

personal animosities

To The Editor:

I am not happy at having to take part in the public discussion of the denial of tenure to professors Williamson and Murray of the philosophy department, but I find it necessary to do so, for several reasons. First, much of the discussion has taken the form of an appeal to your readers to make some kind of judgment. Many of them may have done so on the basis of information and comment in *The Gateway* which, I am convinced, has frequently been false and misleading. Second, it has alleged, specifically, that in view of the teaching ability and scholarship of professors Williamson and Murray, the denial of tenure can only be understood as an injustice arising out of personal animosities. Third, it has been claimed that the Philosophy Department is reduced to a state of almost total wreckage from which it is unlikely to recover. Finally, throughout the entire course of this dispute there has been recourse to unnecessary and invidious comparisons between members of the faculty of the philosophy department, and in one case my name was attached to such a comparison. I must speak to some of these matters.

So far as the justice or injustice of the tenure proceedings is concerned, the first thing I have to say is that I don't have access to the body of information on which the denial of tenure was based. Others who have entered into the discussion have not seen fit to admit to the same limitation, and it has not prevented them from making substantial claims. Neither will it prevent me from asserting that as far as my knowledge of the case goes, it supports the claim that the proceedings were just and the decision correct. Further, I have known Professor Mardiros for almost twenty years and I have no doubts at all about his honesty, his judgment, and his qualities of leadership. He must have wished to counter the explicit and implicit personal attacks made against him during this "campaign", and I too have wished that he could break silence. But I know that tenure proceedings are meant to be conducted in quiet, at least until "due processes" have been exhausted. He should be commended for observing this rule while others broke it to his disadvantage.

Now to the "wreckage" of the philosophy department. It is certainly true that the public discussion of this case has made it exceedingly

difficult for all of us to get on with our proper work. We have been torn between conflicting claims, and on the basis of partial and misleading "information", we have been urged to "get on the side". So it is true of all of us, not alone professors Williamson and Murray, that we have gone through some degree of "sheer psychological hell", but it is not true that we have gone beyond the point of speedy recovery. Professor Tennesen, graduate student J. A. Brook, and the anonymous "spokesman from the department" are mistaken in this. The "spokesman" was "certain that the rest of the professional philosophers in the department will soon be looking for positions elsewhere" and "concerned that the U of A could be blacklisted in academic circles." Neither of these fears have materialized, nor are they likely to. J. A. Brook now claims secret knowledge (he calls it hard fact) that two philosophers and two graduate students are leaving. Whether or not this is true remains to be seen, but even if it proves to be so, students can be re-assured. The philosophy department will carry on.

I would like to turn now to certain comparisons between members of the faculty in our department—comparisons which I consider to be invidious, and which have been a characteristic and depressing feature of this dispute from the start. Some parties to the dispute seem to have felt that in order to support the claims to merit of Professors Williamson and Murray, it was necessary to call the teaching and scholastic ability of other members of the department into the question. It doesn't take much reflection to show that this is wrong. The question whether or not a professor is good at his work can be settled by

looking at his work: it doesn't call for an examination of the work of other professors.

The anonymous "spokesman from the department" implied such an invidious comparison in his claim that the rest of the "professional" philosophers in our department would soon be looking for positions elsewhere. From this it appears that some of us are professionals and some are not, and you can pretty well tell which is which by the position we take on the tenure case. I leave it to your judgment how much this claim is worth.

Professor Tennesen, in one of the clearer passages of his recent letter, says the following:

"Neither do I know of more than one member of our department (except for Professor Mardiros and the non-tenure members of the tenure committee and myself) who has not either expressed to the dean of arts and to the tenure committee, or would be willing to do so (and here I include Professor Ted Kemp) that professors Williamson and Murray are superior to any one of them as scholars and/or as teachers."

As nearly as I can make this out, it means that apart from professors Mardiros and Tennesen and two others, each of the rest of us have either said or would be willing to say that we are inferior to professors Williamson and Murray in scholarship or teaching ability or both. Other members of the department can speak for themselves, but I do not accept the comparison. Not because I think I am superior to either or both of them, nor because I think I am inferior but am unwilling to admit it, but just because I reject

the comparison as one which should neither be made nor invited.

In J. A. Brook's letter, he makes the claim that fifty-five students have signed a petition attesting that professors Williamson and Murray are first-rate teachers. This petition was vitiated because it contained comparative claims that the majority of the signers couldn't possibly have attested to. Since the existence of this petition has been introduced as evidence, I think it is appropriate that students (especially those who signed it) should know some of the things it contained. There are three comparative claims used, unnecessarily, to support the teaching abilities of professors Williamson and Murray: (1) that they are as good teachers as any in the department; (2) that they put across important philosophical ideas as clearly and concisely as any two equivalent philosophers in the department; (3) that in two courses now taught by professors Williamson and Murray which had previously been taught by professors Mardiros and Schwyzer, Williamson and Murray taught as capably as their predecessors.

The author of the petition points out that professors have serious difficulty in assessing the work of their colleagues, but fails to point out what is equally obvious, that students themselves are not miraculously provided with a mysterious ability to assess the competence of teachers under whom they have not studied. Now, supposing that students are not going to judge on hearsay, and supposing further that they have adequate standards for making a judgment, those fifty-five signers would have each to have taken at least ten philosophy courses, no two from the same professor, in order to support the first claim. The second claim could be

supported by anyone at all, since it is a tautology: professors Williamson and Murray put across important philosophical ideas as clearly and concisely as any two equivalent philosophers, i.e. philosophers who put across important philosophical ideas as clearly as professors Williamson and Murray do. The third claim could only be supported by students who had taken each of the two courses referred to twice. I think it is plain that only a very small minority of the fifty-five signers could with justice attest to these comparisons.

It is easier to excuse the signers of the petition than the author. They wanted to support the competence of professors Williamson and Murray, and the author presented them with a means of doing so. But it was a bad means because it raised issues that were beside the point, and because it condemned the signers to being either fools or knaves—fools if they signed the letter without understanding what it contained, or knaves if they signed the letter knowing that they had no legitimate grounds for doing so.

Ted Kemp
philosophy department

condemn

To The Editor:

Mr. Bruce Ferrier, in his now-famous letter to Richard Price, has chosen to condemn the inactivity of this year's Debating Society in strong terms.

As a senior member of the society, and senior member of the McGoun Debating Team, I must concur with his criticism. Due to lack of organization, and some irresponsibility, the McGoun program was disorganized and the Hugil and Oxford programs non-existent, this year.

Although I am not an executive member of the society I feel that I must share in the blame for this failure. None of us are wholly exempt.

I can only hope that the present executive will call an early meeting of the society, and publicize it widely so that all students interested in debating may be present.

An immediate start must be made to restore debating to the high level of prestige it once enjoyed on this campus. Next fall will be too late!

Gerald L. Ohlsen
arts 3

(additional letters on page 2)



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there once was a girl from st. paul
who went to a birth control ball
she bought all the devices
for fabulous prices
but nobody asked her at all

argues english lecturer and grad student jon whyte

'you can help varsity guest weekend by staying home'

by jon whyte

Follow the example of the students this Varsity Guest Weekend. Stay away! Avoid the hypocrisy. Steer clear of the university's biggest lie.

If the students can't stand it, how do you think you will be able to?

Why should you stay away? I suppose the idea of Varsity Guest Weekend is a good one. The taxpayers of the province have a right, perhaps, to see what the university is and how it works. They, after all, are among those who pay for higher education.

But anyone who expects to see what a university is and how it works will not be satisfied by the superficial and cursory glance afforded by a VGW excursion to the campus. For it should be patently clear by now that a university is not a collection of buildings connected by a central heating system.

Nor is it a group of carefully prepared technical displays.

Nor is it a collection of blue-blazed, crew-cutted or back-combed hosts.

Rather, the university is a concept which just happens to

have a bunch of buildings surrounding it. Looking at the buildings will not bring forth any revelations about the idea that lies behind them.

Quite a few hard-working students have gone to a great deal of work again this year to show off the campus. But I feel their work is quite out of line with what they have, hopefully, been learning during their campus experience.

The University is not comparable to a manufacturing plant where the raw materials are processed and finally sent to market as finished products.

Yes, the metaphor of "process" can be carried over; but the process of education is not concrete, hence it cannot be treated easily in concrete symbols.

To regard the university as an industry is a form of profanity, and those students who would promulgate the image do the university a disservice.

For, if anything, the university attempts to "unfinish" students in order that education will continue to be a continuing process.

Cardinal Newman's classic definition of the university as "a community of scholars" may be falling into disgrace.

But I would like to feel that it still has some validity.

Have those of you who have visited the campus during past Guest Weekends ever seen anything which would lead you to define the university in any words similar to those of Cardinal Newman's?

I should think you would be more likely to come up with a phrase like: "A three-ring circus, manned by bright young people;" or, "a madhouse made of mud and snow." Neither definition is flattering or accurate, however close it may lie to the truth as you have seen it.

Finding a professor on the campus during VGW is comparable to Hercules' toughest task.

The profs want as little to do with the mess as they can get away with. They see the Weekend as a waste of good lecture time, a waste of the students' time and a waste of the facilities.

I have yet to hear a single professor speak up in favor of the idea as it is now worked out.

What are the intentions of Varsity Guest Weekend?

Hopefully to help high school students make up their minds about their future careers, to decide whether or not to go to university.

Any high school student who desires to find anything out about the discipline in which he is interested would be hardpressed to discover anything about it, particularly if it is a field in the arts or pure sciences.

That is the most damning criticism that can be leveled at the Weekend as it is now operated. For, if it is not functioning for those people for whom it is intended, then any side benefits cannot justify it.

I'm not sure I know any of the answers to the dilemma that has been created.

Certainly, it would not be a good idea to put a bunch of profs on pedestals (no matter how much they might enjoy it) and point them out to the world at large as examples of wisdom, learning, and sagacity.

Nor is it really feasible to continue with lectures as scheduled with the hope that interested people might drop in and see what is going on.

If you want to see the buildings on the campus, you might as well make your visit during the summer when there's less mud to track into them, and when the grounds are quite beautiful.

Some of the buildings do have interesting permanent displays, open to the public throughout the year.

By all means see them sometime. Walk through the libraries and look at the books. Go to the bookstore and find out what students are studying.

But don't go to the university with 18,000 others and expect to find out what the campus is. You'll be as unsatisfied as I was when I was a visitor in my last year of high school.

Last year, a teacher told me a number of her students went to the campus. She asked them what they thought of the place.

Their only lasting impression was of the "pickled babies" in the Medicine display.

Said she to me, "If they relate my going to university with pickled babies, and that alone, then I want the whole thing done away with."

So do I. And you can help by staying home.