

Wednesday, 24th November, 2010

Dr. David T. Barnard
President and Vice-Chancellor
University of Manitoba
Winnipeg, MB R3T 2N2 Canada

Dear Dr. David T. Barnard:

As members of the mathematical community, we, the undersigned, write you to express our deep concern with the current situation at the University of Manitoba involving the contested award of a PhD in mathematics to one of your students. Recent press coverage of the case¹ indicates that the proper process of evaluation was not followed in this instance. The following facts are particularly prominent.

- A PhD—one of the highest degrees in mathematics—has been awarded to a student who failed a comprehensive exam twice, and who subsequently *never completed it*.
- The PhD course requirements were not fulfilled by the student; in order to accommodate this, an undergraduate course has been upgraded to a doctorate-level course by an authority who apparently *does not have the competence to evaluate a mathematics course level*.
- No qualified mathematician has justified the decision of the administration. On the contrary, several voices within the mathematics department of the University of Manitoba have expressed their concern about its validity; among these are Dr. Gábor Lukács, whose reputation of integrity and sense of justice is well-known among his peers, and Prof. George Grätzer, an internationally renowned and respected mathematician.
- Dr. Gábor Lukács has been suspended for three months without pay for reasons that appear to be secondary to the matter at hand; this inappropriate reprimand unfortunately suggests that the administration is trying to brutally quash dissenting voices.

A PhD in mathematics is a degree that is universally recognized both by academia and industry. Its value depends in particular upon the reputation of the department of mathematics of the granting institution. To ensure the quality of the degree, the department has established rules to evaluate whether or not it should be awarded. That such requirements should be arbitrarily waived by the administration *seriously endangers the reputation of all the students carrying a degree from that institution*, and calls into question the competence of the department itself.

¹Winnipeg Free Press, October 30, 2010; republished on-line. National Post, Nov. 3, 2010; republished on-line. CBC news, November 3, 2010; on-line edition. MacLean, October 28th, 2010; October 31st, 2010; November 3rd, 2010; November 4th, 2010; November 9th, 2010; November 18th, 2010; on-line edition.

Moreover, as members of the mathematical community, we wish to express our deep concern about the repercussions this affair will have at the national and international levels. Indeed, given the current cohesiveness of the mathematical community, and the speed at which information now travels, the negative publicity your institution is receiving threatens to cast a shadow on all future mathematics degrees awarded by the University of Manitoba. In the current context of intense competition, many of your students will find it difficult to overcome such a handicap.

In solidarity with our colleagues at your institution and in support of future degree holders of the University of Manitoba, we hope that you will take swift action to rectify this situation. We suggest either that you clearly² and publicly justify your decision to waive the established academic requirements for this student, or that you correct an error that risks considerable continuing damage to your institution.

Sincerely,

The undersigned (see below)

cc: Dr. Jay Doering, Dean of Graduate Studies, University of Manitoba
Dr. Mark Whitmore, Dean of Science, University of Manitoba
Dr. David Gunderson, Head of Mathematics, University of Manitoba
Dr. Gábor Lukács, University of Manitoba
Prof. George Grätzer, University of Manitoba
Dr. Jacques Hurtubise, President of the Canadian Mathematical Society
University of Manitoba Faculty Association
Canadian Association of University Teachers
Society for Academic Freedom and Scholarship
The Council on Post-Secondary Education
MacLean's
National Post
Winnipeg Free Press

²In view of Dr. Gábor Lukács' documented response, it is obvious that your "Official statement on PhD matter", posted on-line November 17, 2010, is inadequate and cannot be recognized as a valid justification.

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