

news from CUASA

Volume 17, No. 6

Editor: Bob Rupert

April 10, 1987

STUDENT EVALUATIONS AND WORKLOAD SEEM LIKELY TO BE HIGH ON THE AGENDA WHEN CUASA AND THE CARLETON ADMINISTRATION GO BACK TO THE BARGAINING TABLE NEXT WINTER.

IN RECENT BULLETINS, WE HAVE INVITED COMMENT ON THESE ISSUES. THE FOLLOWING SUBMISSION IS FROM PROFESSOR M. CHACRON IN THE DEPARTMENT OF MATHEMATICS AND STATISTICS. IN SUBSEQUENT BULLETINS, WE WILL PROVIDE A FORUM FOR OTHER MEMBERS TO PRESENT THEIR THOUGHTS ON WORKLOAD AND EVALUATION.

Dear Editor,

In the bulletin of CUASA dated December 8, you call for written submissions about the issues of workload and teaching evaluations, which you deem to be of major interest in the next round of collective negotiation. In response to your call I shall submit this open letter for integral publication in the bulletin.

The subject I will be discussing here is the means and methods of teaching courses with course co-ordinators and the methods used for assessing the teaching performances of academic employees who are assigned to teach such courses. Indeed, it is now a well-established fact of life that the considered courses do exist at this university with a large input coming from the Department of Mathematics and Statistics, to which I belong (since 1970). In effect, over the period 1970 to date I have taught a considerable number of the courses under consideration mainly as a co-instructor in a course with course-coordinator, which statistically means that the number of times I was in charge of a course section different from that taught by the course co-ordinator is essentially the same as the number of times I taught the considered courses over the period 1970 to date.

I see the *raison d'être* of the notion of course co-ordination to be the need to achieve some degree of uniformity in the administration of multi-sectioned courses. The way it is in the facts is quite different. Under the administrative disguise, course co-ordination has immensely outgrown each and every other aspect of the teaching of the considered course sections.

As a co-instructor in a course with course-coordinator it is my right and responsibility to assign the compulsory textbook, if any, and the accompanying reference books. I can be over-ruled by the course co-ordinator, who can impose his/her own choice.

As a co-instructor in a course with course-coordinator it is my right and responsibility to teach the course contents in the way which I deem to be fit for the best interest of the students in my class. According to present practices of co-ordination, the principle of uniformity shall strictly overpower any individual enterprise so as a week-per-week coverage of course material shall be strictly enforced in each and every course section.



As a co-instructor in a course with course-coordinator it is my right and responsibility to assess the students' learning by ways of term work and of final examination. Under the principle of uniformity, I have no alternative but to approve the duration, time and frequency of term tests as decreed by the course co-ordinator. It goes without saying that any common examination (mid-term or final examination) shall be under the jurisdiction of the course co-ordinator who can impose, again, his/her own choice of text. Of course, the grading and supervision of the exam are an integral part of the jurisdiction of the course co-ordinator who assigns the share of grading and even of supervision in the way he/she deems fit for each and every co-instructor in the same course. Evidently, the examination answer books are collected globally by co-ordinator x, who decides even the team name of the examiners such as "co-ordinator x and his friends".

As a co-instructor in a course with course co-ordinator I am, yet, subject to the same assessment of my teaching performance. Incidentally, the students' questionnaires that shall be distributed to the class are strictly the same for all other classes with or without course co-ordinators. Assuming that the results of the evaluation are favorable (that is, at or higher than the norm) and that the decrees in the above were strictly enforced in my class, who is to be rewarded; the brains or myself as one co-operating member of the team? Again, is the reward for teaching or for rightfully enforcing the decrees? What if the results of the evaluation are unfavorable? Shall I be categorized as to be not good as a teacher or to be one who does not properly enforce teaching decrees or both? All of this adds a new dimension to the problem at large of proper methods of assessment of teaching performance.

Fellow colleagues, the time has come to prune the overgrown bush of course co-ordination, that is, to bring to its desirable size the foliage and stems of course co-ordination. If one is to follow the spirit and substance of the Collective Agreement, Articles 15 and 22, one should simply uproot it and grow instead something more productive. In this connection, the Department of Chemistry and the Faculty of Social Sciences have taken the lead. Instead of an invading bush of course-coordination, the idea is simply to uproot it and let instead each course section grow to become an autonomous course in its own right. This is what I will call good planning or to use a gardening term a good landscaping!

M. Chacron
Professor of Mathematics

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