

RACISM?

Temple Professor Opposes Easy Grades for Blacks

Paul Jablow, Inquirer Education Writer, The Philadelphia Inquirer | January 25, 1975

Original caption and photograph from the January 25, 1975 Philadelphia Inquirer article about Professor Williams's memo.

A black faculty member at Temple University has accused some of his white colleagues of reverse racism by overly lenient grading of black students.

Walter E. Williams, an assistant professor of economics, said in a memorandum to fellow faculty members at the School of Business Administration that the alleged practice "is clandestine and dishonest and, more importantly, harmful to black students and black people."

Williams, 38, a Philadelphia native who attended Benjamin Franklin High School, said in an interview Friday that he wrote the memo because "somebody has to tell the emperor he has no clothes on."

He said that since he distributed the memo about three weeks ago, he received only slight reaction from his colleagues but that the reaction has been favorable.

Seymour L. Wolfbein, dean of the school, said he admired Williams' "guts" in writing the memo but felt that any leniency towards blacks occurred in lower-level courses and did not result in cheapening a Temple business diploma.

Williams, who has been at Temple for a year and a half, said he had noticed the practice at the business school but felt it was probably more prevalent in other departments of the university.

He said he had drawn his conclusions from talks with other faculty members, complaints from white students and occasional personal experiences.

In one such case, he said, a black student submitted the same paper in his course and another course, although this is not permitted. The other professor, apparently white, gave the paper a 'B' or an 'A-minus,' Williams said. [Williams] flunked it.

"I wouldn't have accepted it from a high school junior," he said. "It didn't contain one coherent sentence."



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Professor Williams accuses colleagues of reverse racism

Williams added that at a faculty meeting, he heard a white professor admit that he would give a 'C' to any black student who "appeared to be taking notes."

In his memo, entitled "Fraudulent Grading," Williams charged that the alleged practice:

- Denies black students measures of their relative competency.
- Fosters superiority attitudes among white students and tends to reinforce stereotypical views held [about] blacks.
- Undermines the effort and merit of those minority students who receive honor grades.

"Regardless of the intent of double standards in grading," he said, "it plays into the hands of the most racist elements in our society for there is no more effective way of destroying the credibility of accomplishments by blacks.

"The alleged reasons for this behavior on behalf of my colleagues varies from those having to do with fear to those having to do with 'compensatory' treatment.

"I can intellectually respect the professor who gives a black student a 'B' when he earns a 'D' because he fears some type of retaliation. On the other hand, the professor who engages in such behavior motivated by guilt or passion to compensate for historical inequities finds only intellectual and human contempt in my heart."

Williams said he believed Temple's virtual "open admissions" policy could work, but only if it devoted more resources to remedial courses and monitored them stringently.

"It's a good time to start focusing on these things," he said. "We have more common sense now than we had in the 1960's. By 1980, we'll have forgotten about 'affirmative action'."

Williams also supports the use of some standardize tests criticized as culturally biased, because "blacks and minorities don't go out into a culture-free world."

Williams says he is receiving more support for his views among black colleagues than he was in the 1960's but that he had held the same views then.

He said that when he was teaching at a West Coast college, a black student came to him and told him he needed a 'B' in his course to graduate. He told Williams that he wanted to teach in Watts.

Williams says he dismissed the student, stating that, "You want to be one more p--- poor teacher in Watts. If you'd said the San Fernando Valley I'd have given you the 'B.'"