

Reply to the Statement of the Fachschaft

Peter Bernard Ladkin

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I regret that the discussion which the Fachschaft apparently wants to have with me about my teaching is pursued in this adversarial manner. Over the years I have put a lot of effort into my teaching. There is a plethora of on-line written material on the internet, as well as in some cases videos from certain lectures, and software for use in the laboratories that was developed within my group or by the tech-transfer firm Causalis. Besides this, representatives of the Fachschaft have awarded my group €20,000 in the last two years to equip the local-area-networks lab. So certain students must rate my teaching positively. I regret that others rate it negatively. I don't know how I should do things any differently and this statement from the Fachschaft doesn't give me any hint.

Before the publication of these comments, I invited the authors, Mathias Wilhelm and Madis Rummig, to a discussion of the matter [the award of the «Black Chalk»]. Unfortunately, what they say here does not reflect what was discussed.

I comment their statement point for point.

Professor Ladkin's communication art leaves something to be desired for students. According to his own words, Peter B. Ladkin never answers emails from students, but refers to his Office Hours.

It is incorrect that I «never» answer. I correspond with students just as I do with colleagues and others. I receive about 40-50 e-mails per day which require my attention, with varying levels of effort, and I devote 2-5 hours per day on e-mail traffic. It may well be that some e-mails remain unanswered even though the sender had wished for a reply. So it is with e-mail, just as with regular mail.

When students ask me for a personal appointment for a discussion, it is true that I refer to my Office Hours. That is the purpose of Office Hours.

Practical experience shows that in the past, he is often not to be found during his office hours, or is involved in *important telephone calls* [emphasis: sic].

What is correct is that during my sabbatical leave I have regularly held my Office Hours. There were often many students attending, and equally often there was no one. It follows that I offered more Office Hours than needed to satisfy the various wishes for discussion and therefore that the time I offered students for personal discussions sufficed.

Whoever calls me by telephone during my Office Hours is entitled to the same service as anyone else. So people who are present in person must indeed wait until telephone calls end.

He seems to have little interest in improving his courses, shown amongst other things by [the fact that] exercises and lectures don't fit with each other in the course schedule

I have given lots of effort over the years towards developing my courses. Further, I showed the two statement authors where the course materials are to be found on our WWW pages. So I cannot understand why they would say something such as the above.

I am guessing that there is a particular course, Digital Communication and Internet Services, that is

meant here. I am happy to discuss the goals of this course, and how it is taught, with the Fachschaft should there be such a need. The statement that «exercises and lectures don't fit with each other in the course schedule» is too imprecise for me to comment.

and his lectures are not evaluated.

It is not correct to say that I do not evaluate my courses. For example, some courses are based on industrial tutorials that I give, and I take the comments I receive from participants in the course and in the tutorials very seriously indeed. What is correct is that I do not use the common faculty evaluation instrument, the questionnaire developed by the Fachschaft, because I find that it is not precise enough to enable me to improve my courses. Because of this, I have in the past developed and successfully used my own course-evaluation questionnaires and recommended them to colleagues and also to the Fachschaft. The reaction of Messrs Wilhelm and Rummig was that the Fachschaft likely didn't have the time to develop such a questionnaire themselves. So that's that, isn't it.

Interviews with students have shown that he is insufficiently prepared for his lectures.

What is this supposed to mean? I give industry tutorials, but somehow forget the subject matter when I lecture to university students?

I have given my courses for many years, and we have a wealth of material on our WWW pages for all courses. [I teach courses in computer networking and services, and in System Safety.] We use our knowledge about computer networks (we have run our own local area network for 15 years now) and System Safety (in which I have an international reputation) on a daily basis in my group. I think I am sufficiently prepared for my teaching.

Various lectures are cancelled without warning or commentary.

This statement is too imprecise to address in detail. So here is an equally imprecise rebuttal: as far as I know, I have gone through all the planned teaching material in every course in every semester.

Decisive for the renewed award of the «Black Chalk» was his behavior in the grading of the Module DKI (Digital Communications and Internet Services). The exams were returned after the end of the 6-week grading period in the semester following the written exam (exam: January, grades:)

That is true. The problems with the DKI lecture and participation in the written exam are known, and I couldn't have foreseen them. This stems in part from the legally-regulated organisational structure of the new degree courses and I have little influence on that. The main problem was that two-thirds of the exam-takers barely attended the lectures (general lecture attendance: 12-15; exam-takers: 39!) and the course and thus the exam is based in large part on material that was discussed in detail in the lectures. So in this case the behavior of many participants did not conform with the goal of the course. Grading the exam took me about five times the usual time, in order to develop appropriate grading criteria and thus the results were as noted very late. The Fachschaft needs to step in here to help avoid such a situation occurring in the future. To give me full responsibility for this debacle may seem an easy option, but this will not lead to a permanent solution. A solution would mean either that the behavior of course participants becomes more conformant with the goal of the lecture course, or that I change the goal of the lectures to what the students appear to want, which would seem to be a self-study course. I couldn't really support the second option for those who want to study the entire module including the laboratory. But I could think about it. Both options require consideration by all stakeholders, including the Fachschaft.

Besides which, it is unclear what criteria were used to correct and grade the exams.

There are about 20 A4 pages that describe the problems and the grading criteria [for the exam], in such a way that colleagues informed about computer networks can understand it. What is supposed to be unclear here? What *is* true is that neither Fachschaft representatives nor other members of the Examination Committee want to consider these documents in detail.

I regret very much that in the meeting of the Examination Committee in which the DKI written exam was discussed, and in which the coauthor of the Fachschaft's commentary, Madis Rummig, also participated:

1. no member of the Committee considered my written prepared material, even though I requested multiple times for members to do so, and even though the Committee is legally required to take these materials into account during its deliberations;
2. no member of the Committee claimed to be knowledgeable about computer networks, even though this was the topic of the exam being discussed;
3. one colleague apparently saw the need to comment on the matter by swearing.

I am pursuing these matters through the usual faculty channels.