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Graduate School Administration Threatens Status of Over 1600 Students

• Thomas Smith •

Many Graduate School students recently received unsigned letters from Senior Registrar Robert Goldstein. These letters informed students that they had failed to fulfill the minimum requirements for satisfactory progress toward completion of their degrees. According to Bob Nelson of the Office of Student Services, a total of 1619 letters were sent out, out of a total of 3956 cases reviewed. In order to meet minimum standards for satisfactory progress students must:

- Maintain a 3.0 GPA
- Take their first doctoral exam before they complete 45 credits of course work.
- Not have more than two incompletes outstanding.
- Complete their degrees within eight years if they begin work here without a master's degree; seven years with a master's.

These letters further informed students that they must consult with their Executive Officer at the beginning of this semester to arrange a required plan of action. If students do not satisfy these minimum requirements by the spring semester, they will be barred from registration.

Understandably, quite a few students were upset. These letters, coupled with rumors to the effect that the Federal Government conducted an audit of the CUNY system over the summer, has led some to believe that the Administration was pressured into a "crack down" to preserve its funding. [According to Ian McGowan of the *Student Leader News Service*, Dean Floyd Moreland confirmed that the Graduate School Office of Financial Aid was audited during the summer of 1991.]

However, Registrar Goldstein, Dean of Student Affairs Floyd More-

land, and Executive Director of Student Services Matthew Schoengood, all insist that "extenuating circumstances" would be taken into account with the advent of spring semester. These circumstances might include family obligations, work, etc.... Each official insisted that the letters were not intended to "intimidate" anyone though Floyd Moreland admitted that the letters have caused some "panic" among students. Moreland apologized "if the letters were read that way." These letters were intended to "foster a stronger relationship between faculty and students, to foster better mentoring by meeting with their EO's," one administrator responded. At the least, these letters give "the students six months to get their act together," said Goldstein. Yet, Floyd Moreland ominously pronounced that "At the end of the Fall semester the computer will generate another series of reports. If the students have achieved a minimum degree of progress, fine. If not, they've got trouble."

The Advocate asked these administrators how they will define a minimum degree of progress. "This is a difficult question, and will have to be taken up on a case-by-case basis, in consultation with the student's EO and advisor," answered Goldstein. Such consultation will be especially important, Goldstein acknowledged, at the dissertation stage, where it is difficult to show tangible results, and where the student frequently changes the "direction" of her/his topic or text.

Moreland admitted that only "a small percentage" of those who received letters faced serious problems. What most concerned Goldstein, Moreland, and Schoengood was students' failure to maintain a 3.0 GPA. "We make a commitment to the student

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Meet the President:

An interview with Frances Degen Horowitz.

On July 17th *Advocate* editors Andrew Long, Thomas Smith and Jonathan Lang interviewed the newly appointed president of the Graduate School, Frances Degen Horowitz. We have printed an abbreviated version of this interview below.

Advocate: Can you tell us more about yourself, about your New York memories and your academic interests in college? You were, for example, a philosophy major.

President Horowitz: Well, I grew up in the Bronx. If you have ever read Doctorow's *World's Fair* he writes about Eastbourne Ave., the street I grew up on. And in fact I attended P.S. 70, which is the school he went to. I even think we were there at the same time because I remember some of the things which he recounts. I consider growing up in the Bronx to have been a very personally rich experience. It was partly because my extended family lived in various parts of the Bronx. I intend to write more about that. For a child growing up here it was a whole world. While reading *World's Fair* I compared his perception of the exact same block with my own memories. I think part of the difference in our perceptions was that he was male and I was female. He seemed to have much more freedom than I ever had as a child.

Why did you attend Antioch rather than CUNY? I ask that because I know that Antioch has a reputation as a radical and alternative place to pursue a degree.

I knew someone who had gone there and I was really attracted to their work-study program; I loved to travel, and needed that sense of freedom. Actually I

went to another college for a year before I went there. Getting to Antioch was like a breath of fresh air.

A: Was it unusual to go to a place like Antioch at the time?

H: Well, I knew only one other person. By that time my parents had moved to Long Beach, Long Island, and that is maybe why I never thought of CUNY, as I was no longer a resident of the city.

But my mother's dream, when I was growing up, was that I would go to Hunter College. In fact, my husband ended up teaching at Hunter. Hunter College was, in my mother's youth, the absolute epitome of a perfect college. I think she always wanted to go there. Anyway, Antioch was a very special experience. It was a place of a lot of ideas, and while I would never claim to have been part of the radical fringe, I learned a lot about a spectrum of ideas, but I didn't learn about conservatives there. I had to go to Kansas to understand that.

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A: How do you feel about returning to New York?

H: It's exciting and it's scary. The city is very different from when I left it, and in a sad way it's different. But it's still a vibrant place and there is still enormous en-

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Distinguished Psychologist Sylvia Scribner Dies at 67

Editor's note: This obituary is reprinted from the Graduate School and University Center newsletter.

Sylvia Scribner, an internationally renowned cognitive psychologist on the faculty of the Graduate School and University Center of the City University of New York, died of cancer Saturday, July 20, at Lenox Hill Hospital in Manhattan. She was 67 years old.

Dr. Scribner gained an international reputation for her research on cultural influences on learning and development. Her interests included learning and thinking in the workplace, formal and informal education, and the influences of activities such as schooling, literacy and work on the development of intellectual skills.

One of her best known research projects examined the psychological skills involved in literacy activities among the Vai people of western Liberia who invented an original writing system. Her work was detailed in a highly acclaimed book, *The Psychology of Literacy* (1981), for which she received the Melville J. Herskovits Award from the African Studies Association in 1981. Another book, *Culture and*



Thought: A Psychological Introduction (1974), which she co-authored with Michael Cole, has become a standard college textbook in the field of cognitive psychology.

Dr. Scribner was a member of the U.S. Department of Education Delegation on Educational Research to the Peoples Republic of China. She made presentations and consulted on projects throughout the United States and in Berlin, Moscow, Helsinki, and Tokyo, among others.

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Around & About The Center

Students Threatened

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when they matriculate that we believe they can do the work," Moreland remarked. "We let them down if we let them complete nearly 60 credits with less than a 3.0 average and they have to take extra courses to catch up," Schoengood argued. Such a student "might be better off at another school, such as Columbia or NYU," argued Goldstein. "Sometimes students and departments don't match. It's not fair to let them continue if there's no way they're going to complete."

According to Goldstein, these letters were written collectively, as a "group compilation." He and his office were merely "an instrument in the process." The Administration thought it most suitable that the Registrars handle the matter. Its officials were thought to have the most experience in "dealing with students sensitively and on a regular basis," Goldstein reported. The letters were unsigned "because we did this on the computer."

Schoengood and Moreland were reluctant to comment on when asked if the letters were prompted by an audit. Schoengood commented that such an audit was always a possibility, "given current attitudes in Washington toward public education." He added that an audit might seriously jeopardize the Graduate School's Title IV funding, including College Work-Study and Student Loans and that this was a factor in the decision to send these letters. But "this is nothing new," Schoengood argued. "We have been doing this on a smaller scale, warning students about lack of progress, for seven years. What's new is that we now have the computer facilities to generate information and these letters on a wide scale." This new computer facility is based on Oracle, a new database system used by the Administration which will soon be made available to the departments. "Our capacity to generate this information is a positive thing," Moreland stated. "In the past, students often did not even get to look at their Satisfactory Progress Report before it was signed off and sent to our office. Now at least the students know there is a problem and must meet with their E.O.'s to discuss it."

Schoengood and Moreland also asserted that the Administration, in particular the new President, Dr. Frances Degen Horowitz, was open to other ways of building a "mentoring relationship." Such alternatives would include more meetings between faculty and students about exam and proposal procedures and standards, as well as courses on the research process. Moreland also said that students could appeal to his office when they felt that their E.O.'s had unfairly refused to certify their progress. "I can set up an ad hoc appeals committee, composed of an E.O. from another department, and two faculty members, who do not know the student, from the student's department. I set up such appeals committees regularly for cases of failing grades and exams, etc.." Students have in the past expressed concern about how sensitive such committees

are, however. But Moreland also said that he proposed the appointment of an independent ombudsperson for all such appeals, including sexual harassment, early in the summer. He is awaiting final "technical" approval from 80th St. Such an ombudsperson "was appointed at Columbia University last month," reported Moreland. "The Graduate Council once appointed a faculty member for the position; but this position was allowed to lapse."

Goldstein, admitted to The Advocate that there was an audit, "a short, fast one." He does not remember which agency conducted it, whether it was state or federal. This audit was applied "to schools throughout the local area, in New Jersey and upstate New York, as well as throughout CUNY, not just the Graduate Center." As a result of this audit, the agency felt that there was some "confusion" on the part of administrators as to how to apply these standards. Administrators were informed that they could not enforce satisfactory progress standards only against those receiving financial aid. While the standards themselves are a matter for the individual school to decide, the standards, "have to be applied universally, to all students," said Goldstein. Thus, to satisfy the auditors, it was not sufficient to inform a few students that their financial aid would be withdrawn if they did not achieve these standards. All students, whether they receive financial aid or no, would have to face the more universal sanction of being barred from registration. ❧

COMMENTARY:

Though the Graduate School administration's explanations and provisos will hopefully assuage students, they need to make good on their commitment to pursue means other than intimidation and the threat of suspension. Since the Federal Government leaves enforcement to each school, the Executive Council should consider revising these standards. The average duration for a social science doctoral degree at Columbia University, a fully funded private institution, is ten years. Why should the Graduate School require its students to complete their degrees in eight? Why should CUNY's grad students have to apply twice for a year's extension? With the new presidency, the Graduate School should try to live up to its rhetoric of good-will for the next six months, and certainly avoid the expulsion and forced withdrawal of approximately 33% of our student body.

Thomas Smith is a doctoral candidate in Political Science.

D.S.C.

(Doctoral Students' Council)

General Meeting

September 23

5:30 p.m. SC10

AUTOMATED SYSTEM TO SPEED BOOK CHECKOUT

by Susan Newman

During the month of August the Mina Rees Library began barcoding ID cards of Graduate School students and books circulating on the CUNY+ system. No longer will library users find that the date due tag has peeled off the book; no longer will they have to write in their name, social security number and telephone number on the book card of each item they wish to borrow. The CUNY+ system assigns a barcode to each patron and a barcode to each item in the library collection. If your Graduate Center ID card has a Graduate Center Library barcode and if the book you wish to check out also has been barcoded, the checkout process will involve only a few flicks of a light pen and a minute of your time.

The key to such speed is the presence of the barcode, so please come to the library to obtain your personal barcode on your ID card as soon as possible.

While many of the library's books have already been barcoded; many others have not. As it takes a few minutes to barcode a book and, as each book must now have a

barcode before it can be borrowed, it would be wise to bring books to the circulation desk at least 20 minutes before you plan to leave the library and at least 20 minutes before the library closes.

Using the CUNY+ online public access catalog (the computerized card catalog), you will now notice that books on reserve are so indicated on the screen. Bar-coded books which are taken out will be indicated as "in circulation". If you have a modem you could by accessing CUNY+, find out if the book have been taken out, and thus save a trip to the library to look for a book which is not on the shelf.

Additional benefits of the automated system will be: more timely recall notices for overdue items and the ability to check on which of books need to be renewed.

The staff of the Mina Rees Library hopes that you will find the new system helpful and the library easier to use. We also ask your forbearance while we barcode all our patrons and all our books. ❧

Susan Newman, here since 1986, has recently been promoted to the position of Head Librarian.

BLACK STUDENT ALLIANCE

(formerly the Minority Students Association, MSA)

FIRST MEETING
FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 13

5:30 PM

ROOM 06 OF THE STUDENT CENTER

FOOD, DRINK

NEW AND RETURNING STUDENTS WELCOME