

# Hector's unhappy retirement

*A vilified linguist demands a full retraction from SFU*

During an academic career of more than 30 years, Hector Hammerly became an expert in language instruction. But it's still possible for the Simon Fraser University professor to make a few verbal slips of his own. He admits to making such mistakes on April 11, when he met with acting SFU president David Gagan to discuss his unhappiness with how the linguistics department was being run.

When Mr. Gagan said he wouldn't intervene, the conversation turned sour, and the outspoken professor said he could think of 10 SFU administrators—including Mr. Gagan—who deserved to be "punished" and he referred to them as his "Ten Little Indians." Days later, Prof. Hammerly was suspended, barred from campus and charged with making threats.

Last month, the university allowed him back on campus after he agreed to end his teaching career four years early. The university's response was extreme and showed that administrators were not above a little linguistic creativity of their own, says Prof. Hammerly. He accuses the university of misrepresenting the facts to make him look like a bigger threat than he really was. "I do want to insist on some sort of apology because they have distorted what I said and what I did," says the 61-year-old linguist. "I just want them to acknowledge that they overreacted, that they made unwarranted assumptions. I'm not a violent person."

Prof. Hammerly's main beef is that SFU used his purchase of a "stun gun" to foster a perception that he was preparing to harm Mr. Gagan or other university administrators. The *Vancouver Sun* also made that connection. In a front-page story on April 19, the paper reported that the professor was "banned from campus after he bought a stun gun and sent angry e-mail messages to senior administrators and staff." The next two paragraphs stated that Prof. Hammerly went to Bellingham, Washington, to purchase a stun gun, and "was suspended with pay the same day."

The truth is, the decision to suspend Prof. Hammerly was made on April 14, two days before he picked up the stun gun (an illegal device in Canada). In an April 16 letter from Mr. Gagan outlining the terms of the suspension—including the ban from campus—

there is no mention of a stun gun. "[Prof.] Hammerly was suspended as a result of a communication that he sent to me, and not as a result of anything else," the acting president now says.

But even as Mr. Gagan was writing the letter, he was having Prof. Hammerly followed by private detective Brian LeBlanc. In a court affidavit, Mr. LeBlanc said he trailed the professor on April 16 to Blaine, Washington, a border town where Prof. Hammerly keeps a post office box. As fate would have it, a stun gun Prof. Hammerly ordered on April 1—he has the shipping receipt to prove it—had arrived.

The professor says he ordered the stun gun, and also installed motion-sensitive lights

ROB MULLIN



Prof. Hammerly: Condemned for a stun gun purchase.

around his home, because his van had been vandalized and he was worried about a home invasion. "It has nothing to do with SFU," he says.

When Mr. LeBlanc told his client what he saw in Blaine, it fed the apparent paranoia of university administrators. Judith Osborne, SFU's associate vice-president academic, filed an affidavit of her own in B.C. Supreme Court the same day. In her statement, she said she was concerned that Prof. Hammerly was "mentally unstable," and noted that most of the characters in the murder mystery *Ten Little Indians* are killed. She also said the pri-

vate eye "observed [Hammerly] purchase a weapon" to bring back to Vancouver. That contradicted Mr. LeBlanc's statement, which said the professor got the package at Hagen's of Blaine, a shipping and receiving business, not a weapons store.

The Osborne and LeBlanc statements helped create the impression that Prof. Hammerly was a real threat, a violent man ready to blast SFU officials with a stun gun. These statements were used to justify even stronger sanctions against the professor. The university used the declarations to get a court injunction that prohibited him from any contact with SFU employees and from carrying a weapon.

So what exactly did the linguist mean when he threatened to "punish" Mr. Gagan and others? Prof. Hammerly says he meant "punish politically" by asking for non-confidence votes against selected senior administrators. The week before his ill-fated talk with Mr. Gagan, the professor had argued in a letter to *Maclean's* that administrators should be removed "for at least five years" if faculty decide their performance is sub-par. He says the concept is similar to recalling politicians.

*'Any other matters that Prof. Hammerly thinks remain unresolved, will remain unresolved.'*

—Acting SFU president David Gagan

Mr. Gagan, though, didn't ask Prof. Hammerly to clarify what he meant by "punish." Instead, he decided to have the professor followed. Why such a strong measure? That's "confidential information," says Mr. Gagan. The acting president says he doesn't recall how much the exercise cost. He also states that he isn't going to apologize to Prof. Hammerly, nor will he publicly clear the professor's name. "All outstanding matters were resolved [in the early-retirement deal]," says Mr. Gagan. "Any other matters that [Prof.] Hammerly thinks remain unresolved, will remain unresolved."

It is easy to see why university brass would be happy to see Prof. Hammerly leave. He has been one of the most vocal professors on campus, criticizing everything from his salary to SFU's harassment policy to poor management at the bookstore. But even with a \$192,000 retirement package in hand, he vows not to fade away until the university does something to restore his name. "My reputation is in tatters," he says. "and I'd like to recover that."

—Derek DeCioet