

# The Underground GRAMMARIAN

Volume Two, Number Two

February, 1978

**A** recently published HEW survey, *Social Indicators, 1976*, tells us, to no one's surprise, that one out of five American adults is what they call a functional illiterate. It also finds that about a half of all American adults might as well be called functional literates: They *can* fill out simple forms, and they *can* read the instructions on child-proof bottlecaps.

Right now America is probably less literate than ever before in its history but *more* literate than it will ever be again. We can quite reasonably expect the day when few of us can read and write at all and when only a few of those few can read and write skillfully. When that day comes the literate minority will be able to control the thoughts and lives of vast herds of the illiterate. Now *that* is elitism.

We have convinced ourselves that our malignant illiteracy is caused by television, by divorce, by parental neglect, by poverty, by malnutrition, by over-crowding, by drugs or electrical guitars, by the war in Viet Nam, or even by Dr. Spock. All these horrendous hypothecations and others even gloomier are now comforting articles of belief in schools of teacher-training, since none of them suggests that the teaching is bad. But it is, and bad teaching is probably the *one* cause of mass illiteracy about which we can do something.

With one breath, our teachers boast that they are highly trained *professionals* worthy of profound respect and large salaries. With the next, they whimper that they can hardly

be expected to compete with *Mod Squad* or teach large classes. Our teacher-training departments presume to teach how to teach, but not, apparently, how to teach in the face of great but clearly expectable obstacles. It's as though physicians should ask to be spared the trouble of treating the sick. If our teachers aren't deeply enough educated and well enough trained to win, as good teachers have always won, battles against stupidity and ignorance, then what *can* they do? Babysit?

A teacher who doesn't know how to have more influence than *Charlie's Angels* is just no damn good. A teacher who cannot compel more attention and credence than the sellers of hemorrhoid ointment is just no damn good. An educational system which harbors such teachers is just no damn good, and a school of teacher-training which turns them loose is just no damn good.

Don't despair. We are going to do something. Glassboro has been chosen\* to be the Flagship of Teacher-training in New Jersey, an unhappy title surely, but a happy chance. There is nothing more important for us to do than to design and construct a program for the making of excellent teachers.

First we must put away the presumption that we have such a program. We don't, and

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\*When we use the passive, we *mean* the passive. Nobody here did the choosing. As Mark Chamberlain says: "He [Hollander the Chancellor] has made us an offer we can't refuse."

# Sea Isle City 3, Glassboro 0

**G**NE year ago, we pointed to the need for a grammatical competence test for all teachers and administrators at Glassboro. It would be, we thought, one small way of showing the taxpayers how much we care. Strange to say, nothing has been done.

Our President *says* that grammatical skill is now considered in candidates for retention, tenure, and promotion, and our *Academic VP* says the same about incipient members of his staff, but we still have no competence test. Well, never mind. Until such a test comes to be, we'll just have to carry on with our case by case examinations. Such examinations are all the more important now that we are taking up our new station as Teacher-Training Flagship. We *do* want to be excellent.

The passage chosen for this month's competence examination is the work of a Robert Loughran, a junior but especially significant member of our administration. We'll take up his significance later; for now consider this memo to resident students, 12/14/77:

As you are probably aware, a horrible fire occurred in a woman's dormitory at Providence College. An early determination of the cause has been attributed to the igniting of Christmas decorations. We through a directive from Mr. Tumminia, Vice President of Campus Planning, have consequently advised the Resident Director of each dormitory to remove all decorations from their resident hall that would be considered a fire hazard.

It is your responsibility as a resident to insure that your individual room is also clear of any potential hazard. If needed, extra trash bags will be made available via your student advisor for the removal of any necessary materials.

We are not attempting to damper your holiday spirit. We are, however, endeavoring to insure that you are living in a safe environment.

This passage is less than excellent. It has some flaws. Some of them, had they appeared

in more respectable company, might well have been dismissed as mere typing mistakes, but this writer sounds as though he may indeed be quite unaware of the difference between a woman's dormitory and a women's dormitory. Considering the occasion, that "damper" might have been a failing try at a macabre and tasteless pun, but it's probably nothing more than a mistake.\*

It's fun to see a novel silly mistake in that startling "via," but most of the mistakes are common and dull. We see the nonsense often caused by a needless passive in the assertion that a determination has been attributed to igniting, and the usual misplaced modifier in that "resident [?] hall" that might be considered a fire hazard. It is momentarily fun to notice that "possible" becomes redundant in the company of "might," but the similar fault in "individual room" isn't any fun at all. And what can it be that makes pronoun agreement so hard for those people?

But enough of that. Further analysis can benefit only the writer, and we'd rather not do him any more favors. It's time to reveal what was earlier promised—the Significance of Robert Loughran.

Robert Loughran isn't just some chap who wandered in off the street and fell into some not-too-burdensome duties in the Wildman

\*Sometimes mistakes like this are made by secretaries, but we hold that he who signs the document takes the rap. That's why we wish that someone had signed a memo from the Interim Advisory Committee to the President for Career Development Assistance which offered to "disperse" \$10,750.

The secretaries here are generally more competent in English than their bosses. The College certainly wouldn't lose anything by having all secretaries and bosses swap desks, tasks, and salaries. The typing, of course, would be rotten, but just imagine what we would gain in grammar and policy-making.

apparatus. He is one of our own graduates, a graduate of a teacher-training program in social studies. Had he not come to rest with our Dean of Students, he might easily have been nurturing the youth of Sea Isle City.

This troubles the mind. We are reminded of something else we said a year ago:

We see why so few students can write English; few teachers can write English. The ability to write and speak clear, correct, conventional English is not an antiquated social grace; it is an indispensable skill of our profession and the medium in which teaching and learning happen.

We still mean it. Until some unimaginable new mode evolves in us, language will be to learning what water is to swimming. We can hope for very little effectiveness in a teacher who is less than skillful in language, our best medium not only for the expression but even for the very creation of intelligence.

But let's be fair. It would hardly be logical to draw conclusions about teacher-training at Glassboro from a single example. One fly does *not* a summer make, nor yet one ant a picnic. Let's assume the best—that Loughran's competence in language is not typical, because if it is, the jig is up. Who would ever trust us to train any more teachers? So, if he isn't typical, his grammatical skills must be greater or less than those of the typical graduate. If greater, the jig is even upper, so let's just not think about that. And there you have it. We can save our self-respect simply by asserting that Loughran's grammar is his own problem and has nothing to do with his training as a teacher of social studies. Whew.

But wait. How can that be? Aren't we devoted to excellence? Hasn't Robert Loughran been chosen, out of all his classmates, to stay on and serve his alma mater for \$16,682 per year? Don't all these things mean that he is one of our *best*? Well of course they do. And doesn't *that* mean that the writing sample we

have printed is the work of one of the best of our graduates? Hmm.

Something must be wrong with our logic. Listen—we're all in this together, and this is just the kind of stuff, especially if there's a lot of it around, that might dent our Flagship. For our part, we'll keep looking at the writing of the Glassboro graduates who are still around—there must be some who write well, and you can all help by seeing to it that no word of this gets to our Chancellor at 225 W. State St. in Trenton 08625.



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boastful claims will invite public displays of our inadequacies. But we must equally put away the suspicion that we can't make such a program. We can, and **THE UNDERGROUND GRAMMARIAN**, naturally, will keep reporting on what we do and what it means.

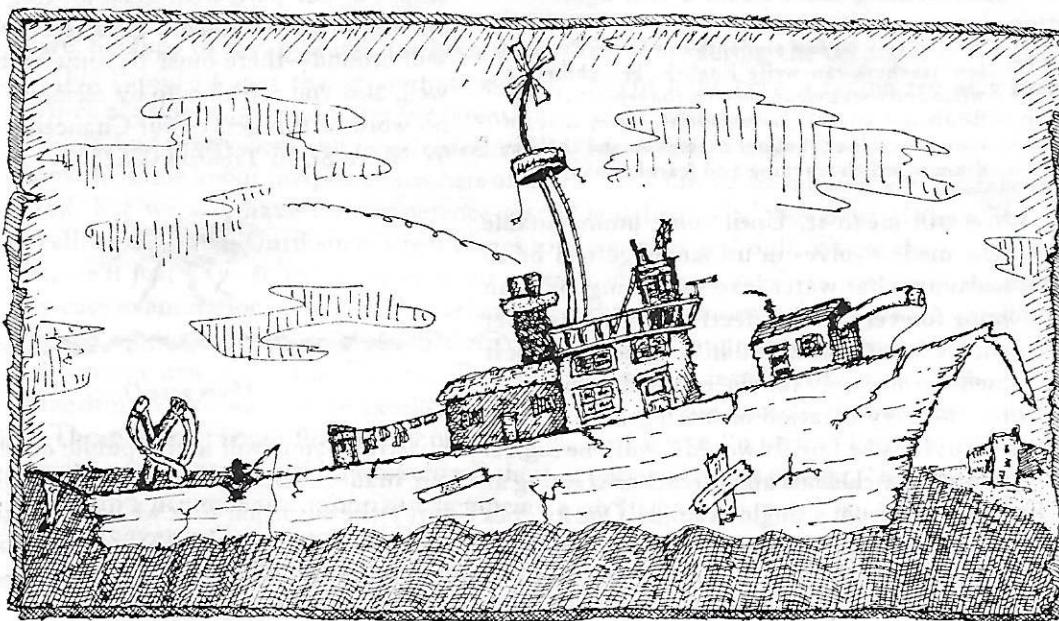
A F----† program will make us scrutinize *everything* we do, since putting teacher-training into the hands of teacher-trainers alone is like leaving war to the generals. It may be our lofty neglect of this principle that has brought us legions of teachers less interesting and less influential than *Gilligan's Island*.

And for now, let's wait for others outside of the teacher-training apparatus to praise us before we praise ourselves. "Excellent" does not permit certain modifiers: "somewhat excellent" just won't do. Careless talk about our "demonstrated excellence" will bring embarrassment. Try it and see. Loose lips have been known to sink even F----s.

†We just can't print it again. It's sappy.

“An offer we can’t refuse!”

# OUR FLAGSHIP!



An exclusive and hitherto unsuspected depiction of the auxiliary trawler *Gschmrub*, late of the Bulgarian Navy. Reprinted here by special permission from *Jan's Fighting Ships*.

## DHE Unanimous: Glassboro gets it!

Overheard in Trenton: “Well, we’re at this neat surplus place, you know, and we see this thing and naturally we think right away about Glassboro. I mean, after all, it’s over ten years Chamberlain has been bringing those people on board—right? The Chancellor was a little worried, but I told him—listen—no problem. I know those people. If they’ll buy the Triad they’ll buy the *Gschmrub*.”



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