

Harold Donnelly Narrative

compiled and with comments by Leonard Lipshitz

Note: This document has names redacted at the request of the Editor of the Notices of the AMS.

*My involvement in this matter is explained in **Appendix 10**, and particularly at the beginning of **Appendix 13**. For background, I was on the Mathematics faculty at Purdue from 1972 to 2019, and was Department Head 1992-97 and again 2002-07.*

2018 – 2020 Low student evaluations in some courses, mostly but not exclusively MA262. Also, some very respectable student evaluations in graduate courses. **Appendix 3** contains a brief history of MA262 written by Leonard Lipshitz (=LL) and some comments on some of the MA262 issues written by Harold Donnelly (=HD).

Appendix 1 contains a May 2020 3 year review of HD and a January 2021 e-mail addressing teaching, both from the Department Head's predecessor.

Appendix 2 contains some student complaints and related communications. The last complaint refers to the snow event below.

Snow. On February 1 2021 we had a heavy snowfall. Harold spent several hours shoveling snow to free his car and then drove in to teach his two sections of MA262. He was exhausted. After the first section he became confused in thinking that he had completed his teaching, and headed home. This was obviously upsetting for the students waiting for the second class, and is reflected in one of the student complaints. On the way home, HD realized his error. Not having e-mail at home, he couldn't do anything until the next day. Early on February 02 the Department Head came to HD's office and removed him as instructor in both classes. **Appendix 4** contains e-mail from the Department Head formalizing the removal of HD from his classes, mentioned above, and ordering HD to go on sick leave. HD objected that he was not sick. The Department Head responded that HD would not be paid unless he agreed to go on sick leave. HD agreed to be on sick leave even though he wasn't sick.

Overview of Appendices 5-11: The Department Head instructed HD to write out notes for the whole of MA262 and demonstrate a facility with various on-line platforms, as a precondition for being allowed to teach again. This is all fairly Byzantine, and beyond my ability to completely unravel, but here are what I think are the salient facts:

HD carefully wrote out notes for the whole course. The kind of notes that a faculty member might use in class. The Department Head declared that the notes were not detailed enough. She wanted "*Lectures should be written to be ready for delivery without any ad libbing. . . .*" Harold pointed out that this is (close to) impossible, especially if one is to interact with the class and entertain questions. A colleague offered his very complete course notes. The Department Head said those were unacceptable because they were written for Tuesday Thursday class

meetings and HD had a MWF class. HD explained how the conversion from two lectures a week to three would work. The Department Head raised further objections.

Comment: It's hard for me to view this as anything other than an attempt to humiliate HD, set him up for failure, and drive him to retire.

I think HD completed (most of) the administrative homework, but I'm not sure.

They also mention reductions in salary and the possibility of revoking tenure. More detailed descriptions:

Appendix 5 is e-mail on July 26 2021 specifying the conditions HD is to meet in order to be allowed to teach. It is worth noting that the Department Head told HD that MA262 is the only course she will consider assigning him. She will not allow him to teach at the graduate level because (some) graduate students did not want him to. The Graduate Chair says he was not party to that decision, and that he has no objection to HD teaching at the graduate level. See **Appendix 13, page 26** (written by LL) for more on HD's graduate teaching. I doubt there is any other faculty member who has taught half as many different qualifier courses.

Appendix 6 is a July 28 2021 memo reducing HD's salary to 80%.

Appendix 7 is an e-mail dated October 5 2021 summarizing a meeting of the Department Head, HD and the Senior Associate Dean (=SAD), in which the Department Head and SAD "explained" to HD how he had failed to pass the criteria they had set for allowing him to teach.

Appendix 8 is a memo dated October 18 2021 reducing HD's salary to 40%.

Appendix 9 is more e-mail give and take about meeting, or not meeting the criteria the Department Head established for assigning HD teaching.

Appendix 10 is a January 31 2022 memo threatening to reduce HD's salary to zero and to fire him. In this memo the Department Head suggests that HD talk to LL about retirement, which he did.

On LL's advice HD informed the Personnel Committee about what was happening. Said committee tried to engage with the Department Head on the subject but was rebuffed – she was "within her rights as department head, was supported by the associate dean and the university lawyer", and roughly speaking it was none of their business.

Appendix 11 is an e-mail exchange between HD and LL on the teaching criteria that HD has failed to meet, the suggestion that HD inform the Personnel Committee about what was transpiring, and an addendum to the Personnel Committee. I (LL) don't seem to have a copy of HD's communication to the Personnel committee, but I believe he sent them the memo in **Appendix 10**.

March – April 2022 Grievance.

HD filed a grievance. Rules allow only a 30-day window, so the grievance was based on the January 31 2022 memo only (**Appendix 10**). Purdue rules suggest an informal attempt at

resolution with a mediator. HD agreed to that process. The Department Head refused. The hearing took place on April 20 2022. The rules were very restrictive. LL was allowed to attend, but not to speak. The grievance committee found completely in the Department Head's favor. Both HD and LL have all the documents, but they are not pasted into these appendices, since the process is supposed to be confidential. The only part I have made public is the statement from the Department Head, in her written response to HD's grievance, that *"I have never threatened to reduce Prof. Donnelly's pay to zero if he did not retire."* which is in direct contradiction with exactly that threat which is made in her memo of January 31 2022 (**Appendix 10**).

Appendix 12 is a June 8 2022 Memo suggesting that HD has "opted" to be on unpaid leave (forever?) and threatening to reduce his salary and benefits to zero and HD's e-mail response that he is not so opting.

Appendix 13 is the June 9 2022 memo from LL to 35 colleagues informing them of what has been transpiring, and the Department Head's June 10 response.

Appendix 14 June 23-24 2022 e-mail exchange with two photos between HD and Charles Fefferman (=CF) re "Donnelly-Fefferman Philosophy" at a conference in Oxford on "topological data analysis" in a talk by Leonid Polterovich. HD subsequently sent CF the memos in **Appendix 13**. CF subsequently spoke with HD and a couple of faculty members.

Appendix 15 is a July 5 2022 memo reiterating previous threats to reduce HD's salary to zero and fire him. It also reiterates the statement from January 31, 2022 (**Appendix 10**): *If you believe that you will expend effort in furtherance of the Department's research or engagement missions, please carefully outline that effort, and I will work with you on establishing benchmarks for validating your effort.* It points out that what HD submitted *do[es] not amount to a document from which we could establish benchmarks for validating your research effort along the way.*

It also includes a July 6 2022 e-mail announcing that "time's up". HD's salary was reduced to zero. Contribution to medical insurance was stopped.

On July 5 2022 there was a zoom meeting with 16 senior faculty participants. It was unanimous that the Department Head's behavior is detrimental to the department. The meeting chose a committee of 5 members to talk with the dean. The committee asked to meet with the dean to try to head off the catastrophe. There was a long delay in getting to meet with the dean but the meeting eventually took place with the Department Head present. He asked that the 5 work with the Department Head to try to increase the possible ways to solve the problem. After discussions with HD the 5 emailed the Department Head with a proposal of 7 courses

(undergraduate and graduate) that HD has taught before and would be interested in teaching. The Department Head refused to meet with the 5 to discuss the proposal.

Appendix 16 Is the October 4 2022 report from the Committee of 5 to HD on their efforts to date. It is worth noting that the Department Head ends her memo of June 10 (**Appendix 13, page 30**) with the sentence: "*My office is open*" but has nevertheless refused to meet with the Committee of 5 (which includes 2 ex-department heads and 2 distinguished professors) to discuss a matter of departmental importance. I don't think that any other department head in the last 50 years has refused to meet with even one faculty member who wanted to meet.

November 2022 Harold's personal recollections on his collaboration and interactions with Isadore M. Singer appeared in the Notices of the AMS as part of the second half of a two-part article.

<https://www.ams.org/journals/notices/202210/rnoti-p1770.pdf?adat=November%202022&trk=2573&cat=communication,commentary,department,editor&galt=none>

The first part appeared in October 2022:

<https://www.ams.org/journals/notices/202209/noti2546/noti2546.html?adat=October%202022&trk=2546&galt=none&cat=communication,commentary,department,editor&pdfissue=202209&pdffile=rnoti-p1547.pdf>