

## MSU Math departments recent woes

Having served MSU for 35 years helping to form a Geometry/Topology group here, seeing the progress we made always makes me feel like a proud “Spartan”. So it is only natural to be alarmed by the recent woes of the math dept. If two years ago, you had told me some day math Chair could get you panelized by lying to the university administration, I would have said “Naa it can’t happen, fraud is a serious crime”. Well, it happened. To my horror Chair lied just to put me in hot water with administration, no blushing no twitching.. He reported a class I was teaching as “nonexistent” and got me penalized by “abrogation of duty” penalty from the provosts office (this penalty comes with a salary cut), even though he knew full well that this officially announced class did run as scheduled. In fact this was one of the more successful “Topics in Topology” classes I have taught over the years, it had 8 participants (5 registered, 1 auditing, 2 visiting faculty), and 2 PhD’s came out of it. This class was particularly pleasing to me because its notes helped me finish my *4-Manifolds* book manuscript.

You would think a Chair’s job is to help run math department smoothly, not run around university forging his colleagues academic records to create mischief. Over 3 decades I have been here, I have never ever seen nor heard any Chair work so hard to disturb a running class like this. What is worse, just when you expect a wise dean would take a few minutes to talk to you to clear things up and stop this grudge act, you hear Chair telling you “Don’t try the dean’s office, dean and I work together!” OMG.. Sure enough, then you find out the dean doesn’t want to talk to you. If you think your esteemed colleagues would object to this craziness, think again, you generally get “Nope I don’t want to get involved” reaction :)

It looks like malfunctioning starts in CNS deans office. Recently dean forced 2 quick Chair elections to math dept in violation of its Bylaws (Bylaws state that you need at least 3 candidates and a certain months of vetting period for them before the election). His first candidate (call it C) ran unopposed, but lost the election anyway :) Right after this, another quick election was held with only 2 candidates, and this time deans candidate won (call it C’, which is the present Chair). Then C’ immediately appointed C as the Associate Chair and the Chair of Graduate Studies (GS) (making C a shadow chair must have pleased the dean). Story doesn’t end here. It turns out C has anger management problem (allegedly towards some student groups), It is ironic, considering that the deans office had given him the mission of reforming and cleaning math departments GS office (I didn’t think we needed it). Since I first arrived here (in 1967) the political climate has changed considerably, it is not a good time to be from MiddleEast anymore, I guess you might say the curtain of civility has developed some cracks lately.

I must say, when Chair told me that the dean was not happy with my criticisms, I was irked, but chose not to take it as a threat, because university is a free speech environment and it is only natural to expect some constructive criticisms from its faculty. Now I wonder if the ugly harassment I faced teaching that course was related to this. I would like to believe MSU-math will overcome this unhealthy state soon, like a bad flu, and return to normalcy. In the meantime I should be prepared to live with being shunned by administration’s loyal bootlickers (getting infected by venality is a real risk, just remember where you get your academic privileges and salary rises), I guess it is best to turn this negativity to positive energy, by concentrating on research and teaching until this malady heals.