

The Great Move Backward

By Charles Reavis Price

In many ways the move of the Graduate School community from 42nd to 34th street has been a step or two backward, not forward. We all were promised cutting edge technologies, new equipment, wonderful working spaces, and a new image. Maybe the smiling minority faces that adorn the new building's Fifth Avenue frontage are part of the attempt to develop a new image.

But what is happening inside the building is frustrating and troubling. We now work in a centralized bureaucratic environment that has taken away what little autonomy students, staff and faculty previously enjoyed. Important decisions about research needs such as utilizing special software or adding peripheral equipment has to be approved by one of our new chief bureaucrats, Vice President of Information Resources James Haggard.

The computer network, the NEW state-of-the-art network, is a big pain-in-the-

ass, when it works. Only expletives can convey the feeling when it doesn't work, when you really need it to work, such as when I and my colleagues at the Howard Samuels Center had to coordinate a national conference with phones, electronic communication, and fax machine, that did not work at all at first.

How have we moved backward when our new building and image imply great strides forward? The CUNY Graduate

School is a Ph.D. granting institution of the third largest university system in the nation. But the entire school, for the past six months, has only one fax machine that consistently works. Information Services is jokingly referred to as Disinformation Services because they are understaffed and not thoroughly familiar with the new equipment. I have been told by insiders that there is a backlog of over 2000 requests for service.

The software we have access to is extremely limited: one psychology student desperately searched me out to see if I could help him find a copy of SPSS; it's not accessible for many. If you want it you have to request it from Information Services.

But then, Information Services has done a poor job of providing information. How many people in the Graduate School community know this? Even a task like printing a letter is a disagreeable chore. Where I work we have to "add" a printer each time we want to print, even one

page! Most people know how many screens one has to pass through to add a printer

The Howard Samuels Center purchased new equipment, bought with funds procured through research grants, which is not usable now. We brought a new all-in-one fax machine but can't use it because it's analog. If you have a laptop, you can plug it in, but don't think about using it to electronically communicate. You have to use what is here at the Graduate Center. This is not progress. I thought years of planning went into this process.

As can be expected, the criticisms laid out here and in this issue of the Advocate will be met with promises that it will all soon be ironed out. The amount of human effort that has already been wasted would not be tolerated by any private sector organization. Doing what ought to be mundane and simple tasks generally require minutes of digression. For example, it takes me about ten minutes, round trip, to go the second floor to check for faxes. And this is when there is little traffic. On some days I have to

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Message From the Editor

By Mark Petras

Welcome to a "special" issue of the Advocate. In this issue, nearly every article is based around a central theme. The theme is: there are several specific, frustrating problems here at the new GSUC building, and something should be done to fix them. Articles in this issue will touch upon problems with our school's computers, printers, fax machines, financial aid, housing, etc. I hope you enjoy this issue.

A Call To Action!

By Jocelyn Boryczka

In 1962, Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) convened in Port Huron and wrote a statement that galvanized the New Left. The Port Huron Statement reflected, among other things, student concerns about racial tensions and corporate liberalism. They thought such concerns could be addressed by rejuvenating participatory democracy and empowering the people. Students across the country read their "Call to Action" and mobilized a powerful student movement.

Today, students at the Graduate Center (GC) and the City University of New York (CUNY) share similar concerns. Racial tensions recently surfaced when the CUNY Board of Trustees Chairman Herman Badillo made disparaging, anti-Latino remarks directed at new immigrants from the Dominican Republic and Mexico. And, CUNY is currently phasing out remedial education at its senior colleges, a policy directly limiting equal educational opportunities for minority students. On the fiscal side, the GC and CUNY remain under strict budget constraints despite the economic prosperity and budget surpluses in New York. For these reasons and the others specified in this Advocate issue, this is an opportune time for a CALL TO ACTION to demand change here at the GC, CUNY, and beyond.

This special edition of The Advocate covers various, diverse student grievances. Here, I focus on how we can begin transforming the Graduate

Center into a more democratic institution where the administration respects and listens to student voices. More broadly, I want to consider a strategy for increasing student participation in a coordinated, on-going effort to take action for change on three levels: the Graduate Center, CUNY, and New York City.

I suggest three steps toward coordinating a GC student-based CALL TO ACTION:

Step One: Communication

To address the grievances put forth in this issue, an open door meeting between GC students, faculty, and administrators should be held as soon as possible in order to address these grievances. This meeting will allow others to present further problems, open the door of communication between students, faculty, and administrators, and facilitate a response to these grievances by the GC Administration. Students may also use this meeting as a springboard for organizing further action.

Step Two: Coordination

GC students organize a coordinated group to address issues at the GC, to fight the attack on the CUNY system, and to protest various New York City policies. Over the last few years, student groups and individuals from the CUNY campuses and the GC, including Doctoral Students' Council representa-

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Contra "Jane Doe" I

By Stuart Liebman,
Film Studies Certificate Program

My life has not been quite the same since December 7, 1999. Late in the afternoon that day, an article about me was published in *The Advocate*. The piece—two whole pages long—described itself as an "Editorial," although, as I shall suggest below, it was something quite different. The writer, who used the pseudonym "Jane Doe," concluded that I was a "certified racist." Jane Doe based "her" outrageous and utterly false allegation on what purported to be a very detailed account of a trial in which I and two colleagues from the former Communication Arts and Sciences Department at Queens College had been accused of discriminating against an African American student who had failed his first comprehensive exams in the Queens College Media Studies master's program in 1993.

The first thing your readers must know is that Jane Doe's presentation of the facts of the case is egregiously flawed, and that it is flawed for a simple reason. Despite the labored piety of her conclusion in which "she" expressed a desire to begin "a conversation about our university, looking into whom it appoints to represent itself in the role of Department Chair and Program Coordinator," Jane Doe really wished to recklessly and maliciously defame me and my colleagues Helen Cairns and Jonathan Buchsbaum who, collectively, have served this university with distinction for more than seventy five years. We have been innovators and facilitators in our curricula which, thanks to our efforts, now include courses in which the politics and ethics of the representation of many different minorities and national communities are analyzed. We have taught and assisted dozens of minority students, many of whom volunteered to speak on our behalf at the trial. In fact, prior to the filing of this very problematic lawsuit, our reputations have never been tarnished by even a hint of discrimination

of any kind, let alone of racism.

But Jane Doe obviously did not consider these facts at all; nor did she pause to consider the irreparable harm to our standing and the personal pain she would inflict by making her extraordinary charge. She simply proceeded to play fast and loose (and often sloppily) with the facts. She concocted her wild allegations by contriving quotations, quoting out of context, ignoring all evidence that contradicted her fantasy of what took place, falsely imputing thoughts and motives to a jury without the slightest documentary basis, and failing to cite specific sources (the old McCarthy trick), among other well-worn techniques of the semi-professional demagogue. And, of course, Jane Doe did all this without making the slightest effort to speak to any of those—with the possible exception of the plaintiff or his attorney—who had first-hand knowledge of the case.

As I hope should be clear by now, I consider Jane Doe's accusations not only to be utterly inaccurate, they are defamatory. Mark Petras has now seen the trial transcripts, the depositions and other court documents. It is my understanding that in this issue he will list many of the errors of fact, both large and small, that appear in the article and render it utterly unreliable and self-contradictory. She obviously did not think it important at all to investigate the case thoroughly and fairly; rather she resorted to the sorts of practices noted above which we, both established and emerging scholars, know to be illegitimate and to guard against. Even a comprehensive list, however, could not convey how systematically Jane Doe worked to obscure the facts of the case in order to contrive the most wild-eyed and biased account leading (that is: misleading) to her unfounded and reprehensible conclusion. To demonstrate the truth of what I have just claimed would require time and space which I do not now have, and I leave it to the judgment of this paper's readers to decide for themselves whether such a shockingly flawed work of scholarship would (and certainly: should) ever pass muster with thoughtful, fair-minded individuals. In my opinion, I repeat, her charges cross the line from legitimate editorializing into the vicious and yet somehow simultaneously sad realm of libel.

I have not chosen the recourse of legal action. I preferred somehow to transform my terrible personal experience into something productive and even positive rather than destructive of people's lives, time and money. In that spirit, through the offices of the Ombudsperson Rolf Meyersohn, I have met with the two principal editors of the paper and representatives of the Doctoral Student Council and its Media Board. I am pleased to note that a public retraction has been issued in their name. At least three of them have published or conveyed to me personally sincere apologies and I have happily accepted them. To date, only Mark Petras has been grudging in his response. From long discussions with him I gather that he believes he is defending First Amendment rights. He has stated that he does not wish to censor opinions

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Contra "Jane Doe" II

By Jonathan Buchsbaum,
Associate Professor
Graduate Center/Queens College

I am writing in response to the Jane Doe "editorial" which appeared in the Nov/Dec. issue of *The Advocate*. My name is Jonathan Buchsbaum. I am currently the Graduate Advisor to the Master's Program in Media Studies at Queens College, where I have taught for over twenty years, and I am also a member of the Personnel and Budget Committee in the Media Studies Department. In these two capacities, I have extensive first hand knowledge of the material presented in such a patently inaccurate, distorted, and yes, malicious manner by Jane Doe.

I would like to reassure your readers of the groundlessness of one of Jane Doe's central contentions. Jane Doe wrote that "Evidence shows that this system of grading is not blind and that racial favoritism occurred to the detriment of Derek Tolbert." No evidence presented at trial, let alone in the "editorial," supports this charge. Nor is it true that "The jury deemed that Mr. Tolbert's exam was, in fact, not graded anonymously." Here, as in many other parts of the "editorial," Jane Doe refers to an opinion of the jury. But to my knowledge the jury made no statement at all apart from the award of damages. At no time did the jury, or the judge, make any claims about the grading process or racism. Jane Doe presumed to read the thoughts of the jury and the "court" without the honesty of identifying those speculations as her own inventions. Rather, she concocted those attributions with the clear intent to mislead the reader and smear Professor Liebman.

Here are the relevant facts. The evaluation procedure for the comprehensive exams is designed specifically to guarantee anonymity of grading from beginning to end. All students receive sample questions prior to the exam day in order to help them prepare (the type and number of questions has changed since 1993, but the procedure remains the same).

On the day of the exams, students answer four questions during the scheduled period of six hours. The departmental secretary, following standard procedures, composes a grid for all questions of all students, with two professors assigned to grade each question. The assignments are distributed according to the expertise of the faculty members. The grid also indicates what third teacher should grade each exam question in the event that the first two teachers assign different grades, all of which are pass or fail.

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Editor: Mark Petras
Managing Editor: Mark Noonan
Layout Editor: Miriam Greenberg

Contributors: Jocelyn Boryczka, Jonathan Buchsbaum, Funky Rubber Chicken, Stuart Liebman, Alan Moore, Mark Noonan, Mark Petras, Roberta Piker, Charles Reavis Price, Michelle Ronda, Kim Spanjol, & The Media Board

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