

MEMORAND

To: Professor Ron Lambert, Chair, Dep

cc: Professor Adie Nelson, Department of Sociology
Professor Ken Westhues, Department of Sociology

From: The undersigned

Date: 5 January 1993

Professor A. Nelson has passed on her memorandum to you of 24 November, Professor K. Westhues' communication to her of 13 December, and her letter to you of 16 December. As you will know, Nelson's memorandum describes behaviours of abuse and intimidation Westhues directed toward her and indicates how he tried to interfere with her performing her academic duties before and after the recent comprehensive examination in sociological methods in the sociology department. Westhues' letter to Nelson acknowledges the abusive and interfering behaviours, attempts to excuse them in terms of Nelson's failings, and directs still further abuse at Nelson.

We must record with you our abhorrence of Westhues' actions, and our great embarrassment at these behaviours having occurred in our department. Comparisons of these behaviours with the university's codes for proper conduct among colleagues and for ethical behaviour will confirm that they involve serious misconduct. There can be no proper justifications for these behaviours. Steps must be taken to try to ensure that such offenses are not again practised in the department by Westhues or anyone else who might emulate this behaviour.

We are appalled to see that Westhues' letter clearly shows that, with some time for reflection since the last two episodes of misconduct, he does not see his behaviours as particularly serious and that he continues to abuse Nelson. Westhues' behaviours are exceedingly offensive breaches of the university's norms directed at making this an environment where faculty can exercise their duties, including academic judgments, without interference, intimidation, and abuse from other faculty.

It is Westhues' position in his letter that a proper measure of his colleague's scholarly merit, and proper cause for interference with her work, is her not agreeing with him and not working in opposition to established departmental procedures for the graduate program. This approach must be shown to have no support at all within the department. If we give even tacit support to this view, it will put us all at odds with the codes of proper behaviour we have just mentioned.

Moreover, if we stand by silently – without acting – in the face of the grievous abuses of Nelson we become part of the problem of this misconduct. We must disassociate ourselves from Westhues' behaviour in the clearest possible way, and propose some action.

We know that Nelson will likely take actions of her own in these matters. Beyond this, though, we urge you, as chair of the department, to impose upon Westhues some proper sanctions for the misconduct as soon as possible. We say as soon as possible because

Westhues' document shows that he sees it as appropriate to continue abusing Nelson. Something must be done to stop this immediately.

Regrettably, it appears necessary, too, for your sanctions to be substantial. We say this because the abuse of Nelson has been sustained, and it has been particularly offensive and hurtful. If, following study of the situation, including discussions with Westhues about the matters, your assessment is similar to ours, we recommend that you issue a letter of strong reprimand to Westhues - - detailing his offenses and your actions concerning them, and indicating that any further offense will result in additional action. As appropriate, this letter should be filed with relevant university officers as well as in the department files.

Our analysis of the situation also suggests that you should undertake to, for some extended period, cut back on your assignment of duties in the graduate program to Westhues - for graduate courses, work on Ph.D. comprehensive examination panels, and for advising new Ph.D. students. We are very sad to have to make this recommendation. However, it seems necessary because Westhues continues to reject some of the Ph.D. program regulations and insist others should ignore them. We should, therefore, expect further trouble from Westhues to the extent that he is assigned duties in the Ph.D. program and consequently has contact with those of us who believe in following the regulations developed by the department. In short, it seems necessary to arrange for a period during which Westhues can reflect on his behaviours and in which department members can get on with their work without intimidation and interference. The above procedure, or any improvement upon it that has the same consequences, should be considered.

It is not clear that Westhues would see these last measures as significant sanctions, given his disaffection with the Ph.D. program. If he did, this would be a hopeful sign. Be this as it may, these actions should be taken because they are likely to reduce conflict between Westhues and others involved in the graduate program. After a period of time, of course, the department should try to determine whether Westhues has changed his mind about practising intimidation and interference around the graduate program. If he has, he should be asked to resume a full load of duties in the program.

Nancy Heberge

Peter Carrington

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A. Wiggold

Jim Curtis

Le Helmer-Hayer

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