January 12, 2006

DGR copy

G-4

Louise Pagé-Valin
Associate Vice-President
Human Resources Services
University of Ottawa
Tabaret Hall
INTRA

Dear Mrs. Pagé-Valin:

Notice of grievance: Use of the S/NS grading system

I hereby file a notice of grievance regarding the recent employer's interference in my right to use the S/NS (satisfactory/non-satisfactory) student evaluation system in courses assigned to me, PHY 1702 W2006 in particular.

I interpret paragraph 21.1.2(c) of the Collective Agreement to imply that a professor has the right to choose among Senate-approved marking scales, in "evaluat[ing] students' performance objectively [and] in a manner appropriate to the course [and] consistent with relevant academic standards".

Evaluation methods are an integral part of any pedagogical method and directly impact student motivation and student strategy in performing assigned tasks. It is only logical that a professor be entitled to some choice in marking systems in exercising her *right* to "adopt reasonable means to foster and maintain a productive and orderly learning environment in the courses assigned to her" (21.1.2(a)). Otherwise, paragraph 21.1.2(c) would state that the marking scheme must be that required by the particular course and would not allow a choice.

The S/NS option is a Senate-approved grading system and no Senate-approved regulation states that the S/NS system *must* be limited to certain types of courses, nor does any Senate-approved regulation explicitly state that the *default* marking scheme *must* be the alphanumeric (F to A+) system. In addition, the official university web site has S and NS listed, on equal status with other entries, in a table entitled "The following is the grading scale for all courses.", along with the F to A+, ABS, etc., options (e.g.): www.uottawa.ca/academic/info/regist/crs/scienEN/SCIEN_6.htm

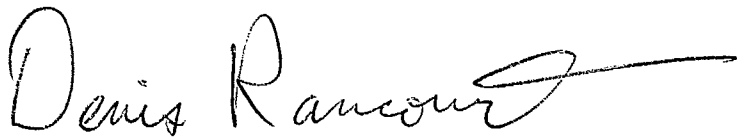
Also, much research in the pedagogic literature has shown the benefits of the S/NS system, applied as part of a coherent pedagogical method, compared to the more common alphanumeric system (e.g., Kohn, 1993; and references therein). Further evidence that both the use of the S/NS system and professors' attempts to innovate in their pedagogical methods are consistent with "relevant academic standards" (21.1.2) can be found in our institution's Vision 2010 document: "To focus on learning that is driven by innovation and excellence [... we will] [s]upport and recognise initiatives designed to implement a range of new and diversified strategies for *learning and evaluation*" (my emphasis).

In contrast to this, the Dean of Science has stated his view (memo from the Dean to all Faculty of Science staff, dated December 2, 2005, attached) that all courses in the faculty must 'by default' use the alphanumeric marking system (F to A+) and that other approved systems of student evaluation, such as S/NS, cannot be used except by special permission which would involve the lengthy process of Senate-approval to change the official course description so as to specify the marking system.

The Dean has also forbidden me in writing (his letter dated December 19, 2005; his e-mail dated December 22, 2005) of using the S/NS system in PHY 1702 W2006, despite my many explanations specific to PHY 1702 and my e-mail open letter dated December 8, 2005. Given the employer's ruling on PHY 1702 W2006, I have indicated to the Dean that I will comply (under constraint of article 13.2.10) and that I would file this grievance to clarify the issue.

I ask that the employer recognise a professor's right to use the S/NS grading method in any case where it can be reasonably argued that this would be of benefit to the students. I ask that a general memo from the employer be sent to all professors to inform professors of this position (and that a parallel memo also be sent by the APUO). I ask that the Dean of Science send a memo rescinding his memo of December 2, 2005.

Sincerely,



Denis Rancourt
(Professor)
Department of Physics

References:

Vision 2010 document:
http://www.uottawa.ca/vision2010/english/documents/strategic_plan.pdf

Kohn, A. (1993) "Punished by Rewards", Houghton press, pp.430.

Attached documents:
Dean's memo dated December 2, 2005.
Rancourt's open letter dated December 8, 2005.
Dean's letter dated December 19, 2005.
Dean's e-mail dated December 22, 2005.
Grading scale table from official University web site.

cc: APUO, all University of Ottawa professors [by e-mail, excluding attachments].

uOttawa

Université d'Ottawa
Faculté des sciences
Cabinet du doyen

University of Ottawa
Faculty of Science
Office of the Dean

DESTINATAIRE / TO: Tous les professeurs à temps plein et à temps partiel de la Faculté des sciences/ All Full Time and Part-time Professors of the Faculty of Science

EXPÉDITEUR / FROM : Christian Detellier, Doyen /Dean

DATE : 2005-12-02

Cc : François Chapleau, Vice-recteur associé (Gestion des effectifs scolaires et registraire/ Associate Vice President, Strategic Enrollment Management and Registrar
Robert Major, Vice-recteur (études)/Vice President (Academics)
Gary Slater, Doyen/Dean, FÉSP/FGPS

RE : Notation des cours / Grading Scale

Je tiens à vous rappeler que, par défaut, tous les cours offerts par la Faculté des sciences au niveau du premier cycle doivent être soumis à l'échelle de notation alphanumérique de l'Université d'Ottawa (F - A+; 0 - 10). Pour qu'une autre notation soit utilisée (P/F ou S/NS), elle doit avoir été spécifiquement indiquée dans la description du cours telle qu'elle a été approuvée par le Conseil des études de premier cycle, et par le Sénat de l'Université. Tout changement au système de notation doit donc être proposé au CEPC après examen par le Comité du curriculum de la Faculté et approbation par le Conseil de Faculté. Un professeur ne peut pas, unilatéralement, décider d'un autre système de notation que celui approuvé officiellement par le Sénat universitaire.

Il en va de même pour les cours des niveaux de 2ème et 3ème cycles, sachant que les notes données pour les examens de synthèse, les thèses, les travaux de recherche et les stages sont habituellement satisfaisant (S) ou non satisfaisant (NS). Toute autre notation que la notation alphanumérique pour un autre type de cours doit être approuvée par la Faculté des études supérieures et postdoctorales. À nouveau, ici aussi, un professeur ne peut pas, unilatéralement, décider d'un autre système de notation que celui approuvé officiellement par la FESP et par le Sénat universitaire.

I would like to remind you that, by default, all undergraduate program courses offered by the Faculty of Science have to be subject to the alphanumerical grading scale of the University of Ottawa (F – A+; 0-10). To use another grading scale (P/F or S/NS), it ought to have been specifically indicated in the course description as approved by the Council on Undergraduate Studies (CUS), and by the Senate of the University of Ottawa. All changes to the grading scale system have to be proposed to the CUS after it has been examined by the Faculty Curriculum Committee and be approved by the Faculty Council. A professor cannot, unilaterally, decide to use another grading scale system than the one officially approved by the University Senate.

The same applies for the graduate programs, knowing that the marks given for the comprehensive exams, thesis, research papers and fellowships are usually satisfactory (S) or not satisfactory (NS). Any grading scale other than the alphanumerical grading scale for another type of course has to be approved by the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies. Here again, a professor cannot, unilaterally, decide of another grading scale system than the one officially approved by the FGPS and by the University Senate.

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December 8, 2005

TO: All professors (sorry for some double posting)
FROM: Professor Denis Rancourt.

An open letter on academic freedom in the Faculty of Science at the University of Ottawa

As explicitly spelled out in most collective agreements between universities and their academic staff, 'academic freedom' implies, among other things, that a professor is entitled to choose the methods of teaching and of student evaluation, in delivering a course in a manner consistent with the approved course description, as long as these methods are consistent with professional and ethical standards.

These rights are spelled out in the collective agreement between the University of Ottawa and its professors (link below). Administrative rules are not allowed to supersede any position clearly expressed in the collective agreement (39.1.3(a)). That is the whole purpose of the collective agreement: To delimit the rights and responsibilities of both parties; employer and employees.

As with any right, this does not mean that all professors must comply with what the majority of professors do, just as minority rights cannot be removed by a majority vote in a democracy. That is why we have independent judiciaries and collective agreements. Here, the only criterion is consistency with professional standards. In other words: Can it be reasonably argued that the choice of methods will benefit the students?

Recently (memo from the Dean to all Faculty of Science staff, dated December 2, 2005, attached), the Dean of Science has stated his view that all courses in the faculty must 'by default' use the alphanumeric marking system (F to A+) and that other approved systems of student evaluation such as pass/fail (P/F) and satisfactory/non-satisfactory (S/NS) cannot be used except by special permission which would involve the lengthy process of approval to change the official course description so as to specify the marking system in a new course description. In this process, typically six committees must separately approve the change. The Dean thereby states that a professor does not have the right to choose the marking system that the professor judges would be most beneficial, or the right to change from year to year based on her better judgement. This 'by default' interpretation proposed by the Dean is nowhere to be found in any Senate approved regulation. If it was, it would be invalid as it would be in contradiction to the letter of the collective agreement (21.1.2(c)).

This issue has not come out of the blue. I have recently used the S/NS system in both a graduate course and an undergraduate course in this fall 2005 term. Both courses were much appreciated by the students. There were direct and official challenges to my using the S/NS method, from both the Dean of Science and the Dean of Graduate Studies. In the case of the graduate course, despite a course description, unanimously approved by Departmental Council, that stated that the S/NS system would be used. Both deans

claimed that I was required to obtain 'pre-approval' from the respective faculties before using the S/NS method. Neither dean produced the text of any rule that states this, despite my official requests for such texts. Now, it appears, both deans (the Dean of Graduate Studies is in cc to the Dean of Science's memo which explicitly claims application to graduate courses) claim that even 'pre-approval' by the relevant dean is not enough: It is claimed that the use of S/NS must be stated in the Senate approved course description. The Dean's December 2 memo also comes only days after my November 29 e-mail to my Chair where I explore and describe the pedagogical advantages of the S/NS method for my winter 2006 first year physics course.

The Dean of Science's position on the use of the S/NS system is contrary to the letter of our collective agreement and is contrary to the principle of academic freedom. It is a reactionary position that flies in the face of the University of Ottawa's mission, as stated in its recent Vision 2010 document (link below):

"To focus on learning that is driven by innovation and excellence [... we will] [s]upport and recognise initiatives designed to implement a range of new and diversified strategies for learning and evaluation".

The contrast between the Dean's apparent attempt to stifle pedagogical development and the official encouragement to implement improvements in methods is striking.

The Dean of Science's position also flies in the face of much pedagogical research (in the sciences in particular) that has shown the benefits of the S/NS system (see below). The Dean's persistent position projects a retrograde image of the university. This potential harm can best be combated by critical discussion and transparency, which is the spirit of the present open letter.

For those of you who were not in my fall 2005 classes and who cannot easily foresee the possible relative benefits of the S/NS method over the more common alphanumeric method, please allow me to offer the following explanations. Keep in mind that I am not arguing that all courses should use the S/NS system, only that it is healthy to allow and encourage diversity and experimentation, especially in the Faculty of Science.

Dozens of detailed comparative studies (e.g., those reviewed by Kohn, 1993) have shown that the alphanumeric motivation and evaluation system is incompatible with quality learning. This is why many educators have adopted the S/NS system and why S/NS methods are promoted by many experts. These studies show that, for quality learning that has lasting value, motivation must be intrinsic, not extrinsic. Significant learning advantages are achieved by dropping the carrot and stick approach. (Of course there are various homework and tests and exams but each one is S/NS and any NS results can be turned into satisfactory results.)

In dropping the reward and punishment system, the challenge then becomes: How does one best catalyze intrinsic motivation so that each student naturally wants to go as far as possible? Here again researchers have provided strong answers, backed by much

empirical data (e.g., Kohn, 1993; Roth and Barton, 2004; Roth and Désautels, 2002). The answer is: (1) provide interesting and relevant (to the student) content, links, and examples, (2) allow the students to develop at their own pace and to participate in determining the content, and (3) relate the content to the broader world, to important societal questions. Under such circumstances, students are self-motivated and the learning is deeply experienced. Much of this motivation comes from group interactions, not just individual work. This approach works and it is not possible to implement without dropping mark-based extrinsic motivation. Professors wishing to experiment with such learning methods must therefore have the freedom to chose an appropriate student evaluation tool.

This discussion about the S/NS system is not just a tempest in a teapot. It is at the heart of the education versus certification debate. Coercion prepares obedient employees whereas education prepares independent-thinking and responsible citizens. No one can deny that our highly competitive certification programs are increasingly driving out the space for independent thought and development, under market pressures in a corporate controlled economy. Our student newspapers (The Fulcrum and La Rotonde) have recently been filled with examples and students are increasingly aware of this problem. University professors need to protect and use their hard won freedoms in order to create space for learning within one of the last publicly funded institutions not yet completely privatized.

Denis Rancourt
(Professor)

(Your comments and suggestions would be most welcome.)

REFERENCES

Kohn, A. (1993) "Punished by Rewards", Houghton press, pp.430.

Roth, W.-M. and Barton, A.C. (2004) "Rethinking Scientific Literacy", RoutledgeFalmer, pp.227.

Roth, W.-M. and Désautels, J. (eds.) (2002) "Science Education as/for Sociopolitical Action", Peter Lang, pp.323.

LINKS:

University of Ottawa APUO Collective Agreement:
http://www.uottawa.ca/services/hr/apuo/contents.pdf

Vision 2010 document:
http://www.uottawa.ca/vision2010/english/documents/strategic_plan.pdf

ATTACHED: Dean's December 2 memo, PDF file.

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Université d'Ottawa
Faculté des sciences
Cabinet du doyen

University of Ottawa
Faculty of Science
Office of the Dean

Le 19 décembre 2005

Professeur D. Rancourt
Département de physique
INTRA

20 DEC. 2005

M. Rancourt,

Je vous remercie pour votre lettre datée du 12 décembre en réponse à ma lettre datée du 5 décembre demandant des précisions sur la façon dont vous allez enseigner le cours PHY 1702 à l'hiver 2006. Je suis heureux de savoir que vous allez couvrir la matière du cours PHY 1702 selon la description du cours approuvée par le Sénat universitaire (paragraphe 4 de votre lettre), et je me satisfais de votre réponse, sans avoir le besoin de voir les documents de référence.

Cependant, je suis dans l'obligation de vous rappeler que vous devez utiliser l'échelle de notation alphanumérique telle que décrite dans l'annuaire. Je vous réfère à la note de service que j'ai envoyée aux professeurs de la Faculté le 2 décembre dernier, et que je joins à cette lettre, pour rappel. Il s'agit d'un règlement fondamental du Sénat que je n'ai pas l'autorité de modifier. Seul le Sénat pourrait le faire, sur recommandation des comités pertinents.

Veuillez recevoir, M. Rancourt, l'expression de mes sentiments les plus distingués.

Christian Detellier
Doyen
Faculté des sciences

c.c: Louise Pagé-Valin, vice-recteure associée, Ressources humaines
Richard Hodgson , Directeur, Département de physique

p.j: - note de service du 2 décembre
- procès-verbal de la septième réunion de l'année 1974-75 du Sénat
- règlements sur les cours et le système de notes

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Subject: 1702
From: "Christian Detellier" <deansci@uottawa.ca>
Date: Thu, 22 Dec 2005 11:04:38 -0500
To: "'Denis Rancourt'" <dgr@physics.uottawa.ca>
CC: "'Louise Pagé-Valin'" <lpvalin@uottawa.ca>

Denis,
Je viens de laisser un message sur ton répondeur (au 6774). Je dois recevoir
la réponse à ma question d'hier durant notre conversation téléphonique, et à
ma lettre datée du 19 décembre, portant sur la méthode de notation du cours
1702, au plus tard au début de l'après-midi, soit 14hrs. Si je n'avais pas
reçu l'assurance que la notation sera alphanumérique, je devrai livrer sans
plus tarder ma lettre portant sur les suites de l'article 39.4.
Christian

http://www.uottawa.ca/academic/info/regist/crs/scienEN/SCIEN_6.htm

c) UNIVERSITY OF OTTAWA GRADING SCALE

The following is the grading scale for all courses.

Letter Grade	Numerical Value	Definition
A+	10	Exceptional
A	9	
A-	8	Excellent
B+	7	very good
B	6	
C+	5	Good
C	4	
D+	3	Passable
D	2	
E	1	failure[1]
F	0	Failure
ABS	0	Absent
INC	0	Incomplete
P	-	Pass
S	-	Satisfactory
NS	-	not satisfactory
*	-	excluded from the average

[1] Failure with supplemental for 1000-level courses of the faculties of Science and Engineering.

A+: 90-100; A: 85-89; A-: 80-84; B+: 75-79; B: 70-74; C+: 66-69; C: 60-65; D+: 55-59; D: 50-54; E: 40-49; F: 0-39.

Failure

1. Students who do not obtain the minimum grade in a compulsory course taken for the first time must repeat the course successfully. Otherwise, they must withdraw from the program or faculty in which they are registered.

2. In the case of an elective, students may repeat the failed course or substitute another elective which meets the requirements of their program.