

# FAUW Forum

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## GRADE INFLATION AT UNIVERSITIES

### Harvard under fire; U of Windsor study shows grade inflation in Ontario universities

As reported in the *National Post* (22 November 2001), Harvard University has once again come under criticism for inflating students' grades. This time the criticism comes from within – in a report issued by the Education Policy Committee of Harvard's Faculty of Arts and Science. The internal review of grading procedures was prompted by a *Boston Globe* study revealing that virtually all Harvard students are awarded As and Bs, with 91% of students graduating with "honours."

According to the Harvard report, some professors feel pressure to conform to their peers' grading practices and are concerned that they will be singled out as "tough graders" if they give low marks. Others feel that most students are "above average" and likely deserve the high

marks. In order to provide some history, two articles from the *Boston Globe* are reprinted in this issue of the *Forum*: (a) the 23 October 2001 article on the decision by Harvard's administration to investigate grading policies (Page 10) and (b) the first (7 October 2001) of the original two-part series that investigated grade inflation at Harvard (Page 11).

#### Only at Harvard, you ask?

Paul Anglin and Ronald Meng of the Department of Economics, University of Windsor, have found that "significant grade inflation" has taken place in arts and science programmes at seven Ontario universities. Their thought-provoking study, published last year in *Canadian Public Policy*, is reprinted in this issue (Page 18).

### ANOTHER "GRADE CHANGING" INCIDENT AT UW

In her President's Message (Page 26), Catherine Schryer reports briefly on another incident in which the grade of a faculty member was changed without consultation.

### LIBRARIANS WANT TO BE REPRESENTED BY THE FAUW

Seven of UW's librarians explain why, along with the potential benefits of such representation to the UW community (Page 2). They also comment on why such representation, present at most other Canadian universities, does not already exist at Waterloo.

### READERS RESPOND

to the articles by UW philosophers Centore and Novak in the previous *Forum*, beginning on Page 4.

### THE FAUW/LIPSHITZ GRIEVANCES AGAINST UW

and the arbitrator's award will be the focus of a special session "Administrators and Academic Freedom," at the February 2002 Conference, "Dealing with Academic Freedom Cases," sponsored by the CAUT (Page 25).

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# LIBRARIANS' REPRESENTATION BY THE FAUW: THE "WATERLOO WAY" AND THE OUTSTANDING ISSUES

by Christine Jewell, Amos Lakos, Susan Moskal, Erin Murphy, Shabiran Rahman, Paul St-Pierre, Carol Stephenson  
UW Library

A previous article (*Forum*, September 2001) focused on the common goals of faculty and librarians with respect to the University's teaching mission, information advocacy, and research. We asked why, despite these commonalities, UW's thirty librarians are not represented by the Faculty Association for their terms of employment. This article follows up on that discussion by presenting answers to some frequently posed questions:

- Why do librarians want to be represented by the Faculty Association?
- What is the benefit to the University?
- Why don't UW librarians have academic status already?

## **Why do librarians want to be represented by the faculty association?**

Librarians want to be represented by a bargaining unit that understands their interests and concerns. Our roles and responsibilities are more similar to those of faculty than staff at the University. In the U.S., approximately 75% of academic librarians have full faculty status. Their ranks are comparable to those of faculty, as are benefits, leaves, and salaries. Achievement of tenure is required for continuing appointment. In Canada, over 90% of librarians are associated with faculty associations. However, most hold what is referred to as "academic status". It is a modified form of faculty status, tailored to meet the unique roles of librarians. Those with academic status work with the faculty association to negotiate terms and conditions of employment. Most faculty agreements in Canada have separate sections or clauses for librarians.

CAUT's Guidelines on Academic Status for Professional University Librarians acknowledge that academic status protects the scholarly and intellectual nature of academic librarianship. Research and continuing education are recognized as essential components of the profession. Academic freedom protects librarians' collection development decisions as well as the expression of opinions in research. Librarians with academic status work collegially, participate in the planning and management of the library and collections, and contribute to the governance of the university in a meaningful way.

Librarianship is an applied discipline with a theoretical body of knowledge. Librarians contribute to the growth of the discipline through active participation in research, publication and conferences. With academic status, librarians could devote a greater portion of their workload to research and would have better access to research funding and study leaves.

Librarians share the professional concerns of faculty members. Academic freedom, for example, is a crucial protection for librarians, because we are trustees of knowledge with the responsibility of ensuring the availability of information and ideas, no matter how controversial. Currently at UW, we have no recourse if our academic freedom is challenged.

Librarians are concerned with selecting, organizing, disseminating, and protecting access to scholarly information in support of teaching and research. CAUT recognizes that librarians with academic status are "partners with faculty members in contributing to the scholarly and intellectual functions of the university". For instance, when creating new academic programs, communication between faculty and librarians is crucial for ensuring that a solid information foundation is in place to provide a local knowledge base for teaching and research. Without appropriate access to discipline-specific materials such as indexes and journals, a program cannot hope to attain an advanced level of scholarship.

Librarians perform a teaching and research role as they instruct students formally and informally, and advise and assist faculty in their scholarly pursuits. Teaching by librarians complements that of faculty by focusing on the development of general critical thinking and research skills, rather than imparting subject-based knowledge. Academic status would provide opportunities for increased instructional collaboration with faculty.

## **What is the benefit to the University?**

The Library constitutes a vital instructional arm of UW and acts as an essential element in the University's curricular, teaching, and research functions. As the University's major information resource, the Library enhances and extends students' classroom and laboratory experience and facilitates the research conducted by

faculty, staff and students. The Library is integral to the University's mission of sustaining an atmosphere in which information and ideas are readily accessible and freely exchanged.

In the current organization, the Library is not integrated into the academic structure of the University. Librarians do not have voting membership on academic committees. With academic status we could become full members and contribute in meaningful and constructive ways to university governance by bringing our unique perspectives and expertise to the discussion. In addition, increased opportunities for communication would lead to greater openness and accountability from the Library in responding to diverse and evolving faculty and academic program needs.

In the October 16, 2001 issue of the *Daily Bulletin* the Provost included faculty and staff retention among the priorities for the coming year. Academic status will provide added incentives in attracting and retaining librarians, who face increasing recruitment pressures from a well-funded private sector that recognizes the value of information professionals.

Information technology and the development of the electronic classroom have been cited by the University administration as central to continued growth and success. Librarians are knowledgeable and skilled at using information technology to make information resources accessible and at integrating them into the learning experience. Knowing and anticipating present and future information trends make librarians effective partners with faculty in providing the optimal learning and research environment.

### **Why don't UW librarians have academic status already?**

Formal discussion on this question has been initiated at University of Waterloo several times in recent years but has continually met with resistance from the administration of the day. Responses received from University administrators have failed to address pertinent questions raised about academic status and terms of employment for professional librarians.

Polls to voting members of the Librarians Association of the University of Waterloo have confirmed librarians' support for representation by the FAUW.

The FAUW has been prepared to represent librarians with respect to their terms and conditions of employment since 1992. In 1992, FAUW president Dr. Gordon Andrews reported that, in response to a formal request from the executive committee of the LAUW, the FAUW

would seek to represent librarians through an affiliation between the two associations. Terms would be negotiated through discussions between all interested parties, and documented in future memoranda of agreement between the FAUW and the University of Waterloo administration.

In 1996, librarians were included in a vote for certification of the FAUW. The Labour Relations Board ruled that librarians were part of a community of interest with faculty members and should therefore be represented by the FAUW. At that time, the University agreed to this ruling. However, since the vote to certify the FAUW failed, they have not followed through and honoured the decision.

In 1998 the FAUW Memorandum of Agreement was settled without the inclusion of librarians. The agreement contained an article stating that the University agreed to further discussions with FAUW, "regarding the proposed inclusion of librarians as Members for the purposes of this Agreement, as defined under 12.1.1, starting no later than November 1, 1998". We have been working toward establishing a dialogue.

The university administration has not been prepared to accept the representation of librarians by the FAUW. To date, it has offered few substantive arguments beyond its position that FAUW representation of librarians is inappropriate since librarians "do not determine the content, standards and future directions of academic programs and related research activities." But our role as providers of access to scholarly information and literacy instruction constitutes an integral contribution to the academic directions of the university. We would welcome the opportunity to re-open the discussion of FAUW representation of librarians with the current administration.

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## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

I am very grateful for the contents of the current issue of the *Forum*. For the first time in some years I left every other pressing issue and took 30 minutes to read through it. I am especially impressed by the Novak and Lipshitz material.

*John North*  
*Department of English*  
*Former President, FAUW*

What evidence attests to the growth of our university? Enrollment increases? Construction of new buildings? First place in the *Maclean's* ranking? The October issue of the *Forum* is better evidence: FAUW's sensible proposal for resolving disputes over marking, intelligent letters from Andrews and Smith, Lipshitz' informative backgrounder, and the beautifully juxtaposed arguments for free, reasoned debate by Centore and Novak. Thanks to all the contributors, for making the *Forum* itself our common room.

*Ken Westhues*  
*Department of Sociology*

I read the October edition of the *FAUW Forum* with its promise of some interesting critical discourse and philosophical insight into relevant issues. Dr. Novak's letter caught my attention first, but as I read on the lack of cohesiveness in his arguments and the juxtaposition of unrelated elements into a tirade of surprising bitterness struck me. The trigger for his response was a request from the Federation of Students to read a memo to all classes on campus in an attempt to deter the harassment of local Muslims in response to the WTC terror. The fact that there was a "request" to read this memo suggests to me that if one was uncomfortable at the request, than it could simply have been ignored. This is echoed in the politics of language aboard Her Majesty's Canadian Ships. If an officer is wanted at the brow, he is piped as follows: "Lieutenant Macdonald, requested brow". A petty officer would be addressed by "Petty Officer Macdonald, required brow" and finally a common seaman would be piped with: "Able Seaman Macdonald, brow." The latter did not permit any dissension, whereas the first form suggests the possibility of not conforming in the event of any inconvenience. One can apply this interpretation to the "request" from the Federation of Students, who have no authority over the actions of faculty.

As pointed out by Dr. Novak, the abuse of language and the decline of the English language in particular are to be lamented. One of the worst examples of language decline

presented by George Orwell in his essay "Politics and the English Language" is the use of the not-un formulation, as in "it is not unwise to allow open discourse on campus." There is a sense here of hiding one's meaning, or perhaps a lack of conviction that prevents the use of the simpler form: "it is good sense to allow open discourse on campus". Thus, when Dr. Novak began his letter with "... a fashion not atypical of the political correctness that has dominated many a university campus..." I raised my eyebrows. Dr. Novak's immediate reactions to the offending memo were quite strong, perhaps indicative of someone who had experienced the "shock, fright, worry and anger" of the events of September 11. The fact that the focus of his anger was on the "political correctness" question suggests to me an existing resentment which was triggered by the offending memo and the events of September 11. On the other hand, the fact that some people focused their anger on innocent peoples of the Muslim faith is more disturbing. There have been numerous reports about Muslim women being harangued in public, men spat at and in extreme cases assaulted or shot at. A particularly disturbing example was the case of a Sikh gas station attendant in the U.S. who was shot dead because he wore a turban. Other than the wearing of a turban and having a beard, there is little in common between followers of the Sikh faith and some followers of the Muslim faith. However, in the eyes of the ignorant, anyone who wears a "diaper" on his head is not to be trusted in the New World Order. [The latter expression comes from the mouth of an American politician.]

The human response to the shock of September 11 can take many forms. Each of these may have consequences of their own. One's response is usually a result of existing perceptions and mindset. Therefore, some people experienced irrational fear and hid out with the CNN news for a few days while others adopted a vigilante mentality and pursued action such as harassing persons of the Muslim faith or firebombing the nearest mosque. These acts are not spontaneous, but are built upon an existing ignorance. It is doubtful whether hearing a memo such as that released by the Federation of Students, or the counsel of the Prime Minister, will change the minds and actions of these individuals. However, it is also possible that if one were to reflect on one's response as a result of hearing such a message, then a certain mindfulness would prevail. Insulting the local Muslim populace with "f\*\*\*\*\*g paki" is a form of low level violence. For every action there is a potential reaction which can perpetuate the violence of the original action. I am sure that this was partly the intent of the September 11 terrorists, who would like very much to see a world thrown into a religious war or jihad.

Dr. Novak complains that there was no mention of the “evil, vicious, wicked, or even demonic” aspects of the events of September 11 in the original memo. There is no doubt that these and many other adjectives could describe September 11, and I doubt that anyone on campus was celebrating the deed. However, it is interesting to note that the language he uses is itself indicative of a religious interpretation of the events. The concepts of good and evil, wickedness, and especially demonism, are all religion-based. As much as Dr. Novak claims to have turned away from his Catholic background, there is no denying that his perceptual framework is still influenced by that heritage. In his letter he goes on to provide extreme examples of certain shameful excesses of Catholicism (child sexual abuse, tyranny, financial mismanagement, etc.) which seem completely unrelated to the thread of his argument about “political correctness.” I suppose his desire is to show how completely he has detached from his Catholic heritage. His criticism of the Catholic religion with some rather strong language may have been provided so that when he later takes a dig at Islam, he cannot be accused of specific religious intolerance, since he appears intolerant of all religions. Although he does not realize it, this is surprisingly similar to the message contained in John Lennon’s song “Imagine,” which Dr. Novak refers to in a particularly acidic way. If he were to have a close look at the lyrics of this song, he would realize that Lennon’s sentiments align quite well with his own arguments about jettisoning the religious beliefs that he finds so distasteful. John Lennon wrote about a world in which there is no religion and no heaven or hell to live (or die) for. In such a world, one can only act upon the present reality in which one is immersed. Many acts by religious extremists are committed on the basis of entering some form of afterlife or avoiding some form of hell. Without these motivations, one is forced to consider the world as it exists now, in the moment. Unfortunately, most people are busy planning for tomorrow or some time in the future and thus tolerate all kinds of suffering in the present. This is as true for Muslims in Afghanistan as it is for some traders lost in the World Trade Centre who may have been unhappy with their jobs, but hoping to make big gains in the next few years so that they could retire in relative comfort. Human suffering is often tolerated in anticipation of a payoff. Religion offers the ultimate payoff. In contrast, John Lennon writes about a world in which the only reality is the one we find ourselves immersed in right now, without attachment to some theological system. This forces us to deal with life and each other in a different way.

The final arguments that Dr. Novak presents in his essay remind me of George Bush’s decree to the Taliban. First of all he demanded the head of bin Laden. When the Taliban said they would consider negotiating this, Mr. Bush said he wanted not only the head of bin Laden, but the

closure of all terrorist camps and the expulsion of all terrorists and the freezing of their funding – and, he said, it was not negotiable. Dr. Novak seems to want Waterloo Muslims to denounce their religion, to insult their religious leaders, and to turn in any of their brothers who may harbour anti-Western sentiment. He notes with extreme fury the minority of Muslim protestors shown on TV who were dancing in the streets when they heard of the WTC bombing. I think if Dr. Novak had a closer look at the circumstances surrounding these people, such as the current situation in Palestine, he would realize that such a response is quite natural from the perspective of a life so wretched and powerless. There is no doubt that the West has had a hand in setting up the conditions that lead to these sentiments, whether by propping up ridiculous governments in countries such as Saudi Arabia to guarantee ready access to oil, or arming the Mujahedin in Afghanistan against the Russians – warriors who now make up the Taliban. We live more and more in an interconnected world where suffering at one end of the globe affects us all with great immediacy. To my parents Afghanistan was just some bizarre country located off the map that had no relevance to their situation. However, this has all changed. The WTC terror was a despicable act committed by religious maniacs, and certainly set the bar high for atrocities. However, the bombing response of the West seems to be an attempt to meet this challenge. In the eyes of an Afghan father with no TV who has seen his family blown apart as a result of collateral damage by a wayward USAF bomb, the events in New York which is a far away place cannot compare to his suffering. When this suffering gets multiplied by a hundred, or even a thousand, we will be in deeper trouble still and more religious extremists will rise from the rocks and rubble and ignorance vowing to destroy the Western dream.

*Robert Macdonald*  
*Department of Mechanical Engineering*

In his embarrassing letter, Prof. Novak extrapolates from a short Federation of Students memo to political correctness and the universal condemnation of Catholicism and Islam.

I wonder, has Prof. Novak ever eaten a banana? Perhaps he should be held liable for a his contribution to a huge number of gross humanitarian violations in Central America related to fruit harvesting.

Does he drive a car? Then I hold him personally responsible for any respiratory problems which my daughter might incur while living in the Waterloo area, or any future liability with respect to global warming.

Does he purchase products manufactured in the United

States? Then his purchases support the dropping of landmines and cluster bombs, a large number of which remain intact to maim and kill future civilians.

Statements such as

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 ...

are untrue or even slanderous. I am not Catholic, and would readily acknowledge the Catholic church's flaws and serious past errors, however it is simply false that donations have "only" (or even close to "only") supported pedophiles and legal costs: I have been to a number of Catholic missions in other parts of the world whose contributions are overwhelmingly positive.

Similarly, what he seeks from the Muslim community is

the promise to search out and identify all those photographed who were found celebrating the bombing ...

Such a request is almost criminal – it presupposes that a few cheering Muslims elsewhere in the world implicate those here in Canada. This is effectively a racial prejudice, equating two people on the basis of one or two common features (such as skin colour, philosophy, or religion), when in fact they differ in at least as many ways as they have in common. Ironically, this is precisely the sort of attitude which concerned the Federation of Students and which motivated their memo.

I completely agree with Prof. Novak that discretion is required in choosing where to donate or to spend money, however with median donations a fraction of 1% of income (StatsCan 1999) I consider the religious angle to be a red herring. Far greater is the influence of the remaining 99%, through which we fund the capitalist system to undertake its horrible, shameful abuses of the environment and of the developing world.

The world of Prof. Novak, if his letter is to be taken at face value, does not appear to promote clear dialogue, rather it is a sort of total anarchy where we support little and are suspicious of much. On the other hand, I appreciated Prof. Centore's article which, although provocative, expresses a much more positive tenor of coming together and meeting more regularly, an activity which I would agree to be sorely lacking, both within the university setting and more broadly within our communities.

Surely it is far better to live in a world in which we support imperfect organizations (and religions), but where a

little discretion ensures that far more good is perpetrated than evil.

*Paul Fieguth*  
*Systems Design Engineering*

### **A UW philosopher replies to his fellow philosophers:**

FAUW Forum 110 (October 2001), contained two articles ostensibly related under the rubric: "Open Discussion and Rational Debate". The articles were "Whatever Became of the Common Room?", by Floyd Centore (Philosophy, St. Jerome's University), and "Whatever Became of Critical Discourse?", by Joseph Novak (Philosophy). Two philosophers in one issue; an embarrassment of riches. As a hitherto unheard-from, not to mention unheard-of, philosopher at UW, I thought I might take up and pursue their themes.

In the case of Professor Centore's article, the pursuit is quite short. He begins by asserting that "[t]he university is not supposed to be a hotbed of political turmoil and intrigue". Rather, "there should be a common room at the center of the university, a place where people actually talk to each other".

This surely is an excellent idea. But what shall we talk about? Well, obviously things that will not cause political turmoil or intrigue. Professor Centore's suggested discussions include: embryonic stem-cell research (why it's wrong); Darwin's theory of evolution (how it causes racism); adult pornography (why it's the same as child pornography); and taxation for public education (which is really just another form of religious education). What is striking about these perspectives, besides their obvious probity, is how their suggestion is so clearly without the vaguest whiff of intrigue, and how clearly they lack all potential to cause political turmoil.

But space is limited, and I neglect Professor Novak's article. This piece used as its foil a memo circulated by the Federation of Students on September 12, cautioning "all members of the UW community" not to blame Muslim students in Waterloo for the actions of people with whom they share, at most, a religion. Professor Novak is distressed that this memo made reference neither to the feelings of those who died in the WTC attacks, nor to the evil, wicked, vicious – indeed, "demonic" – nature of the attacks themselves. He is angered that a memo intended to discourage "spreading hatred" should simply say: Don't spread hatred. Surely it should also explain why one might have wanted to spread hatred, and explain why there are good reasons for spreading hatred, but conclude that it's wrong to spread hatred anyhow. (Actually, Professor Novak does not include that last bit.)

The article briefly limns the absurdity of the memo, and the roles played in that absurdity by baby boomers, political correctness, John Lennon, and the NDP. I set that tapestry of insight to one side, however, in order to pursue what I perceive as the real contribution of Professor Novak's article. Specifically, the worldwide Islamic community contains many "mullahs, imams, or even ayatollahs" who deserve "to be flushed down the drain of history". But Professor Novak asks the hard question, "... how many Muslims ever openly criticize these men?" Not enough, that's how many. And hence "they have become complicit with the ideas, statements, and actions of such men...".

To be sure, Professor Novak is aware that Christianity too has long traded on the Every True Scot evasion: Every true Scot eats oatmeal. – But MacIntyre doesn't eat oatmeal. – Well, MacIntyre's no true Scot! In this fashion, none of horrific bloodlettings performed in the name of Jesus over the centuries (take the Crusades as an example) is to be attributed to real Christians. Professor Novak is not about to let Islam get away with using a move that he denies to Christianity. Though, rest assured, the Crusades were just "a response to Islamic expansionism". (King Richard's participation no doubt being explained by Islamic encroachment on Jersey and Guernsey.)

Neither is Professor Novak taken in by the "[n]umerous Muslim clergy, professionals, and associations", who "have issued condemnations of the attacks...". These disclaimers are "anemic", regardless of the strength of the condemnation. Why? Because after the WTC attacks, "a large number of Muslim protesters throughout the world ... were dancing in the streets". We're not told how large the number is, nor whether Professor Novak isn't remembering a small number of people caught on videotape that was then shown a large number of times on CNN. But presumably Professor Novak has evidence for his interpretation. Anyhow, the relevance is clear: Canadian Muslims must

...promise to search out and identify all those photographed who were found celebrating the bombing and subsequently [submit] their names to the Canadian and American governments with a request that those people never be allowed to enter North America again for any reason.

Professor Novak adds,

I want the members of the Muslim community ... 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.

This is an idea with such obvious merits that it deserves to be extended. I, for one, have long wanted every individual Albertan to utter – audibly, publicly, and repeatedly – apologies for the existence of Stockwell Day. More to the point, I have hardly been inundated with derogatory statements about Pat Robertson and Jerry Falwell by the many Christians with whom I am acquainted. I now require them – require them – explicitly to utter some. All of them. Otherwise they too are know-nothing laughable cretins, and must remain so (at least) until I receive the statements I've requested.

Hey, this is fun! Would all women please apologize for Barbara Amiel, and turn over the names of anyone observed reading her without laughing? I demand that all blond males utter derogatory statements about Eminem. All people of muscular build must request that WWF wrestlers be expelled from North America. And I insist that all Ontario academicians turn over the names of anti-Darwin, anti-pornography, pro-religion professors, for immediate detainment under Canada's impending anti-dissent... er, anti-terrorism law. Wonderful! With all this denying, informing, and disowning, people will be way too busy to blow things up. Or plot. Or eat. Now that's a common-sense revolution.

*Tim Kenyon*  
*Department of Philosophy*

#### **Hoffman replies to Lipshitz:**

In Stan Lipshitz' recent letter, my name appears frequently, mostly in places where he writes inaccurately in certain respects. Presumably this is due to misunderstanding what I wrote. He appears to confuse a defence of the Math Faculty core enriched sections with an attack on himself. If not from misreading me, that confusion would otherwise only arise if this so-called "Lipshitz affair" had from the beginning partly involved subverting the enriched sections, a hypothesis which I'd prefer to avoid.

To correct these inaccuracies is why I'm writing again. Stan takes great umbrage at an article of mine (which referred to quite a few earlier *Forum* pieces by others on various subjects), and also to two letters (basically an exchange with Jeanne Kay Guelke). My apologies in advance to *Forum* readers for the (apparently necessary) rewording of some old material from these.

The letters were concerned with remarks by Professor Guelke (from the Faculty of Environmental Studies).

Those remarks implied, by any reasonable interpretation of her words, that instructors (from the Mathematics Faculty) have been assigning grades in enriched sections which are inappropriately generous to the point of potentially ruining the university's reputation, and have been giving credit to students for work not done. There is little need to rebut that again. But if my letters were not understood by Stan to be in defence of (at least some) students and faculty (including me), then I'm not sure what else can be said to help him understand "whose battle" I'm "fighting", as he puts it. I'm just not prepared to sit on my hands while the Lipshitz affair is converted into an attack on these valuable academic options.

I interpret Stan's reference to my replies to Guelke's letters, but silence on her statements, as agreement with her. Those statements seem much more like an attack on the academic integrity and competence of fellow faculty members than anything I have actually written or implied. (More on this in the penultimate paragraph below.) But perhaps I am wrong and he will disavow Guelke's statements.

As for the article, the part which again touched on the Lipshitz affair was entirely a criticism of the initial decision of the Faculty Association to proceed with a poorly thought out case, and to deal with it as an infringement of academic freedom (risking devaluation of something valuable – compare the Nancy Olivieri case). The very fact that Stan feels that grave "implications for the future" may result from the decision would seem to bear out the opinion that a mistake was made in not consulting more widely before launching the case. It is good to learn from Stan's letter that FAUW and CAUT will not be pursuing this any further in the courts. That decision by the FAUW was probably the result of sober second thought and consultation (not cowardice – "failure to have the courage," as Stan says).

I won't be responding to the barrage of arithmetic related to Stan's class of 18 or 19 students. The statistics which I admitted to not having gathered were ones involving perhaps 18,000 or 19,000 students (35 years  $\times$  an average of 500 or 600 students per year). So his attempt to put me down on that one by conflating the two cases is simply careless reading on his part, or else a gross misrepresentation. Those potential statistics were about the general issue of grade inflation (largely a non-issue at UW in my opinion). I was not writing about the question concerning who of Stan or Alan George was closer to the mark for these particular 18 students (nor the question of whether an instructor's grades can be changed and who can do it). Nowhere in either letter or the article did I offer an opinion on that (despite Stan's attempts to imply otherwise), that opinion in any case being more subtle than just choosing sides, as in a lunchtime spat between school-

children. *Forum* readers who want more objective information related to Stan's arithmetical analysis might wish to talk to non-Stan members of a Math Faculty committee which looked at his arguments and proposals, which did consult with all enriched section instructors (from 4 of the 5 departments in the Faculty of Math), which gathered considerably more statistics, and which came to a quite different conclusion than Stan does.

The silliness concerning my department (Pure Math) looking upon the enriched sections as departmental courses is hardly worth commenting on. For example, a department mate of his, and former Chair of his department (Applied Math), taught the enriched section of calculus for about 10 consecutive years, even adjusting his sabbatical to make this possible. (We were both department chairmen around that time, and he's a friend of mine, since he taught me how to ski down a hill fast without falling down – I guess every letterwriter needs to exhibit a bit of immodesty.) I'd be surprised if there were a faculty member anywhere who didn't hope that most of the very best students would choose his/her department and discipline as their major. When many of those students are among the top 30 or 40 math students in North America (by at least one measure), it is especially edifying when they decide on your own discipline. I can think of at least four cases in the past where these students were the superbly gifted progeny of faculty members from other departments here at Waterloo! Choices made by students of this quality don't seem likely to be the result of the student being bamboozled by sly professors into a poor choice. But gifted students often do show up from high school with preferences that they change quite soon after getting here and seeing what really appeals to them. And very often that change is in a direction away from what is sometimes characterized as 'pure job-training'. Now it is true that quite a few 'alumni' from the enriched sections end up having Pure Math as at least one of their majors (many do doubles); but that happened just as often when the earlier mentioned applied mathematician was teaching them very frequently as it has at any other time.

Stan's remark about "meanspiritedness" and "nastiness" is a self-evident *ad hominem* which contributes nothing to the discussion.

I must respond to the remark about me avoiding contact with him after he provided me with his arithmetical analysis. Firstly it is unfortunate when a perfectly cordial relationship of three decades is somewhat ruined by an academic dispute. (This brings up a remark attributed to Kissinger, which I can't remember exactly – something to the effect that *the nastiest politics are academic politics, perhaps because the stakes are so low.*) After returning his material at his request with a brief written comment,



and then after a few friendly "hellos" in the hallway were met with stony silence, no further discussion with him was subsequently attempted by me. I'll certainly survive all that. In any case, my concern has not been to pick a side in the dispute between Stan and the Dean. It has been

1. to correct misinformation from whatever source about what has actually been happening over the years in the enriched sections, and
2. to try to get purveyors of vague innuendo about grade inflation to come clean with UW data which are statistically significant. (Maybe this *Forum* issue will have something on that, but I'm not holding my breath.)

There was no "gloating" in anything I wrote, nor was there any criticism of Stan or anyone else as a teacher – read the stuff again in context and you will see that. It was necessary to point out that Professor Guelke was being unreasonable in painting the assessments of the enriched section students by the vast majority of instructors over many years as being inappropriately generous, and taking those of an instructor doing the course for the first time as the appropriate norm. Having spelled this out in more detail, I trust that wounded pride will heal more quickly.

Readers are likely getting pretty weary of all this. That this somewhat overblown issue has been too prominent in the pages of the *Forum* is partly my doing, though it wasn't initially; and gross mischaracterization of what I wrote (e.g. that I even raised the issue of "the nature of the student grades which Dean George actually manipulated") needed to be cleared up. Perhaps we should all go away and, say, listen to some Schubert songs (*An Die Musik?*) before rushing off to the Hague World Court to continue the squabble. Speaking of musicians, at least we're not responding to each other as did Max Reger (about being seated in the smallest room in the house with the offending script in front of him, soon to be behind him); nor the Stravinskian rejoinder (about there already being too many counterexamples to the converse of Freud's theorem that brain implies ego).

This entire exchange perhaps falls under the anonymous reviewer's dictum about material which fills a much needed gap in the literature. (Having come this far, you deserved a couple of jokes, however unoriginal.)

*Peter Hoffman*  
*Department of Pure Mathematics*

## INTERDISCIPLINARY COFFEE TALK SOCIETY

I would like to suggest the founding of an informal society of UW researchers who are interested in running a series of talks across all disciplines. The idea is that about once a month one of us gives a talk on some fascinating topic relating to his or her own research, in terms understandable to all, and yet on a high level.

I am a new faculty member here at UW. Previously, as a postdoc at Cambridge (UK), I founded and ran such a society for a number of years – it was great fun! In our monthly talks, which were usually held in the late afternoon, and which were preceded by coffee (and the occasional cake) we made it a tradition to encourage any number of interruptions for questions. This usually resulted in very lively seminars and in active discussions which often continued at a social get-together after the seminar.

If you would be interested in helping to found such a society here, please contact me at [akempf@math.uwaterloo.ca](mailto:akempf@math.uwaterloo.ca) (Achim Kempf). If there is sufficient interest, I would suggest that we hold a first meeting in January, to establish a nice place and a convenient time slot for our regular meetings. Hopefully we'll achieve a good mix of participants across all faculties, from the Arts to the Sciences.

By the way, the Coffee Talk Society in Cambridge is still very active. It's now run by Dr. Peter Wang, and its website is <http://www.corpus.cam.ac.uk/collegelife/pcts/index.shtml>

*Achim Kempf*  
*Department of Applied Mathematics*

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## HARVARD ASKS FACULTY TO JUSTIFY GRADING METHODS

by Patrick Healy  
Boston Globe Staff

For the first time, professors at Harvard University have been asked to justify the grades they give students as the university launches its toughest examination yet of grade inflation.

Susan Pedersen, dean of undergraduate education, gave faculty members a January deadline to explain their grading practices in writing. A committee will review the data and recommend whether changes to grading should be considered.

The plan was announced at a private faculty meeting last week, following a *Globe* study revealing that decades of grade inflation have made it much easier to graduate with honors.

More than half of Harvard's grades last year were A's and A-minuses, and a record 91 percent of students graduated with honors in June. Yale, Princeton, and other Ivy League and nationally ranked universities had far lower rates of honors, the *Globe* found.

Pedersen did not discuss honors at the faculty meeting, but the new president, Lawrence H. Summers, said through a spokesman afterward that he was "very concerned about both honors inflation and grade inflation", and would consult with professors about the issues. He declined to comment further.

The pattern of high grades and near-universal honors indicates that professors are not assessing students as critically or rigorously as the university's elite reputation would suggest, education specialists warned in the *Globe* study early this month.

Deans have previously warned the faculty about the upward trend in A's. But some professors say Harvard has sent mixed signals about the seriousness of grade inflation. In the past, for example, officials suggested that students receive more leeway in dropping classes, an option students sometimes invoke when the threat of a bad grade looms.

This latest review is the broadest and most explicit attempt in years to rein in grade inflation, Harvard officials and professors say.

"I'm not aware of anything untoward going on in our department, but we're under some pressure now to show it," said Oliver Hart, chairman of the economics department.

Over the next few weeks, academic departments will receive data on their grading histories and patterns. Professors and graduate-student teaching fellows are expected to describe the ways in which they assess and mark student work, as well as to explain grading trends that may suggest inflation. The Educational Policy Committee, which is made up chiefly of administrators and faculty, will discuss the data in the spring.

Deans would clearly like professors to grade more carefully and rigorously, but the officials cannot impose any new grading standard unless they or Summers want to start a dispute within the faculty. The faculty largely dictates academic policy and has traditionally enjoyed broad independence in how it evaluates students.

Short of challenging this prerogative, the deans and Summers can only direct departments and committees to study the issue, build a case for a proposed policy change, and then use the bully pulpit and private meetings to persuade the faculty to vote for it.

Many professors support the grading review, though they generally add that they think grade inflation is not a major problem. Many also see themselves as fairly tough graders who give high marks only because their students are academically extraordinary. Whether a problem truly exists, and how it might be solved, will become clearer once they see Pedersen's data, they said.

"Dealing with grade inflation requires knowing the extent of it – have your grades risen from C-plus to A-minus, or from B to B-plus? Is it big or small?" said Roderick MacFarquhar, chairman of the government department.

Like other department leaders, MacFarquhar said it would be inappropriate for him to instruct his faculty members on how to grade their students. "All you can do is get professors to recognize that this has been delineated, officially, as a problem," he said.

Lawrence Buell, who heads the English department and once held Pedersen's job, said his chief concern is that

grading practices vary by department, making grade inflation a problem in some classes but not all. He said he believes Harvard should adopt an anti-inflation strategy used by Dartmouth College and some other schools: Students receive transcripts with two grades for each class; the grade earned by the student and the median grade in the class. This way, graduate schools, corporate recruiters, and professors themselves know when an A is a common grade or a rare one.

Harvard professors considered this idea several years ago, but it ultimately died in committee.

The outcome of the new study will depend in large part on Summers, given that deans have failed to solve the problem on their own. Summers says he wants undergraduates to meet high and rigorous academic standards, but whether grades will become part of his agenda is unclear. A data-driven economist and former US treasury

secretary who is known for forming his ideas on the basis of evidence and then quietly persuading others to see his point of view, Summers has been reluctant to speak publicly about the issue.

For example, after Pedersen unveiled her plan at the faculty meeting, a professor asked the president for a comment on grade inflation as well as any other academic matters. It was his debut meeting as president, yet rather than make a splash he was characteristically circumspect.

"These are important discussions and right now. I have observations on international relations and grade inflations, but I am going to defer those observations until next time," he said, according to an unofficial transcript of the meeting. The next meeting is on Nov. 13.

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## **HARVARD'S QUIET SECRET: RAMPANT GRADE INFLATION**

*by Patrick Healy  
Boston Globe Staff*

CAMBRIDGE - Trevor Cox is in the throes of his greatest challenge at Harvard University: A senior honors thesis about Abraham Lincoln's wartime attorney general. It's exciting and gut-churning, he says; it's also his first Harvard paper that doesn't feel like a sham.

"I've coasted on far higher grades than I deserve," said Cox, who has a B-plus average and leads Harvard's student volunteer group. "It's scandalous. You can get very good grades, and earn honors, without ever producing quality work."

This is Harvard's dirty little secret: Since the Vietnam era, rampant grade inflation has made its top prize for students – graduating with honors – virtually meaningless.

Last June, a record 91 percent of Harvard students graduated summa, magna, or cum laude, far more than at Yale (51 percent), Princeton (44 percent), and other elite universities, a Globe study has found.

While the world regards these students as the best of the best of America's 13 million undergraduates, Harvard honors has actually become the laughingstock of the Ivy League. The other Ivies see Harvard as the Lake Wob-

gon of higher education, where all the students, being above average, can take honors for granted. It takes just a B-minus average in the major subject to earn cum laude – no sweat at a school where 51 percent of the grades last year were A's and A-minuses.

"Honors at Harvard has just lost all meaning," said Henry Rosovsky, a top dean and acting president at Harvard in the 1970s and '80s. "The bad honors is spoiling the good."

With Harvard's new president, Lawrence Summers, focused on improving undergraduate studies and set to deliver his inaugural address this Friday, the Globe reviewed the university's academic records and internal memos over the last 50 years to analyze the rigors and rewards of a Harvard education.

The documents indicate that Vietnam and the protest movements of the '60s led to an increase in lax grading campuswide, and that the faculty never recovered. Harry Lewis, the current dean of Harvard College, wrote in one e-mail that humanities professors today can't tell an A paper from a B paper, partly because of a "collapse of critical judgment."

Many Ivy League schools now limit honors, but Harvard says that's unfair – today's seniors are better students than a generation ago, and those who do honors work deserve the distinction.

"After teaching them well, and after they perform well, would it really be fair to give them low grades or deny them honors?" said Susan Pedersen, Harvard's dean of undergraduate education.

A Harvard College education is undoubtedly one of the best in the world, and at least some of those thousands of A's can be attributed to the fact that the campus is full of high-school valedictorians with perfect 1600 SAT scores who do superior work.

Yet Pedersen also admits that grade inflation is real. As at many schools, at Harvard, the A to F grading range has unofficially turned to an A to B-minus range. As a result, the university's current honors requirements make Harvard unique: It inevitably rewards grade inflation with honors.

"A Harvard graduating class with 91 percent honors is the most impressive indicator of grade inflation I've seen in a long time," said Arthur Levine, president of Columbia University's Teachers College and an authority on grading. "Rather than singling out who performs best, they're singling the 9 percent who perform the worst. Harvard has done away with true honors."

Besides the comparison with other elite universities, the Globe study of Harvard's honors and grading practices also found:

- Undergraduate honors increased from 32 percent in 1946 to 91 percent in 2001, with the greatest growth in the 1960s and early '70s, and then again during the last 15 years;
- Vietnam-era draft boards panicked Harvard students and teachers, so that inflated grades became the moral equivalent of opposition to the war, helping prevent all but 19 Harvard College men from dying in Southeast Asia;
- 1969 was the defining moment in grade inflation: SAT scores for entering freshmen fell for the first time in years, yet the proportion of A's and B's shot up by 10 percent and the rate of honors continued climbing sharply;
- The arrival of 120 black freshmen in 1969 – up from 60 the year before, because of aggressive affirmative action – was partly the result of lowered admissions standards, but was not a primary cause of grade inflation, as one Harvard professor contends;
- Graduate-student teaching fellows have exacerbated grade inflation because of their power in the class-

room and a lack of guidance from professors, who are often consumed with research.

Yet no matter how much grade inflation drives honors at Harvard, the credential has retained real cachet in society. It adds luster to resumes and graduate school applications, and sticks in people's minds during networking conversations. Corporate recruiters especially value honors – some say they won't even interview applicants who aren't cum laude material. In a tight job market, the credential helps a candidate stand out. And honors is still a nice touch for the Sunday wedding pages; Harvard alumni regularly note that they graduated cum laude, a cultural status symbol.

Yet some academic insiders say that when 91 percent of Harvard graduates can claim honors, it becomes more like a reward for good attendance than for excellence.

"From age 3 nowadays, students compete to get into nursery school, primary school, high school, and then Ivy schools, and each stage they have to present their credentials: grades and honors," said Isaac Kramnick, Cornell's vice-provost for undergraduate education, and himself a 1959 summa from Harvard.

"Now they're paying \$35,000 at Harvard, and they expect something to show for it," he said. "But honors cannot speak for itself anymore."

### Three wars, one campus

Between the end of World War II in 1945 and Kramnick's arrival 10 years later, Harvard Yard bustled with men who knew more about fighting in the Pacific Theater than studying for exams. The GI Bill of Rights had professors widely fretting about grade inflation for the first time. If the vets struggled in class, would anyone really penalize them with a D?

Grades did rise, but not dramatically, and it was largely due to Harvard setting higher admissions standards, according to university memos from the period.

The Vietnam War, and to a lesser extent the Korean War, gave grades real value. Students needed good marks to stay in school and keep draft deferments. And some, trying to avoid fighting overseas, used A or B averages as a springboard to graduate schools. Honors from Harvard was second only to a Rhodes scholarship for opening doors.

"Latin honors really helped people who wanted to become professors, and many students did," said Kramnick.

As an undergraduate, Kramnick devoured political phi-

losophy and hungered for honors. In 1959, his work paid off when he was among 2 percent of his class to earn summa (compared to 5 percent last June). Then came Cambridge University, a doctorate at Harvard, and finally Cornell.

Today he keeps his diploma in his attic to avoid seeming showy. The current honors rate at his alma mater only makes him laugh; he wonders, if more students are striving for honors, are they less bashful than he in mentioning it?

"Summa's been on my vita for 41 years, but I can count the times I bring it up on one hand," Kramnick said.

The '60s began with Harvard students demanding choice: over the curriculum, over grades, over just about everything. The faculty, meanwhile, worried about a narrow curriculum: English majors seeking a broad liberal arts education, for instance, shouldn't be consumed only with Chaucer and Shakespeare.

In 1961, professors hit on a compromise. They loosened honors requirements by allowing students to earn cum laude by taking a range of courses, without actually doing honors work in their major.

The move was significant. Honors shot up in 1962 by seven percentage points. Today, one-quarter of all honors go to these students who do not earn honors in their major. It requires only a B average overall, and not everyone needs a thesis.

That kind of honors distinction seems more than a little flimsy to most Ivy schools.

"To be an honors student is to create your own intellectual work in a thesis or a science lab – to have had a transformative experience," said Jamshed Bharucha, dean of the faculty at Dartmouth, where 40 percent graduated with honors last spring.

"If you go to Harvard, you are by definition a Harvard student, so we automatically know your education is worth a lot – therefore honors should require more there than it does at most places," said Lee Mitchell, a Princeton English professor who has studied grade inflation in higher education.

High grades took on new urgency at Harvard in 1963 as each week brought rumors of a looming draft for the war in Southeast Asia. To avoid it, steady academic progress was needed, and top grades would be extra insurance to dissuade draft boards from taking a Harvard man.

Graduate teaching fellows were instinctively sympa-

thetic, since, as students, many of them found the idea of a draft chilling. And with more professors caught up in their own research and publishing, the twentysomething teaching fellows began exerting enormous power over grades, to the bane of some administrators.

"I don't believe in giving low grades," one fellow said during the first week of Epic and Drama, an introductory humanities course, in 1963. "Life is much too short."

At that, students broke into applause, said Jim Metcalf, a freshman then, who recalled the moment. He ended up receiving a B in the class, while in some other courses – several taught by professors – he earned C's. (The physics major ended up graduating without honors, "but still had a very happy life", he said recently, with a job at Hanscom Air Force Base and a daughter now enrolled at Harvard.)

Anxiety over the war worsened in 1965-66, when the Selective Service System sought Harvard's help in developing rules for drafting its own students. The request sickened some professors. But "we at Harvard felt obliged to cooperate, and did so," John U. Munro, the dean of the college, wrote at the time.

Under this arrangement, Harvard computed a class rank for each student based on grades, then sent the data to the student to forward to the draft board. Students had deferments from the draft, yet they worried about losing them if the war escalated. If that happened, and a draft board needed men, high grades and class rank would be essential to avoiding Vietnam.

"Students realized they needed evidence to show they weren't just messing around in college to avoid the draft," said George Flynn, a historian and author of "The Draft, 1940-1973."

"The war just set off inflation at Harvard," said Henry Rosovsky, who joined the economics faculty in 1965. "Professors gave higher grades to protect them."

Rosovsky, now retired and working on a research project about grade inflation with other scholars at the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, demurred on whether he himself inflated grades. "It's a very hard question for me to answer," he said. "If I did anything like that, it wasn't consciously."

In the end, very few Harvard men were called to serve. For Rosovsky, perhaps the most powerful symbol of grade inflation is above the pews in Memorial Church on campus. There, a small, gold-plated plaque lists the undergraduates who lost their lives in Vietnam. It has only 19 names.

Across from it is a huge stonefaced wall etched with the names of hundreds of students who died in World War II. "Vietnam was our class-based war, no question," Rosovsky said.

### **No time for finals**

By 1966, many students spent as much time organizing protests as writing papers. Any high-profile event on campus was ripe for a demonstration. More than 1,000 students screamed "Murderer!" at Defense Secretary Robert McNamara as he tried to drive through campus for a speech; he was finally escorted by police. The next year, students barricaded a recruiter from napalm-maker Dow Chemical in Mallinckrodt Lab for several hours, until faculty "worked out conditions for his release," according to one memo written in the aftermath.

The Social Relations Department, a locus of antiwar thought, even hired outside protesters to teach and grade students.

"The TF's (teaching fellows) went into the streets and hired people who had no academic ability at all to run class sections," said John Dunlop, a faculty leader and economics professor at the time, who later became US Labor Secretary under Nixon. "There were plenty of grading abuses, when grades were even given."

The taste of power drove students to seek more control over education as well. And time and again, the faculty bent. Classes were sporadically canceled. In 1967 and '68, professors encouraged the use of plus and minus grades; broadened options like pass/fail marks and student-designed independent study; and eased tough foreign language requirements. "A flight from grades," as one dean said in 1968.

"Professors were being told to get with it," said Theda Skocpol, a government and sociology scholar who had just started teaching at Harvard. "And the professors, in general, loosened up. Once that happens, it's very hard to tighten back up."

There were so many powder-keg issues on campus that faculty began retreating deeper into their labs and libraries. One volatile topic was racial diversity. Harvard had been enrolling a few dozen black freshmen each year, but protesters began demanding more, as well as a degree-granting Department of Afro-American Studies.

Harvard aggressively targeted the nation's ghettos as part of an affirmative action campaign in 1968-69. Officials wanted a broader socioeconomic, as well as racial, spectrum. And in the fall of '69, about 120 black freshmen arrived in the Yard, almost twice as many as the previous year.

Many of them struggled. Derek Bok, who became president of Harvard in 1971, said this was inevitable for students whose high schools were anything but Andover and Exeter. "That created some academic difficulties because of the big adjustment to Harvard," Bok said.

That freshman class in 1969 had some of the worst SAT scores Harvard had seen in years. The top percentile of test-takers – mostly white students from prep schools – had an average of 1561, down seven points from 1968, according to records. The two lowest percentiles – many of them less affluent and less prepared academically for college work – scored 1280 and 1134, a decline of 37 and 28 points respectively.

A weak freshman class usually would lower grade averages, but the opposite was true in 1969-70. The proportion of A's and B's overall grew by about 10 percent. And honors spiked up. The freshmen of 1969 ended up earning more honors than previous groups – and they were arguably not better students, as the university asserts today. About 77.5 percent of them earned honors in 1973, compared to 69 percent in 1969.

Did race play a role in grade inflation? Harvey Mansfield, then and now a professor of government and a social conservative, says yes. He argues that the lax grading culture led professors and teaching fellows to indulge their more liberal sympathies and inflate grades in order to create a level playing field for black students, who would have done worse than whites otherwise.

This theory is offensive to many and roundly dismissed by current Harvard officials. In private, however, former officials say that black and white students both benefited from grade creep when they were on the cusp of a higher mark. Academic records from the 1960s show that the draft and faculty votes on grading had a much more pervasive impact on grade inflation than 120 black freshmen sprinkled among hundreds of classrooms.

"It's conceivable that the human impulse was to not give black students D's, but it doesn't explain the grade inflation up the line," Bok said in a recent interview.

Mansfield still discusses his views on race in the hopes that it will spur Harvard into, first, proving him right or wrong, and second, publicly acknowledging grade inflation as a major problem.

"One professor follows another here – I give high grades because others do, and I don't want my students to suffer," Mansfield said. "Action must be taken university-wide."

What worries Bok more than grade inflation is the kind of surge of top grades that happened in 1969-70. In May 1970, after Ohio National Guardsmen shot and killed four students at Kent State, the faculty made spring finals optional, and went on record supporting students who were drawn "away from their academic work and into direct political activity," according to a 1970 faculty memo.

"Things got excessive that year," Bok said. "I think you can't force people to conform on grading, but you can try to find a way to stabilize the number of categories by which you distinguish different students' work. I think that conversation could be healthy today."

His friend and former dean, Rosovsky, agrees.

"One of the problems is that very few standards are ever discussed. What is a B-plus? What is an A-minus? It's assumed people will know what to do when grading. But I think that's a faulty assumption now," he said.

#### **A or A-minus?**

When Bok became president in 1971, the protest culture was ebbing on campus. Many in the Students for a Democratic Society – who had roughed up deans during a takeover of University Hall in 1969, only to be ejected violently by police the next day – had graduated (with honors, in some cases). The "crisis" was passing, officials felt, and an attempt to save learning and grading was needed.

One study by historian Ernest May, a dean at the time, found that departments graded and awarded honors quite differently. Bok hated that. History and literature majors like Frank Rich, class of 1971, were able to graduate magna while some peers in the hard sciences were on a steep grading curve that drove marks down.

"This was the period of really shifting cultural values, and grades were a part of that," said Rich, who is now a New York Times columnist. "You practically had to write '(expletive) you' on a blue book to flunk out."

To provide more unity, Harvard crafted a core curriculum. One of the goals was to return more professors to the classroom and reduce grade inflation by the teaching fellows.

Rosovsky, who led this effort as dean of the faculty, also worked with professors to develop tougher rules for honors. In their first year, 1978, honors declined from 85 percent to 73 percent. By 1985, it had fallen to just under 69 percent. But high grades never really slid downward. The A grades returned in earnest in the mid '80s, and honors took off again, to 80 percent in 1990 and 91 per-

cent this past June.

For students like Richard John, the obsession with high grades only grew with time. John, a freshmen in 1977, wanted to become a university professor. And because honors would help him in a crowded academic field, he dreamed of summa.

John avoided a few legendary tough graders, and he carefully steered his way past the Marxists in his social studies department who demanded more ideology than he gave. And he benefited from a faculty culture that didn't emphasize careful grading. In one of Professor Daniel Bell's sociology courses, John remembers turning in a paper on economic development that came back more honored than assessed.

"He didn't make any comments on it and gave me an A," John said. "He didn't have a [teaching fellow], which was good. But I don't think he spent a lot of time on the paper."

John graduated magna in 1981 and went on to become a teaching fellow at Harvard, where he saw the arbitrariness of grading in a new light. He and another teaching fellow once argued over honors for a student who, the other fellow felt, hadn't properly criticized Horace Mann's views on American education in a paper.

"The TF's judgment was based on shallow, ideological grounds, and he blocked the student from getting magna," said John, who is now an associate professor of history at the University of Illinois at Chicago. "I felt she deserved a magna, and still do. I really feel quite bad about that."

Last spring, after French grammar teaching fellow Mahalia Gayle had given her students their final grades, she received e-mail from two of them begging for higher marks. One young man wanted an A-minus upped to an A because, he said, his class participation was strong and his homework was always thoughtful and complete.

"We had a long argument but I made it clear he was getting an A-minus – one, I had calculated the grade; two, it was already at the registrar; and three, I don't negotiate," Gayle said.

"It was charming in a way," she added. "I think he'll do very well in life."

Corporate recruiters are indeed looking for academic stars, and honors particularly helps one shine. "A degree from Harvard is very good, but honors certainly helps it along," said M.J. Wheble, national manager of campus recruiting for Deloitte & Touche. "It indicated someone has really worked hard."

Over the last decade or so, deans at Harvard have made stabs at discouraging grade inflation, such as regularly informing faculty about how fast A's are rising. But the prerogative for controlling grades belongs to the professors. And ever since Rosovsky, the deans have either marched in lockstep with tradition or chosen not to take the faculty on.

The current dean of the college, Lewis, wrote a memo last spring linking grade inflation to better students, but he also blamed it on "the collapse of critical judgment in the humanities and some of the social sciences." "Yet what can be done?" Lewis wrote, noting the power of the faculty's dean, Jeremy Knowles, and a largely failed effort by Princeton to rein in grades. Lewis and Knowles declined comment.

The humanities are indeed a harbor for A's, which account for half of all the grades given in those classes; humanities professors teach about 30 percent of Harvard students. The hard sciences enroll a similar proportion and give more B's, while the social sciences enroll about 50 percent and fall toward the middle of grading trends.

Alexandra Mack, a 1991 anthropology major, received a C in calculus and a B-minus in Stephen Jay Gould's evolution class, but recalls breezing through one humanities exam by simply regurgitating the professor's ideas.

"The comments back from the professor were 'great insights, great thoughts,'" Mack said. "I felt, 'I'm glad you think I'm brilliant, but c'mon.'"

Still, renaissance literature scholar Stephen Greenblatt, a University Professor in the Humanities, says a lack of critical judgment isn't the issue – it's that Harvard simply has better students than other colleges. He uses words like "astonishing" and "amazing" to describe his students' papers.

"A very remarkable number of these projects are publishable quality," Greenblatt said. "Is someone who graduates summa cum laude at a less selective university really the same as a summa at Harvard or Yale?"

Summa, in fact, is the one honor that Harvard officials have taken steps to protect. In 1996, the number of highest honors jumped from 79 (or 5 percent of degrees) to 115 (about 8 percent), infuriating some professors. They then decided to cap summa at 5 percent and required that these students earn almost all A's, receive an endorsement from a special summa committee, and almost al-

ways write a thesis or other project.

Yet while Yale and others cap other honors categories as well, Harvard worries far less. Cum laude, which can be earned either with a B-minus in the major or a B average overall, was given to a total of about 50 percent of graduates last spring. About 36 percent earned magna by having a B-plus average, usually a thesis, and a recommendation from their department.

While Harvard and other Ivies have talked about joining together to deflate grades – to avoid a unilateral change that might hurt a given school's students who apply to graduate school – that step seems unlikely.

"It would be hard to motivate our faculty to do something different about grading because the Comell faculty thinks it should," said Jeff Wolcowitz, Harvard's associate dean of undergraduate education.

But some say that as long as grades and honors continue to rise, Harvard is raising doubts about the integrity of its own diploma.

"It's a good time for Summers and the faculty to reconsider how they grade and give honors," said Professor John, the magna from 1981. "It wouldn't hurt Harvard one bit to get a reputation for being tough."

President Summers declined to be interviewed for this article. Officials say he wants to address undergraduate issues at his inauguration on Friday, but Dean Pedersen also notes that grading and honors have not been a major concern of his. She hopes to at least start the faculty talking seriously this fall about the issues of grading and evaluating students.

Trevor Cox, meanwhile, is graduating in a matter of months, and is therefore prone to reckoning. He is among those who say they would sacrifice easy honors for more rigor: More comments on papers, more challenges from faculty members, more direction in his studies, more grades that made him buckle down. Cox says he is putting his all into the Lincoln thesis, but he knows he won't have to sweat it too much. Honors is guaranteed.

"You'd think I'm not competitive enough to care about honors, but I'd feel dumb if I was among the 9 percent who don't get it," Cox said. "I think magna is within my reach – which is criminal, really."

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**TOP OF THE CLASS**  
**Percentage of college seniors graduating with honors in 2001**

**Ivy League schools**

Harvard	91%
Yale	51%
Princeton	44%
Brown	42%
Dartmouth	40%
*Columbia	25%
Cornell	8%
**Penn	Not available

**Non-Ivy League schools**

Tufts	52%
BU	39%
Johns Hopkins	35%
BC	29%
Duke	28%
Stanford	20%
MIT	0

\* For Columbia College, by far the largest undergraduate school. Percentages for the other undergraduate schools are: engineering, 10%; general studies, 30%; nursing, no honors available.

\*\* Penn does not release honors data, nor does it provide universitywide honors data to its students for them to determine their class ranks.

**HARVARD'S HONOURS SYSTEM**

Year	Scenario	Percentage of Harvard students graduating with honors
1946	Enrollment of World War II veterans surges; first sign of grade inflation, former Harvard President Neil Rudenstine says.	31.8%
1961	Harvard faculty eases rules for graduating with honors.	49.9%
1965	Many students, hoping to avoid the draft, grow increasingly anxious about class rank, Harvard sees signs of grade inflation.	64.9%
1967	Faculty adds flexibility to grading, stoking concerns about grade inflation.	66.2%
1969	In April, antiwar protesters seize University Hall, police oust them a day later. In the fall, new affirmative action policy enrolls many more black freshmen. SAT scores for the freshman class fall sharply, but A's and B's increase.	68.9%
1970	Harvard faculty further loosens grading in the face of antiwar protests. It makes spring finals optional.	71.0%
1971	Internal report says Harvard grading, honors are too erratic and that too many graduate students are teaching classes.	75.4%
1973	Hoping to stop grade inflation, faculty allows greater use of satisfactory/unsatisfactory instead of grades.	77.5%
1977	Under Dean Henry Rosovsky, a new core curriculum is designed; rules for honors are toughened.	84.9%
1979	First year of Harvard/Radcliffe official merger, women are included in honors rates.	72.5%
1988	Harvard faculty dean warns of grade inflation; A's become increasingly common.	77.1%
1996	After bulge in highest honors, Harvard caps them, appoints panel to review "outstanding work".	85.5%
2001	Harvard honors exceed 90 percent, new President Lawrence H. Summers takes office.	90.8%

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## EVIDENCE ON GRADES AND GRADE INFLATION AT ONTARIO'S UNIVERSITIES

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Using information on first-year university grades from across Ontario, we examine whether or not there has been grade inflation by discipline. In a survey of seven universities for the periods 1973-74 and 1993-94, we find significant grade inflation in various Arts and Science programs. The rate of inflation is not uniform. Some subjects, such as Mathematics, experienced little or no change in average grades at most universities, while English and Biology experienced significant grade inflation.

### Introduction

Universities are being examined in more detail than they have been in recent memory. Taxpayers, governments and students are becoming increasingly concerned about getting their money's worth. While this increased scrutiny makes some university administrators and professors uneasy (Bruneau 1994), the principles of accountability and transparency are slowly being accepted in the education industry. There have been recent studies on the relative efficacy of Canadian universities (McMillan and Datta 1998), the private economic return in obtaining a degree (Lavoie and Finnie 1999; Dooley 1986; Freeman 1999), the social returns to a degree (Vaillancourt 1995) and the future of university financing (Carmichael 1999; West 1988). *Maclean's* magazine's annual rankings of universities are often disputed but few disagree about the popularity, or the profit produced by its publication (both in English and Chinese, although there is no equivalent in French). These changes can be expected to continue because of the fundamental shift in education funding when governments reduce their contribution and deregulate fees (CAUT 1996).

Each of these and many other issues have been extensively and deservedly studied in this journal and elsewhere. Still, an important dimension of the modern Canadian university has been overlooked: grade inflation. Grade inflation is generally unmeasured and is therefore omitted from the list of indicators studied by *Maclean's* or by governments. The fact that our data was difficult to obtain motivates one of the lessons that we wish to convey. We offer our results to stimulate an informed discussion about grading policies.

Why should researchers be interested in grade inflation? First, grading offers an unobserved margin of adjustment

that can be exploited. In times of government cutbacks, this margin represents an important disadvantage to using performance indicators, such as student-professor ratios and research funding, as proxies for the cost of educating a student or the quality of that education. Simply put, professors could manipulate grades in order to attract more students and cushion the negative effects of any government cutbacks. Second, our data should help to refine the debate on the returns to increasing the quantity of education since those studies often ignore marginal changes in its quality. Third, if grade inflation varies between departments then the signals and incentives that students receive are distorted and students are less able to judge where their comparative advantage lies. If grades do not indicate a student's strengths and weaknesses then the expectation of a good grade in a certain discipline will influence their choice of courses (Sabot and Wake-man-Linn 1991). By lowering the relative price of some subjects compared to others, students may choose the "wrong" field of study in terms of their own comparative abilities. For example, to increase the number of computer scientists, maybe universities should be encourage to offer higher grades in such courses and offer lower grades in disciplines with an excess supply of students. Finally, grades and the acquisition of a degree are signals to potential employers. Grade inflation makes these signals less clear. If an "A" student today is not the same as an "A" student 20 years ago, or the contribution of an "A" student in English cannot be easily compared to that of an "A" student in Mathematics, then what criteria does an employer use to distinguish differences in quality? Few people question that costs due to mistakes exist.

The issue of grade inflation has been discussed for many years (Durm 1993; Juarez 1996; McKenzie 1979) but debates on the issue are usually restricted by a lack of data. This paper helps to fill this void by reporting on grading policies at seven Ontario universities: Brock, Guelph, McMaster, Ottawa, Trent, Wilfrid Laurier, and Windsor in 12 traditional introductory (first-year) courses. Our reference years are for the 1973-74 and 1993-94 academic years [1].

The next two sections look at two aspects of grades. The first section considers the mean grade point average (GPA), the second section focuses on changes in the dis-

tribution of grades, and this is followed by our conclusion. The Appendix shows how the data were constructed and how we accounted for changes in the way grades are recorded over time. In order to compare grades over time, we use a common index. Most institutions in our sample report final grades as a letter. For comparison purposes, we quantify letter grades in the following standard format: an A is 4, B is 3, C is 2, D is 1, F is 0, and we ignore + and - distinctions. Our data show that the rate of inflation has not been equal across courses and we give an indication of the changes across the distribution from A to F.

### Grade inflation

Table 1 compares the average grade awarded to students enrolled in courses offered during the 1973-74 academic year with the average grade awarded in a comparable course during 1993-94. Table 1 also records the variance in grades across the universities in our sample for each academic year and the number of universities that experienced grade inflation or deflation in each course [2]. The average GPA rose in 11 or the 12 courses. The only exception was Sociology and its average GPA is above the median in both years.

More importantly, this table shows that even among the courses that experienced grade inflation, the rate of inflation was not uniform. For example, the greatest increase occurred in English, with Biology and Chemistry following. The focus on inflation instead of just GPA levels is important because the highest 1993-94 grades are found in Music, English and French while the lowest grades are Economics, Mathematics and Chemistry. Twenty years ago and with the marked exception of English, the same courses were highest and lowest grading.

The variances measure the average of the variances in each department across the different universities [3]. A decrease in the variances between 1973-74 and 1993-94 would demonstrate that the distribution of grades is shrinking around the mean. In all cases, except Music, Political Science, and Psychology the variances declined or stayed the same over the 20-year period [4]. The biggest decline in the variance is found in English [5]. Generally, and as expected, departments with the biggest decline in the variance of grades also had the biggest inflation. The notable exceptions are Mathematics and Economics which, as discussed below, have lower variances because they have fewer failures in the 1990s than in the 1970s.

Of the 80 individual course-university combinations on which we had data for both beginning and end period grades, 42 (53 percent) had grade inflation at the 10-percent level of significance, 25 (31 percent) had no statistically significant change in their mean grades, and

average grades fell in 13 (16 percent). These results indicate that while grade inflation is not uniform across all universities or even all courses, the pattern of rising grades is widespread. Our results are especially noticeable in the Arts where 16 of the 24 course-university combinations showed statistically significant grade inflation.

Only two courses (Psychology and Sociology) had grade deflation at more than one university, while further evidence suggests that the cases of deflation may represent the idiosyncratic behaviour of specific professors. Nine of the 13 course-university combinations with grade deflation had exceptionally high grades in 1973-74 relative to the mean for that course at other universities in that year. On average, these nine courses were a half a grade (0.46) higher than the rest of the subjects in their field across the other five universities.

### Distribution of Grades

For many purposes, the distribution of grades is more important than the average grade in a course. There have always been competing views concerning the purpose of a university, but students and their parents are increasingly concerned about getting jobs. As part of this view, employers would like prospective employees to be well trained [6]. Or, if the student is not well trained, employers could profitably hire him or her at a reduced wage if there were reliable information about a student. Letters of reference have well-known weaknesses. Simply graduating from a university is less distinctive than in earlier decades, which leaves grades as an important measure for employers, especially measuring grades relative to those of classmates.

Table 2 reports on the fraction of students who received As, Bs, Cs, Ds and Fs. The horizontal sum of the first five columns, except for small rounding errors, totals 100 percent, as does the horizontal sum of the second five columns. The last two columns also show the 1993-94 percentages of As and Fs less the 1973-74 estimates. As expected, more students are now receiving high grades and fewer students are not receiving low grades compared to 20 years ago. All of the introductory Arts courses have more than 50 percent of students receiving a B- or higher. Some people argue that most of the grade inflation has occurred at the B and C level, but that professors have preserved the value of an "A." These data suggest otherwise. Statistically significant increases in the fraction of a class receiving an A occurred in most of the courses that experienced grade inflation.

These data indicate that the time of the "Gentleman's C" is gone. It would be more accurate to refer to the time of the "Gentleperson's B" (or even A in some cases). One could respond that these courses attract better students

but we have rather limited evidence on this hypothesis. One could argue that students should take as many introductory courses as possible in order to be well-rounded citizens. Even if true, not all of these students should be encouraged to continue. For this reason, the widespread decreases in the fraction of a class receiving Ds or Fs are worrisome.

The results presented in the second last column,  $\Delta$  (%A), indicate that 11 of the 12 subjects assigned more As in 1993-94 than in 1973-74. The only exception is Sociology. In the case of English, for instance, the fraction of the class with As during these two periods more than doubled from 8.5 to 18.4 percent. Averaged across courses, the increase in the fraction receiving an A over a 20-year period was 4.7 percentage points.

Except for Music, which already has an exceptionally low failure rate, fewer Fs are being assigned. Some disciplines like English, French, Music and Biology have significant grade inflation at the upper tail of the distribution. Interestingly, a number of other subjects, especially in the sciences, have significantly lower failure rates with small increases in the percentage of As. These subjects apparently have grade inflation at the lower end of the grade distribution.

It is clear from Table 2 that widely different grading standards apply within a university. There are now the hardest grading departments (Chemistry, Mathematics and Economics) and the softest grading departments (English, French and Music). A few disciplines, like Political Science, Physics and Psychology are medium hard while Philosophy, Biology and Sociology would be classified as medium-soft [7]. While there has been a general upward drift in grades, the differences in discipline-specific grading practices is quite revealing. Most departments, historically and presently gave either high (e.g., Music) or low (e.g., Economics) grades. However, English and Biology would have been considered among the hardest grading departments in the early 1970s, but are soft grading departments in the 1990s.

### Discussion

Our survey of selected Ontario universities finds significant grade inflation. Are these results typical of other universities in Canada or elsewhere? We know of no comparable Canadian study while Sabot and Wakeman-Linn's (1991) results imply that grade inflation is common throughout the United States.

A vast number of hypotheses have been put forward to explain grade inflation. To generalize, grades could increase because: (a) professors are more generous [8] for a given group of students, (b) the quality (e.g., intelligence, study effort) of a group of students has increased over

time, (c) for a given group of students, teaching methods improved, and (d) random effects that apply to a particular observation (i.e., specific course-university effects). Most people believe that the first hypothesis is the most prevalent and represents the greatest concern to policy-makers while acknowledging that the second and third make careful analysis difficult. We acknowledge the final hypothesis by noting which changes are statistically significant. The essential problem in studying or verifying any of these hypotheses is that they rely on data that are not readily available. Hopefully, our results will encourage researchers who have access to the required data to conduct appropriate studies.

Canadian universities are under pressure, mostly due to declining federal and provincial grants for postsecondary education, to attract more students and to retain them. The competition between universities to attract students, and the resources that go with them, has intensified over the last decade. There is also greater rivalry between departments within each university because increased student enrolment for any given subject will mean that, at a minimum, faculty size will not fall as fast as in other less fortunate departments. This simple-minded intuition requires two points of clarification.

First, professors sometimes feel compelled to award higher grades, ask less of students, or anticipate lower enrolment (Dickson 1984). To our knowledge, only one study attempts to estimate the response of student choice with respect to grades. Sabot and Wakeman-Linn (1991) studied a representative sample of students at Williams College to see if course choice was a function of grades. They developed a panel data set that traced their students through their undergraduate studies. Starting with first year and using a probit model they measured the influence of the grade received by a student on the possibility that the same student would take a second course in the same department. After controlling for such things as relative ranking of the student (the marginal grade versus the average grade in the class), gender, and several socioeconomic background characteristics, their results indicate that subsequent enrolment in low-grading departments is adversely affected by the absolute grade the student receives in their introductory courses. In the case of Economics, also a low-grading department at Williams (and other US schools), changing a student's grade from a B to an A increased the probability of taking a second course in the department by 15 percent.

Second, are university administrations aware of the differential grade inflation and its possible effects on resource allocation? In universities with their specialization on advanced knowledge, such awareness is not clear, and for this reason, there is a potential unresolved governance question of how administrations can deal with grade in-

flation while professors profess their specializations. If universities offer a differentiated product, in the sense of specializing in certain disciplines, grade inflation is a potential way for less favoured disciplines at a university to attract attention and students, conversely, a favoured discipline with excess students may find that tougher grading is a way to cut costs. Thus, when this "monopolistically competitive" market reaches an equilibrium, the net effects of differential grade inflation may be hard to sort out. How to make this informal explanation precise is an open research question.

Given these issues and as long as resources are tied to student enrolment, it is possible that grades will continue to rise and employers will have an increasingly difficult time distinguishing a well-trained student from someone who just "gets by." If the informational value of a degree's grades deteriorates, employers will demand an even greater signal to ensure quality. Therefore, a debate on grading leads to a debate on "credentialism." Credentialism refers to the idea that a university degree is valuable because employers use it to reduce the pool of applicants rather than because it demonstrates particular skills. Some (e.g., Orr 1997) claim that all courses "look the same on a transcript." If a credential no longer provides added value to the economy then a university degree represents an enormous expense for a government without producing a public benefit.

#### Notes

We would like to thank Pamela Kirch, Ruisheng Pan and Linda Qiu for their research assistance as well as Charles Beach, Felice Martinello and three anonymous referees for their valuable comments. We are also indebted to our colleagues at various Ontario universities and the Registrar's Office at the University of Windsor for supplying us with the data used in this study. Comments can be sent to the Department of Economics, University of Windsor, Windsor, Ontario, N9B 3P4, or by e-mail to [pan@uwindor.ca](mailto:pan@uwindor.ca) or to [rmeng@uwindor.ca](mailto:rmeng@uwindor.ca)

[1] Of the seven universities in our survey, the beginning period for two universities was 1972 and for another it was 1975. The authors contacted 15 universities in the province in order to obtain data on grades. Only about half gave us data for the two periods.

[2] The potential number of comparisons for 12 subjects at the seven universities is 84. However, three universities did not have Music grades for at least one period and one university could not provide their 1973-74 English grades.

[3] Throughout this analysis we have used unweighted averages and variances. If we weight the summary statistics by student enrolment, the numbers from one or two large universities swamp the smaller institutions. By

weighting our estimates, we would also be studying the wrong question. Our goal is to look at the behaviour of a "typical" program at a representative university.

[4] The results for Music should be viewed with caution since they use data from only four universities.

[5] As far as the authors are aware none of the courses were compulsory for a wide range of students in 1973-74. Being a required course could change the situation if professors view their classes a "captive audience" and would not have to compete with other departments for students.

[6] Reading the *London Times*, a leading British newspaper, reveals an interesting fact: job advertisements ask for minimum standing, e.g., a "2:1 honors degree" at graduation. Our thanks to Marion Steele for noting this fact.

[7] Our lines of demarcation between departments are somewhat arbitrary, but Table 1 suggests there are noticeable clusters of disciplines. The hardest grading departments have less than a 2.2 GPA in 1993-94, while the softest grading departments have a GPA greater than 2.6 and others are, of course, in between the two averages.

[8] "Generosity" should be interpreted broadly. Without a structural model of behaviour, we do not distinguish between changes in professors' tastes and changes in their incentives, which could be referred to as hypotheses (a) (i) and (a)(ii). At the very least, identifying incentives that are compatible with an "equilibrium" requires careful study of the competition for students within a university and between universities.

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#### Appendix: Constructing Data

We collected data on grades at different universities at different times. Universities have a surprising number of ways of reporting grades. Plus, these ways differ from the numerical 0-100 scale often used on tests that are returned to students.

We compared grades in 12 courses because they are core courses and are offered at nearly every university. We excluded professional courses such as engineering or business. We focused on first-year courses because they have no prerequisites that might limit students and that might change over time. Grades in higher level courses (see Millar 1997, for some data) reflect some self-selection by students and are less pure measure of grade inflation.

Our aggregation of grades may raise some questions. All universities report an A to F scale but not all use the same method of converting it to a GPA. We assume that an A counts as a 4, B is 3, C is 2, D is 1, F is 0. We ignore the difference between a B+ and a B-, counting both as 3 points. The difference between a B+ and an A- is important because an A- counts as 4 points. Some universities, especially in the earlier years, did not give +/- . A more serious problem might occur if a mass of students now receive a B- who would have received a C+ under the older grading policy because the measured change would overstate the true change in grades. The sign of this effect is ambiguous, though, since a change from B- to B+ has no effect on our measure of GPA.

In the normal course of events, some students withdraw from a course while others take a course for a second time in hopes of getting a higher grade. Since these people have some information on their abilities, they are unlikely to be a typical first-year student. Students who withdraw from a class may find the course too demanding or because they want to avoid a low expected grade or because of personal problems unrelated to their studies. Students who take a course for a second time tend to have received a low grade the first time. For these reasons, selection bias could affect our estimates of the "average" GPA in a class at any point in time. This potential is especially relevant when university rules change over time and differ between universities. While acknowledging this problem, we feel that we cannot solve it without much more data and data of a different type. We chose to count every student who finished a class equally: that is, students who drop a course are ignored; students retaking a course are treated as though taking it for the first time.

Some readers may be concerned that, even if there is no grade inflation, there may be disguised grade inflation as professors adjust the content of their courses. As with several other hypotheses that were noted in our discussion, we cannot confirm or refute this hypothesis without more data of a different kind.

#### EDITOR'S NOTE

*To the best of our knowledge, the only published study of grades and grading practices at UW is "The Eroding Standards Issue: A Case Study from the University of Waterloo," by S. Miller and J. Goyder, Canadian Journal of Higher Education Vol. 30, No. 3, 2000, pp. 57-78. It is based on an Honours B.A. Thesis by S. Coutts (now Miller) that was supervised by Prof. J. Goyder of UW's Department of Sociology. Copies of the article are available from TRACE.*

**TABLE 1**  
**Mean Grades and Variances in Seven Universities, 1973-74 and 1993-94**

Departments	1973-74		1993-94		Number of University Courses	Inflation*	Deflation*	No Change*
	GPA	Variance	GPA	Variance				
English	2.17	1.04	2.76	0.89	6	6	0	0
French	2.47	1.15	2.69	1.07	7	4	0	3
Music	2.89	0.95	3.02	1.16	4	2	1	1
Philosophy	2.38	1.15	2.54	1.07	7	4	1	2
Biology	2.18	1.19	2.52	1.19	7	5	1	1
Chemistry	1.88	1.57	2.18	1.51	7	4	1	2
Mathematics	2.14	2.00	2.19	1.86	7	2	1	4
Physics	2.17	1.65	2.38	1.63	7	4	1	2
Economics	2.07	1.53	2.18	1.44	7	3	1	3
Political Science	2.37	0.90	2.49	0.94	7	3	1	3
Psychology	2.31	1.16	2.40	1.17	7	3	2	2
Sociology	2.57	1.02	2.51	0.92	7	2	3	2
<b>Totals</b>					<b>80</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>25</b>

Note: \*10 percent level of significance. The means and variances for each of the 80 university courses were generated for the two reference years. Standard t-statistics for differences in means were calculated for each of the 80 pairings.

**TABLE 2**  
**Distribution of Grades: 1973-74 and 1993-94**

Departments	1973-74					1993-94					$\Delta$ (%A)	$\Delta$ (%F)
	%A	%B	%C	%D	%F	%A	%B	%C	%D	%F		
English	8.5	31.6	36.8	15.0	8.1	18.4	45.6	26.7	5.8	3.6	9.9	-4.5
French	17.7	36.2	27.7	13.0	5.4	24.5	36.6	26.5	8.2	4.2	6.8	-1.2
Music	29.2	43.4	17.4	7.3	2.8	42.7	29.4	17.7	7.1	3.1	13.5	0.3
Philosophy	14.5	35.3	31.6	11.3	7.2	18.1	38.2	28.3	10.4	4.9	3.6	-2.3
Biology	12.8	29.1	30.3	18.8	9.1	22.6	31.9	25.7	14.0	5.7	9.8	-3.4
Chemistry	15.1	20.2	24.6	22.0	18.1	18.0	24.9	26.2	20.2	10.7	2.9	-7.4
Mathematics	22.9	21.9	19.7	17.1	18.4	23.6	20.9	21.5	19.2	14.7	0.7	-3.7
Physics	18.7	26.6	21.7	18.9	14.0	21.1	25.0	25.4	18.5	9.9	2.4	-4.1
Economics	14.0	25.8	26.6	20.3	13.4	17.1	24.5	27.8	20.7	10.0	3.1	-3.4
Political Science	9.6	38.7	37.1	9.2	5.4	12.7	42.9	30.2	9.0	5.1	3.1	-0.3
Psychology	15.9	30.8	30.0	16.4	6.8	17.2	31.2	31.0	15.6	5.0	1.4	-1.8
Sociology	16.9	43.5	25.6	8.2	5.8	15.9	36.9	33.1	10.8	3.4	-1.0	-2.4
<b>Average</b>	16.3	31.9	27.4	14.8	9.5	21.0	32.3	26.7	13.3	6.7	4.7	-2.8

## ATTACK ON ACADEMIC FREEDOM AT THE UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

*by Rhonda Love*

*President, University of Toronto Faculty Association*

*At the September 22 meeting of the OCUFA Board the Directors requested that Rhonda Love, UTFA's President, write an open letter to Directors and Presidents to advise them of the attack on academic freedom at the University of Toronto, its implications for the University of Toronto Faculty Association, and for faculty and academic librarians in general. This letter is reprinted with permission from Dr. Love.*

For three years the University of Toronto Faculty Association has been attempting to get resolution to a set of grievances that arose when Dr. Nancy Olivieri informed her patients that she was worried about the safety of a drug she was researching and using in their treatment. Other faculty members rose to her defence and our grievances allege that they and Dr. Olivieri have had their academic freedom denied, have been harassed, have been subject to vicious attacks and retribution. We believe that what has happened to Dr. Olivieri and her supporters reflects a larger attack on academic freedom in Canada. (Please see our website [www.utfa.utoronto.ca](http://www.utfa.utoronto.ca) for published material and other matter.)

When UTFA began this effort to defend academic freedom for professors, it had almost \$600,000 in its reserves. We have had to raise our mil rate for two years, reserving the funds for the defence of academic freedom, and we are struggling against two public institutions, funded by our tax dollars. In addition to these cases, we fought the highly public case of Professor Denise Reaume and we have filed grievances over the treatment Dr. David Healy. There is now one other case which we allege involves administration interference in the research ethics review process and in the conduct of research and we are seeking relief through the UTFA-UT administration joint committee. If resolution is not reached, this case will go to the internal arbitration body, the Grievance Review Panel (GRP).

In January, 1999 UTFA assisted in brokering a 16-point settlement between Dr. Olivieri and the Hospital for Sick Children. But, within a few months we came to believe that the HSC was not prepared to honour the agreement with Dr. Olivieri and that the UT was not prepared to

enforce the affiliation agreement it has with the HSC. This agreement legally binds the two institutions to respect each other's policies, make joint staff appointments, and respect the need for critical inquiry. Many of the points in the affiliation agreement are referenced by the Memorandum of Agreement, which is negotiated between the UT and the UT Faculty Association.

The Faculty Association has worked tirelessly to get a resolution in a collegial manner. In April, 2000 we published an "open letter" describing the grievances, the process and the lack of progress. Soon after, the new UT President agreed to reinvigorate attempts at negotiated settlement with us. As that process unfolds, the grievances are filed with the GRP. The HSC refused to provide documents to the GRP, and UTFA had to go to court in June, 2001 to attempt to obtain the documents. We were successful. Then, in July, the University of Toronto pulled out of an agreement that it had previously been a party to, with the HSC and the Ministry of Health, and the language protecting academic freedom in that agreement was removed. Again, UTFA had to go court. This matter is back at the GRP and the University counsel continues with procedural objections which delay the hearing of the merits of the case.

The University of Toronto asserts in public that it supports the academic freedom of clinical professors. But, we no longer believe it does or even can. The case is not over and the UT and the HSC appear to have very deep pockets, lined with our tax dollars. One might wonder why these two public institutions have fought so hard against an association of faculty members and librarians. This case involves the medical profession and a major corporate sponsor of research. But, the issues could arise in any faculty where public health and safety are affected by what professors do and in any university with agreements with "third parties" who need the legitimacy and the resources of the University. We believe that UTFA is the "canary in the mine" and we are writing not only to put our own struggle in front of our sister associations, but also to warn you. If it can happen to us, it can happen to you.



## THE OLIVIERI REPORT

The complete 527 page text, as well as a 48 page summary, of the Report of the Independent Inquiry Commissioned by the Canadian Association of University Teachers on the Case Involving Dr. Nancy Olivieri, the Hospital for Sick Children, the University of Toronto, and Apotex Inc. is available in PDF format from the CAUT website at:

<http://www.caut.ca/english/issues/acadfreedom/olivieri.asp>

The FAUW Office has a copy available for lending. The report is also available from bookstores under the title *The Olivieri Report*, published by James Lorimer & Co. Publishers (ISBN: 1-55028-739-7).

## CAUT GRIEVANCE ARBITRATION CONFERENCE

Sheraton Ottawa – February 1-3, 2002

### “DEALING WITH ACADEMIC FREEDOM CASES”

Today, academic freedom is being challenged in a variety of ways on our campuses. Faculty associations are facing increasing difficulties in defending academic freedom. These challenges range from job offers being withdrawn after a candidate expresses concern about potential effects of a certain drug; to grades being changed by the administration; to a professor having her lab moved to a pesticide-tainted storeroom after she criticized a genetically-modified food product made by a company linked to the university; to a professor being threatened with legal action by a drug company sponsoring her research after she decided to warn patients of potential problems with one of its drugs.

Matters involving academic freedom have an immense impact on individuals and on the profession as a whole and can become an important part of a grievance officer's caseload. This year's annual Grievance Arbitration Conference will provide participants with the opportunity to hear how some of these cases were handled by faculty associations and will also provide a forum for discussion and practical advice on how to address these concerns.

Information on the conference can be found on the CAUT Website (<http://www.caut.ca>, click on events) or contact Christiane Tardif at the CAUT office by phone (613) 820-2270 Ext. 333 or by e-mail at [tardif@caut.ca](mailto:tardif@caut.ca).

Sessions in the draft agenda include:

**Academic Freedom: Putting collective agreement language into practice**

*Speakers:* Rosemary Morgan, CAUT Legal Officer/Jerry Kovacs, CAUT Legal Officer

**Case Study – Administrators and Academic Freedom (University of Waterloo Faculty Association)**

*Speakers:* Fred McCourt, Faculty Association of the University of Waterloo/Mariette Blanchette, CAUT Legal Officer

**Important academic freedom cases and how they were handled**

(Nancy Olivieri, University of Toronto; Ann Clark, University of Guelph)

*Speakers:* Allison Hudgins, Legal Counsel/Ed Carter, University of Guelph Faculty Association

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

*Catherine Schryer  
Department of English*

### SALUTATIONS AND SEASON'S GREETINGS!

As the year 2001 comes to an end, I would like to spend some time speculating about what I believe are an oddly related set of events.

At the local level, during the last two weeks, I have received several personal phone calls and e-mails from faculty expressing their dismay over their increased workloads and the conflicts they are experiencing between their academic and their family demands. At the same time, I am aware that the AF and T committee is handling more cases than ever – and that they are advising mediation wherever possible in cases that involve faculty members lodging complaints against each other. I have also heard from another faculty member (who wishes to remain anonymous) that one of her grades was changed without consultation because a student charged her with unfairness. The Board of the FAUW is continuing to try to find resolutions to our own academic freedom case – the impropriety of changing an entire set of marks without consulting the instructor. Finally, *Maclean's* reported that we are the top rated university, and yet observed that universities across Canada are experiencing a serious decline.

At the national level, I recently attended a Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT) council meeting in Ottawa. The meeting focused on issues of academic freedom as faculty associations and unions from across the country reported serious infringements of their professoriate's right to speak out on important public issues. The most serious infringements, of course, have been reported at the University of Toronto with respect to the cases of Dr. Olivieri and Dr. Healy. As most of you know, Dr. Olivieri was disciplined by the University and the Hospital for Sick Children for reporting that a drug she was studying had negative effects on children suffering from Thalassaemia. *The Olivieri Report* by three eminent Canadian researchers, Drs. Thompson, Baird and Downie, makes it clear that a drug company, Apotex, had improper financial arrangements with the Hospital and that it attempted to suppress Dr. Olivieri's findings. The Report also states that the University and the Hospital were severely remiss in failing to protect Dr. Olivieri. For the last few years the Faculty Association at the University of Toronto has been assisting Dr. Olivieri to find remedies both professional and legal for her situation. However, this assistance has come at enormous

personal and financial cost. The Association at Toronto has already spent over \$500,000 on her case and believes that the University and the Hospital have purposefully attempted to draw out the case in order to bankrupt the Association.

So what do all these events have in common? In my view all of the above events, both local and national, are the result of short-sightedness or a profound lack of vision on the part of federal and (especially) provincial governments. Sadly, too, many university administrations have responded with their own version of short-sighted reactions.

The fact that universities in Ontario are the worst funded post-secondary institutions in North America (in 60<sup>th</sup> place out of 60 comparable districts) is indisputable. Even brief comparisons with countries such as Ireland and Sweden suggest that this underfunding demonstrates an astonishing failure to recognize that investing in education creates not just jobs but an expert, flexible, inventive population. These countries have stable economies because they have not just invested in technology, they have invested in people. They have recognized that post-secondary institutions and research programs create software for the mind – intellectual products and smart people.

However, in Canada, our universities are not challenging this lack of funding in any concerted way. Instead they are struggling to survive by relying on corporate money and by expanding programs without the necessary resources. The results are cases like Olivieri's and Healy's, cases that clearly demonstrate that some institutions are willing to lose their own credibility, their own reputations as independent research organizations, in order to attract funding. The result, too, is the necessity to maintain and even increase student numbers while not providing the resources to support this growth. In my view grade inflation and grade changing are a result of this crisis in funding – measures that seem to help maintain student numbers. Finally, of course, the result is a great deal more stress for you and me as we attempt to balance our increasing workloads and our family demands.

Why aren't the administrations of universities across Canada, and especially in Ontario, united and vocal in their opposition to this decline in our institutions? What

does it really mean to be the number one university in the *Maclean's* survey when that survey also indicates that universities across Canada are in serious decline? Don't we perhaps have a responsibility to use our position to challenge the current lack of vision that characterizes our governments?

At the local level we can address some symptoms of this short-sightedness by developing better policies and procedures to protect academic freedom. And we can

advocate for policies that offer faculty members assistance during times of family crisis. However, in fact, the crisis in university funding goes far beyond our local context. University administrators, especially in Ontario, need to be far more vocal and united in their messages to the provincial and federal governments. As the number one university in our class in the *Maclean's* survey we have a particular responsibility, I believe, to voice the concerns of post-secondary educators across this country.

### **FORUM EDITORIAL BOARD**

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### **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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## **32ND ANNUAL HAGEY FUNSPIEL**

**BEAT THE WINTER BLUES AND JOIN THE UNIVERSITY COMMUNITY ON  
SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 23, 2002 AT THE AYR CURLING CLUB**

**SEE [HTTP://WWW.ADM.UWATERLOO.CA/INFOWAST/HAGEY.HTML](http://www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infowast/hagey.html)**

*Season's Greetings  
from the  
FAUW Board of Directors*



**Left to right:** Metin Renksizbulut, Fred McCourt, Bill Power, Len Guelke, Catherine Schryer, Ray McLenaghan, Jeanne Kay Guelke, Mieke Delfgaauw, Edward Vrscay, Ian Macdonald

**Absent:** Conrad Hewitt, Frank Reynolds, Carol Stephenson

