



# Spokesperson

November 18, 1998

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“But why keep silent when it’s something truer than truth?” Erasmus

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## IRONY WINS!!

by *The Spokesperson Staff*

The following story is *The Spokesperson’s* own. We have had no help with this story, except from the principals, who seem to want to help us with our work at every turn. We are totally responsible for this story from beginning to end. As it says on page one of *The Sailing Rules*, following all the warnings about the imperatives of “knowing the rules” and “following the rules” and about the “dire consequences for the community of vessels not to mention all the fish in the sea” that can follow if one does not,

“Sometimes you have to go with what you’ve got.”

In a stunning development in the latest “Arney scandal,” Evergreen Provost Barbara Smith has issued her first-ever “Provostial educational edict” (Pee 1). Smith has ordered that all classroom material for the “academic” program “Fictional Sociology” be reviewed by her office before distribution to consumers of “Fictional Sociology.” Pee 1 reads:

All classroom material, including but not limited to books, articles, images, films, transparencies, filmstrips, slides, posters, tests, pop quizzes, data bases, Internet sites, experiments (especially those involving fictional Sociology students), lecture notes, and intra-seminar communication facilitation devices, will be submitted to this office before use for instructional purposes. All material will be inventoried by the teaching staff of “Fictional Sociology” and those items suggested by or acceptable to Dr. William Ray Arney shall be marked with an asterisk. This office will expeditiously review all material to make sure it is in accordance with current standards of “academic freedom.”

Now, here’s the **irony**: This order is the direct result of a cooked up, made up *joke* about a “new policy” that involved just this kind of administrative prior review of classroom material.

Reached at a home for the semi-retired on the outskirts of Washington, D.C., Irony, speaking only for herself,<sup>1</sup> said, “These *are* hard times for humor.” Of her victory on the Evergreen campus, Irony said, “I’m pleased, of course, but a little embarrassed. At heart, I’m basically a tease. I never really expect to be taken seriously in the end. But it is rather fun to know there are some people with whom I can have my way so completely and so fulfillingly.”

Irony explained that she had come close to victory before, especially with Clinton in the White House. “Remember Newt Gingrich’s joke about buying personal computers for poor people? When he told that at a dinner party, everyone laughed. Al Franken was there and he asked the Speaker if he could use that one. But the next day, after repeating the joke in the Capitol Cloakroom, 185 members of Congress signed on to House Bill 102-462, ‘PCs for the Poor.’” Irony works best on those who are not entirely asleep at the switch but on those who, she said, “have been dozing a little.” “If it hadn’t been for congressional staffers and their spokespersons, we’d have gotten that bill through. I’d have had the whole country laughing.”

In issuing her edict, Barbara Smith said, “This whole thing has gotten way out of hand. Lots of people were starting to take *The Spokesperson* seriously. We even got calls from The Council of Presidents about that “Council for the Presidents” memo. They thought they had missed out on an important development in higher education policy.<sup>2</sup> We’ve got to think about the school’s reputation. After all, we are number 2 in *Newsweek*’s listing of campuses and we’re working hard to keep it that way.”

Earlier in the week the teaching team had been told by Academic Dean John Cushing that whatever the teaching team did within their classroom “within certain bounds” is okay, but nothing should leak out of the classroom and potentially affect others. Following that conference the team announced plans to hire a student of public artist Cristo<sup>3</sup> to enclose their classroom in latex to contain the effects of their teaching. When told of the plan, Smith said, “Latex is pretty expensive. If they would go with vinyl I might be able to get behind it.”

Irony was, understandably, feeling pretty cocky. “I think I can parlay this victory into some real success. Imagine the possibility of whole college courses devoted solely to me, Irony. It’s probably too much to expect, but there might even be a high school teacher who would say something about me more than, ‘Irony means saying the opposite of what you mean.’”

Already at The Evergreen State College changes are underway. Part-time consumers enrolled in the “Management” program demanded that their faculty include a section on “The Management of Irony in the Workplace.” “We don’t understand it,” Part-Time Studies Dean Susan Fiksdal said, “I just don’t know what’s gotten into them.” But part-time studies consumer

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<sup>1</sup> Long known as a feminine rhetorical device, Irony works by sucking in the unwary, holding her prey by her pleasures, and releasing her victims only after exacting from each of them a teeny, tiny drop of their soul’s vital liquors.

<sup>2</sup> A spokesperson for the Council of Presidents issued the following statement: “We didn’t think it was very funny. Students can call themselves what they want to. We will continue to treat them as guests on our campuses.”

<sup>3</sup> Cristo’s best known works are a curtain across a mountain pass, the wrapping of the Reichstag, and putting pink aprons around some Pacific islands. His student, Jesu Cristi (no relation to anyone), is well known for the stocking cap he placed atop Pike’s Peak following the 1992 Pike’s Peak Hill Climb.

Bill Brightball explained, “As managers we have to be able to tell when our employees are serious and when they are just fooling around. If they are joking we want to be able to laugh with them. Mutual laughter is a tool we can use to build community and improve communication.”

Irony, of course, had the last word. “This could open up some folks’ eyes. Wouldn’t that be great?” she asked coyly.

## **Provost Smith, “Pee”ved by FicSoc Actions, Offers Lesson in Manners** **by Bibi Hunter, General Consumer**

In a refreshing show of administrative responsibility, Academic Vice-President and Provost Barbara Smith called the Faculty of Fictional Sociology to account in her office Thursday morning. Offering a dose of their own medicine, Smith expressed her dismay that Faculty Members Arney, Rideout and Pailthorp had failed so badly as College Hosts. “Hospitality has long been our byword,” she reminded the three. “While it is true that Guests are not empowered to make the same demands as Consumers”—a sly reference to an item found in their own publication, *The Spokesperson*—Provost Smith explained in tones approaching exasperation, “it behooves us as Hosts to make sure that Guests never question whether they are welcome, never wonder whether we have their comfort in mind, never doubt whether we are prepared to adopt each Guest’s every concern as our very own.” The FicSoc Three could answer these remarks with nothing better than downcast eyes and seeming embarrassment. Smith had their attention.

“Hospitality,” she reminded them, “has room for laughter, but never, not ever, at your Guest’s expense. An innocent joke??? Can you really imagine that it was polite to trample on your Guests’ constitutional rights?” Her urgency grew. “Forcing words into the mouths of your Guests, or their newspaper ... surely the same thing when your Guest is an Editor-in-Chief... Can you possibly defend that as POLITE?!?” Silence descended over the room.

It dawned on the Fic Soc Three that something had gone amiss.

“What’s to be done?” Arney politely inquired. Rideout shared this show of concern.

“This is no simple matter of mending hurt feelings,” Smith explained. “You have gone too far for that.” She suggested that a good talk might dissuade the offended parties from seeking redress in court or from invoking the dreaded MCTWAC (Mid-Contract Termination With Adequate Cause, see related story), although she was careful to offer no guarantees. The hospitality of the FicSoc Three would have to be guaranteed. A promise of more thoughtful, more consequential thinking should be forthcoming, she insisted.

“I, for one, would rather eat shit than wear it,” Pailthorp was heard to mutter as he left.

## The Consequences of Not Thinking Through the Consequences Surveillance-Cam™® Transcript

Dr. William Ray Arney received the following document from the “Grievance Officer” (quotation marks ours). It is self-explanatory:

### MS-Mediator®/MS-Enforcer® System

Dear Dr. Arney (Sociology):

You have admitted responsibility in the matter of the instuffing of inserts into *The Cooper Point Journal*. This is a/an grievous offense which could result in sanctions under the College’s Mid-Contract Termination With Adequate Cause (MCTWAC) policy. Because this is your first offense, you are hereby ordered to undergo therapy at the College’s Counseling and Life Arrangement Center. The expected results of this therapy are:

1. A sincere apology from you to the staff, present and future, of *The Cooper Point Journal*, the said sincerity of which shall be judged by the said *Cooper Point Journal’s* staff.
  2. A guarantee that you shall hereafter bear no responsibility for any effects of your work in any classroom on this campus.
- and
3. That you adequately work through all remaining issues concerning your admitted affair with the College’s Grievance Officer.

You are hereby warned that should you fail to complete the ordered therapy to the satisfaction of your assigned therapist and, in the case of #3, the College Grievance Officer, you may still be MCTWACed.

In accordance with the Pre-MCTWAC Policy, all therapy sessions will be imaged on the Counseling Center’s Room 101 Surveillance-CAM®™ and made available to all members of the community so that they can feel informed of your progress.

Cordially,  
Sue Feldman  
Grievance Officer

Accompanying documentation:

From: smithb@elwha.evergreen.edu

To: feldmans@elwha.evergreen.edu

MCTWAC was made for this guy. Can you help me out on this one?

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*The Spokesperson* staff painstakingly transcribed the following initial session between Dr. Arney and Cheri Smith, Fellow of the Life Arrangement Counselors Society (LACS). Like all other documentation (as opposed to most of the people we deal with), this transcript, too, speaks for itself.

**Smith:** I know it can be difficult to be ordered to undergo therapy that you don’t want. So I want to acknowledge up front that this could be a difficult time for you, especially since you are teaching a class devoted to ..., uh, “the overthrow of the Therapeutic Mentality in our times.” Do I have that right?

**Arney:** That’s right. But I have no problem with being here. I think it’s the right thing to do when someone gets a little over the line. Haul ’em back, I always say. “Every action has its

consequences,” I always say. “You pay a price for everything; it’s just a question of which price you’d rather pay,” I always tell my consumers. So carry on, Cher.

**Smith:** Maybe you could call me “Ms. Smith.” So, what would you like to work on first?

**Arney:** Uh, my sincerity issues?

**Smith:** That’s very good, Bill. That “my” shows a sense of ownership of that problem and indicates a willingness to accept responsibility. Excellent start, Bill. So, maybe we could start with the apology you owe Mr. Probasco and the *CPJ* staff.

**Arney:** Gladly, Smitty.

**Smith:** Ms. Smith.

**Arney:** Right. How about: “I’m sorry”?

**Smith:** Well, it’s a good start, Bill, but you can’t smile. I think that’s a lot of the problem with your sincerity thing. You have to look like you are sincere in order to be perceived as sincere, and that’s what we’re aiming for here, isn’t it?

**Arney:** I don’t know if I can pull it off, Ms. Smith. My consumers in “Fictional Sociology” tell me that I laugh at everything, their papers, them, life, death, you know, everything. Sort of like a Woody Allen alter, you know? Maybe I could write a letter?

**Smith:** That’s good. You know you’re making progress in therapy, Bill, when you become innovative in dealing with your issues. So, here, let’s try typing out a letter on this screen.

**Arney:** [typing] To the Editor:

**Smith:** This isn’t a letter to the editor. It’s a letter to Mr. Probasco. He takes all this personally, so you have to be personal.

**Arney:** [typing] Dear Matt:

**Smith:** Part of being sincere is caring enough and having compassion enough to spell his name right. It’s Mat, M-a-t.

**Arney:** Like what you walk on?

**Smith:** Why don’t you try “To the CPJ Staff:”...

**Arney:** [typing] To the CPJ Staff: I am very sorry

**Smith:** Too fast. Sincerity is a feeling that occurs in the interstitial spaces of our outward expressions. Leave room for the feeling.

**Arney:** [typing] T o t h e C P J S t a f f : I a m v e r r y s o r r y

**Smith:** Don’t fuck with me on this one. I can have you MCTWACed outta here faster than you, with your prostate, can take a whiz.

**Arney:** Okay, look maybe we could [sniffs]... maybe we could, you know, [tears begin] ... you know, like, [lots of tears] ... move on to something else.

**Smith:** [demonstrating caring behaviors] I’m with you on this, Bill. I’m sorry I yelled, but I accept the fact that I yelled and take responsibility and hope you’ll be able to see it in the context in which it occurred.... I can feel you hurting on this, Bill. You just take it where you want to go.

**Arney:** I’m just feeling so empty.

**Smith:** Empty? That’s a feeling, Bill. Can you go to that feeling, Bill? Can you go inside and feel that feeling?

**Arney:** It's down deep, down low. [His hand reaches down, out of camera range.]

**Smith:** Can you show me that feeling, Bill?

**Arney:** [doing so]

**Smith:** Get your hand off that, Bill. I told you not to mess with me. If you make me uncomfortable one more time, I'm going to punch MS-Enforcer's® buttons and you are a goner.

**Arney:** Sorry. You just asked me to show you my emptiness. It's all those donations I'm making. Our salary here is so low that... Oh, no, [sobbing] ... oh, my ... Oh, I have a feeling now. [wrenching sobs]

**Smith:** Go with it. Go with that feeling, Bill. Speak it out. Let it go, Bill. You're safe with me.

**Arney:** [brightening] Really?

**Smith:** [caring] Really, Bill. Really, really, really. This is the point in the process where all those hidden thoughts have to come out before you'll be able to get anywhere.

**Arney:** [wracking sobbing. hysterical crying]

**Smith:** [really, really caring] Come on, Bill. Tell me. Tell me everything.

**Arney:** Well, Cheri, two years ago ... it was at Levensky's five-year evaluation....

**Smith:** Mark's

**Arney:** Yeah, Mark's. Well, one of his students had written about him, "You haven't been to Evergreen until Mark Levensky has made you cry." I want my students to think of me like that, Cheri. Is that too much to ask? [the sobbing subsides]

**Smith:** Bill, can I ask you a personal question?

**Arney:** [compassioning] Anything, Cheri.

**Smith:** That thing with the Grievance Officer ... was that love, or was that a lust in the dust sort of thing?

**Arney:** Oh, Cheri, you really care about me, don't you? Personally, I mean.

[Smith and Arney are shown in a "therapeutic embrace" that lasts, in our staff's opinion, just a little too long.]

**Arney:** Can I ask *you* one thing?

**Smith:** Depends, of course.

**Arney:** Well, I was wondering about Grievance Officer Feldman. Is her name S-i-o-u-x or S-u-e?

**Smith:** She worked on those issues here. I can't talk about it.

This and the other videos that speak for themselves are available on the college's website

<http://www.evergreen.edu/SurveillingU/archive/MCTWACers/arney/index.html>