As a member of the English Department I periodically receive complaints from OSU faculty asking, "Why don't you people teach our students how to write?" But the faculty needs to improve its own writing, as is illustrated by the "Report of the Ad Hoc Committee on Faculty Workloads." Take for instance the sentence, "The university as an institution is a structure that has developed over centuries to transform inputs, consisting of faculty and student efforts, into outputs, or products." What does this Frankenstein's monster of a sentence say? Cleared of most of its meaningless phrases, it says, "The university transforms inputs into outputs." After "centuries" of development, that is what we do, apparently, though I do not understand what transforming inputs into outputs means.

Or take the sentence, "The committee believes that accountability of the University to the supporting public requires the identification of improved measures of University output and faculty performance despite the problems of identifying and measuring inputs and outputs." Through this underbrush of verbiage one can faintly discern some meaning, which seems to be, "The University ought to find better ways to evaluate the things that it does." A harmless but maybe reasonable suggestion.

On the other hand, take the sentence, "The second important problem in measurement of faculty and University performance derives from the fact that instruction, research, and public service are complementary in their production in the sense that fewer resources are required to produce the several and diverse University outputs together at the same institution than if they were produced separately." Even with a machete one could not hack his way through to the meaning here.

Presumably the report of the Ad Hoc committee was meant to communicate, since it was printed (no doubt at some expense) and distributed to the faculty. But meaningless phrases, inflated diction, and modish jargon about inputs and outputs communicates nothing, except perhaps a headache or rage. At the least, a shrewd person would be intensely suspicious at so much obfuscation.
This is not meant as an attack on the people who wrote the report. They have simply contracted a badly infected rhetoric, an ailment that used to flourish only in Government bureaus and big business but is now spreading everywhere. It is meant as an attack on a kind of writing that has neither grace nor simple clarity. Until the faculty itself writes well it can expect little from the students, since writing, like other skills, is learned mainly through imitation. And until faculty reports are well written, the printing and distributing of them is wasteful, since few can or will read them.

Willard Potts
English Department
April 24, 1973
A Question About Our Representation By O.S.E.A.

The events of a year ago in regard to our Major Medical Insurance may serve as an illustrative example of the problem of faculty representation by O.S.E.A. The insurance pool of which we were members was changed from a national college faculty group (T.I.A.A.) to the employees of the State of Oregon in general. One unfortunate result was that the several plans of coverage made available were those negotiated for all state employees in general, and did not include one specifically designed for faculty members. Another result was a very substantial increase in our out-of-pocket expense, despite the introduction of a state contribution towards the premium payment. These changes, which were lobbied for by O.S.E.A., may have been to the advantage of state employees on the average, but were certainly detrimental to the O.S.U. faculty.

Wouldn't the same sort of problem arise if O.S.E.A. became the official bargaining agent for the O.S.U. Faculty?

John T. Yoke
Chemistry
April 26, 1973
Authority and Responsibility

If the OSU faculty adopts compulsory union membership or universal financing of the faculty union, this may well come about as the result of the same administrative neglect, alienation, and mismanagement which prompted unionization elsewhere. Prof. L. G. Harter in the April issue of Faculty Forum Papers described the way in which higher education administrators nationwide stand aloof from their onetime colleagues as a new and "remote elite" who at times contribute to the widespread contempt for faculty when wishing out loud for an end to tenure. Evaluations, often based on hearsay, damn teaching faculty with "faint praise", as Prof. Harter describes it.

Capricious assignment of teaching loads would rank high on any nationwide listing of administrative abuses which push faculty members reluctantly toward collective bargaining. From reports of colleagues at national meetings many can confirm that gross distortions exist in the teaching duties assigned among colleagues where all of them get paid entirely from "Resident Instruction" funds or the equivalent. It is not unusual for one-fourth of a departmental faculty to do more than half the work of teaching and production of new teaching materials. When questioned, some administrators rationalize such irregularities as necessary to lure research grants. But the more heavily loaded faculty members note that (1) the released-time research often has little if any relevance to the remaining small amount of teaching performed by the faculty researchers, (2) the heavily loaded teaching professors get little recognition, if any, for the fact that their teaching loads preclude grantsmanship, and (3) even the production of widely used textbooks for their own courses will not rate accolades in annual evaluations.

Authority, as Prof. Jesse F. Bone observed in the April issue, is "the preserver of order in a free society." It is the "working under orders" as declared by the Roman captain in Luke 7:8. Authority is constructive when it expresses responsibility to its source and when its competent use assures accomplishment of the objectives stated by the source of that authority. Many professors in the nation believe administrators tend to act arbitrarily and with no relation to their responsibility for wise use of manpower, talent, and resources within the academic tradition.

The "collegial relationship" which Prof. Harter sees as "eroding" did at one time exist with teaching faculty and administrators bound together by cordial ties of common endeavor as a company of teaching scholars. Many present faculty members sought to participate in serious adult education and did it with production of instructional aids for their own students which would prove worthy of widespread adoption by others guiding students to the frontier of knowledge or to the threshold of professional careers. Sadly today many veteran faculty members feel themselves ignored by administrators too busy with "management"
to cultivate faculty morale with words and deeds of recognition. And the managers make some loyal professors feel trapped when denied pay raises because, they suspect, cynical officials regard them as not likely to give up tenure to seek better opportunities.

A widespread suspicion exists in the U. S. among many teaching faculty that the evaluators merely reinforce their previous evaluations and decisions when they render new annual evaluations. The more elaborate the evaluation system, therefore, the more entrenched and buttressed with documentation will become the faculty "pecking-order" reflecting prejudices of academic administrators who wish to impose their own bias rather than provide catalytic leadership toward evolving a collegial set of goals, objectives, and policies.

Teaching faculty members also have abundant reason to suspect that some of the country's administrators favor grantsmen over teachers. Grants bring overhead funds, and at some universities these become "slush funds" not subject to the budgeting and purposes prescribed by the governing boards for other funds. Urging all the faculty to seek grants for research may, moreover, merely divert some competent talent to "blue sky" research of a useless nature. Inevitably, some thus diverted to grantsmanship will be lost forever to teaching and to the critical scrutiny of their subject matter to improve course content.

Across the nation many highly qualified teaching professors trying to uphold standards of learning have encountered student scorn in the anonymous evaluations. These provide the documentation for administrative acts discouraging such traditionalists by denying pay, promotion, or both without due process. Not uncommonly the evaluations by academic administrators have no great basis in observation but rely upon circumstantial evidence and unreliable sources for unproven conclusions.

Authority may inevitably be exercised capriciously if people in authority do not feel an obligation to act responsibly. Senate Bill 1 in the 1973 Session of the Oregon Legislature contains provisions which could promote such a feeling of responsibility in Oregon and thereby provide a national model for correcting the defects described above. SB 1 came from the Interim Committee on Education and is at present before the Senate Educational Committee. It provides for setting educational goals and objectives and for evaluating personnel. It in Sec. 9 mandates the State Board to "assign highest priority to the teaching-learning process" at state institutions of higher education. In Sec. 11 the bill requires evaluation of faculty according to the actual duties, i.e., teachers for teaching, researchers for research, and administrators for administration.

Copies of SB 1 can be obtained from the Bill Room at the State Capitol or from the Senate Education Committee. Colleagues interested in testifying on this bill may contact the committee office or file statements with the committee.
Constructive action on SB 1, possibly amended to require employment of external, impartial, independent, and professional evaluation, could go a long way toward ameliorating the unhappy circumstances described above, whether or not colleagues opt for a union as collective bargaining agent.

Support for the higher education provisions of SB 1 in Sections 9 and 11, or constructive proposals for change in those sections can today work toward accomplishments which must otherwise await years of negotiation and bargaining, even with the most effective professors' union.

Fred W. Decker

30 April 1973

Fred W. Decker
Atmospheric Sciences