

## Political aspirants need our support

Election time is nigh, and it's all systems go at the University of Nairobi. A lecturer and three students have declared their interest in Parliamentary seats in town and in the country side.

Politics play an important role in our lives and all sections of the population must therefore play a role in national politics.

The popular belief held by ruling party and government operatives that "politics should be left to politicians" has no place in an increasingly vibrant democracy. The university community should critically re-examine its role in national politics. Universities are held in high esteem, and society generally acknowledges the fact that it is from such institutions of higher learning that leaders who will decide the destiny of this nation will come from.

Students and lecturers, by virtue of having a more balanced perspective of society than the common man should play a vital role in championing causes that will transform our country to a true democracy and move the country to the next millenium. The university community by virtue of its numeral and intellectual strength should seek to ensure that their interests are well articulated in the National Assembly by putting one of their own in the august House.

This can only be realised, however, if universities look at politics as something to be promoted and not undermined as is hitherto the case. Political debate in the campus should be promoted as long as students and lecturers pursue that noble goal, academic excellence.

Those who have declared interest in parliamentary seats should be afforded the opportunity to express their views; they should be supported to make an entry into the political arena. Universities should be in the forefront in the struggle for freedom since no intellectual excellence can be achieved in an atmosphere of intimidation.

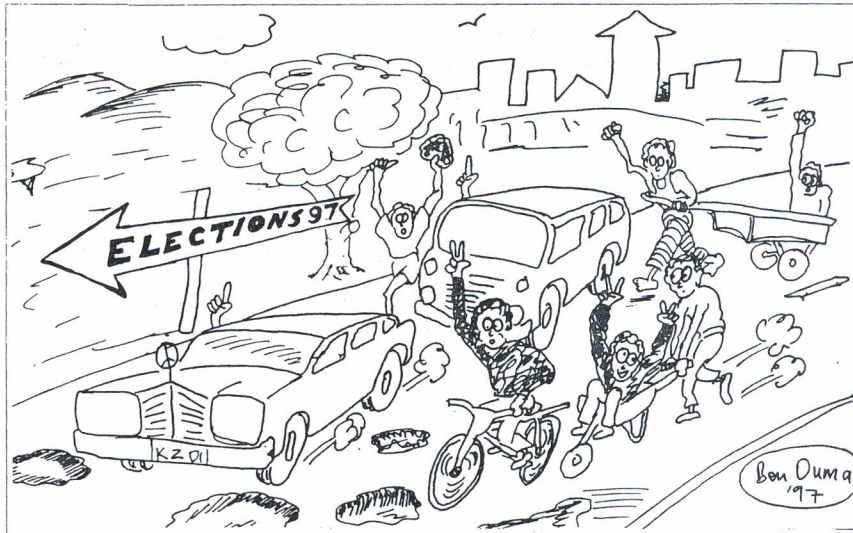
We at *The Anvil* fully support those from among us taking the bold move of attempting to go to parliament.

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COMMENTARY

## Lecturers unfair in exam marking

By VINCENT MAKORI

The ambition of any student is to complete their course and get awarded the highest grade possible. In Kenya examinations are the most important aspect of formal education at all levels. However bright one is, whatever one does, it is the final examinations that determine the career pursued and sometimes, what one becomes. This is the tragedy of the education system.

Each year, thousands of Kenyan youth are branded failures because they have not attained certain grades in the examinations. Some cannot join university because they have not attained the cut-off points. Their dreams of getting university education are shattered.

There have been claims that the university marking system is wrought with irregularities stemming from the personalised nature of grading.

At the university, there are no marking schemes for examinations. The lecturer is the 'god' who determines one's fate. Woe unto you if you cross his path. They wield the power to award marks and their grades are rarely questioned. The lecturer is supposed to know what each student is worth and how they arrive at the grades is their business. Students have many times got intrigued to see half a mark on their Continuous Assessment Tests (CATs) papers. How a lecturer arrives at half a mark beats logic sometimes. Unfortunately, scripts for the main examinations are never released to the students and they never get to know where they went wrong.

A number of factors have been cited as interfering with fair grading at the university.

Some students have been given low grades not because they are weak but because the course lecturer did not like them. Reasons range from such a student being outspoken and sometimes openly disagreeing with

the lecturer over academic issues; having interest in the same woman; to tribal differences. Lately, even political differences have been cited as interfering with fair grading.

Some lecturers, as a rule, don't award any marks above 'C'. It is claimed that they don't want their students to get stronger degrees than they (lecturers) got. Others simply want to make students feel inadequate.

The male students may have suffered but their female counterparts have a painful story to tell. Most have suffered silently while others never discovered why their performance was so dismal, despite their hard work.

Some male lecturers have been accused of using grades as a bait to get sexual favours from female

The tragedy is that there is no redress system as the "crime" employs blackmail, which is sometimes very difficult to prove. In fact most of the administrators in the university deny the existence of widespread sexual harassment, while those who admit it claim that the cases are so few, that they are of no consequence. What does one expect when some are guilty of the same crime, including respectable and elderly professors?

Some lecturers argue that they cannot unfairly award low grades because external examiners have to verify the results. However, with the swelling numbers of undergraduates, external examiners rarely go through all the scripts. Most times they only look at the highest and lowest scores. Moreover, external examiners are fellow lecturers from other universities and most times close friends and they are unlikely to report irregularities.

There should be a system by which students can channel their complaints whenever they feel that a lecturer is denying their marks because of personal reasons. This could be achieved by forming a committee comprising female and male lecturers to listen in confidence to complaints and investigate them. If the complaints are verified, the concerned lecturer should be disciplined by a higher office. The committee could also ensure that no student is victimized for making complaints.

External examiners should be drawn from outside the country. The course lecturer should not know who the external marker is until all the papers are checked and recommendations made. The external examiner should discuss the papers with the course lecturer in the presence of two or more lecturers.

The above recommendations may look idealistic but given the value of examination results in this country those concerned should make every effort to ensure that there is fair play

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students. Those ladies who cooperate get 'A's while the 'stubborn' ones get 'punished' effectively. They will get poor grades in their CATs and even worse grades in the final paper. This has led to some sitting supplementary exams or emerging with miserable 'D's in their finals. The results are that students who should have otherwise been awarded first class honours degrees may end up with second class lower division or even a pass. On the other hand, some who are weak end up with first class honours or second class upper division.

Many of those ladies who are not willing to trade their bodies for grades have suffered depression, not knowing who to share their problems with. Some, feeling so desperate and dreading the prospect of failing in their examinations, have given in to the giles of randy lecturers. After that, they feel cheap, used and hopeless.