

Case against large classes unconvincing

by Howard Flock

Last week *Excalibur* published an article in which the reporter took issue with large classes of 500 students and in particular with a class in the course Introduction to Psychology 1010. Some of the issues that were aired in the article are of considerable importance within the university community. My views on those issues, as I tried to convey them to the reporter, need clarification.

Writing essays: Like all sciences, psychology is composed of a hierarchical system of terms and concepts, a specialized language with a vocabulary in the thousands. How is one to write in a language before one



therefore, to ask intro students in psychology to write essays in the first course.

The reporter did listen to an impassioned plea that the university must assume responsibility, to ensure that each student who receives a BA degree can write and express him or herself in the English language. That obligation belongs squarely with the university. The buck should not be passed to the departments, who are ill-equipped to undertake such a universal responsibility.

Decorum in the classroom: The reporter decided to sit in the farthest row of Curtis I, among those who frequently take catnaps and concern themselves with pressing affairs other

than the lecture. Well, mindful that some students have had an eventful but sleepless night, the instructor from the first encouraged them to come to class anyway. They can sit in the back row, by all means catnap if they must, and hopefully between naps will become *au courant* with at least some of what is going on. But sit in the back row, please.

Student interest: Introduction to Psychology is a course that gives an even-handed overview of the voluminous content of the science. This enables students to discover what does and does not interest them, what is and is not their cup of tea.

There are perhaps some 3200 arts majors in psychology, out of a total of perhaps 18,000 students in the Faculty of Arts. That means we have perhaps one-sixth of all students as majors. It is possibly true that few of those people knew much about the sweep of psychology and what it is about when they entered York. They got their sense of it from even-handed intro-courses. As the course moved from topic to topic, they discovered what topics fascinated them, and, frankly, in some instances, what topics left them only mildly interested, if not downright indifferent.

Accessibility of the Instructor: Students sometimes miss classes, frequently don't understand the lectures, have trouble with the handouts they are given, lose their syllabus with exam dates, and in short have oodles of questions. Each student has been assigned to a teaching assistant, a knowledgeable graduate student, who is more than qualified to answer their questions about the course.

On various occasions, the instructor has reminded the students to take their confusions to their teaching assistant. Were they to bring all such questions to the instructor, even if a student's question took only five minutes to answer, the instructor would need 2500 minutes, or 62 extra

hours just for that. Moreover, it would put the teaching assistants, who need the income, totally out of a job.

Students have been reminded on various occasions that if their problems lie beyond the capability of the teaching instructor, or are personal, they should by all means see the instructor at his office, after class, or by appointment. Many students have availed themselves of that access.

Large-class format: Last, but not least, the article was purportedly a complaint about large-sized class format. The reporter was challenged to produce data that would prove that a small class format is a better forum for transmitting the conceptual language found in a high-level text in psychology, and for accomplishing the goals of such an introductory course.

This is a question of empirical data on behalf of a good for the greatest number, not a sounding-off of the personal opinions and/or idiosyncrasies of particular individuals. The question needs clear definition to get answers. What do we wish to accomplish in the introductory course in psychology and how can this be best accomplished?

That long-suffering, but good-natured breed, the taxpayers, ante up for all of what we call "quality" education. They have a right to know that there are reasonable grounds — good data based on today's (not yesterday's) students — for the way in which their generosity is expended.

If introductory psychology was taught in groups of 50 instead of 500, the cost factor in salaries alone (not to mention plant and other facilities) would escalate by a factor of ten. What empirical data would justify such an outpouring of treasure? Those of you who read this are, or soon will be taxpayers. Be concerned.

Howard Flock teaches York's largest lecture, PSYC 1010, section E

CLASP's well-intended discrimination

by Roxane Tracey

Consider this scenario.

Part one: Jim the factory worker staggers through the door after a hard days work. He's slightly drunk, and pissed off from a possible strike at the plant. A strike can only mean two things — those old familiar welfare cheques, and the standard loss of male pride.

Part two: Jim's girlfriend didn't cook dinner and the apartment looks like a WWII revival.

Later that same evening Betty lies awake in bed wondering how she will explain her black eye to the girls at work.

How many people will believe Betty's story, and how many will call her a liar? Sunday night made-for-t.v. movies have taught us that battery is very difficult to prove.

"So, Mr. Smith, you say that your girlfriend broke her jaw and two ribs when she tripped and fell down?"

"Yup, that's right, officer..."

Until the legal process intervenes, who's to say that Betty's word is, in fact, "the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth"?

Although this crime of abuse is void of morality and ethics, and is sickening in its inhumanity, in order for justice to prevail the legal system must follow its rightful course. This is a system that involves *all* means of legal defense being made available to both the woman and the alleged abuser.

Section 15, subsection of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms states that everyone has the right to equal benefit of the law without discrimination. But what about legal aid? Does the man who is charged with physically assaulting a woman have the right to the luxury of free legal aid services — at the taxpayer's expense?

The bottom line in any legal case, including spousal abuse, should always be the rights of both the victim and alleged abuser. Although this fact remains, there are legal services which do not represent the abuser.

One of them is CLASP (Community Legal Aid Service Program), a legal aid clinic here at York for people who are unable to afford it, and do not qualify for Ontario legal aid.

The fact that they'll help the woman, but not the accused, is not a signal for trumpets of discrimination to sound, however — their reasons for doing so seem well-intentioned. CLASP has very limited staff and resources. A crime such as wife-battery is considered a crime against the state, not against the individual woman, who is just a 'witness' in the

case. As such, she does not qualify for legal aid. Therefore it makes sense for CLASP to represent the woman, rather than the offender who can readily acquire a legal aid certificate and receive legal services elsewhere.



• graphic by Carsten Knox

But denying any avenue of legal defence to the offender contradicts the premise "innocent until proven guilty", which is the basis of any democratic legal system. As I hear shouts to deny the abuser legal aid, I can also feel the ground give way as society regresses back to the days of "hang, burn and kill them all!"

Although the policies of some community services that prohibit legal aid to the accused seem well-intentioned, even the most twisted

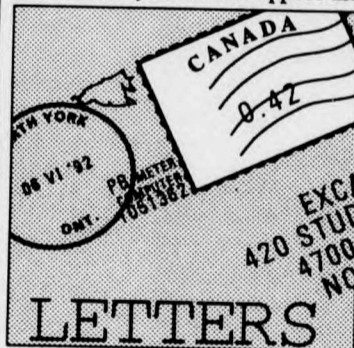
rapists, murderers or abusers should be entitled to both legal aid and a sound unbiased defense in a court of law.

Excluding human rights in any form, is not a road our society should even attempt. Does this denial of rights stop at the alleged offender, or does it extend to members of a certain race or religion? Once we begin to draw the line, where does it end?

Everyday, all over the world, people struggle and fight for rights which everyone should simply and naturally just have. I do not personally condone any crime, but to take away any right from any human is to take away a gift as precious as life itself.

Fear tactics not called for

We, the executive of SEDS (The Students for the Exploration and Development of Space), wish to express our anger over a recent act performed by those who oppose the



International Space University (ISU). It seems that they have deemed it acceptable to use our office window, without our authorization, to display a sticker supporting their cause. Our anger stems from the fact that this sticker directly opposes our view. Since our name is prominently displayed, we doubt that the vandals mistook our office for another. It is interesting to note that the YFS office does not display this sticker, despite their well-publicized anti-ISU stance.

We also wish to express our sorrow for those who must resort to such tactics, rather than engaging in intelligent conversation. We would gladly participate in any discussion

of the topic.

In fact, we held a student information session on Oct. 14, held by students for the students. Most of our advertising outside of the science buildings, however, had mysteriously disappeared as soon as it was posted. The turn-out was thus disappointing, even though this was probably the most informative session held so far. Perhaps those who oppose the ISU do not want more information to get out to students, we cannot say. So, for as long as certain factions continue to use fear tactics, make far-fetched accusations and vandalize, we will wait. Eventually, they will come down to Earth and discuss the issues maturely and intelligently.

Nicole Aucoin,
Lori French,
H. Peter White,
Christopher Ackney,
The SEDS Executive

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