

A SPECIAL WELCOME TO NEW FACULTY MEMBERS

is extended by FAUW President Catherine Schryer in her first President's Message of the Fall 2003 term. Prof. Schryer recalls some accomplishments of the FAUW during the previous academic year along with some goals and resolutions for the future. She also identifies some "hot spots" that are developing on campus, including workload, the online SISP/QUEST system and concerns regarding the treatment of sessional instructors.

A HOLE DEVELOPING IN UW DISABILITY BENEFITS?

Frank Reynolds (Statistics and Actuarial Science) identifies some potential problems that could result in a major loss of income for UW faculty. He also offers some possible solutions.

THE OBFUSCATION OF "U-SPEAK"

Ian Hunter, Professor Emeritus (Law) of the University of Western Ontario, examines the "leaden combination of jargon and bombast" that has infected universities. For example, universities no longer "teach" but rather "deliver modules across a wide range of courses within the undergraduate programs."

The *Forum's* "Language Watch" presents some recent examples of UW's own contributions to "innospeak".

GRADE INFLATION – A CRISIS IN COLLEGE EDUCATION

is the title of a book by Valen E. Johnson (Biostatistics, U. Michigan) that is reviewed by the "Irascible Professor," Mark H. Shapiro (Page 6). Johnson addresses five persistent myths about grades and grade inflation. He also examines the relationship between grades and student evaluations of teaching.

In another article entitled, "The Lake Wobegon Effect – All Our High School Graduates are 'Above Average'," (Page 8) Shapiro examines how high school grade point averages continue to grow whereas the amount of time that high school seniors spend on homework has dropped to a new low.

Inside this issue:

Letters to the Editor	2
President's Message	3
Disability Benefits	5
Grade Inflation Part I	6
Grade Inflation Part II	8
'U-Speak'	10
Language Watch	11
Did You Know?	13
FAUW Board of Directors 2003-2004	14
Open Board Meeting of June 12, 2003	15

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Crosswalk or “Traffic Calming Device”?

You’ll be happy to know that it is not a cross walk, as you said in your article (*Forum*, Mar/Apr 03). I was so informed in no uncertain terms by the driver of one of the UW green vans transporting the maintenance workers around campus. A group of us were returning to campus from lunch in the plaza and a car stopped at the ‘what-is-it’ in front of CPH to let us cross. The green UW van driver honked the horn, causing the car to take off, splitting the group nicely. The green van came at me pedal-to-the-metal and I just escaped. I had words with the driver and I called the maintenance supervisor to report the incident.

You will also be happy to know that one of the people on the committee that abandoned the crosswalk was a distinguished transportation engineer from my department who is now retired. He probably gave them the line-of-sight idea.

Nick Kouwen, Department of Civil Engineering

More on Women in the Canadian Academic Tundra

I was a bit astonished to see Jeanne Guelke’s letter (*Forum*, Mar/Apr 03).

It is interesting, these days, how hard facts, when they go against your side, are called “ideology” whereas when they support it, they are just facts. Any study of the gender ratios of academic appointments related to normal criteria of qualification will show that in Canada, anyway, women are appointed out of proportion to PhDs earned, etc., and have been for decades.

Jeanne Guelke presumably implies that I am relying on “ideology, anecdotal evidence”, etc. in my criticism of her review of *Women in the Canadian Academic Tundra*, and she refers me to UW’s Provost’s Task Force on Female Faculty Recruitment. I have dutifully turned to this source, and point out that its main page about statistical situation in Canada is, as usual, irrelevant to the point at issue. UW claims to be at a “low” 20% females, though the report itself generously points out that female PhDs in mathematics, engineering, and science are much fewer and farther between than in other areas, and that UW does much of its hiring in those areas. The report talks about how UW is “ahead” in some departments and “behind” in others, but that’s in regard to the percentage of females in those departments now, period. What matters, however, when the question is whether women are getting a “chilly” reception – or indeed, “arctic” as the book’s title has it – is the ratio of women hired to women available with relevant qualification (notably the PhD). My letter clearly referred only to that, and it is that which, as a matter of statistical fact, is very favorable to women.

Any department producing PhDs in the humanities and social sciences in Canada can report the greater difficulty males have relative to females in competing for scarce jobs. (I would note that the very same report to which she refers us observes that “There is fierce competition for women with PhDs not only from other universities in North America, but also from industry and government.” Yup, that’s just my point. If you were to substitute the word ‘men’ for ‘women’, however, the picture would be very different.

This is ‘anecdotal’ only in the sense that we are all experiencing what is a statistically well documented fact of life.

In short – if this be arctic for women, folks, then global warming has set in in earnest in the hiring area!

Jan Narveson, Department of Philosophy

Student Evaluations and Grade Inflation

Harvey Mansfield, in an article published earlier in the *Forum* (Mar/Apr 03), talks about the bad effects of student evaluations, in particular grade inflation. In fact, the use of student evaluations of how well their professors have taught them has inevitably led to this result. To evaluate anything about the teaching of any professor, the student must know how much he has learned. In order to know this, the student must know at least as much as the teacher. If he knows this much, then he has no need to study with the teacher.

Teachers may make mistakes in evaluating the work of students, and at UW there are procedures for appealing grades. In some schools and universities, evaluations of what a student has learned is done by outside examiners, not by his teacher. (Oxford and Cambridge Universities do this.) A student may think that he deserves an ‘A’ (85 and over) for a course in which he gets a ‘C’ (65-67). Perhaps he does! Are we then to put the grade of ‘A’ on the student’s transcript, as if the grade reflects the opinion of the teacher or of the outside examiners, when it only reflects the opinion of the student?

(A more general problem is the evaluation of any work. Much is thought highly of by some and not by others. The accusers of Socrates – Anytus, Lycon, and Meletus – thought that he corrupted the youth of Athens while Socrates and his friends did not.)

Student evaluations show at most the popularity of a teacher. Such evaluations are important for entertainers, who must please their audiences. But they undermine education. They corrupt education, for the teacher who must please his students is unlikely to give them poor grades. No wonder that grade inflation has flourished since student evaluations have been used!

A student may find one teacher more interesting than another, which shows nothing about what he has learned. Moreover, students differ about how interesting a teacher is and about how much they think they have learned. The professor who led me to go into philosophy rather than science (chemistry, physics) or mathematics was Roderick Firth, then at Swarthmore College and later at Harvard University. I found him fascinating – but a fellow student in the same class complained to me that she found him dull and unintelligible! If we had had student evaluations, which we fortunately did not, whose opinion would have been right?

The hard test for student evaluations is whether education has improved since they were first used. The answer is “No.” Education has been undermined, for students have been misled to believe that they have learned more than they have and that they know more than they do.

Judy Wubnig, Department of Philosophy (Emerita)

Editor’s Note: For more on student evaluations and grade inflation, please see Page 6.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



*Catherine Schryer
Department of English Language and Literature*

Greetings and Salutations

I often feel that as a professional educator I experience two New Years: one is the traditional January the First holiday, but the other is the beginning of each school year, the first few weeks in September. The arrival of an entirely new group of faculty members and students creates a sense of renewal and new possibilities. And, of course, new beginnings are often associated with memories of past accomplishments and problems and with new resolutions: promises to oneself to re-energize courses, write a research proposal and finish that article that has been hanging over one's head like the sword of Damocles.

Last year we experienced some genuine accomplishments. The Faculty Association through its salary negotiation team, thanks to Metin Renksizbulut and Bill Power, managed to secure a two year agreement which substantially improved our salaries and more importantly improved our ability to attract new faculty through an improved salary structure. For the last decade the Association had been arguing that our salary structure made it difficult for us to compete with the better universities in North America. Thanks to Metin and Bill we had the facts and figures to support our argument. Events also conspired to assist us as well. Many faculties had experienced the recruitment and retention problems that we had been pointing to over the years.

Last year as well we developed more mechanisms with which to connect to our members. We held an open meeting to explain and discuss the salary settlement, and we have now reshaped the Council of Representatives'

meeting so that most of the meeting is spent hearing the concerns of the various Faculties. Our newsletter has also garnered more attention and participation.

Of course, we also had areas in which we were not as successful as we wanted to be. Despite many meetings with the Administration we were not able to bring the academic librarians under our Memorandum of Agreement. As you might recall, the Administration, under article 12.2(a), had agreed to undertake additional negotiations regarding the inclusion of the academic librarians. We remain almost the only university in Canada, and certainly one of the only research intensive universities in Canada, that has failed to address the professional status of its academic librarians. We have decided to keep 12.2(a) in our Memorandum of Agreement until the Administration satisfactorily resolves this inequitable situation.

This year we also have our resolutions.

First, we intend to expand our connections with faculty members. We are doing this through hiring a part-time staff member. For the last two years, the workload of our Administrator, Pat Moore, has grown exponentially, and we have known for some time that our plans to develop our infrastructure had to be put on hold until we had the space and staff necessary for the job. We now have extra office space and are in the process of hiring new personnel. One of our first priorities will be to improve our web connections to faculty as well as the range of services that we can provide. Our second priority will be to further develop the Council of Representatives. The tasks of our representatives are not onerous. They need only be part of a listserv and attend two meetings a year where they report on issues in their department or school. However, several departments and schools do not have representatives and therefore we are not sufficiently receiving their input and advice.

Second, we recognize that "hot spots" are developing on campus. One obvious issue is workload. We are hearing from more and more faculty about the increasing demands of research, teaching and service. Other issues relate to pension and benefits. The current climate seems to question the value of our benefits, despite the fact that their presence is another major recruitment and retention tool. The Peoplesoft computer system also has raised many concerns. Finally, some faculty are becoming increasingly concerned about the problematic way that some of our sessional instructors are being treated.

Our major venues for tackling these kinds of issues are the Faculty Relations Committee (FRC) and the Pensions and Benefits Committee. The FRC meets bi-

(Continued on page 4)

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE *(Continued from page 3)*

weekly from September to June with Administration representatives and there we discuss issues such as the above and try to develop policies or agreements to resolve them. Our representatives on the committee this year include myself, Catherine Schryer, Roydon Fraser (Mechanical Engineering), Melanie Campbell (Physics), Metin Renksizbulut (Mechanical Engineering) and Ray McLenaghan (Applied Mathematics). We also send members to the University's Pension and Benefits Committee where we ensure that our input remains salient. The Chair of our delegation this year is Sandra Burt (Political Science), with the other members being Jock MacKay (Statistics and Actuarial Science) and Alan

Macnaughton (School of Accountancy). If you have particular concerns about any of these issues (or know of new issues), contact any of these committee members or any Board member.

Finally, I would like welcome everyone back to campus, with a special welcome to newcomers, and remind everyone that, although we represent you, you are not automatically a member of the Association unless you chose to join. We know that many faculty are unaware that they are not members. Please resolve to officially join the Association. Check with Pat Moore, ext 3787, to see if you are a member. And if you are not, send in the membership form enclosed in this newsletter. We need your advice and input.

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.

ISSN 0840-7320

FORUM EDITORIAL BOARD

Edward Vrscaj, Applied Mathematics, Editor

Paul Fieguth, Systems Design Engineering

Paul Malone, Germanic & Slavic Studies

Jeffrey Shallit, Computer Science

David Williams, Optometry

Catherine Schryer, English Language & Literature, ex officio

Pat Moore, Faculty Association Office, Production

FAUW Office

Pat Moore, Administrator

Room 4002, Mathematics & Computer Building

Phone: 888-4567, ext. 3787

Fax: 888-4307

E-mail: facassoc@uwaterloo.ca

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

A HOLE DEVELOPING IN OUR DISABILITY BENEFITS

by Frank Reynolds

Department of Statistics and Actuarial Science

Member, FAUW Academic Freedom and Tenure Committee

Over the last five years, a subtle change has taken place that leaves an increasing number of faculty and others in the University community vulnerable to a major loss in income. This article will attempt to identify the problems and suggest some possible solutions.

Consider a faculty member with a health impairment that is expected to exist for the duration of the member's life. If the impairment is such that the member cannot work at all, then the disability plan will provide a reasonable income. Beyond this case, unfortunately, there can arise a number of situations for which current disability coverage breaks down.

The most obvious case is where the member is unable to do the normal duties of a professor but can work full time in another equally remunerative field. For example, suppose a person develops an allergy to chalk dust. Here, the disability plan provides an income for up to 30 months during which the person can retrain and seek employment elsewhere in a new field. To most, this would seem a reasonable outcome. And I would agree.

In some cases, the disability prevents a professor from performing a normal workload in one particular area, typically teaching. Consider a faculty member who may be able to work a normal work week for her/his department and teach one course each term, but has difficulty in teaching two courses in a term unless the class sizes are relatively small. For example, I know of a case in which a back injury restricted the time that a faculty member could stand or even sit in a classroom to one hour per day. Yet the person could engage in research as well as certain types of service. In such cases, UW's Administration has been relatively rigid, insisting that a faculty member must be able to carry a teaching load of 40%. It is difficult to reconcile this position with the Memorandum of Agreement which specifies that a professor must do a minimum of 20% in each of teaching, service and research and that deviations from the normal 40/40/20 load can be negotiated with the faculty member's Dean. It is also contrary to Ontario Human Rights Law which requires the modification of a person's job description where justified by a disability.

What if the professor can do all of the duties expected of a faculty member – teaching, service and research – but cannot work more than n hours per week? Here the University's Administration seems to have two possible solutions: (1) take a reduced load or (2) leave and seek employment in a field that requires fewer hours of work per week. The Administration's position has led to a number of problems that centre on the definition of what a reasonable minimal work load is. In what follows, I shall use "hours of work" since it is the universal standard although I recognize that the Administration tries to avoid the concept by using "production" as the criterion.

For Employment Insurance purposes, the Administration claims that professors work a 35-hour week. However, when it deals with individual faculty

members who are partially disabled, the ability to put in thirty-five productive hours is not deemed to be sufficient. As a result, professors are being forced to assume reduced loads or to seek employment elsewhere. (Financially, being forced to a 75% load implies a 29% reduction in pay when the difference in benefit costs is considered.)

There are three problems here. First, there is an obvious inconsistency in the Administration's position regarding the number of working hours in a week. Second, there is the question of how many hours of work per week are needed by a typical professor to earn a "fully satisfactory rating", the lowest acceptable rating. According to the provincial Human Rights Code, if a person can work sufficiently to attain the "fully satisfactory" level of performance, then any action to reduce income or dismiss the person is illegal discrimination. Thirdly, a number of diseases are slowly debilitating. If a faculty member is forced to partial load and subsequently becomes totally disabled, disability benefits are based on the reduced load income and not the pre-disability income.

And what about faculty members who are not able to work at least 35 hours per week? Here, two cases arise. Suppose a person is able to work a sufficient number of hours for the Administration to accept at least a 50% partial load contract. In this case the faculty member bears the full brunt of the cost of the disability – income is reduced and he/she must bear part of the costs of health and dental benefits. For a person more than 10 years from retirement, their pension will also be cut. The second case arises where a person is unable to work sufficient hours to negotiate a partial load contract. The long-term disability plan requires that a person be "totally and permanently disabled" in order to collect benefits. From the insurer's point of view the work week is 35 hours. A person who is able to work, say, 28 hours would not be totally disabled. But this person is not able to meet the Administration's definition of a 50% load. As a result, the person is dismissed.

What should be done? First, we must recognise that the people involved are generally long service faculty members who have given the best years of their life to this institution. Secondly, the concepts of typical and minimal work week need to be distinguished. While many faculty members work a 50-70 hour week to the exclusion of other interests, demanding it is another thing. Since 35 hours is used for long term disability and Employment Insurance it would appear to be a natural basis. Thirdly, the Administration should accept that disability is a valid reason for a reduction in teaching load with an offsetting increase in service or research. Fourthly, partial disability benefits need to be added to the disability plan – they would provide an income supplement in the case where a person suffers a reduction in income of at least 20% due to disability but is not considered fully disabled. Fifthly, where disability is the cause of a reduced load contract, the University should bear the benefit costs currently charged to the faculty member.

Reprinted with permission from The Irascible Professor, Irreverent Commentary on the State of Education in America Today, www.irascibleprofessor.com (from the Commentary of the Day dated June 23, 2003). The Forum thanks Prof. Carla Carnaghan of UW's School of Accountancy for the suggestion to reprint the article.

BOOK REVIEW

GRADE INFLATION – A CRISIS IN COLLEGE EDUCATION

*by Mark H. Shapiro
The Irascible Professor*

“Disparities in student grading have led to a general degradation of America’s postsecondary educational system. Inconsistent grading standards result in unjust evaluation of students and faculty, and discourage students from taking those courses that would be of greatest benefit to them.” Valen E. Johnson

Grade Inflation – A Crisis in College Education by Valen E. Johnson is, in the opinion of the Irascible Professor, an outstanding contribution to the debate about the effects of ever rising grades in colleges and universities across the United States.

Valen Johnson is a statistician by trade. Currently, he is a Professor of Biostatistics at the University of Michigan; but, before that he was a Professor of Statistics and Decision Sciences at Duke University. In contrast to the many commentators on the subject who have spoken from the perspective of educational policy or educational philosophy, Johnson approaches the subject through the lens of the statistician. The result is both unique and important.

This is a book with both strengths and weaknesses. Probably the major weakness is Johnson’s failure to chronicle the history of grade inflation in any great detail. The introductory chapter instead focuses on the current state of the debate on the issue and on introducing the DUET (Duke Undergraduates Evaluate Teaching) experiment that was conducted during the 1998-1999 academic year. Evidently, Johnson feels that the facts of grade inflation are so overwhelming that no examination of the data that supports the existence of the phenomenon is necessary. Fortunately, those readers who want to see the data that confirm that grade inflation is common in American higher education can find ample resources at Professor Stuart Rojstaczer’s web site Gradeinflation.com.

The second weakness of the book also is its main strength. Namely, Johnson is an expert at mining statistical data, and at interpreting the results. Those readers who have little or no background in statistics initially will find parts of the book tough going. However, by subjecting both the data on student evaluations of teaching (SET) and the data on grades, themselves, to thorough statistical analysis, Johnson is able to reach firm – and

sometimes surprising – conclusions about the effects of student evaluations of teaching on grade inflation and the relationship between student ability and grade distributions.

Johnson’s book addresses five persistent “myths” about grades and grade inflation:

1. Student grades do not bias student evaluations of teaching.
2. Student evaluations of teaching provide reliable measures of instructional effectiveness.
3. High course grades imply high levels of student achievement.
4. Student course selection decisions are unaffected by expected grading practices.
5. Grades assigned in unregulated academic environments have a consistent and objective meaning across classes, departments, and institutions.

Johnson devotes two full chapters to examining the relationship between grades and student evaluations of teaching. From an analysis of the more than sixty previous studies on this issue and from the results of the DUET experiment, Johnson not only shows that a strong relationship exists between expected grades and SET’s; but, also is able to determine the most likely reason for this relationship.

“One of the most important conclusions from Johnson’s work is that SET ratings generally don’t measure student learning. Instead, they measure student satisfaction with the teacher.”

The four most common theories to explain the correlation between expected grades and SET ratings are the teacher effectiveness theory, the grade leniency theory, the grade attribution theory, and the intervening factors theory. The teacher effectiveness theory posits that students taught by more effective teachers learn more and receive higher grades as a result. The higher SET ratings for these teachers merely reflect that fact. At the opposite extreme, the grade leniency theory suggests that students simply reward teachers who are easy graders with higher SET ratings. The grade attribution theory is

more subtle. It says that a student who expects a high grade in a class generally feels that the high grade has been achieved through his or her own effort. At the same time, a student who expects a low grade is more likely to attribute the low grade to poor performance by the teacher rather than by lack of effort or talent on his or her part. Finally, the “intervening factors” theory posits that factors that are not directly measured by the SET forms (such as the student’s prior courses or interests) cause the positive correlation between grades and SET ratings.

Johnson is able to show quite convincingly that both the teacher effectiveness theory and the grade leniency theory are wrong. Students don’t automatically reward teachers who are easy graders with uniformly high SET ratings, and the students of teachers who receive high SET ratings don’t learn any more effectively than the students of teachers who receive average SET ratings. Instead, the data indicate that the correlation between grades and SET ratings is due to grade attribution and to a smaller extent to intervening factors. In other words, instructors who grade more stringently are likely to have more students give them lower SET ratings than the instructors who grade less stringently, because they feel that it is the instructor’s fault that they are earning a lower grade.

One of the most important conclusions from Johnson’s work is that SET ratings generally don’t measure student learning. Instead, they measure student satisfaction with the teacher. The two are not always related. A teacher who is well organized and enthusiastic may garner higher SET ratings than a colleague who is less well organized and less enthusiastic in the classroom. But, the students of the lower rated instructor may learn as much or more as the students of the higher rated instructor because so much of what is learned in college courses comes from work on assignments that are done outside of class. A teacher who may be a bore in the classroom may assign more interesting or more challenging work to be done outside class.

“Inflation has been most prevalent in humanities and the arts, less prevalent in social sciences, and almost nonexistent in the sciences.”

Another important result from Johnson’s work is that grade inflation is by no means a uniform phenomenon. Although grade inflation has affected nearly all segments of higher education from the most elite private colleges and universities to the “open-enrollment” public community colleges, it has not affected all disciplines equally. Inflation has been most prevalent in humanities and the arts, less prevalent in social sciences, and almost nonexistent in the sciences. The result has been a

Gresham’s Law effect. Students, and that includes the more able students as well as the less able students, are more likely to take courses in disciplines that have less stringent grading patterns than in disciplines that have more stringent grading patterns. And, the less able students gravitate to majors where the grading is easy. According to Johnson, this helps to explain the limited correlation between high school grades and SAT scores and college grades.

Johnson also raises an issue that few have considered. Namely, that the differential grading patterns between disciplines creates inequities for students. Those students who take more courses from the disciplines with more stringent grading patterns will achieve lower overall GPA’s than students who take more courses from the easy grading disciplines. As a result we find that premedical students tend to major in departments like psychology rather than in biology or chemistry because they know that they will be at a disadvantage when they apply for medical school if their GPA’s are lower – even though a biology or chemistry major might provide better preparation for medical school.

“His most controversial suggestion, and the one least likely to be adopted in today’s academic climate, is to weight student grades by a factor that takes into account the average grade in each of the courses that the student takes.”

Finally, Johnson makes a number of suggestions for reducing the effects of grade inequity and grade inflation. His most controversial suggestion, and the one least likely to be adopted in today’s academic climate, is to weight student grades by a factor that takes into account the average grade in each of the courses that the student takes. Thus, a student who takes mostly courses that are graded stringently would have his or her “effective” GPA raised; while a student who takes mostly courses that are graded easily would see his or her effective GPA lowered.

Grade Inflation is an important book. Johnson does an excellent job of making the sophisticated statistical results accessible and understandable. It should be read by every faculty member who serves on a personnel committee, as well as by all academic administrators.

Grade Inflation – A Crisis in College Education (ISBN 0-387-00125-5) is published by Springer-Verlag (New York).

Mark Shapiro is Professor of Physics (Emeritus) at California State University, Fullerton.

Reprinted with permission from The Irascible Professor, Irreverent Commentary on the State of Education in America Today, www.irascibleprofessor.com (from the Commentary of the Day dated January 31, 2003).

THE LAKE WOBEGON EFFECT – ALL OUR HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATES ARE “ABOVE AVERAGE”

*by Mark H. Shapiro
The Irascible Professor*

“I feel like a fugitive from the law of averages.” Bill Mauldin

According to the recently released “American Freshman Survey” compiled by the Higher Education Research Institute at UCLA, high school seniors are spending less time studying for classes and reading and more time using the Internet. A record low of 34.9% of college freshmen report having spent more than six hours per week on homework during their senior year in high school. This is down from the high of 47.0% reported when the question was first asked in 1987. During that same period of time the number of students reporting that they spent less than one hour per week on homework during their senior year in high school rose from 8.5% to 15.9%.

While the amount of time high school seniors spend “hitting the books” has dropped to a new low, their high school grade point averages continue to inflate. As the chart below (from the report) shows, almost 70% of freshmen at private universities now receive A averages in high school, and more than half of the freshmen at public universities receive A averages as well.

There is no evidence that these high grades reflect improvements in student performance. Instead, high school students have become adept at manipulating the system. They have learned how to obtain high grades not through diligent study, but by concentrating on just those items of information that are likely to appear on exams. Part of this trend toward “empty” grades can be attributed to the increasing pressures associated with college admissions. Students these days feel that they can’t afford anything less than A grades if they want to get into a decent college or university. To achieve this goal they take an ever increasing number of Advanced Placement (AP) courses that carry college credit, and look good on their transcripts.

Parents join in the game by pressuring high school teachers to award high grades. Teachers, in turn, often cave in to this pressure. They respond by

turning their classes into preparation sessions for the standardized AP tests that are required in the Advanced Placement courses. Rather than exploring the intellectual foundations of the subject, high school teachers tend to base class discussion and quizzes on specific AP exam questions. This “teaching to the test” helps students achieve high scores, but often at the cost of genuine understanding.

Those of us who teach at the university level are left to cope with the effects of this system of illusory accomplishment. The majority of our incoming freshmen are ill prepared to cope with the intellectual demands of college courses – not because they lack intelligence, but because they have not developed the study and time management skills that are needed to succeed in an environment where most learning takes place outside the classroom. It is not surprising that many students bring to the college classroom a cynical attitude towards grades. They do not view grades as a measure of intellectual development in a particular course or major, but rather simply as a reward for completing a series of disconnected transactions – a reward that will help them get into graduate or professional school or to get that well-paying job after graduation. “Tell me what I need to know to get an A in this class” has become a familiar refrain.

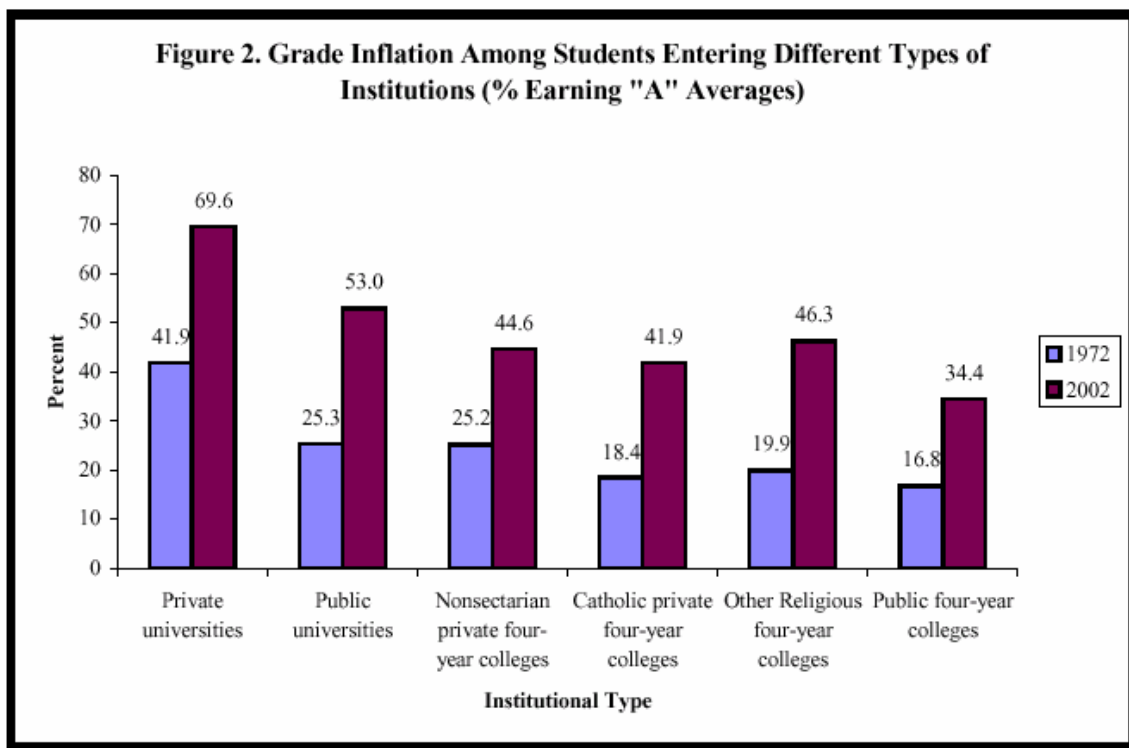
Students expect, from their high school experience, to be told exactly what is required to receive a particular grade. They expect to be given “study guides” before exams that lead them by the hand through the material that is likely to appear on the exam. And they expect tests and courses to be graded by “rubrics” that assign a fixed number of points for the completion of each item assigned. Woe to the poor professor who sets exam questions that might require a smidgen of original thought or insight on the part of the student. He or she is likely to hear about that in spades when it’s time to fill out those teaching evaluation forms.

While their grades may suggest that most of our high school graduates are “above average”, in reality many have below average “curiosity coefficients”.

Many need to spend more time expanding their intellectual horizons and less on figuring out ways to “beat the system”.

There is a glimmer of hope, however, in the results of the most recent freshman survey. In 2002 more students reported having an interest in current events and political affairs than in recent years. Compared to the all time low of 28.1% of

college freshmen who viewed keeping up with politics as very important in 2000, the current number of 32.9% is a definite improvement. However, it still is far lower than the peak value of 60.3% reported in 1966. As uncertainties in international affairs continue to grow, we may find college students reconnecting with underlying ideas and issues.



Reprinted with permission from the National Post (from the issue dated July 17, 2003)

THE BOMBAST AND JARGON OF ‘U-SPEAK’

by Ian Hunter

*Professor Emeritus, Faculty of Law
University of Western Ontario*

Now that I am no longer employed at a “centre of excellence” (a Canadian university), daily engaged in the “pursuit of excellence,” I no longer need maintain the fictions which sustain university life; for example, that the current crop of semi-literate undergraduates are “the best educated generation in history.” Given that few entering university can either read or write, this might be thought a difficult shibboleth to maintain. But, no, not where “diversity” is the goal and “tolerance” the watchword; not in institutions engaged in a postmodern rejection of truth and falsity; not in institutions too intellectually troubled to affirm the multiplication tables. Instead, everyone plays along and few are so boorish as to comment upon the Emperor’s nakedness. Anyway, the pay is good, one’s colleagues are, for the most part, amiable, so why rock the boat?

One unexpected consequence that I discovered on leaving the university was a feeling of liberation. Ironically, the very institution that invented tenure to safeguard free speech has become a place of stultifying political correctness. Small wonder that a former U.S. secretary of education called universities “islands of repression in a sea of freedom.”

But it is something else I wish to focus on; namely, the leaden obfuscation that surrounds what might be called “U-speak.”

In his 1946 essay *Politics and the English Language*, George Orwell foresaw a time when words would be chosen not to reveal but to conceal the speaker’s true intention. So, a contemporary university engaged in discriminating by race, gender, etc., in hiring appends to each job advertisement the reassuring words: “We are an equal opportunity employer.” Orwell also pointed out that the road to linguistic totalitarianism is paved with such lesser grotesqueries, such as pompous words where a simple word would do (“At this point in time” instead of “now”); and padded sentences to give a false impression of profundity. He suggested that the King James version of Ecclesiastes – “I returned and saw under the sun that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favour to men of skill: but time and chance happeneth to them all,” would be rendered by an academic as: “Objective considerations of contemporary phenomena compels the conclusion that success or failure in competitive activities exhibits a tendency to be commensurate with innate capacity, but a

considerable element of the unpredictable must be taken into account.”

Political discourse has always been an exercise in obfuscation. When Richard Nixon proclaimed “I am not a crook,” even the last doubter knew for sure that he was. Likewise, when the House of Commons voted by an overwhelming majority, less than 18 months ago, to affirm “marriage” as “the lifelong union of a man and a woman,” one knew that the old institution was crumbling and gay marriage imminent.

Universities are rife with a leaden combination of jargon and bombast. Universities no longer “teach” – they “deliver modules across a wide range of courses within the undergraduate programs.” Faculty no longer do research; they “support and extend the capacity of the research function.”

At the University of Western Ontario students do not come to learn; no, according to the “mission statement” they attend “a community of learning” to “... unite the past, present and future by preserving and extending the frontiers of knowledge.” On arrival, they discover that “the buildings form Western’s physical body, however our Faculty and students constitute its neural network.” The Mission statement goes on in a similar vein, but I shall spare you. Writing recently in Britain’s *The Spectator*, Dr. Peter Jones examined some job postings at English universities; “Newcastle longs for ‘Functional Specialist Directors’ (as opposed to dysfunctional ones) to play ‘a pivotal role in delivering on its vision’ of ‘enhanced customer focused service delivery’ and ‘substantial service delivery enhancement.’ Birmingham wants a registrar to ‘build upon the institution’s strengths, while addressing key opportunities in today’s challenging environment.’ Surrey wants ‘study skills tutors’ who will be ‘devising and delivering a range of study skills programmes, and participating in learning and teaching development to support widening participation.’”

On and on it goes. A student blessed with an innate capacity for clear expression is likely to find it sapped by attending such institutions.

Copyright 2003 by the National Post

The Forum thanks Prof. Hunter and the National Post for permission to reprint this article.

LANGUAGE WATCH

Monitoring the “innovative” use of language at UW

- From the proposal to establish the Waterloo Institute for Health Informatics Research (Senate meeting of June 16, 2002):

“WIHIR is a virtual institute.” (p. 4)

“Wellness ontology” and “Risk behaviour reduction motivation” (p. 26)

- From the proposal to establish the Canadian Centre of Arts and Technology (Senate meeting of June 16, 2003):

“Technology without content is void.” (p. 4 and 9) quoted from the UW Strategic Research Plan, March 11, 2003 (www.research.uwaterloo.ca)

Under the *Paradigm Step* entitled *Design*: “create prototype designs that begin from a humane perspective, that of people interacting within their lived contexts.” (p. 5)

“Click-to-Meet Technology”, (p. 7)

- UW’s Purchasing Department is now called the “Department of Procurement (and Contract) Services”: www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infopur/index.html

The *Forum* was informed of this change by a faculty member who received a “Procurement Bulletin”. Puzzled by this name change, the faculty member points out that the Oxford English Dictionary includes the following definitions of “procure”:

- to care for, take care of, attend to, look after,
- to manage,
- to obtain by care or effort, to gain, win, get possession of, acquire,
- to obtain (women) for the gratification of lust.

The *Forum* has been told that No. 4 is the default meaning in a number of British Commonwealth territories, e.g., South Africa.

A graduate student has asked why a simpler or less contentious name was not chosen, e.g., “The More-Than-Just-Purchasing Department”.

(Continued on page 12)

LANGUAGE WATCH (continued)

(The following is not a paid advertisement.)

A NEW – AND FREE – JARGON-DETECTING SOFTWARE PACKAGE

The *Forum* is pleased to announce the availability of ‘Bullfighter’, a free software package developed by Deloitte Consulting to “take the bull out of business”. According to the website www.dc.com/insights/bullfighter, Bullfighter could be all of the following:

- “A value-added, leverageable global knowledge repository,”
- “Repurposeable, leading edge thoughtware that delivers results-driven value,”
- “A future-proof asset that seamlessly empowers your mission critical enterprise communications.”

However, Deloitte Consulting admits that it has no idea of what any of the above are.

Bullfighter runs in Microsoft Word and PowerPoint, within Microsoft Windows 2000 or XP. It is comparable to the spelling and grammar checkers in those applications but focuses on jargon and readability. It can be downloaded for free or ordered as a CD-ROM/book package.

Quoting once again from the website:

Unless you believe in expressions like “value-based paradigm shift” or in multi-syllabic sentences that run on for ages, you owe it to your loved ones and co-workers to try. The documents you save could be your own.

The *Forum* has acquired a copy of the Bullfighter software package.

DID YOU KNOW?

The following message, displayed repeatedly on a small electronic billboard in the Student Life Centre, is directed to UW "frosh".



FAUW BOARD OF DIRECTORS 2003-2004

President

Catherine Schryer, English Language and Literature

Vice President

Roydon Fraser, Mechanical Engineering

Secretary/Treasurer

Acting Chair, Academic Freedom and Tenure Committee

OCUFA Director

Ray McLenaghan, Applied Mathematics

Chair, Pension and Benefits Committee

Sandra Burt, Political Science

Melanie Campbell, Physics

Mieke Delfgaauw, Faculty of Environmental Studies

President, St. Jerome's Faculty Association

Danine Farquharson, English, St. Jerome's University

Chair, Compensation Committee

Metin Renksizbulut, Mechanical Engineering

Chair, Political Relations Committee

Frank Reynolds, Statistics and Actuarial Science

Editor, FAUW Forum

Edward Vrscay, Applied Mathematics

Official Visitor to the Board (Non-Voting)

Anne Fullerton, Library

OPEN MEETING OF FAUW BOARD OF DIRECTORS

On June 12, 2003, the FAUW Board of Directors held a special open meeting so that members of the FAUW could hear details of the salary proposal for 2004-5 and 2005-6. After a rather lengthy discussion involving many in attendance, the proposal (<http://www.uwfacass.uwaterloo.ca>) was approved by the Board.



President Catherine Schryer welcomed FAUW members to the meeting and outlined the agenda. Board members (pictured at left) introduced themselves. President Schryer also provided the background for the negotiations.

Metin Renksizbulut, the Chief Negotiator of the FAUW team, described in detail the salary proposal and answered many questions.



Although attendance was moderate, there was much discussion. The FAUW negotiating team members, Metin Renksizbulut and Bill Power, were thanked for their work and a round of applause followed.

**WANT TO SHARE YOUR IDEAS/OPINIONS?
THEN CONTRIBUTE TO THE FORUM:
IT'S BEING READ EVERYWHERE!**



The above photo is a near-perfect reconstruction of a surprising discovery by the Editor in June, 2003. The *Forum* has obviously made its way into the more important reading rooms on this campus. (A note to the cynical: No paper was missing from the original *Forum* issue.)