

"Ombudsman"

Wendy Stringer majors in zoology and likes art. She does well at both, holding an honors average in science. And last year, when she took Art 231, her work was considered good enough that the instructor retained it all to use as examples for this year's class.

Art 231 is a junior studio course given by the department of art and design, which is technically part of the Faculty of Arts but, actually, an almost autonomous group in what the University calls the "Fine Arts" program. These are departments which give courses leading to the degree of "Bachelor of Fine Arts" art and design, drama, and music. All three are tight departments with a heavy emphasis on narrow specialization: most courses are given almost exclusively for their own students, and they tend to limit their students to their courses. For a BFA degree in art and design, for example, you must (or are allowed to) take English 200 plus one "approved" Arts or Science option per year for four years. All 15½ remaining courses must be in the department of art and design.

Similarly, this department lists 48 studio courses in the current calendar. Only one of these does not carry a note to the effect that it is limited to BFA students or requires "consent of the Department" meaning in effect that you must be a BFA student to take it.

Technically, then, the only drawing course that Wendy could take as an outsider, was Art 231. But she likes drawing, she's good at it, and knows she can learn more. So this year she wanted to audit Art 340, a three-hour studio course, one step up from Art 231. However, it carries a note identifying it as "restricted to BFA students."

Auditors are different from students, though; so Wendy thought she'd ask. The secretaries told her "no way" and wouldn't even listen to her ask if there was

somebody else she could talk to. She managed to find out who the instructor was to be and tried to talk to him. He's only part-time at the university, and couldn't be found. She tried, on and off, from September to

If you have problems you want the "Ombudsman" to help with, or if you're someone who wants to help solve others' problems, contact Dirk Schaeffer at 439-6486 (in person at 1010 Newton Place, 8515-112 St.) or Kevin Gillese in Gateway 432-5178 (Room 282, SUB) or at home, 433-2136.

December, but he just wasn't to be found. The secretaries scowled every time she came near. In December, she came to see me.

Between the two of us, then, we managed to run down the instructor, who agreed that there was room in his class for her, and agreed to let her audit the course, provided she could get permission from the departmental committee responsible for these matters. We also learned from a former Chairman of the Department that there was *no way* she could get that permission. Wendy's Dean, finally, was sympathetic, but there was little he could do. Early in January, permission was formally denied. In her attempts to talk to the chairman of the department prior to that decision Wendy could, again, not get past the secretaries.

There are several nasty aspects to this story, other than those already implied. For one thing, biological scientists repeatedly lament the fact that there are so few good *artists* in the sciences, since so much of what they teach requires good drawing skills to communicate. Thus, aside from the larger questions of what

an education is for, anyway, which Wendy's case points to, there is the much more practical issue of the university's having discouraged very effectively just those talents and abilities many of its members seem to need very badly.

Further, there is the matter of Wendy's desire to audit the course, rather than take it for credit. This arose solely because, despite her good work last year she received only an average-lowering 7 for the course. Apparently, the instructor informed her (and everyone else) at the outset that non-BFA students do not get anything higher than 7 in that department. She didn't feel she could afford that mistake again.

Third, there is the question of why, given its restrictions, the department of fine arts is still a part of the Faculty of Arts, and not a separate trade school. Granted, they do give several art history and appreciation courses, but these passive courses could probably be better handled within Arts, while the active studio courses would seem to make more sense if in a separate faculty, analogous to Law and Medicine. Indeed, two Deans in the Faculty of Arts could come up with no good reasons as to why that arrangement should not be instituted here; it now exists in Calgary.

Finally, there is the less obvious aspect of Wendy's treatment by the administrative members (primary secretaries) at the department of fine arts. As she describes it, it was simply inhuman: the only answer to any question is "no"; and much indignation occurred as she tried to push beyond that, in any way. In a specific sense, this is trivial: there's no law to prevent secretaries from being bitches and God knows many have ample cause for it. More generally, however, this appears to be an intrinsic part of the "closed shop" atmosphere and contempt for "outsiders" that prevails in this department. It seems thoroughly objectionable within the university framework.

What all this leads me to is the impression that the department of fine arts is acting, in several ways, contrary to the best interests of students, of educational ideals, and of the image of this university as a place where students may pursue learning. The present course structures and limitations within the department of fine arts were all approved, at one time or another, by the Faculty of Arts and General Faculty Council. They can be re-opened for examination by either of those bodies at any time; student members can request that such examination be undertaken. Right now, I'd like to urge the Students' Union, through its members on GFC and Arts committees, to ask that an examination of the pre-requisite and grading procedures within the department of fine arts be undertaken, and that the possibility of separating the department from the Faculty of Arts be explored. In that way, at least, we could put an end to the present hypocrisy of allowing students to believe they can participate in anything that Department has to offer without selling their souls first.

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