

GSE&IS Discussion

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Fact checking cannot be expected

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Author

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twilde
Guest

Posted: Tue Mar 09, 2004 2:40 am Post subject: Fact checking cannot be expected

While it appears that the mode taken in this "Discussion Forum" is simply to pile it on faster and deeper (where before and after my last posting, "it" consists somewhat of thinly veiled self-promotion and links to the same), I'll attempt to slow this one-man Juggernaut leading the heady work of liberation by taking up the question raised at the end of my last posting. After all, at least as it is put to students in the GSE&IS, this liberating work at hand is predicated on these students' giving themselves some time to consider those more mundane, work-a-day operations at UCLA that are being effectively clouded over by these faculty-powered rolling theoretical and rhetorical fronts.

As I noted at the end of the last posting, a mundane question that students rightly ask is: What is it that their termination is based upon? This question is raised when, following a student's termination for an insufficient GPA, two UCLA faculty members write:

"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."

Of course, we needn't consider whether UCLA faculty members make this statement after the termination of the Chancellor's university-going child (or even their own), as clearly this statement would not come up even before the termination of the Chancellor's (or any other faculty member's) child. Certainly, enquiries are made about the real status of the Chancellor's son/daughter's grades and about this student's general progress (and of course the same is done in the case of a UCLA faculty member's son/daughter). Indeed, let us imagine the Chancellor's son or daughter coming home (permanently) from UCLA with this faculty-written statement in hand; clearly, we do so simply to humor ourselves heartily at the absurdity of this scenario, either because we know that if it did happen, the Chancellor's own university would be the laughing stock of the nation or, more likely, that it would never happen in the first place.

However, in order to make it entirely clear and quite well-understood that the above faculty statement carries weight (for those appreciative of fact-checking enquiries made before a student is terminated), an Assistant Dean of the Graduate Division confidently confirmed it. That is, after I was terminated for an insufficient GPA, and after my advisor and my department head wrote a letter containing the above statement (again, a letter cc'ed to the Dean, the Chair, and another administrator in GSE&IS), I telephoned this Assistant Dean and asked her whether the Graduate Division verifies the information on which it bases a student termination decision. She replied, "We cannot be expected to do that." In short, this Assistant Dean, speaking as a UCLA representative and policy spokesperson for the UCLA Graduate Division, stated flatly that students (and apparently faculty) cannot expect UCLA to do any fact checking before it makes a decision to terminate a student's academic career.

Now here, any UCLA student is inclined to consider what would likely happen if s/he parroted this Assistant Dean's statement in response to a similar question posed by her/his faculty thesis committee when examining a thesis/research paper. Again, while it might indeed be quite humorous for a student to say to her/his faculty committee, "I cannot be expected to check the accuracy and/or veracity of the facts and information presented in my paper," the humor would be quite lost on the faculty and the entire matter would necessarily end there.

Humor aside, the real and obvious question to be addressed by UCLA students and faculty (as well as by the entire UCLA community) in light of this Assistant Dean's pronouncement follows: Is it in fact the case that UCLA cannot be expected to verify the information on which it bases its decisions to terminate UCLA students? Or is it perhaps the case that only UCLA's Graduate Division cannot be expected to verify the information on which it bases its decisions to terminate UCLA graduate students? To be sure, by taking the Assistant Dean's response to my question and removing its passive voice, UCLA students and faculty rightly put this question to the university:

Can we, as students and faculty of UCLA, expect this university and/or its Graduate Division to verify the information it uses to end its students' academic careers?

It is of course clear that UCLA faculty and students don't ask this question and don't demand an answer to this question primarily in the interest of (or for the sake of) the student whose academic career was terminated based on information that had not first been verified by the Graduate Division. UCLA faculty and students ask this question and demand an answer to it because they well know that fact-checking is central to the work of the university, and that without this fundamental fact-checking operation in place, UCLA is actively undermining the legitimacy and credibility of their own research work and scholarship. And more immediately, they also ask this question and demand its answer because they want to protect their own academic careers from being terminated due to "department error," "professor and university disorganisation," and "carelessness by whoever...issues the dismissal notice (for their failure to verify the situation)." Indeed, once they know that they are being held responsible—and will "be made to pay with" their academic careers—for UCLA's own errors, disorganisation, and carelessness, UCLA students and faculty members can better guard against their terminations. And they will then know that if they fail to catch the errors of UCLA, these UCLA students and faculty must suffer the stiffest consequences that UCLA has to offer them: termination.

To conclude for the moment, it might also be important for the purposes of a "GSE&IS Discussion Forum" to consider actual UCLA faculty discussion on the matter of my termination. That interesting discussion will be found in the next posting.

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