

RESPONSES TO MFN 18: LETTERS TO THE EDITORS

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Dear *MFN*:

I would like to respond to Anne Clark Bartlett's article, "An Entrepreneurial Approach to the Job Market," in the Fall 1994 issue of *MFN*.

Professor Bartlett's essay is filled with useful and constructive suggestions for job seekers. I have often wished that I had such effective mentoring when I was on the market myself. Nevertheless, I must strongly object to "a somewhat controversial suggestion" Professor Bartlett makes, namely that job candidates seek access to their dossiers by roundabout means without informing their referees.

A candidate who wishes to obtain this information has at least two legitimate ways to proceed. If the job seeker does not sign the optional waiver form, she can ask her referees outright for copies of their letters, which she then has a legal right to see. Or if she does sign the waiver, she can ask her mentor (or any other faculty member) to review her file in the placement office and look for any danger signals. Most universities, to my knowledge, would make no objection to such a review.

On the other hand, a candidate who signs the waiver but then gains indirect access to the file has a great deal to lose in return for a relatively small gain. Most important, she sacrifices her integrity, and if this dishonest procedure is discovered, she may gain a reputation for unethical behavior that will be hard to shake. If I learned that one of my own students had done this *after signing a waiver*, I would immediately pull my letter from the file and refuse to offer any further support to that student's career.

Job seekers should be aware that their mentors, especially at large institutions, may often have to recommend several candidates for the same position in the same year. Under such circumstances, letters need to be carefully worded in order to highlight each student's distinctive assets, but not everyone can be praised in equally superlative terms. Open access to referees' letters would inevitably heighten competitiveness among job seekers, who already have more than their share of realistic anxieties, while at the same time weakening the credibility of their referees and diminishing the trust that characterizes a good mentor-student relationship. At this level as in many others areas of the profession—tenure reviews, readers' reports on manuscripts, fellowship applications, and the like—there are very good reasons for maintaining the traditional confidentiality of the review process.

Sincerely,

Barbara Newman, Northwestern University

To the *MFN*:

A quick note to correct a comment made in Ruth Evans' review of Britton Harwood and Gillian Overing's collection. Evans writes that in the early 1980s I "declared that class and feminist analyses were incompatible." In fact, my 1975 essay "Sexual Economics"—reprinted in Evans' new anthology—does in fact bring together class and gender analyses, as does much of my work before and since 1975. What I wrote about was the ultimate incompatibility of socialist and feminist strategies for fundamental social change—taking "socialist" as equivalent to "revolutionary," and feminist as