

GSE&IS Discussion

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A few questions to prompt discussion? (redux)



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Posted: Wed Mar 10, 2004 7:25 am Post subject: A few questions to prompt discussion? (redux)



Since it appears that this GSE&IS Discussion Forum does not contain much more than postings (including advertisements, press releases, and www. links), with an infrequent response (and rarely a discussion of any sort), perhaps the postings themselves are such that they're not meant to elicit discussion (in which case "discussion forum" is something of a misnomer). Nonetheless, in an effort to test these waters for discussion, I'll approach the topic a bit less obliquely than before.

I had thought that the topic "Silence is Golden" might put someone simply to ask if it's the case that the GSE&IS participates in the termination of one of its grad students while one of its Emeritus faculty states that he will argue that this student has been "made to pay with [his] academic career for department error (...), professor and university disorganisation (...), carelessness by whoever (...) issues the dismissal notice (for their failure to verify the situation)." Or perhaps a reader might have been curious enough to ask to have the quoted parenthetical ellipses filled in, as these likely contain relevant information? After all, this is a forum specifically for GSE&IS students...and faculty (though if we take to heart the words of historian David F. Noble quoted in the prior posting, faculty are already in the habit of exercising silence as the "well-known" golden rule, at least when it comes to a truly controversial issue).

As a possible launching point for discussion, we might consider the intense interest in the UC student admissions procedures shown this past autumn by students already admitted to UCLA, though it was later pointed out that those "questionable" student admissions actually fell within the margin of error for the admission procedure statistics. From this show of such great concern for the admission procedures at UCLA, it stands to reason that UCLA students would be all the more interested in UCLA's student termination procedures, given that once they've cleared the admissions hurdles and are in, these students necessarily have a greater stake in how UCLA goes about kicking them back out.

Here, however, it must be noted that as with any other institution, small or large, UCLA's administrative staff makes inevitable human errors. In fact, as surely as UCLA

cannot state that its operations are totally free of human error, we might well ask if these errors are being investigated and satisfactorily resolved by the university. And given that UCLA's business is students, handling as it does some 40, 000, its errors inevitably involve students' academic careers. Yet it presently appears that students look in vain for an open admission of these errors and a clear view into how these errors have been handled by the university. Accordingly, should any UCLA students want to protect themselves and each other from UCLA's inevitable errors, all UCLA students ought to be asking for information on these errors. In other words, since it seems apparent that UCLA administrators are not asking the Daily Bruin to notify UCLA students about administrative errors involving students' academic careers, present students ought to be actively seeking out those branded ex-students by the university in an effort to display these inevitable errors. For it is only by openly examining an error that this error is rendered less likely in the future.

As the intense interest in UC admissions procedures shown by UCLA students (and the general public) was generated initially by the Los Angeles Times reporting on actual instances of student admissions to the UC campuses, so it is that interest in UCLA student termination procedures can be generated by UCLA students' retrieving and/or providing information on actual instances of student terminations from UCLA. Below, and in future postings, I provide information on my own termination from UCLA's GSE&IS. My posting this information is simply an important first step taken to ensure that UCLA students know not only how their university operates, but also how others within the university react to its operations. I'll start by posting what I think is a particularly noteworthy quote from UCLA faculty.

Following my termination from GSE&IS, both my advisor and my Division Head wrote a letter to the UCLA Ombudsman and cc'ed it to the Education Department Dean, the Education Department Chair, and another administrator in the Education Department. They wrote, in part:

"In August, Mr. Wilde received a letter from GSEIS's Committee on Graduate Degrees, Admissions and Standards (CAGDAS) dismissing him from the program. While a copy of this letter was sent to his department head, no copy was sent to his advisor. More importantly, neither of us had been asked for any background information on Mr. Wilde's case. Nor apparently was much effort taken to verify the apparent facts of Mr. Wilde's academic record. Incompletes that had been cleared were listed as Fs and no enquiries about their real status or about the student's general progress were made."

There are of course more than a few ways to approach an after-the-fact dismissal, but in taking these faculty members' words at face value, we then might reasonably ask if this same letter would have been generated with the Chancellor's son's name replacing my own...or even a UCLA faculty member's child's name replacing mine. Or, we might reasonably ask whether this quote would find its way into a letter concerning a faculty member who had been summarily terminated from his/her academic career. Of course these would be entirely rhetorical questions, as a university simply cannot even hope to remain a university if the above quote goes into letters that follow a student or faculty dismissal. And if "no enquiries" are made by those deciding to terminate a student's academic career, we rightly ask what it is that the termination decision is based upon.

We'll turn to that question and others in the next posting.

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