

SAIT SAFARI

Making The Grade

Many students wheedle for a degree as if it were a freebie T shirt

by Kurt Wiesenfeld

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It was a rookie error after 10 years I should have known better, but I went to my office the day after final grades were posted. There was a tentative knock on the door. Professor Wiesenfeld? I took your Physics 2121 class? I flunked it? I wonder if there's anything I can do to improve my grade?" I thought: "Why are you asking me? Isn't it too late to worry about it? Do you dislike making declarative statements?"

After the student gave his tale of woe and left, the phone rang. "I got a D in your class. Is there any way you can change it to 'Incomplete'?" Then the e-mail assault began: I'm shy about coming in to talk to you, but I'm not shy about asking for a better grade. Anyway, it's worth a try." The next day I had three phone messages from students asking me to call them. I didn't.

Time was, when you received a grade, that was it. You might groan and moan, but you accepted it as the outcome of your efforts or lack thereof (and, yes, sometimes a tough grader). In the last few years, however, some students have developed a disgruntled consumer approach. If they don't like their grade, they go to the "return" counter to trade it in for something better.

What alarms me is their indifference toward grades as an indication of personal effort and performance. Many, when pressed about why they think they deserve a better grade, admit they don't deserve one but would like one anyway. Having been raised on gold stars for effort and smiley faces for self-esteem, they've learned

that they can get by without hard work and real talent if they can talk the professor into giving them a break. This attitude is beyond cynicism. There's a weird innocence to the assumption that one expects (even deserves) a better grade simply by begging for it. With that outlook, I guess I shouldn't be as flabbergasted as I was that 12 students asked me to change their grades after final grades were posted.

That's 10 percent of my class who let three months of midterms, quizzes and lab reports slide until long past remedy. My graduate student calls it hyperrational thinking: if effort and intelligence don't matter, why should deadlines? What matters is getting a better grade through an unearned bonus, the academic equivalent of a freebie T shirt or toaster giveaway. Rewards are disconnected from the quality of one's work. An act and its consequences are unrelated, random events.

Their arguments for wheedling better grades often ignore academic performance. Perhaps they feel it's not relevant. "If my grade isn't raised to a D I'll lose my scholarship." "if you don't give me a C, I'll flunk out." One sincerely overwrought student pleaded, "If I don't pass, my life is over." This is tough stuff to deal with. Apparently, I'm responsible for someone's losing a scholarship, flunking out or deciding whether life has meaning. Perhaps these students see me as a commodities broker with some-

thing they want—a grade. Though intrinsically worthless, grades, if properly manipulated, can be traded for what has value: a degree, which means a job, which means money. The one thing college actually offers—a chance to learn—is considered irrelevant, even less than worthless, because of the long hours and hard work required.

In a society saturated with surface values, love of knowledge for its own sake does sound eccentric. The benefits of fame and wealth are more obvious. So is it right to blame students for reflecting the superficial values saturating our society?

Yes, of course it's right. These guys had better take themselves seriously now, because our country will be forced to take them seriously later, when the stakes are much higher. They must recognize that their attitude is not only self-destructive, but socially destructive. The erosion of quality control—giving appropriate grades for actual accomplishments—is a major concern in my department. One colleague noted that a physics major could obtain a, degree without ever answering a written exam question completely. How? By pulling in enough partial credit and extra credit. And by getting breaks on grades.

But what happens once she or he graduates and gets a job? That's when the misfortunes of eroding academic standards multiply. We lament that school-

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FAQs

Frequently Asked Questions



by Heather Sagan,
SAFA Administrator

FAQ: What is the purpose of the SIR (Student Instructional Report)?

A: The SIR was developed to aid in evaluating and improving instruction. It provides faculty members an opportunity to systematically obtain feedback on their students' experiences in the classroom, and it gives students a chance to describe and assess their courses and instruction.

FAQ: Who should administer the SIR?

A: The SIR comes complete with an Instructor's Guide with directions for administering the SIR. It is outlined very clearly in the SIR Guidelines that the Instructor should administer the SIR. The use of the SIR should be by the instructor, for the instructor, to improve instruction.

FAQ: Who should decide in which classes to use the SIR?

A: The Instructor should decide which classes should be SIRed and the results should be used solely by the instructor, and possibly by his or her academic coordinator, to improve instruction.

FAQ: How often should a SIR be administered?

A: There is no standard policy at SAIT for the frequency that SIRs are used. The recommendation is once per semester.

Benefits

FAQ: Are you aware of what is available to you through extended health care benefits?

A: I recently had an enquiry from a faculty member regarding claims for chiropractic services. Human Resources could not answer my query and suggested that I call the Mutual Group.

On discussion with the Mutual Group, I obtained the following information:

Alberta Health Care pays \$12.66 per visit for chiropractic services.

The annual maximum that Alberta Health Care pays is \$200.00/person/benefit year (July 1 - June 30).

The participant can submit claims to the Mutual Group when he/she reaches the Alberta Health Care \$200.00 maximum for chiropractic treatment.

The participant has to request a statement for chiropractic services from Alberta Health that the \$200.00 maximum has been reached and submit the statement to the Mutual Group.

The Mutual Group's benefits for chiropractic services are limited to \$500.00 per year and one x-ray per year.

SAFA has requested that this detailed information be included in "You and SAIT" extended health information.

Are there other extended health care benefits that you have experienced any difficulty with? If so, we would like to hear from you. What would you like to see changed and/or improved? You can e-mail the SAFA office at safa@sait.ab.ca or send you comments to us via interoffice mail.

There are four SAFA representatives on the Employee Benefits Committee: Simon Bergen-Henengouwen, Len Filmer, Randy Paul and Diana Ponsford. These representatives have been working on your behalf to make improvements to health care benefits for faculty. ♦♦

SAFAGRAM

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SAFAGRAM is published by the SAIT Academic Faculty Association (SAFA) five times a year on or about the first days of October, December, February, April, and June. Deadline for submissions is the 10th of the month preceding publication. Send submissions to SAFAGRAM, care of the SAFA office, N201 or email submissions to luda.paul@sait. Please keep submissions under 300 words, double space, and, if possible, submit on floppy disc (Mac or DOS) with an accompanying hard copy. Submissions may be edited

for grammar, length, or content. SAFAGRAM editorial policy, as approved by the SAFA Executive on June 14, 1995, is as follows:

1. The Editorial Board has the final say as to what is included or deleted from the newsletter.
2. Editorial Board decisions about newsletter material must be agreed to by consensus.
3. The newsletter will include a disclaimer stating that the views expressed in its content do not necessarily represent the views of the Editorial Board or SAFA.
4. All material included in the newsletter must
 - be signed by the author when submitted to the editors but anonymity may be requested and granted for printing.
 - be based on "reasoned argument" if personal criticism is used.
 - not involve name-calling.
 - not include sexist, racist, or homophobic comments.
 - be related to SAIT, although this will be interpreted broadly.

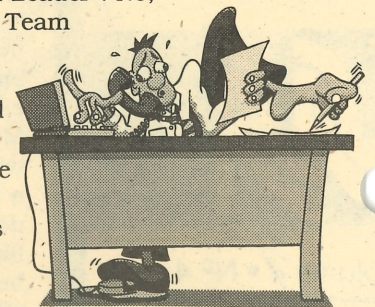
The views expressed in SAFAGRAM do not necessarily represent the views of the Editorial Board or SAFA.

Team Leaders

Have you been asked to be a Team Leader for your section and/or department? Have you been given an off-load to perform the duties of a Team Leader only to find out after the fact that the off-load you were given was not adequate? We have heard concerns from instructors who have been off-loaded to do other duties but the off-load they have been given is not nearly enough to do the work that they have been assigned.

Is there an obligation by instructors to be Team Leaders? In some cases, instructors have been told that "you have to be the Team Leader". No, you don't "have to be the Team Leader". As an instructor you have an obligation to teach your Unit Standard Load but there is no obligation to carry out the duties of a Team Leader.

How are Team Leaders selected? Do these positions go to competition? It seems in most



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*Making The Grade
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Children get "kicked upstairs" until they graduate from high school despite being illiterate and mathematically inept, but we seem unconcerned with college graduates whose less blatant deficiencies are far more harmful if their accreditation exceeds their qualifications.

Most of my students are science and engineering majors. If they're good at getting partial credit but not at getting the answer right, then the new bridge breaks or the new drug doesn't work. One finds examples here in Atlanta. Last year a light tower in the Olympic Stadium collapsed, killing a worker. It collapsed because an engineer miscalculated how much weight it could hold. A new 12-story dormitory could develop dangerous cracks due to a foundation that's uneven by more than six inches. The error resulted from incorrect data being fed into a computer. I drive past that dorm daily on my way to work, wondering if a foundation crushed under kilotons of weight is repairable or if this structure will have to be demolished. Two 10,000-pound steel beams at the new natatori-

um collapsed in March, crashing into the student athletic complex. (Should we give partial credit since no one was hurt?) Those are real-world consequences of errors and lack of expertise.

But the lesson is lost on the grade-grouching 10 percent. Say that you won't (not can't, but won't) change the grade they deserve to what they want, and they're frequently bewildered or angry. They don't think it's fair that they're judged according to their performance, not their desires or "potential." They don't think it's fair that they should jeopardize their scholarships or be in danger of flunking out simply because they could not or did not do their work. But it's more than fair, it's necessary to help preserve a minimum standard of quality that our society needs to maintain safety and integrity. I don't know if the 13th-hour students will learn that lesson, but I've learned mine. From now on, after final grades are posted, I'll lie low until the next quarter starts.

WIESENFELD, a physicist, teaches at Georgia Tech in Atlanta. ♦♦

EDITORIAL

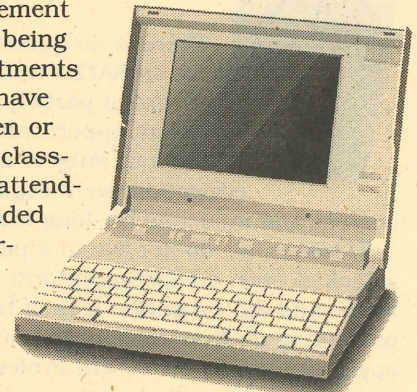
WHO'S RESPONSIBLE FOR...IT?

The Technology Enhancement Program (TEP) is currently being embraced by several departments at SAIT. Many instructors have already taught, or have been or will be asked to teach TEP classes. Many instructors have attended sessions that have provided some of the basic TEP information; and over the past year, more and more support has been made available to instructors via the Teaching and Learning Centre (TLC), the Learning Skills Center (LSC), and TEP and curriculum coordinators within departments.

Now the concern for many instructors becomes when to find the time to get the adequate training to be prepared to teach TEP classes. Developing a TEP course is a huge undertaking, and even though some support is now available at SAIT, it still takes a great deal of time to convert course materials into TEP format (six months would be a reasonable TEP training and course development time). The first few instructors who taught TEP courses had virtually no up-front support. They were given laptops and were put into a "sink-or-swim" situation; and if they were lucky, they stayed just one step ahead of their students—not a confidence-building scenario for instructors or for students.

Most SAIT instructors strive to give SAIT the professional image that SAIT wants to portray to its "customers." Portraying that professional image is next to impossible when instructors are struggling with new technology and, in some cases, new course material. Kudos go to the TLC and the LSC for offering courses and workshops in TEP training. But...why are so many of these sessions offered in the evening and on

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What's new at TLC



by Laura Cuthbertson
Teaching and Learning Centre

With SAIT's growth in areas of distributed learning and technology enhanced learning environments (TEP), I am pleased to announce two new appointments to the Teaching and Learning Centre. Our new team members are providing critical training support for faculty involved in these growing initiatives.

Nina Morberg: Projects Coordinator

Nina brings to the TLC here experience as a consultant for Computer Applications in the Education. She is working in close liaison with ACCE99 Technologies to provide best practices support in teaching and learning, for faculty engaged in distributed learning. As well Nina will be developing teaching and learning materials for on-line delivery.

Denis Beaulieu: Projects Coordinator

Denis has been seconded by the TLC from the Applied Arts and Sciences Department. Denis's instructional experience over the past 10 years has been both extensive and varied. Most recently, he has been actively involved in delivery of classroom instruction for students enrolled in TEP. Denis will be responsible for coordination of development and delivery of Instructional Skills Programs that relate directly to the TEP environment. He will be working closely with TEP coordinators and faculty who are currently using this technology in the classroom.

Nina and Denis are co-ordinating the Teaching and Learning with Technology Workshops in June. The workshops focus on assisting instructors who are participating in TEP and ACCESS Technologies programs and who are using technology to enhance learning. ♦♦

PD or Not PD—That is the question ... or is It?



by Pam August
Teaching and Learning Centre

There is no question that in a perfect world, we as SAIT Faculty would break down the doors to participate in professional development opportunities. As professionals both in our subject matter areas and in adult education, we recognize the value of remaining current and modeling life-long learning.

However, we do not live in a perfect world. Issues such as lack of time, conflicting priorities, ever increasing workloads, and did I mention lack of time, are primary barriers preventing us from maximizing our professional development opportunities. In the recent Professional Development Survey, time issues were cited as the main reasons for non-attendance at P.D. sessions.

While members of P.D. Series committee can not lessen your workload (wouldn't we be popular if we could), we have attempted to make the upcoming professional development sessions well worth your time and energy. We are confident you will find the P.D. Series offers excellent return on investment.

The theme for the 1999 Professional Development Series is "Great Teaching Getaway – Building a Learning Community." The overall goals of the series are to help you develop specific skills, obtain current information in teaching and learning practice, and have some fun! Professional development sessions provide an excellent opportunity for peer interaction and dialogue, fostering the continued growth of our learning community.

Sessions for this year's series are categorized into one of four streams

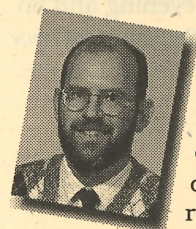
- Swapping Tricks of the Trade (A series of "Spotlight Cafes" where your colleagues will share techniques and tricks that have worked for them.)
- Beyond Covering the Material (Sessions focus on ways we can engage the learner for learner success.)
- Teaching and Learning with Technology (These sessions focus on integrating technology for enhanced learning outcomes.)
- Keeping Sane in an "In-SAIT" World! (Our favorite section—sessions and activities designed to de-stress you, rejuvenate you and . . . forget all that—participants will just get to have some fun!)

Additionally, from May 27th through June 2nd, we are bringing in a number of excellent keynote speakers each known for his or her expertise and ability to inspire and educate.

- David Brown—Vice President & Dean, International Center for Computer Enhanced Learning, Wakeforest University—"Teaching and Learning with Technology—How can Technology be Used Most Effectively to Enhance Learning Outcomes"
- Gillies Malnarich, Centre for Curriculum, Transfer & Technology, British Columbia—"SAIT as a Learning Community" and "Collaborative Learning"
- John Dyer, Calgary—"Using Humor in the Classroom"
- Stephen Downes—University of Alberta—"The Future of Online Learning"
- David Wangler—University of Alberta—"Rediscovering Your Passion for Teaching and Learning" (We're not here for the big pay cheques or fancy cars, or are we?)
- The Presentainers, Calgary—"The Soul of a Teacher" (This event will be followed by a pub night.)

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LIBRARY UPDATES



by Dave Weber
Educational Resources Library

- ⇒ The preview of four corporate research databases is almost completed. A possible replacement for our current hard copy subscription to the Financial Post Corporate Card service will be either Moody's International Company Data, Micromedia's Cancorp, Financial Post's Corporate Profiler, or Financial Post's Investor Reports.
- ⇒ The expansion of the print collection has necessitated a shift of books into the J-wing quiet study room. Material on graphic arts, photography, music, and recreation are now located in the J-wing with the material on language/literature and history/geography.
- ⇒ The Library display of new and notable acquisitions has moved and expanded from a three shelf, portable display near the entrance to the computer lab to a much larger six-shelf, permanent display near the Webcat PCs. The Library entrance display case is featuring new electronic resources at the Library, and the audio visual display case is featuring a new set of videos on wine. ♦♦

*Team Leaders
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departments that Team Leaders are not selected through the competition process but rather assigned by the Academic Coordinator or selected by a consensus of the instructors in the section. There is no provision in the SAIT/SAFA Collective Agreement for Team Leaders.

What should the expectations of a Team Leader be? Several years ago when instructors were assigned additional duties as Team Leaders, it was to coordinate one or two subjects for the department so that there was some consistency in the course outline, course content and the final exam. The position of Team Leader seems to have expanded from that concept to include timetabling, instructor loading, coordinating SIRS.

We would like to hear from instructors who have been assigned duties as Team Leaders to get some feedback.

If the off-load you have been allowed to "carry out these other duties" is not enough, you have two choices: a. Keep track of the hours that you are putting in to do the work assigned, and if the hours are not enough ask for additional off-load to make the workload more manageable, b. When your term as Team Leader is complete, advise your Coordinator that you do not wish to continue because the off-load is not sufficient for the workload. ♦♦

SAFA Elections 1999/00

Support your Faculty Association! Now is your opportunity to be involved and help to share the direction of SAFA and by association, the institute's direction.

Positions on the SAFA Executive are a one year term. The SAFA Executive Committee meets every Wednesday for approximately two hours each week. At these meetings we discuss the issues that affect SAIT and the professional interests of instructors. Issues are then addressed through the available channels—discussion, negotiation, grievance, arbitration as the circumstances demand until the best interests of the whole SAIT community—students, instructors, as well as management—have been met. The more active you are, the better the Association can serve you. It is important that we get a high number of candidates so that all positions benefit from competition.

Nominations are required for each of the following positions:

President

Secretary Treasurer

Directors - two directors are elected from each division:

Directors Division A:

Mechanical Trades & Tech., Auto-Diesel, Energy & Natural Resources,
Recreation & Athletics

Directors Division B:

Applied Arts & Sciences, Business, Health Sciences, Information Technologies

Directors Division C:

ACET, Electrical/Electronics, Hospitality Careers, Counselling, TLC

Board of Governors

- One position to be filled for a 2-year term

The Board of Governors meets that last Tuesday of every month. There is a Board retreat/planning session held in June.

Academic Council

- In Division A there are two positions to be filled.

Division A - two representatives

- In Divisions B & C there is one position in each division to be filled.

Division B - one representative

Division C - one representative

Academic Council meets the second Tuesday of every month. Meetings are held October to June.

The SAFA annual election will be held in May. ➡

*Editorial
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Weekends? (Recently, two full days were dedicated to TEP training, but both of these days were Saturdays.) In bases where training has been offered during the work day, most instructors can't fit another thing into their already full days of teaching, preparing, marking, corresponding, consulting, meeting, networking, etc., etc., etc. Why is no time off loaded for them to take the necessary training? Why are instructors responsible for using their own leisure and family time on weekends and evenings to learn new material so that they can survive in the classroom?

Instructors are not adverse to change if that change enhances student learning. Students are an instructor's priority in the classroom. Rather than investing all the money available for TEP in hardware and software, more of that money should now be invested in the instructors who are expected to teach TEP classes.

We know SAIT has bought into the TEP program. We know the laptops are available. We know computer labs are being created. What we need now is for SAIT to give instructors adequate time and compensation to become TEP proficient before they walk into a classroom. ➡

*PD or Not PD
continued from page 4*

PD or Not PD? That is a question only you can answer. We hope you are able to participate in some of the professional development offerings this spring. We are confident you'll be glad you invested the time!

The Professional Development Survey results have been compiled. If you are interested in seeing the results, please stop by the Teaching and Learning Center, N-202, Senator Burns Building. ➡

... A computer manual according to Dr. Seuss

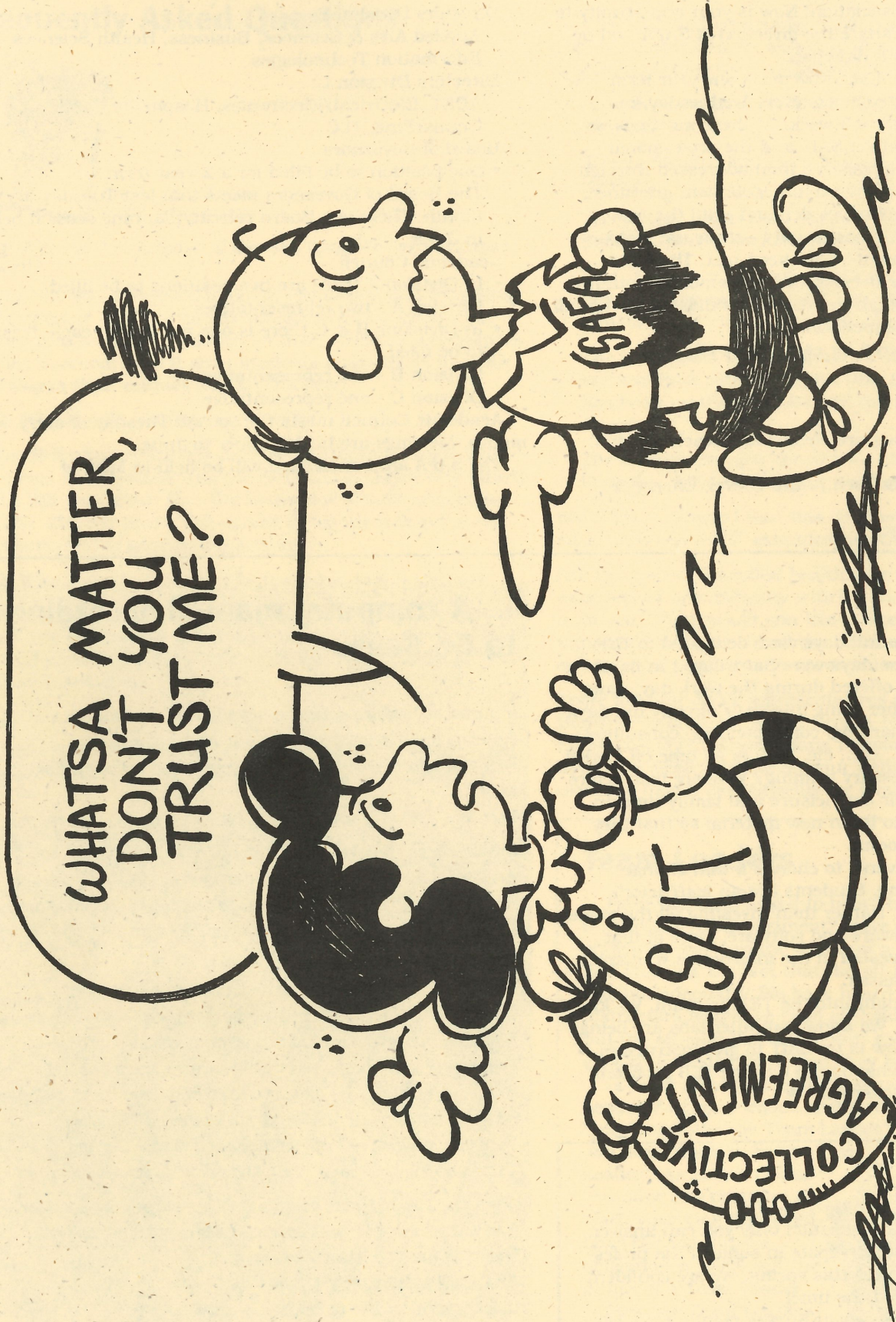
If a packet hits a pocket on a socket on a port,
And the buss is interrupted as a very last resort,
And the address of the memory makes your floppy disk abort,
Then the socket packet pocket has an error to report.

If your cursor finds a menu item followed by a dash,
And the double-clicking icon puts your window in the trash,
And your data is corrupted 'cause the index doesn't hash,
Then your situation's hopeless and your system's gonna crash.

If the label on the cable on the table at your house,
Says the network is connected to the button on your mouse,
But your packets want to tunnel on another protocol,
That's repeatedly rejected by the printer down the hall,
And your screen is all distorted by the side effects of Gauss,
So your icons in the window are as wavy as a souse,
Then you may as well reboot and go out with a bang,
'Cause as sure as I'm a poet, the sucker's gonna hang!

When the copy of your floppy's getting sloppy on the desk,
And the microcode instructions cause unnecessary risk,
Then you have to flash your memory,
And you'll want to RAM your ROM,
Quickly turn off the computer, and be sure to tell your mom.

From Lite 96 CHFM "A Laugh A Day" calendar for Wednesday April 7.



THAX SCHULZ!
—HAMILTON

Things that make me go 'Hmmm' #649:

SAIT files intention to invoke Section 13.02
of the Collective Agreement ... then backtracks.