

# DR NULL

## **By Dr. Felix Null, Ph.D. Program of Interdisciplinary Redundancy Dept.**

Dear Dr. Null:

Their's a rumor that your'e not a "real" profesor. Please tell me weather its true or not. —*Just Curious*

Dear *Just Curious*,

That depends on what you mean by "real". Do you mean a "full" profesor? No, sadly I've been passed over several times in my attempts to become promoted to the rank of "full professor", in favor of those with longer publication records but who do not care as deeply as I do about students.

As proof of how much I really care about students, you will note that out of respect for your feelings I have not commented on your complete abuse of the language. Perhaps my response to the next letter will further convince you that I am a "real" professor, if not one who is yet "full".

Dear Dr. Null:

I have long thought that one of the easiest ways to make a few extra dollars is to win the Teacher of the Year award. It must be pretty easy, all other things being equal, as long as you can figure out how it all works. It is one of those unique Clark institutions: big hype, mysterious process— no wonder the Dean likes it so much. I would like you to tell me how it works: who does the nominating (how many students, and what kind of vote is taken— what percentage of the student body— to create the slate of nominees (in case you are wondering, Dick Peet would have been my vote for last year). Then, once the nominees are announced, what percentage of the senior class has actually voted in, for example, the past 4 years?

See what I mean? You could travel to Foxwoods, but this seems like more of a sure thing. —*Struggling Assistant Professor*

Dear *Struggling Assistant Professor*,

What did you do with the incredibly generous raise we got last year, blow it on a new set of tires? We were hornswaggled into selling out our future colleagues' fringe benefits so the robber barons would give us all raises of 4.5 percent. Then they gave us a whopping 2.5 percent raise.

Trust me, there are only two ways to

make any real money at Clark. You can become a suit for a little while. From there, you can commit terrible blunders, take the fall for another suit's blunders, or try to actually be a dean of whatever. In all three cases, they'll pay you big time not to be a suit any more.

Alternatively, you can come in from the outside in the guise of some sort of messiah who will straighten out some threatened department or program. With little regard for existing faculty (who sometimes point out their errors), administrators are very attracted to outside cognoscenti and other shiny objects. As an assistant professor, your only choice is to become a suit. Later on, I may write a column on How to Become a Suit. It is not a pretty process, and you would maintain more self-respect by robbing graves. For now, suffice it to say that becoming a suit has nothing to do with winning a teaching award.

I regret to say that the process of selecting a teaching award recipient is equally mysterious to me. Clearly, it is controlled by evil administrators, and probably some sycophantic faculty committee with a student representative.

Just as clearly, it is obviously not a fair process, because I have yet to receive such an award despite all my best efforts. I've tried all the obvious methods: I gave up all academic standards when the administration did the same in 1986. I pander shamelessly to student opinion, and even share gossip with them about faculty politics. This tactic worked well for one of my colleagues, and he got an award. The students do seem to delight in the dirt about the faculty, so I think it's probably worth another try, even though faculty gossip is not very interesting. After all, most faculty are the same types that you were embarrassed to be seen with in high school.

So, dear students, if anyone bothers to ask your opinion, remember that Dr. Null is still waiting for his/her award! With your help, maybe I'll get to be a real "full professor" someday.

Got a problem with this? Send it in to Dr. Null! Remember, as any good pedagogue (that's what really smart people who teach, like me, like to call themselves) would say: "there's no such thing as a stupid question."

Address correspondence to: Dr. Null's Bag o' Notes, Box B-22, c/o *WheatBread Magazine*. Be sure to check out the DR. \_NULL folder in Bulletin!