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The record is stuck

by Ralph Melnychuk

The decision of a philosophy department committee to deny tenure to Ted Kemp recalls rather forcibly one of the more prominent horrors of my undergraduate days.

In 1966, as a Gateway staffer, I wrote a number of articles and editorials about the notorious Williamson-Murray tenure dispute that was then interrupting the rather tedious semantic angel-counting that usually emanates from the sacred halls of the philosophy department.

Although political, personal and procedural conflicts tended to grab most of the attention in that tenure dispute, the whole question of the manner in which the university evaluates its academic staff was also aired.

As a student journalist, my main concern with the issue was the star chamber aspect of the proceedings. Teaching is one of the major aspects of a professor's job and students have a right to know why a professor is judged incompetent.

Four years, two degrees, and the bulk of a two-year stint as a sessional lecturer for the English department have passed since the days of my innocence. And if I was a bit upset over the stupidity and inhumanity of the earlier dispute, I am totally revolted by the current decision since, having committed myself to an academic career, it hits closer to home.

Academic research is certainly a crucial function of the university community, and I certainly would not like to see anything happen which would discourage proficiency in this.

However, the university also has an educative responsibility which, I think, is even more crucial.

Personally, I am not particularly interested in spending the rest of my days voiding my academic insights into learned journals. I want to become a teacher, and for reasons of my own, I want to teach at a university. Now, I concede that a high level of academic excellence is essential in a university teacher.

A university teacher must be able to do research, but the sort of research required in teaching a class, particularly an undergraduate class, is often significantly different from "pure" research (whatever that is). Unfortunately, too little teaching research (apart from the accumulation of the data which is spewed out at the students) is done around this place.

The only test for such teaching research is the classroom. Hence it is impossible to evaluate a professor on the grounds that he has failed to publish. And consequently, a professor who chooses teaching as a priority is at an obvious disadvantage.

Ideally, of course, a professor will find time to indulge in both types of research. However, it is conceivable that a professor, especially in the earlier phases of his career when he is developing a teaching style, might choose to concentrate on this aspect of his profession rather than write publishable, but essentially insignificant articles.

This devotion to teaching should be encouraged, especially since the average professor's formal education consists entirely of training in research competence rather than in methods of instruction. The present tenure system, however, discourages such devotion.

I do not wish to become involved here in a discussion of the pros and cons of the concept of tenure. I agree that some form of job security is essential, but I am suspicious of a system that pays only lip service to the goal of excellent teaching.

Neither do I wish to become involved in a specific discussion as to why Ted Kemp should or should not be granted tenure. In fact, I have yet to hear an official reason for the denial.

However, Kemp's own conjectures as to why he was denied tenure are disturbing. He claims that he spent much time on teaching research, to the exclusion of the "pure" research demanded by the tenure committee.

Since he also has a reputation as an excellent teacher, I think that his "excuse" is probably a reasonable one.

This university is by no means suffering from a surplus of excellent teachers. As a direct result of the Williamson-Murray tenure dispute, the U of A lost several excellent men. We can ill afford such a loss again.

I can only hope that in the Kemp case, the members of this community demonstrate sufficient concern to force the powers-that-be to re-evaluate their priorities in the matter of tenure.

Dean Smith in defence of the tenure committee concerning Kemp decision

Personal and confidential

Dear Professor Kemp:

Recently I received your letter of Jan. 8, 1970 to me, with a copy of your letter of Jan. 12 to Professor Cody attached. I can give you the information you seek.

First I must explain that you have received all the documents submitted to the committee. It is not our practice to review student questionnaires or comparable details. The only document from Professor Cody I submitted to the committee was a copy of his letter of Dec. 4, 1969 to you. This arrangement was explained to the Faculty Tenure Committee while you were present at the meeting. I explained that you were notified of the evidence supporting the recommendation during a discussion with Professor Cody. You did not ask for a written statement; in a reply to a question from me you confirmed this fact at the meeting of the committee.

A second consideration is that the department chairman has no monopoly on the presentation of information, although he has the responsibility of collecting it as much as he can. Any member of the committee can bring to its meeting any information available to him. For that reason, the discussions at the meeting are usually broader than any statement that can be made by the department chairman. The following summary, which is taken from my report to Dr. McCalla, is based upon all of the material available to the Faculty Tenure Committee.

At the time of your appointment, and steadily since that time, there have been enthusiastic reports about your teaching. There seems to be no doubt about your professional skill as a teacher and your enthusiasm for the teaching process. Much of the information presented to the committee on your behalf repeated and confirmed this kind of appraisal.

Discussion necessarily centred upon your professional development as a philosopher. Your progress towards the Ph.D. was very slow, and the committee was not reassured by your explanation

of the present status of your dissertation. There is no evidence of any alternative scholarly work. Your annual reports do not record published research; it seems that you rarely attend philosophical meetings and have presented no papers to them; indeed, there has been little or no participation in local activities such as philosophical discussions within the department.

During your presentation at the meeting, you were made aware of doubts about the philosophical content of your lectures, and your standards of marking were discussed with you. Once more, the committee was not reassured by your comments. Your contributions to the department must be limited because of the little progress in professional development you have made in six years of your appointment. This limitation would certainly apply to the kind of advanced work which depends upon scholarship, but also seems to apply indirectly to your performance in undergraduate philosophy courses.

It was known that you had been elected to various faculty committees. In my experience as chairman of the executive committee (which arranges nominations), you were selected largely because of your known experience and a probable point of view. Your contributions to the work of committees seem to have been satisfactory but there is no evidence of outstanding performance. In departmental affairs, you have performed effectively when given responsibility and participated generally in departmental discussions. While there was no criticism of any of this work, there was at the same time no indication of performance which would compensate for deficiencies in other aspects of your work.

The decision of the committee is always based on an appraisal of overall performance. In following this approach, the committee concluded that your very slow progress in development as a philosopher and the prospects for future development outweighed your good performance in other aspects of your work.

Douglas E. Smith
dean of arts

No justification for Vivone's charges against this year's editor and staff

Having had access to most of last year's Gateways I find very little to justify Rich Vivone's charges that our present Gateway staff are incompetent propagandists. Our former editor must of lately had a drastic change in character since at no other time have I known him to come out from behind and attempt to backstab someone or something that no longer concerns him; especially when he was isolated and far away from those he attempts to discredit as he now has. I am able to make these statements earnestly and justifiably since it was during Mr. Vivone's reign that I was also involved in student government, mainly as an executive board member of the NAITSA council where I was publications chairman. As such, one of my duties was to observe and take an interest in newspapers printed in other post-secondary educational institutions, for the purpose to improve the NAIT student newspaper. With this background I

can find no justification for the charges that have been laid against our present editor and newspaper.

Indeed when Rich admitted having publicly supported most of our present executive during their election campaigns last year, which he did (Gateway, presumably Vol. LIX, No. 48, Thursday, Feb. 20, 1969); volume and series number are merely calculated guesses since none appear, the credibility and judgment of himself and his staff come severely into question, especially since we are reaping the harvest of at least some of his written public support. As for Rich having given open support to Al Scarth's quest for the Gateway editorship, I must confess that I cannot recall this, but if he did it must have come during one of his few enlightened moments.

Looking at past Gateway staff records I can find none that even come close to those held by our present staff. Never before has The Gateway been published as regularly as it has been this year. Why, now students can for the first time, actually rely on the fact that on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Fridays the paper will come out, complete on Fridays with the Casserole insertion. Furthermore, it seems that this year's Gateway is and has for the first time been able to look and report back, what it sees past the boundaries of the campus. Not however, at the expense of neglecting its internal responsibilities as would Rich Vivone have us believe.

As much as I would like to condemn Mr. Vivone's charges against Al Scarth, his staff and thus against our newspaper to mere trash and cheap sensationalism, I find myself agreeing with one of his points. That charge is that the newspaper is presently not being properly edited. This is certainly true, otherwise his slanderous charges would never have been printed.

George P. Kuschminder
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"You're the lucky one! At least, you can enter the kingdom of heaven."
Saturday Review