Mechanical Engineering

AWARDED TENURE AND PROMOTED TO ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR

Susan Andrews, Civil Engineering
 Monica Barra, Chemistry
 Michael Boehringer, Germanic & Slavic Studies
 David DeVidi, Philosophy
 Michael Dixon, Psychology
 Jean Duhamel, Chemistry
 Paul Fieguth, Systems Design Engineering
 Tarek Hegazy, Civil Engineering
 Bruce Hellinga, Civil Engineering
 Andrew Hunt, History
 Elizabeth Irving, Optometry
 Amir Khajepour, Mechanical Engineering
 Kostas Kontogiannis, Electrical & Computer Engineering
 Fue-Sang Lien, Mechanical Engineering
 Carolyn MacGregor, Systems Design Engineering
 Scott McCabe, Psychology

AWARDED TENURE AND PROMOTED TO ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR (cont'd)

Kevin McGuirk, English
 Stephen Murphy, Environment & Resource Studies
 Alexandru Nica, Pure Mathematics
 Mahesh Pandey, Civil Engineering
 Khaled Soudki, Civil Engineering
 Steve Spencer, Psychology

PROMOTED TO PROFESSOR

Jeff Chen, Physics
 Jiahua Chen, Statistics & Actuarial Science
 Brian Forrest, Pure Mathematics
 Mariela Gutiérrez, Spanish & Latin American Studies
 Jan Huissoon, Mechanical Engineering
 Vassili Karanassios, Chemistry
 Ron McCarville, Recreation & Leisure Studies
 Trien Nguyen, Economics
 Rajinder Pal, Chemical Engineering
 Alison Pedlar, Recreation & Leisure Studies
 Gordon Savage, Systems Design Engineering
 Chettyalayam Selvakumar, Electrical & Computer Engineering
 Jan Uhde, Fine Arts
 Richard Wells, Kinesiology
 Joanne Wood, Psychology
 Michael Worswick, Mechanical Engineering

CRITICAL DISCOURSE *(Continued from page 3)*

So, I effectively gave the Pope a metaphorical kick in his butt and left his organization. After I had done so, I no longer was responsible for the actions of that organization and I no longer was implicated in supporting his decisions and actions which were harmful to others.

It is incumbent on every member of any group to consider seriously what that group does, always bearing in mind that the group strength and even the power of any subgroups within that organization depend on the number and strength of the individual members of the greater totality. Beyond the power one gives quite clearly to a group by making monetary contributions to it, the mere profession of adherence to that group by shared practices, beliefs or even attire simply strengthens that group. For instance, Catholics who have, over the years, dropped money in the offering plate have only ended up supporting the numerous acts of pedophilia and/or the legal costs incurred by the Roman Church in settling these cases. Continued deference to bishops and priests over years has only allowed this kind of activity to continue. Consider the case of the French bishop who was, recently, finally convicted of failure to reveal what had been going on in his diocese.

Turning to the case of Islam, one notes some differences but also remarkable similarities. Although there is no highly structured clergy and central organization as in the Roman Church there still are mullahs, imams, or even ayatollahs who hold enormous sway over Muslims. Where do they get this power? From the Muslims who look to them for leadership. Yet, it is quite clear that many of them really merit nothing other than to be flushed down the drain of history. However, how many Muslims ever openly criticize these men? For instance, how many Muslims have had the courage to call the Ayatollah Khomeini a “jerk”? By not engaging in such open criticism, they have become complicit with the ideas, statements, and actions of such men – and they become “involved” with what such men do.

Now, the standard defense that is usually forthcoming against any critique of religious systems or institutions is that people are fallible and the doctrine must be distinguished from the believers professing it. For all the acts of violence committed by Muslims there are a

comparable number of acts that have been committed by Catholics, Protestants, Anglicans, etc.. (Although it is hard to deny that the event of September 11th has set the bar pretty high – the IRA will have to work pretty hard to beat this one!) The Crusades are cited as a classic example. Even apart from the fact that the Crusades were a response to Islamic expansionism, the objection still illustrates my point. That people could continue to belong to institutions which for centuries would use specious theological reasoning to justify some aspects of the Crusades and/or that they continue to proudly call themselves members of such institutions is beyond me. There should come a point in the life of any reflective, intelligent, person where he/she says: “I simply will not identify with it anymore.” A believer can always try to say that the practices do not represent the intentions of the founder or figure behind an institution – and that may well be the case. Yet, one must keep in mind that actions speak louder than words – everyone should remember that Mohammed was a warrior but Jesus was not.

Numerous Muslim clergy, professionals, and associations have issued condemnations of the September 11th attacks and have published disclaimers of association with any of the people involved in it. However, no matter how strongly these are worded, I find these expressions anemic, to say the least. After the event, a large number of Muslim protesters throughout the world who were dancing in the streets when they learned of the WTC bombing; an Islamic mullah claimed that the bombing was simply a Jewish plot to make the Muslims look bad. Given these kinds of things, something more needs to be said and done by those who wish to continue to identify themselves as Muslims. What I seek from the Muslim community as a testimony of the sincerity of their disclaimers, for instance, is the promise to search out and identify all those photographed who were found celebrating the bombing and subsequently submitting their names to the Canadian and American governments with a request that those people never be allowed to enter North America for any reason. I want the members of the Muslim community, both academic and civic, to turn over the names and whereabouts of students and citizens whom they know to be involved in any way with terrorist activity. I further want them to utter – audibly, publicly, and repeatedly – derogatory statements about the religious and political leaders, by name, who are currently perpetrating or condoning terrorist acts. A failure to do this will simply make their standard expressions of regret fall within a range that extends

from the ineffective to the fraudulent.

Two final remarks. First, the Muslim students on campus must be reminded that their adult lives are just beginning. They have inherited, as each of us has, a huge baggage of tradition from the past. It is their responsibility to sift through what they have received and determine what is true and what is false. In many cases what we receive is interwoven with the people we have known in our families, neighborhoods, and friends – people we love. Aristotle the Greek philosopher noted that truth is more important than friendship. When we find something that is false we must reject that no matter what effect that rejection will have on our relationships, even those within the family. If they find that they must jettison their Islamic beliefs, they must do so despite what this means to their relationships. If those who have been their family and friends reject them as a result, then they must come to realize those

people never really loved them from the start. Instead, each of them had been viewed only as an object to carry on a tradition and a belief. As such, each of them is really only a tribal cipher.

Secondly, the Federation of Students needs to be addressed in precisely the type of language with which they seem familiar. Their note was “offensive.” Rather than seeing the campus as a place where issues can be aired frankly and aggressively, the Federation seeks to control the intellectual environment of the university in a way not dissimilar to the late (but not to be lamented) NDP government which some years ago tried to dictate rules to restrict academic freedom. The only consolation in all of this is that the NDP are gone and that the Federation is elected by such a small percentage of the student body that they are representative of practically nobody.

FAUW Forum

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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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

BELATED RESPONSES FROM TWO UW SENATORS

I enjoyed the September *Forum's* treatment of the response from UW Senators – very much to the point. Unfortunately, I was away from late June until early September and regret that the *Forum's* letter of invitation somehow never did reach me. Since I am on sabbatical (since 1 January 2001) and attendance at Senate is the only service duty that I have continued, I might not have chosen to reply in any case. I'm really surprised that nobody else did, though. I am sorry that you did not get more return for your good effort.

My impression of Senate so far is that it somewhat resembles the monthly meetings of my department, where most of the important work and decisions have already been done and the meeting is largely a forum for discussion and (usually) approval. Approval has come quickly on all major issues that have come before Senate while I have been a member. That is not necessarily such a bad thing, even though it may smell of the rubber stamp. I do not think a committee of 80-odd people, such as Senate itself, could get very far very fast if everything had to be done from first principles by the entire group. We need to have some respect for the informed opinion of subcommittees and other representative groups when they make a recommendation based on their research and discussion of an issue. There is discussion in Senate on some issues, such as the proposed move to Cambridge by the Architecture School. I thought that Senate worked fairly well on that one. The debate was not terribly long or heated but it did force the presenters to review all the major issues that I could think of pertaining to the move. It seemed to me, and apparently to most of Senate, that the advocates (1) had researched the proposal pretty well, (2) had good support from their main constituencies (including students and faculty affected), (3) were alive to the potential problems and (4) had good plans for proceeding. I do not recall that Senate found any new or overlooked issues in the proposal, so maybe it was all futile hot air. If there were no need to make the arguments to Senate, however, I wonder if the proposal would have been as thoroughly researched. Perhaps not.

That being said, I am a little surprised at the limited degree of debate that I have seen on most other issues. In fact, identifiable issues have been fairly scarce in the Senate meetings I have attended so far. My experience in Senate is still limited and I may yet see discussions as long and spirited as some of those that have been played out in the Biology Department – for example, curriculum change. Then again, I also have not yet joined any Senate committees.

I shall reserve judgement until I have had more experience of both Senate and its committees. I hope that you hear from some other folks, especially those with more experience and perspectives than I have had to date.

Ralph Smith
Biology

Thank you for soliciting my opinion concerning the role of Senate and participation of faculty members. I retired in April, and last served on Senate about 18 months ago, but I believe that my comments are still relevant.

There is no ambiguity about the role of Senate. The University of Waterloo Act defines Senate as the highest academic body, with wide-ranging powers: "The Senate has the power to establish the educational policies of the University and to make recommendations to the Board of Governors with respect to any matter relative to the operation of the University. . . ." Senate is composed mainly of elected faculty members and, in turn, elects seven members to the University's Board of Governors.

In spite of this broad-ranging authority, some faculty members occasionally take a cynical or negative view of the role of Senate. I have heard colleagues decry the power of Senate on the basis that the Board of Governors has the final financial authority, and the Board is therefore more important. Similarly, some faculty members demean Senate by calling it a "rubber stamp" which does not participate adequately in the day-to-day running of the University. I reject both of these criticisms.

It is true that most important issues come to Senate for approval at a late stage, when changes will be difficult to make. However, this makes the power of Senate more significant, not less. However, to criticize issues effectively at this late stage, faculty members must do their homework, must be well-informed about the issues, and must be prepared to challenge errors when they get to Senate. I found that the best preparation for Senate was to sit on the FAUW Board of Directors and the University's Faculty Relations Committee (FRC). FAUW Board members usually hear of academic problems as they are being created, debate the issues with senior administrators at FRC, and are therefore fully prepared to deal decisively with controversial issues at Senate. When Senate speaks, the Board of Governors inevitably listens. I can recall many issues where Senate intervened to change proposals recommended by senior administrators.

For example, although the UW Board of Governors has final financial authority, University practice is to send a proposed budget to the Senate Budget Committee, and then to Senate, for their approval before submitting the budget to the Board. I recall when Senate rejected a proposed University budget set mainly by the Vice-President Academic, about a decade ago, and although the Board of Governors had final financial authority and could have ignored the sentiments of Senate, the Board deferred the budget until it had been changed. I could give many other examples. Senate has an important role, and good people need to be elected to serve on it. The price of (academic) freedom is eternal vigilance.

Gordon Andrews, Professor Emeritus
Mechanical Engineering

PROF WHOSE GRADES WERE CHANGED ATTEMPTS TO SET RECORD STRAIGHT

Three letters from Peter Hoffman within the space of a few months (Forum, April and September 2001)! This man is certainly fighting somebody's battle, but it's not clear just whose battle this is. It doesn't appear to be ours (i.e., the academic faculty's), nor is it the students'. Perhaps it's his alone, but my strong suspicion is that it's the Pure Mathematics Department's battle that he thinks he's waging. [You see, the advanced calculus and algebra courses in the Mathematics Faculty are regarded by the Department of Pure Mathematics as being the training ground for students hoping to enter their departmental major programme – this in spite of the fact that these are designated as faculty-wide core courses, open equally to all the best students in the faculty, and never intended as departmental courses. The faculty members in Pure Mathematics (Hoffman is one) have historically formed the vast majority of the teachers of these courses, although it is not clear why this should be, and I believe that it should not be so. Mathematics Faculty Council, when it approved these courses, did not intend them to be the prerogative of any one department within the Faculty. Nevertheless, the extreme defensiveness of the reactions of many members of the Department of Pure Mathematics to this issue suggests to me that they feel their departmental programme to be somehow threatened by this discussion. There is no such threat, either explicit or implicit.] The essential nastiness and mean-spiritedness of Hoffman's two most recent letters come through clearly in spite of their attempts at humour. In this letter I would like to address two of the issues which he raises: the nature of the student grades which Dean George actually manipulated, and the legitimacy of having an administrator (like the Dean) manipulating student grades in the first place. Whereas Hoffman couldn't be bothered to make the effort to produce data to substantiate his claims (“...I haven't done the spadework to actually check this out, but I'm absolutely confident of it...”; “I'm fairly certain...”), I actually spent quite some time more than a year ago gathering just such data in order to try to understand what had happened, and why. I will present some of this data so that Forum readers can judge the matter for themselves.

MATH 247 is the advanced version of Calculus 3 in the Faculty of Mathematics. This is the third in a sequence of three advanced calculus courses – MATH 147 and MATH 148 being the corresponding advanced versions of Calculus 1 and 2 respectively. There were eighteen students in my MATH 247 class in the Winter 2000 term who had previously taken MATH 147 and 148. Columns 1 - 3 of the Table (p. 11) show the grades of these same eighteen students as they progressed through the sequence. Column 3 represents the MATH 247 grades assigned by me, while column 4 shows the “revisions” made thereto by Dean George. The entries are ranked in the order of the column 3 grades. It's somewhat easier to assess these data when presented in graphical form, which is done in the four histograms shown on the left in the Figure (p. 11). What is most striking to me is the progressive downward spreading of the “tail” of the mark distribution, starting with Advanced Calculus 2 (column 2), and becoming more pronounced with my Advanced Calculus 3 grades (column 3). The students in column 3 divide naturally

into three groups (see the Table): the top six students with a grade average of 95.8%, the middle six with an average of 73.8%, and the bottom six with an average of only 53.7%. There are 20% steps between the grade averages of these three groups! The weaker students in MATH 148 generally got weaker still in MATH 247. It is an onerous burden to impose on an instructor of an advanced-level course that he or she should maintain a grade average of “well above 80%”(quoting from the Faculty of Mathematics Guidelines on Class Averages in Core and Service Courses, a document which, although never adopted as policy by the Faculty, is cited by the Dean as the basis for his mark adjustments), irrespective of the performance demonstrated in the prerequisite course (MATH 148) by the incoming students.

The Faculty of Mathematics has no mechanism in place to prevent weaker students from being allowed to continue in the advanced courses if that is their desire, and so there is no protection for the instructor as regards the quality of the students entering his or her advanced class. There were six students who entered my MATH 247 class with grades of less than 75% in the prerequisite MATH 148 class. [According to recently collated data from Frank Zorzitto of Pure Mathematics, who looked at the past six years of MATH 247 offerings (185 students in total), 19 students out of the 185 entered with a MATH 148 grade of less than 75% – that is, about 10% of MATH 247 classes come in with a grade of less than 75%. For comparison, my MATH 247 class had in it six students whose entering grade was under 75% – three times the average for weak students entering MATH 247!] Of these six students, four suffered substantial further grade drops in MATH 247, one stayed about the same, and one raised his or her grade significantly. It is grossly unfair to the instructor (and academically dishonest to boot!) to demand a high class grade average in the absence of any quality control on the incoming students. This is precisely what happened here – the MATH 148 class, from which my MATH 247 students were drawn, had a class average of only 76%. Had a modest continuation requirement of say 75% been applied to the advanced calculus sequence, six of the weaker students would have been denied access, and the class average of the remaining students would have been 82.2%, easily satisfying the Guidelines. This hypothetical column 3 histogram is shown on the right in the Figure – half the class has over 90%, which is what one would hope for in an advanced section! (The best indicator of performance in Calculus 3 is undoubtedly performance in the prerequisite Calculus 2.) Hoffman is aware of this data, which I showed to him after the publication of his first letter (he has had no contact with me on this matter either before or since). He has clearly decided to ignore it entirely, while continuing to ask for evidence from others!

Hoffman implies (and not very subtly at that: “...his one attempt, after 30 years here, to teach such a section...”) that it was my teaching of the advanced section that was responsible for the low grade average. Perhaps he should have inquired of the Faculty's then Associate Dean for Undergraduate Affairs, Paul

Schellenberg, why I was specifically asked to teach this course. I think that he would have discovered that it has something to do with my reputation for being an excellent teacher. (Please excuse my immodesty here, but someone has to attempt to set the record straight!) I am not an inexperienced instructor. I have taught calculus courses at all levels at Waterloo for more than thirty years now, but I have never requested to teach one of the advanced sections. And did I do a good job? Well, the students certainly thought so! Even the new Associate Dean, David Matthews, commented to me that he would have been very pleased to have received such good student ratings. You see, Matthews undertook (with my cooperation) a review of my teaching of MATH 247 to try to ascertain just why the class grade average was lower than the Guidelines. This review found no cause in either my teaching, my assignments, my midterm test, or my final examination, all of which were deemed to be reasonable and fair. (The answers lie, I believe, in the analysis above.) Nevertheless, and ironically, this didn't prevent Matthews and Dean George from going ahead and altering my grades anyway, since they "knew" that the students deserved higher grades! Only the single student who received a grade of 31% from me, had his grade left unchanged. (This student, who was the only failure in my course, had entered with a grade of only 57% in MATH 148, and was the only student with a grade less than 100% whose grade wasn't raised by George.) Why did not a single one of these students pull out of the advanced section, and drop down into the regular section, before the final examination? A good question! I think that the answer has something to do with peer pressure! (Four students in my Advanced Calculus 3 class had come from the regular Calculus 2 prerequisite course. They all decided to switch back to the regular Calculus 3 course before the final.)

Hoffman gloats that I lost my grievance case against the University, and in this he is correct. However, what he appears not to see is that he also lost! We all lost when the arbitrator ruled that senior administrators (such as Deans) can alter grades with or without an instructor's approval, provided that it is done after consultation with the instructor and with due notification. This usurping of the powers of the Faculty Councils and Senate is so clearly contrary to the explicit wording and intent of the University's constitution that it is difficult to understand. For, according to the University of Waterloo Act of 1972, the powers of the Senate explicitly include (Section 22(e)) the power "...to consider and determine the conduct and results of examinations in all faculties or academic units." This power is then invested by the Senate in the Faculty Councils. For example, the Constitution of the Mathematics Faculty Council explicitly states that these powers include (Section 2(c)) the power and duty "subject to confirmation by Senate, to appoint the examiners for, and conduct the examinations of, the courses in the Faculty and determine the results of such examinations." This power is then presumably invested in the individual faculty members as part of their teaching responsibilities, although this is not explicitly stated. If it is thought that a faculty member's grades are egregious, it is then clearly the prerogative of the Faculty Council, or one of its Committees, or failing that, of the Senate itself, to rule on the matter. This power cannot be, and indeed never has been, invested in the Dean. The Dean is primarily an administrator

(Policy 45, Section II): "Within her/his Faculty, the Dean of that Faculty is its senior executive officer." I, and I am sure many others, would be most interested to hear from the Dean and/or the President just why they consider it so important to allow the Dean to bypass the academic checks and balances built into our Constitution.

My greatest disappointment in this whole affair is the failure of arbitrator, Ross Kennedy, to comprehend the academic structure of a university. His decision, if it is allowed to stand, will set a dangerous precedent for Canada's universities. And let us be in no doubt that Dean George (at least) believes that Kennedy's decision has empowered him to act similarly in the future if he deems it necessary, provided only that he consults with the instructor in advance, and informs him or her of his intentions. This is made clear in the letter which he was required by the arbitrator to send to the students whose grades were changed, and I quote it in its entirety:

Dear _____,

Last summer I undertook a review of the grades assigned in Math 247. I did so because the class average was below the range stipulated in Mathematics Faculty guidelines. Your grade in this course was raised as result of this review.

I am writing to you now to confirm that your revised grade in Math 247 will stand. Professor Lipshitz did not revise your grade. I assigned the revised grade without his knowledge or consent on behalf of the University when I was Dean of Mathematics.

Yours truly,

Alan George

Vice President Academic and Provost

My second greatest disappointment is the failure of the CAUT and/or FAUW to have the courage to challenge this ruling by taking it to judicial review. As long as it stands, our academic freedom to teach and evaluate our students, a cornerstone of what constitutes a university, is significantly circumscribed. This right to teach and evaluate was upheld by Kennedy in his ruling, and is the reason that (in his words): "Where grades are changed in such a manner, it must be clear that those are not grades assigned by the Professor involved, but rather are grades assigned by the institution itself." This is why the letter was sent by George to the MATH 247 students involved. Hoffman may prefer to believe that these are trivialities. I, and many others, are far more concerned about the implications for the future. Think about it!

Stanley Lipshitz

Departments of Applied Mathematics and Physics

TABLE

Columns 1-3:
Grade history of the 18 students in my W2000 MATH 247 class who had previously taken MATH 147 and 148.

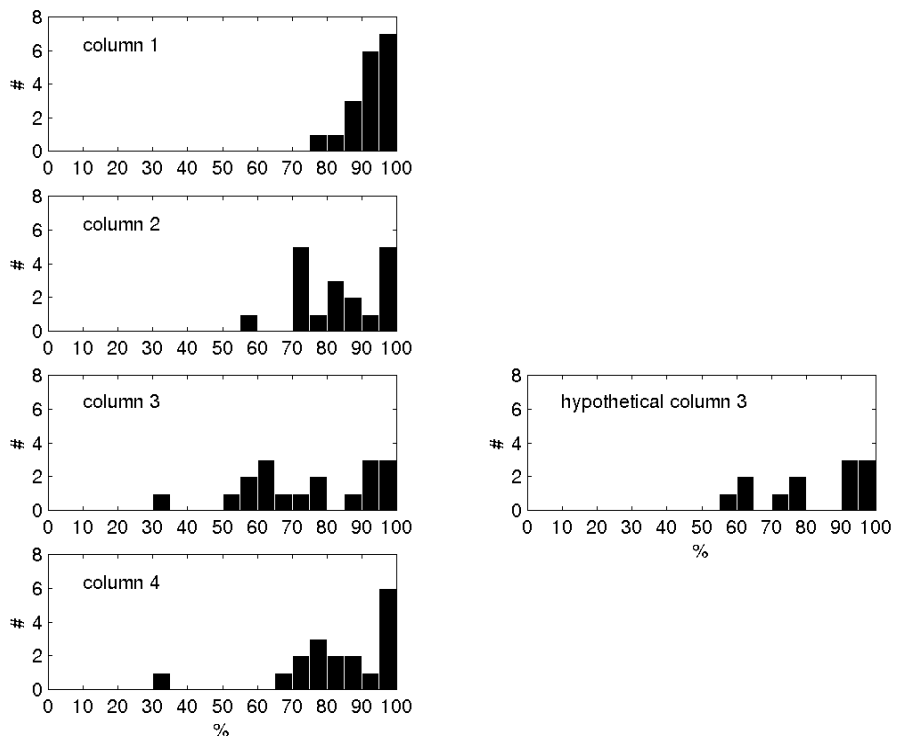
Column 4:
MATH 247 grades assigned by the Dean of Mathematics.

| Student "X" | col. 1 | col. 2 | col. 3 | col. 4 | |
|-------------|-----------------|-----------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| | MATH 147 F 1998 | MATH 148 S 1999 | MATH 247 W 2000 SPL | MATH 247 W 2000 JAG | |
| A | 100% | 100% | 100% | 100% | |
| B | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | |
| C | 99 | 99 | 100 | 100 | col. 3 avg=95.8% |
| D | 99 | 99 | 92 | 99 | |
| E | 99 | 85 | 92 | 99 | |
| F | 100 | 98 | 91 | 98 | |
| G | 88 | 74 | 85 | 93 | |
| H | 94 | 84 | 78 | 88 | |
| I | 94 | 80 | 75 | 85 | col. 3 avg=73.8% |
| J | 90 | 91 | 72 | 83 | |
| K | 90 | 72 | 69 | 81 | |
| L | 88 | 75 | 64 | 77 | |
| M | 93 | 85 | 63 | 76 | |
| N | 92 | 72 | 63 | 76 | |
| O | 78 | 80 | 59 | 73 | col. 3 avg=53.7% |
| P | 84 | 71 | 56 | 70 | |
| Q | 98 | 71 | 50 | 65 | |
| R | 85 | 57 | 31 | 31 | |
| #=18 | avg. | 92.8% | 82.9% | 74.4% | 83.0% |

FIGURE

Left:
Distributions of grades in Columns 1-4 of Table.

Right:
Distribution of Column 3 grades with hypothetical "continuation requirement" of 75% in MATH 148.



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A LETTER TO MY STUDENTS

by Michael Blumenthal

My dear young friends:

As I prepare to depart your august institution, I am aware that I will hardly be leaving a mournful group of tear-struck students in my wake. On the contrary, many of you will be glad to see me go. For, I well realize, many of the expectations engendered, and nurtured, by your previous instructors in what we call – at times euphemistically – “creative writing” have been disappointed, if not downright dashed, by my presence among you over the past 10 weeks.

Several weeks before the end of this quarter, I was struck by a certain “Love Letter and Thank You Note” addressed to you and my other temporary colleagues by one of the younger, departing professors of creative writing – a warm and seemingly charming person – in which she declared her devotion to what she described as “student-centered, relationship-based teaching,” and attributed her own, self-described success (which I have come to equate, simply, with popularity) to the fact that she “love(s) my students.” She “started loving my students,” she went on, “because I saw such inspiring, fragile, invincible, vulnerable beauty in them.” She saw, our young poet did, “the same kind of beauty in them I see in the just-about-to-fall spring petals on the tree ...”.

Not satisfied with providing her own encomiums to her capacities as a teacher, our young colleague – whom many of you had as a teacher – also furnished testimony from one of her students’ mothers, who, after having sat in on her class and observed what was no doubt the unabashed praise of her offspring’s work, said to our erstwhile young professor, “I wish the media would cover stories like this [class] – we’d all feel a lot more hope about our future in this country.”

This being California, our young, about-to-go-on-to-greener-pastures professor couldn’t, of course, simply content herself with an outsider’s praise. “When people feel loved, nourished, supported and respected; when people feel recognized, seen, and known; when people feel unique and valued,” she went on, “they feel confident enough to explore their gifts, to develop those gifts, and to make significant contributions to the human community.” To which I can only add: Amen.

In her defense, my younger colleague is probably a victim of what a friend of mine contends (and I wholeheartedly agree) has become, increasingly, the purpose of university life itself: the presentation of moments of self-gratification, little assurances and narcissistic stabilizers that confirm: Yes, I am smart, I am creative, I am loved. Personally, however, I prefer Goethe’s approach – of which you will come, in time, like it or not, to see the wisdom: “If I love you,” the great bard wisely asked, “what business is that of yours?”

And now, my young friends, at the risk of both dashing one of your dear mother’s hopes, and relieving any of you who may be experiencing a certain sadness at my departure, let me make a terrible confession: I do not love you. While I have come to like several of you quite a bit, admire some others, feel sympathy for some, and a cool distance toward others, I must confess that for none of you have I developed that rare, precious, and deeply human feeling I would describe as love.

Nor, let me assure you, am I someone incapable of feeling that emotion we call love. I love my son and my close friends. I have loved both my wives in different ways, and several lovers before and between them. But I was not brought here – your former professor’s mushy rhetoric notwithstanding – to love you, but, rather, to teach you, as I hope I have, something about the beauties, challenges, hardships, joys, and dignity of making, and reading, poems. I was brought here not to be an oracle of love, but because presumably I knew a bit more about being a writer than you do; so that, with some luck and application on all our parts, we might together learn something about that difficult and demanding vocation.

Several years ago, a friend of mine, a long-tenured professor of creative writing, warned me – in a gesture both well-meaning and sincere – not to “shit in your own backyard,” an act for which my ancestors, the Germans, have a much more poignant, and efficient, term: Nestbeschmutzer – someone who dirties his own nest, a term popular among the Nazis as well. But thanks in no small part to colleagues like the one who has showered you with her love and testimonials to “the endless possibilities of the human spirit,” I have long ago ceased to think of the world of creative writing and its instructors as my “nest” (much as I would like to hope that I have a home of sorts in the world of litera-

ture), nor have I continued, except for occasional forays such as this one, to inhabit that backyard. So I can afford, as I am doing now, to take liberties, preferring to cite a line from one of my own generation's better poets, Bob Dylan: "When you got nothin', you got nothin' to lose."

On our first day of class this quarter, I told you that, insofar as I was concerned, there were three possible things to be gained from a class in creative writing: the ability to become better, more discriminating readers; a greater capacity for truth-telling and, with it, the acceptance of hard truths from others; and a greater respect for the difficulty of writing itself. If I have done my job, whether you have come to "love" me or not, you may have learned something about all three, and I can leave here a satisfied, if not universally beloved, teacher.

Which leads me to yet another confession you may, or may not, want to hear: I do not need your love. (And is there, I wonder, a more abused, and misused, word in all of the English language than "love"?) For I am, in that sense, a lucky man: I already have the love of most, if not all, of those whose love I need. What I need from you, or at least would prefer, is something more befitting our student-teacher relationship: your respect. And respect – let me assure you, from the lofty vantage point of middle age – is something both more enduring, and more necessary of being earned, than are the vagaries and vicissitudes of what we so often mistakenly call "love."

Nonetheless, I am well aware that you are under the impression that you have been "nurtured" and "loved" by certain teachers who have been far more popular with you than I have been. But let me let you in on yet another little trade secret: You have been neither loved nor nurtured. You have, rather, been lied to and betrayed. Though the mother's milk that flows from such breasts may temporarily satisfy your ravenous appetites for praise (and its donors' hunger for tenure), it is not, I assure you, a very nourishing brew.

You have been told that the not good is good, that the unworthy is the worthy. Rather than being commended on the hard work and noble intentions of your ambition (when it was worth commending), you have been praised for the beauty and rightness of its product (for poetry, as the poet Howard Nemerov once put it, is "getting something right in language").

And, perhaps worst of all, to paraphrase Auden, rather than being respected for wanting to learn how to play an instrument, you have been virtually handed a seat in the orchestra, endowed with a feeling of professionalism without

either the hard work or genuine apprenticeship that normally precedes it. This, today, is what passes for "nurturing"; once upon a time, it went by another name: deceit. But to give you such unearned praise – as a friend of mine, a long-tenured professor who has taught at Johns Hopkins, Stanford, and the University of Chicago, recently reminded me – "is not only to give [you] nothing at all, it's to deprive [you] of the one thing we have to hold onto: real work and an objective correlative."

Nor has anyone, I suspect, bothered to acquaint you with the dark subtext that underlies all this nurturing and lying and love: That dishonesty – for a writer even more than for most "ordinary" people – is an acquired, and contagious, habit. That if you are lied to by your teachers and encouraged to lie to one another and, ultimately, to lie to yourself, the habit of lying will ultimately permeate both your soul and your work, and you will be incapable – even if you are otherwise graced with the gifts of language, subject, time, and peace of mind – of uttering in your work that most difficult, and necessary, of truths: the truth, as Matthew Arnold put it, "of what we feel indeed."

And so, my young friends, I leave you with perhaps not the most stellar student evaluations, but also with the luxury of not needing them, seeing as how the department of which I aspire to be a tenured member has no office here, nor at any other university. And if, some day, as has happened to me on numerous occasions in the past, I should receive a letter from some – or at least one – of you, saying, "Although I didn't particularly like you at the time, or feel sufficiently praised by you, I realize now that I learned something about poetry, and about the struggles and exhilarations of being a writer, from being in your class," it will feel as good to me as being praised by one of your mothers, or covered by the media.

It will even – let me assure you – feel better than being loved.

Respectfully yours,
Michael Blumenthal


Michael Blumenthal, a poet, novelist, essayist, and translator, was a visiting writer at Santa Clara University last spring. This fall he will be a visiting professor of American literature at the University Jean Monnet Saint-Etienne and a visiting professor of creative nonfiction at the American University of Paris. His memoir, All My Mothers and Fathers, will be published by Harper Collins next March.

The Forum thanks the author for permission to reprint his article.



FROM THE PROFESSOR FILES

Real answers given on a Bible quiz

1. Noah's wife was Joan of Ark.
 2. Lot's wife was a pillar of salt by day and a ball of fire by night.
 3. Moses went to the top of Mount Cyanide to get the Ten Commandments.
 4. The seventh commandment is "Thou shall not admit adultery."
 5. Joshua led the Hebrews in the Battle of Geritol.
 6. Jesus was born because Mary had an immaculate contraption.
 7. The people who followed Jesus were called the Twelve Decibels.
 8. The epistles were the wives of the apostles.
 9. One of the opossums was St. Matthew.
 10. Salome danced in seven veils in front of King Harrod's.
 11. Paul preached acrimony, which is another name for marriage.
 12. David fought the Finkelsteins, a race of people who lived in biblical times.
 13. The Jews had trouble throughout their history with unsympathetic Genitals.
 14. A Christian should have only one wife. This is called monotony.
- 

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE *(Continued from page 16)*

This proposal promises to put the issue of changing grades to rest by developing a consistent, just, and appropriate way of handling all future problems of this nature. It is in accord with current university statements and practices. For example, Senate By-Law 22.f. clearly states that all grade appeals should be handled by Faculty Councils. Our proposal activates Senate By-Law 22.f. by assigning this issue to the Faculty Councils that the University has always envisioned would deal with such issues. We discovered, too, that most faculties on campus already have Examinations and Standings Committees or their equivalent. Our proposal also fairly balances the concerns of faculty, students and administrators – all will be heard under this process. Most importantly, our proposal satisfies the arbitrator's concern that we need a process that reflects "due process, natural justice and collegial governance."

For the last four months we have been attempting to convince the administrative side of the Faculty

Relations Committee to consider our proposal. To no avail.

In an attempt to find a resolution to this issue Dr. Amit Chakma, the Vice-President, Academic and Provost, has sent the issue (but not the FAUW proposal) to the Senate Undergraduate and Graduate Councils for their deliberation.

To date, we have not publicized our proposal because it was within the FRC and therefore confidential. Now, however, we need comments and advice from the rest of faculty. We need to know if you believe that our proposal is reasonable or not. If there is a general sense that our plan is reasonable, then we need to start convincing the Administration to see reason.

Please contact us – via letters to the *Forum* or emails to any of the members of the FAUW Board of Directors – regarding your reactions to this proposal.

TO SEE THE ARBITRATOR'S FULL REPORT GO TO THE FAUW WEBSITE AT

[HTTP://WWW.UWFACASS.UWATERLOO.CA](http://www.uwfacass.uwaterloo.ca)

OR CONTACT THE FACULTY ASSOCIATION OFFICE FOR A PRINTED COPY.

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

*Catherine Schryer
Department of English*

GREETINGS AND SALUTATIONS

Over the last five or six months many faculty from across campus have shared the FAUW Board's concern regarding grade changing policies – or, rather, the lack thereof – at the University of Waterloo. This concern, as you recall, stems from the specific case of Dr. Stanley Lipshitz. Dr. Lipshitz's grades for an entire course were changed significantly without his approval and without any consultation. As you know, we believed then and continue to believe now that the decision to change Dr. Lipshitz's course grades was a denial of his rights to academic freedom. We also continue to assert that this decision affected all faculty at the University of Waterloo as it represented an attempt to de-professionalize a central academic activity – the evaluation of students' performance.

Despite our efforts to effect a mediated solution, Dr. Lipshitz's case was submitted to an external arbitrator. As you are probably also aware, the FAUW Board filed a separate Association grievance as we believed that his case affected all faculty. In his findings the arbitrator, Ross L. Kennedy, clearly stated that that “grading and assessment of students is and always has been considered an essential component of teaching ... and that the protection of academic freedom would extend to grading and assessment...” (p.39). He goes on to state that the University also has some interests in the matter of grading and where the interests of the faculty member and the University come into conflict “they must be resolved on a basis of due process, natural justice and collegial governance” (p.43). Kennedy concludes by asserting “Regrettably, I do not believe that those principles were followed...” in Dr. Lipshitz's case (p.43).

It is our contention that the essential principles to which Kennedy points were not followed at the University of Waterloo because we lack the policy and procedures to handle such situations. Consequently, the Board has developed a draft policy and a process for addressing the issue of changing some or all the course grades assigned by an instructor.

Here in summary is the process that we have been proposing followed by a brief rationale:

1. The primary responsibility for assigning and adjusting marks in a course rests with the course instructor.
2. The Department/School Chair/Director or Faculty Dean may review the assigned marks in a course with respect to failure rate, class averages, and marks. If the Chair or Dean considers the course marks to be anomalous or possibly inconsistent with University policy, the Chair or Dean may present the basis for that belief to the instructor, and ask the instructor to consider adjusting the marks.
3. Following consultation with the instructor, the Chair/Director or Dean may accept the marks as assigned or adjusted by the instructor or may direct the Faculty Examinations and Standings Committee (ESC) or equivalent committee, as approved by Faculty Council, to look into the matter.
4. The Faculty ESC or equivalent committee will consider all evidence gathered from the Department/School, Dean and faculty member. The faculty member involved shall have the opportunity to review and respond to any evidence gathered by the committee. The ESC or equivalent committee will attempt to reach a negotiated agreement that satisfies both the faculty member and the Chair/Director and/or Dean.
5. If no agreement is reached, the Faculty ESC or equivalent committee shall, within 10 working days after receiving written notice from the Chair/Director or Dean, render a decision on the marks, class average and/or failure rate, with a written justification provided to both parties.
6. The decision of the ESC or equivalent committee will be final and binding with respect to marks, class average and failure rate.

(Continued on page 15)