

Published on the web by K. Westhues, 2007, as part of the self-study and documents on “the Westhues case,” 1993-1998. for the context, paste the following URL into your browser:
<http://arts.uwaterloo.ca/~kwesthue/self-study.htm> The name of the student has been deleted.

8 March 1993

Professor Heather MacDougall
Associate Dean for Graduate Affairs
Faculty of Arts

Dear Heather:

At your request, my doctoral supervisee, [student], and I went to a meeting this afternoon in Pat Rowe's office, to which you had also invited Ron Lambert and John Goyder, chair and graduate officer in my department. The purpose, so I assumed, was to try to resolve in an informal, dialogic way the longstanding and deeply felt dispute between [student] and me on the one hand, Ron and John on the other, with respect to the handling of [student's] examination in research methods.

As the one who called that meeting, you had the responsibility of making the environment safe for everyone present, of ensuring that the various points of view all had a chance to be heard, of insisting that each side show respect for the other, no matter how serious the disagreement, and of attempting to ferret out points of agreement around which some kind of solution might be built.

You did not meet your responsibility. You were not in control of the meeting. At the start, you allowed Ron and John to pounce on [student]; you let Pat take some swipes at him, too. Your hostility toward me was hard to miss. Later you allowed Ron and John to berate both [student] and me in loud and angry voices, doing nothing but slump in your chair. Even when Ron screamed about how destructive a force in our department I am, and when John told [student] to get a psychiatric assessment and called me [student's] messenger boy, you did not intervene. In effect, you set [student] and me up for a kind of degradation ceremony. And even though you had scheduled the meeting to run from 2:00 until 3:30, you let it continue for a further forty minutes, until [student] said he had to leave to drive to Toronto.

No matter how unfounded you may think [student's] grievance is, no matter how much you may disapprove of my supporting him, it was cruel and hurtful to call a meeting at which Ron and John would be allowed to heap abuse on us, while you and Pat, as their superiors in the university bureaucracy, watched approvingly. I am sending a copy of this letter to Brian Hendley, as Dean of Arts, since he appointed you to your position. I hope that the two of you will meet for a frank conversation about this incident, and that if, on reflection, you are not convinced that you can enforce rules of basic decency in your work as associate dean, you will step aside and let somebody else give it a try.

Sincerely yours,

K. Westhues
Professor

copy: Professor Brian Hendley, Dean of Arts