

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO
GOVERNING COUNCIL

REPORT NUMBER 292 OF THE ACADEMIC APPEALS COMMITTEE

October 29, 2004

To the Academic Board,
University of Toronto.

Your Committee reports that it held a hearing on Thursday, October 7, 2004, at which the following members were present:

Professor Emeritus R. Scane (Chair)
Professor M. Beattie
Professor C. Beghtol
Dr. G. Halbert
Mr. S. Neata

Mr. P. Holmes, Judicial Affairs Officer, Secretary.

Appearances:

For the Student:

Mr. L. (the Student)
Mr. L. (the Student's father)

For Woodsworth College:

Ms Y. Ali
Ms S. Isbister
Principal M. O'Neill-Karch

The Student was enrolled in the Certificate Program in Teaching English as a Second Language at Woodsworth College. He has completed all of the required courses in that program, but failed the Practicum, TSL545H1, which he took in the Winter Term of 2003. The *Practicum* is a required course to obtain the Certificate.

A student taking the Practicum is required to spend 20 hours of teaching in an actual classroom of a teacher trainer and a further 30 hours of observation of the teacher trainer working in that classroom. They also take four hours of classes outside the training classroom. The services of

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the teacher trainers are obtained through a contract between Woodsworth College and the Toronto District Catholic School Board. They are all qualified teachers of English as a Second Language. Students are assigned to teacher trainers by the Academic Coordinator of the programme, and it is the Academic Coordinator who assigns the final grade in the Practicum to the students, after considering the evaluations submitted by the teacher trainers. At the relevant time, the Academic coordinator was Ms C. Coté. Unfortunately, Ms Coté is presently very ill, and your Committee did not have the help of her evidence.

The Student requested assignment to a particular teacher trainer. In this particular case, the Academic Coordinator was able to fulfill that request, and did so. He was a volunteer observer in that teacher trainer's class for many hours in excess of the observation hours required by the programme.

The Student performed his required 20 hours of teaching over 10 classroom days from February 3, 2003 to March 6, 2003. On two of those days, the teacher trainer evaluated the Student as "C (okay, good)". On the remaining eight days, he received evaluations of "NW (needs work)", which is the lowest evaluation provided for on the form provided by Woodsworth College for teacher trainers to submit their comments and evaluation to the College. At the conclusion of his required twenty hours of teaching, the Student requested that he be permitted further hours of teaching before a final assessment on his *Practicum*. The teacher trainer in question refused to permit this. As the School Board had fulfilled its contractual obligations to the College with respect to the Student, the College was unable to accommodate this request. On the basis of the evaluations from the teacher trainer, the Student was failed.

The Student did not challenge the correctness of the evaluations. Rather, his appeal was based upon what he alleged were flaws in the training and "feedback" processes, which adversely affected his performance, and deprived him of a timely opportunity to correct faults which the teacher trainer was identifying.

With respect to the alleged flaws in the training process, the Student felt that the teacher trainer was rushing him through the programme too quickly. He felt pressured. This was aggravated by the fact that he was not permitted to develop and use his own materials in his teaching. Your Committee does not find substance in these grounds. The time frame of the teaching period of the *Practicum* is strictly limited by the contract with the School Board, and the teaching periods must be fitted into the teacher trainer's own lesson plans for the class. Your Committee was given no basis for finding that the position of this Student in this respect was significantly different from that of other students in similar placements. As to lesson plans, representatives of the College stated that the development of lesson plans was not an objective of the *Practicum*. Sometimes teacher trainers permit a student to teach a segment based upon the student's own plan, but this lies completely in the discretion of the trainer.

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On the question of “feedback”, your Committee finds some basis for concern. The Student claims that the teacher trainer did not give him current appraisals as his teaching segments were completed, and that, until near the end of the teaching hours assigned to him, he was not made aware of the pejorative nature of the appraisals to be submitted to the Academic Coordinator. At that time, the College did not require teacher trainers to submit interim reports on a student’s progress in the teaching portion of the *Practicum* to the Academic Coordinator, or to discuss the subject matter which would be contained in such reports, if they existed, with the student. The representatives of the College advised your Committee that this deficiency is currently being addressed. Your Committee would like to see a requirement that teacher trainers submit a written report to the Academic Administrator as to a student’s progress no more than half way through the teaching part of the *Practicum*, with a copy of such report being given to the student. Your Committee realizes that there are limits to the additional burdens which can be imposed upon teacher trainers, who are not employees of the University, as such additional burdens might require adjustments to the contract with the School Board. However, evaluations of performance in clinical programmes, which by their nature supply no hard record supplied by a candidate, such as an examination script, of the basis for an evaluation, should provide such safeguards as are reasonably possible to give a student timely warning of trouble. They should allow a student who finds that, in a clinical instructor’s view, he or she is not succeeding, to make corrections or even seek intervention by the instructor’s supervisors.

The Student also complained that the then Academic Coordinator never visited his classroom to see the situation for herself. Woodsworth College argued that, given the short period over which the teaching programme in the *Practicum* extends, and the number of students in the programme, this was not a feasible activity for the Academic Coordinator. Your Committee accepts this argument. However, if the Academic Coordinator had a written interim report on each student to review, as suggested above, it would be more possible for that official to attend classes of the relatively few students who appear to be in trouble.

Your Committee is also unclear as to the weight, if any, of the four hours of instruction outside the teacher trainers classrooms that students are required to take. If this portion of the course is to be evaluated in determining the final result, the weight must be determined and published in advance.

Nevertheless, your Committee does not find that it is more probable than not that the Student would have passed this course but for the problems noted by it. Therefore, your Committee will not interfere with the grade awarded to the Student. Woodsworth College has already advised the Student that the Student may retake the *Practicum* course in the certificate programme, while retaining credit for the other courses therein which he has taken and passed. That offer was repeated before your Committee. While your Committee has found that the result in the course probably would not have differed but for the procedural matters to which it has referred, it cannot say that there is no possibility that the result might have differed. For this reason, your

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Committee recommends to the appropriate University officials that, if and when the Student repeats the *Practicum*, fees that would ordinarily be charged to him for this course be waived,

Your Committee was also advised that, at an early stage in the programme, the Student consulted the University's Accessibility Services with respect to a disability. This visit was apparently not followed up by him, and Woodsworth College had no knowledge that the Accessibility Office had been consulted, or that the Student had some disability, until after the *Practicum* was complete. Your Committee has no evidence as to whether any possible accommodation could have changed the result in the Practicum, and cannot weigh this in this appeal. It urges the Student, if and when he returns to the programme, to take full advantage of the services of the University in this regard.

The appeal is dismissed.

October 29, 2004

Paul Holmes
Secretary

Ralph Scane, Q.C.
Senior Chair