

TO: The chairman of Physics and members of the Physics DTPC
(Professors Hodgson, Bao, Brabec, and Piercy)

FROM: Denis Rancourt

DATE: April 10, 2006.

RE: Including the Friday film and discussion series in DGR's official workload

I have made a request to Richard that one of my profession activities be officially recognised in my workload. He has asked me to write this memo of presentation and justification to the DTPC. I am sorry that it is a little long but this appears to be a rather novel request that merits special attention.

1 - WHAT IS THE DOCUMENTARY FILM AND DISCUSSION SERIES?

Since September 2005 and all during this academic year ending in April 2006, I have organized, run, hosted, and moderated a weekly documentary film and post-film discussion series, in the official time block 7-10 pm on Fridays. In the Fall the Marion auditorium was booked under the PHY 1703 code whereas in the Winter the MacDonald auditorium was booked under the PHY 8391 code (as a 'physics seminar', as proposed by Richard).

This documentary film series featured films about societal problems from both a historical and informative perspective and from the perspective of grassroots and mainstream attempts to combat these problems. The film night often featured local groups or experts involved in these issues and sometimes the filmmakers themselves.

The film series became officially affiliated with the international film series known as Cinema Politica (www.cinemapolitica.org) this winter. The Ottawa Fall and Winter schedules of films are posted on the www.alternativevoices.ca web site.

The Winter film titles and invited guests have been:

Black and Gold

The story of New York street gangs turned social justice activists.

El Contrato

The story of migrant worker conditions in Ontario and Canada.

- This film spontaneously lead to the formation of a student government lobby group.

War Hospital

The story of a major war hospital set up to handle civil war casualties in Africa.

- Students Take Action Now – Darfur (STAND) made a special presentation.

What I Learned About US Foreign Policy

A description of US political and military interventions since the Second World War.

- Student Coalition Against War (SCAW) made a special presentation.

Distorted Morality

A lecture by Noam Chomsky about citizen responsibility.

Until the Violence Stops

The official film of the V-day woman's movement

- Student organizers of local V-day events made a special presentation.

Seeds of Change

The controversial University of Manitoba film about genetically modified (GM) crops.

- University Watch executives made a special presentation.

Hearts and Minds

The classic documentary about the Vietnam War

- Student Coalition Against War (SCAW) made a special presentation.

Discordia

The story of activist students at Concordia University.

- Student Coalition Against War (SCAW) made a special presentation.

The Plot to Overthrow FDR

The story of an attempt to install fascism in the US.

- Anti-war activist and editor of Press for Conversion Richard Sanders made a special presentation.

Ipperwash

The story of the shooting of Dudley George by an OPP sharpshooter, and native Canadian rights.

- The lawyer representing the family of Dudley George came from Toronto for this event.

Bus Rider's Union

The story of public transport activists in Los Angeles.

- The Under Pressure Collective of Ottawa made a special presentation.

In addition, I co-organized a film festival (Resist) on globalization resistance activism with star spoken word artists (poets) each night with the following films: Fourth World War, This Is What Democracy Looks Like, and Kilometer 0. This was held in the Agora area of the University Centre, March 6-9. Two Fridays were cancelled because of major competing campus events: The GSAED conference and the OPIRG's Social Theatre.

2 - MY ROLE

My role has been to initiate, run, organise, and moderate/host the documentary film series and post-film discussions. This has included:

- logistics: booking rooms, dates, etc.
- finding (pre-viewing) and selecting the films
- coordinating all the film and event suggestions
- inviting the special guests and presenters
- coordinating with the special guests and presenters
- keeping up and administrating communications (e-mail, press releases, posters, web site)
- coordinating the volunteers (esp. OPIRG = Ontario Public Interest Research Group)
- liaison with the Cinema Politica national office at Corcordia
- follow up with post-event questions
- hosting and moderating the question period

In the Fall term I had hired a TA from my discretionary contracts budget to help run the Fall series however I found that the discussions needed an expert moderator (myself) and hands on organizing.

This project works and grows because of my dedication and the dedication of all the volunteers and special guests. Having a professor take this on, as part of his duties, makes all the difference to a project like this. It gives it the needed continuity and sustained high quality for the series to become recognized and popular.

The main task that could not easily be done by a volunteer or student is to lead and moderate the post-film discussion. This requires special skills, given the broad range of opinions and perspectives represented in the audience. It also requires a broad knowledge base in societal movements and issues, which I am acquiring as part of my new research area 'Science in Society'.

3 - EVIDENCE OF SUCCESS

The film series has been a remarkable success. On several nights we have filled the MacDonald auditorium. The dedicated alternativevoices.ca e-mail list for the film series (and other speaker events) grew from almost 300 in September 2005 to almost 1000 in April 2006. The list continues to grow by 50-100 per month.

Feedback on the series, from students, members of the public, and other professors, has been extremely positive and there has developed a core of regular participants. There is a large component of community and student group involvement and a steady stream of suggestions from both participants and film makers.

Students from my regular winter physics class (PHY 1702) have attended and brought their friends. OPIRG has provided logistics and financial support. There are more student volunteers than can be accommodated.

The event starts with social contacts at 7 pm, the official start is 7:30 pm, and the discussions often lasted past 11 pm. This series answers a definite need.

4 - RELATION TO SCIENCE AND TO THE MISSION OF THE UNIVERSITY

Many societal problems have an important scientific or technological component. Several of our films to date have illustrated this. Examples are as follows.

Metal of Dishonour (Fall term)

This documentary deals with the problems arising from the use of depleted uranium weapons. The scientific aspects include weapons technology, radiation, and health effects of radiation.

The Money Masters (Fall term)

Complex economic mechanisms are explained.

Celcius 9-11 (Fall term)

Several aspects of the science and engineering of building failure and building demolition are detailed.

Until the Violence Stop (Winter term)

Bad medical practices in women's health are exposed.

Seeds of Change (Winter term)

The ecology of GM crops is explained in detail.

The main aim of the film series, however, is NOT to provide scientific training. Instead, it is an interdisciplinary project that seeks to use all relevant approaches for understanding societal problems and societal responses to problems.

In this sense, it is a perfect match to my new research area and it is in symbiosis with the stated ideals of Vision 2010:

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“Our Values

A university that builds strong partnerships to fulfill its social responsibilities

We strengthen our programs and perform our social, political and community-outreach roles thanks to productive ties with other institutions of higher learning, government

agencies, social and community associations, research councils, the private sector, embassies, and national and international organizations.

A university that values its community

We encourage freedom of expression in an atmosphere of open dialogue, enabling critical thought, supported by intellectual integrity and ethical judgment. [...]

Proposed actions by the University [selected bullets]

- Set up undergraduate-level pilot projects that integrate research and learning.
- Support and recognize initiatives designed to implement a range of new and diversified strategies for learning and evaluation.
- Offer a broader education that promotes ethical principles and makes use of features such as elective courses, co-operative programs, and volunteer work.
- Develop more gathering places on campus for social encounters.

Goals [selected specific points]

- To ensure that students' experience at the University profoundly marks their future as responsible citizens who are aware of social and community issues.
- To ensure that the university setting is welcoming and pleasant, encourages interaction and co-operative effort, and promotes diversified means of learning.

By 2010, our students will have acquired new skills related to social involvement in university and community life.

We want to offer our student body the experience of a learning community that is attentive, stimulating, dynamic and effective.

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Clearly, the above described film and discussion series is a creative and effective expression of many of the stated goals and proposed actions of Vision 2010. It is exactly the kind of thing that more and more professors should be encouraged to initiate and participate in.

5 - MAIN ARGUMENT

The Vision 2010 document does not say “except in the Faculty of Science where we will focus only on narrow and community-detached and ethically-neutral pure scientific content”. The Vision 2010 document is a call to interdisciplinarity and to social responsibility. Such an institutional call is meaningless if professors’ workloads (i.e., resource attribution) cannot include professional activities that would further the stated institutional goals and include only narrow service to the academic needs of specific departments.

Our faculty has a tradition of crediting teaching duties that serve students in other departments and faculties (e.g., my measurement methods graduate course, PHY 5130) and the Dean has recently informed me that he would honour my teaching activities outside of the faculty if I wished to pursue out of faculty teaching projects.

This film series is a great service to both students and the community. This is the kind of education and outreach that is eminently compatible with the university's mission. It represents a significant amount of work, equal to one first year course per term (e.g., PHY 1702), and it should be recognised in my workload.

I ask the Chair and DTPC that these professional activities be recognized in my official workload as:

“Organize, coordinate, and moderate the two-term weekly Friday documentary film and discussion series on social issues and science-society interactions.”

The Dean and Chair have already approved the use of an auditorium for these activities in the 2005-2006 academic year. It is implied that if the Dean, in turn, accepts this official workload attribution, resources will be assigned accordingly. This cannot cause an increase in anyone else's workload.

I see no reason why this work, that clearly satisfies a demand and is part of our mission, would not be acknowledged in my official workload.

One counter argument that I have occasionally heard and that I find particularly objectionable is that “We cannot count this as work because it is something you want to do.”! That argument would eliminate most of our research. I would argue instead that we should want to follow our institutional mission, in a way that is creative and best uses our motivation and talent. It would be absurd not to be officially recognised for this – it's our job.

Thank you for your attention and consideration.

DGR