

# LETTERS TO THE EDITOR



## Letter to the Editor

We are writing in response to the article “On Choosing a Thesis Advisor” by Robert Lipshitz [1] in the Early Career Section of the February *Notices*. We found the advice in the article to be very helpful but have concerns about the following piece of advice:

“Should I have more than one thesis advisor?

“Probably not. Get advice from, and discuss mathematics with, many people, but have one designated thesis advisor who is keeping track of your progress.”

Given the length of time invested in a doctoral program and the power a sole advisor has over his or her students, there are advantages for a student to having two advisors, or at least another faculty member who is sufficiently familiar with the student’s work to serve as an alternate advisor if necessary. Think of it as an insurance policy for many years of work. Having two advisors provides a Plan B in case one advisor has a health problem, leaves the university, or other problems arise. Having a second advisor or additional faculty member(s) cognizant of the student’s research has been recommended by the National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine in response to high levels of reported sexual harassment [2], and is also helpful to prevent other forms of abusive advisor/student relationships. There are additional benefits to two advisors, such as diverse feedback on one’s project and career advice. Many departments allow a student to officially have two co-advisors. If the student’s department does not, he or she can stay in close contact with a second faculty member who could in an emergency supervise the completion of the thesis and provide a letter of recommendation.

This letter does not in any way comment on our own relationships with our advisors but arises rather from years of experience mentoring women. It represents the personal views of the signers, not those of their institutions nor of the AWM. It originated through the Ad Hoc Group of AWM Members to Address Sexual Harassment.

- [1] Robert Lipshitz, On Choosing a Thesis Advisor. *Notices of the AMS*, 66 (2019): 191-193.
- [2] The National Academies of Science, Engineering, Medicine. *Sexual Harassment of Women: Climate, Culture, and Consequences in Academic Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine*, pp. 135–6. <https://www.nap.edu/catalog/24994/sexual-harassment-of-women-climate-culture-and-consequences-in-academic>

—Moira Chas,  
Stony Brook University

—Elizabeth Donovan,  
Murray State University

—Lynn E. Eberly,  
University of Minnesota

—Leslie Hogben,  
Iowa State University

—Marianne Korten,  
Kansas State University

—Maeve McCarthy,  
Murray State University

—Leslie McClure,  
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—Christina Sormani,  
City University of New York

—Monica VanDieren,  
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\*We invite readers to submit letters to the editor at [notices-letters@ams.org](mailto:notices-letters@ams.org).

**In Response to Dr. Grinshpon**

To the Editor:

Dr. Grinshpon’s letter in the Mar. 2019 *Notices* has the benefits of being clear and passionate. On the down side, there’s a lot in there to be taken issue with. I could go on at quite some length about what I find objectionable or misguided, but since this is just a letter, I will confine its structure to Dr. Grinshpon’s four starred points.

1. Are “politically charged” statements appropriate in the *Notices*? Earlier on, Dr. Grinshpon took the *Notices* to task for having “join[ed] the ranks of all anti-right liberally biased media in tasteless bashing of everything that can be attributed as right-wing.” On the page in the *Notices* just preceding the one with his letter, it says “Opinions expressed in signed *Notices* articles are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect opinions of the editors or policies of the [AMS].” It seems as though Dr. Grinshpon’s beef is with the author of the article, and not the *Notices* or its editors. And anyway, what’s Dr. Grinshpon’s letter if not “politically charged?” It implies that it itself should not be published, a lovely Gödelian twist if there ever was one. Dr. Grinshpon is correct that the Dawson quote is a rarity as described; that fact might lead one to wonder, what could have moved Prof. Dawson so?
2. Prof. Dawson’s reference to “an extreme right-wing establishment” initiated a discussion of “the establishment” (emphasis mine), and the assertion of “the fact that Trump is NOT part of [it]” (emphasis his). I prefer to think of the country’s power structure as having different power centers, which are sometimes competing, or expressing the differing interests of various communities. It should be clear that one of these centers revolves around the man who is President and de facto leader of the Republican Party. For sure, he had limited political influence before the election. But now? Revolutionaries, like Castro, Lenin, and Hitler, were also outsiders with limited power, until they had power. But more to the point, to describe the Leader as bravely standing up to all sorts of half-amorphous dangerous powers, the stronger the better, and who always succeeds, but just barely, serves only the interests of authoritarianism.
3. To Prof. Dawson’s statement that “the scientific worldview ... is ... under assault,” Dr. Grinshpon responds with “Seriously???,” and then proceeds to set up the wrong kind of strawman. He correctly points out that institutions are not being closed and academicians are not being punished, and this is good. That means that those (non-)actions are not the nature of the assault. When major power centers say that scientists are not to be believed in matters of their professional expertise, they will carry a sizable chunk of the population with them, and so be able to implement policy in contra-

diction to established science. This is, of course, much easier than Dr. Grinshpon’s listed oppressive methods, and there is no need for them to do more than what they are already doing. It bears mention that with the stakes of climate change so high, we cannot afford even these gentler forms of manipulation.

4. I half agree with Dr. Grinshpon’s feelings about comparisons between the current US administration and the Nazis, which he calls “tasteless.” Through my life, I have heard US movements and politicians as diverse as Nixon and Obama called “fascist,” and it had always rubbed me the wrong way. Like Dr. Grinshpon, I find such words very powerful, and they should be kept that way, by limiting their use to when it is truly deserved. Unlike Dr. Grinshpon, for the first time in my life I find their use now appropriate. I would say the Trump administration is in the fascist tradition. Of course it is not identical with the Hitler regime. And it will never be. This current brand of fascism is what fits into its time and place, just as the Hitler, Mussolini, and Franco governments were all different among themselves. I realize that such a claim needs considerable justification; this is not the place for that; I just want to make clear, I do not make such statements lightly. Be that as it may, Dr. Grinshpon finds “it’s spitting at the memory of all those who perished during those truly terrible times.” In contrast, I find the best way to honor their memory is to speak up when the same spirit starts to rear its ugly head again.

Yours truly,  
Bob Lubarsky,  
Florida Atlantic University

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**Rosenbaum Foundation**

Dear Editor,

Thank you for acknowledging in the May 2019 issue of the *Notices* the Award for Impact on the Teaching and Learning of Mathematics that was bestowed upon me by the Education Committee of the AMS. On this occasion, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Gabriella and Paul Rosenbaum Foundation and its president Madge Goldman, for providing generous grants in support of the Keystone Project at Daley College and its subsequent expansion to other universities.

Sincerely,  
M. Vali Siadat  
Richard J. Daley College

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