

Confidentiality Of Student Files Under Fire



Editorial

Richard Willis

The question of whether students should have access to their files has abruptly been brought to the fore as a result of a variety of incidents in the past few weeks (see articles p.3).

The whole issue was initially

raised by Mr. Bing Gallant on University Magazine. He complained about being refused access to his own academic records. Mr. Hennessey, the Registrar, denied the allegation in a letter to the Cadre (March 25) and stated the University policy in such matters.

Mr. Hennessey's first statement was that "students may view their records any time. All they have to do is ask". When a student attempted to see his own file, he was not allowed to. The Registrar's office will show you such pertinent information as your grades (which you already know) but that is all.

In response to Mr. Gallant's allegation that 'any faculty member had access to his file' Mr. Hennessey's stated "Faculty members do not have indiscriminate access to students records". What does not having indiscriminate access mean? It doesn't say that faculty members do not have access

to student files or for that matter under what conditions they do have access.

The Registrar's office is going to make a statement to the effect that there is a difference between records and files. If you want your academic records (grades) you can, but they won't allow you to see your files (which includes some very interesting things such as your recommendations from your high school).

The case on page 3 is an excellent example. The file contains a reference from a high school councillor. The councillor had never seen the student in an official capacity yet he felt free to comment on the student's character, home life, and academic capabilities.

The university's policy is such that you should not be allowed to see this information. This means that you can not point out things that are incorrect, or bring to light information such as in this case that the person

writing the information had never spoke to you before. The university is accumulating information about you, which in many cases is untrue yet you are allowed no recourse by which to make corrections.

What has been shown by recent legislation in the case of credit bureau records, is that people should have access to any information that is being kept on them. The same type of idea was promoted by the people who were considering drafting a 'Student Bill of Rights' last fall. It was suggested that: 1) No student files shall be released without the consent of the student involved, 2) Students should have the right to see their academic files and to make necessary corrections.

I would strongly suggest that the university adapt such a policy. If they refuse, the Student Union should put forth a Student Bill of Rights that will make it policy.

Further Intrigue Over The 'RCMP Interrogation Techniques'

Since the RCMP training manual on Interrogation Techniques first came out in the open, there have been some very contradictory statements about it by the RCMP.

When the commanding officer of the P.E.I. headquarters of the RCMP in Charlottetown telephoned Superintendent Moffet in Ottawa, about the authenticity of the document, he stated that it was currently used as a training manual within the force.

When it was inquired into by Martha Pratt, a writer for the local Guardian, she only ran into

closed doors. 'She was informed by Inspector DeKouchay that since the Charlottetown detachment was not a training depot, he could have no way of knowing if the document were valid.

'The office of Supt. Moffat in Ottawa referred this reporter to Inspector J.R. Bentham, Liaison Officer RCMP Headquarters. Inspt. Bentham stated that the document could not have been verified over the telephone but must be examined before an assessment of its validity would be given.'

A disclosure of the document was then made in Parliament by David MacDonald (PC - Egmont). Mr. Allmand the solicitor General said that he was not aware of the document, but he would get a copy of it. The RCMP spokesman said that he would make no statement until after the Solicitor-General had answered questions.

David MacDonald attempted unsuccessfully on Wednesday to delay the Parliamentary break in order to clarify the issue, since Mr. Allmond was nowhere to be found.

Inspector John Bentham then came out and stated that it was 'not official RCMP policy.' He stated that it was, 'Just part of a broad body of literature on the subject of interviewing techniques.'

'The booklet was said to only be used in a course for senior officers with 5 to 15 years experience. The reason for the RCMP motto and crest on the cover was simply for 'cosmetic reasons only.'

The RCMP admitted to the document at first, then adapted a closed mouth policy, and finally admitted to it, yet played down the importance of the document.

If this document is, as the RCMP attest, simply a small portion of the material used in teaching interrogation techniques, the rest of their interrogation techniques should be reviewed by an independent scrutinizing board. If this is part of the training and it justifies, lying, brainwashing and abridging of civil liberties, it may be quite frightening to see what else they advocate.

Whenever such a government document is exposed to the public, a peoples right to know is always questioned. People have been shocked to see some of the RCMP techniques that are employed, but what else do the RCMP do that we don't know about. As Robert Sherrill said, 'The moral of the New York Times printing of the Pentagon papers was only that the press is free to print what it can get by luck and stealth, not that

it is free to get all that the public should know. The auxiliary value of the Pentagon papers was as a reminder to realists of just how little information the press usually gets from the government.' The situation applies here also.

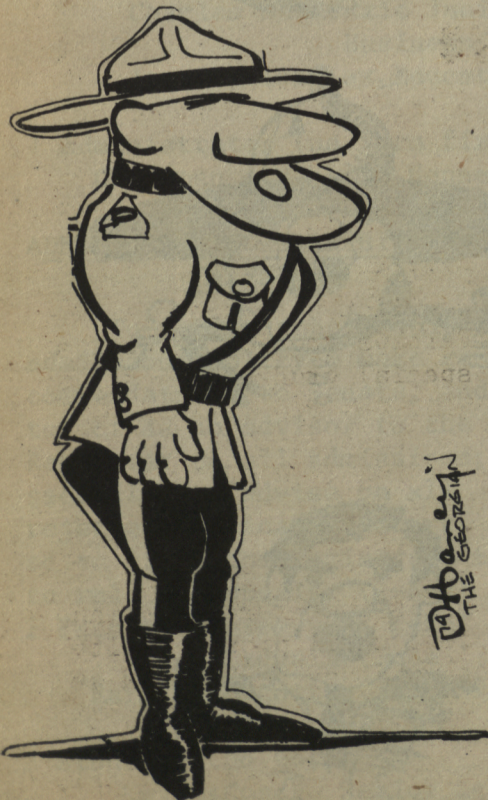
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THE CADRE