

Comment

Comment is an opinion column open to members of the university community who wish to present an informed opinion on a topic of their selection.

By Tom Sinclair-Faulkner

Universities and high schools have received a great deal of criticism lately because of their standards for written English. Some students apparently are receiving degrees despite the fact that they regularly make massive grammatical and spelling errors.

Various solutions have been considered. Some universities are adopting entrance examinations which disqualify applicants with inadequate writing skills. This effectively bucks the problem back to the high schools, but works only if a single examination can be set which tests effectively for general English competency. Other universities are considering success at such tests as a condition for their degrees — a direction in which the University of British Columbia seems to be moving. Some universities have established special remedial courses, but these work best only if they are closely integrated with regular courses. The Dalhousie Writing Workshop has a good program in this respect, but my feeling is that it requires more active co-operation from faculty in order to be fully effective. The University of Toronto, on the other hand, is phasing out its remedial program on the grounds that it is not the university's task to teach students the rudiments of proper English.

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schools, do not have guest or time restrictions. We are paying for our rooms, the same as the males are. We are not given a key to the front door, as are residents of Howe Hall. Girls of eighteen are basically mature enough to handle freedom, more so than are eighteen year old boys. The rules should be the same for all residence.

Males must be out of the female residence by 3 a.m. It is the rule-makers' belief, that if a male is in after 3, the girl must be sleeping with him (shame, shame). If a male guest happens to stay only a few minutes after three, you can lose your guest privileges for a time and even be threatened with a trip to the Dean of Women. (Heaven forbid!) We bad little girls must learn our lesson! Males staying overnight might threaten the privacy of your room-mate. I guess a girl spending the night at Howe Hall is not considered a hinderance to his room-mate.

It looks as though residents of Shirreff and Ardmore Halls will have to put up with the rules for a while yet, at least until Dalhousie develops some ideas on equality instead of out-right discrimination.

M. Lawrence
C. Graham

Confidential

To the Editor-person:

Jeez-boy, I was to one of yer Council of the Union meetings and I seen ya there and I was meaning to ask ya something but ya took off like a hare in heat in the middle of a terrible raquet. What I was wondering on was the nature of that there meeting — like what it was all about? I come in a bit too late so I never got wind of just what was going on and someone gave me a program but I never did get the knack of understanding it.

First I figured I was at some new fangled kind a religious meeting cause one fellow was banging a hammer and shouting like a preacher and everyone else was screaming all frantic like at each other. I then figured tho that there weren't no hymn books and there weren't no

I sympathize with the student whose high school, for some reason or another, has failed to provide him with a good grounding in written English. And I have a modest proposal to make, which I intend to implement this year in Religion 101, a course which satisfies the First Year Writing requirement. Basically it involves treating the student in the same way that I expect to be treated when I submit a paper for publication myself.

I am advancing the deadline for all required papers in Religion 101 by one week. When those papers come in, I shall read them through quickly, circling each grammatical and spelling error with an editorial blue pencil, and return them straightaway to the students. They in their turn will have to correct the errors and resubmit the papers within a few days, at which time I shall read the papers for a grade.

There are three advantages to this procedure. First, it affirms that correct grammar and spelling are essential to scholarly expression. They are not "15%" of total scholarship, but a precondition. Conversely, it provides that grades higher than "failure" are given only on grounds of insight, able analysis, originality of thought, argumentation, etc. And thirdly, the student teaches herself. She does not attend a lecture on grammar (which she has already

one collecting money — jeez boy they was in fact talkin about giving a bunch of money to a couple of Secretariats. Everyone got into a real uproar about whether they should give 'em more or less, or whether we should give 'em anything at all. Problem was that no one ever did say what they were gettin' all the money for. Well I guess I knew I weren't at no church and I figured I weren't at a bar full of YER UNEMPLOYABLES cause there weren't no lickor - I don't think- and no one was dressed up too nice. Then it struck my thoughts like an electric fence, I was amongst a bunch of yer politicoticians - waht a revolting development - I figured - but when I think back on it, it was kind a humorable. What with everyone shouting at each other about nominatin' and secondin' and making movements, and everyone else was yellin' about some fella called Robert who ordered a bunch of rules. What really done it however was when someone remarked that Robert had constipated the reconstitution or that some thing along those lines went haywire. Well jeez-boy that really caused a huff but yer char-person smashed his hammer and yelled and pointed his finger, and a kind a hush fell over everyone - kind a like they was all hypnotic.

I remember the pure shock of the realization of what I was witnessing to. I can remember reading about it in Readers Digest or something - it was yer new free theatre and everyone musta decided before I came that they were gonna do a comedy. Then I really put me old nogger to work and accordin to my calculatin if there are fifty weeks in the year no counting St. Nick's days and if they put on a show every two weeks - that's twenty-five shows. And for the fifty bucks we pay 'em, thats two bucks a show, and that beats the pants clear off the shows down home - and they're better too.

But that's not all boy - I overheard a secret that some of the things they say in the Commedies

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had in high school), but is required to open a dictionary or a manual of style on her own. This is neither more nor less than what any scholar is expected to do as a matter of course.

At least two objections might be raised. Some may say that it is too much work: the professor must read each paper twice, and the student faces an additional, earlier deadline. But I find that I must read every student's paper twice anyway; once to check the mechanics (which I also do in proofreading my own work) and once to grasp the ideas (which I also do in redrafting my own work). As for the student's workload, I suspect that those who miss advertised deadlines will miss

them no matter when they are set. That is a problem quite different from the one under consideration here, and demands its own solution.

A second objection might be that content is what counts, not form. But I contend that correct spelling and grammar, while not essential or even desirable in every phase of our lives, are necessary features of scholarly work. Without them, neither students nor faculty could understand each other adequately as scholars. This does not mean that a James Joyce or a Don Harron should be required to abandon their chosen style of expression. It simply means that they should not be awarded academic credit for writing as they have.

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