THE FACULTY SENATE

April 22, 1997

Dr. Ray M. Bowen
President
Texas A&M University

Dear President Bowen:

At its regular meeting held April 14, 1997 the Faculty Senate approved the Graduate Council’s recommended revision of the policy stated in the graduate catalog regarding repeated coursework. Below is the policy as approved by the Senate:

Revised GPR calculations for Repeated Courses: A course in which the final grade is C or lower may be repeated for a higher grade. The original grade will remain on the student’s permanent record, and the most recent grade will be used in computing the cumulative and degree plan GPRs.

The above statement would replace the one on page 23 in the current graduate catalog that reads as follows:

A course in which the final grade is C may be repeated for a higher grade. The original grade will remain on the student’s permanent record, and both grades will be used in computing the GPR.

Thank you for considering this proposed policy. Please inform me of your action on this recommendation.

Sincerely,

Steven M. Oberhelman
Speaker, 1996-97

pc: Dr. Ronald G. Douglas, Executive Vice President & Provost
Dr. Dan H. Robertson, Chair, Graduate Council
Senator Thomas E. Wehrly, Chair, Academic Affairs Committee
Ms. Linda F. Lacey, Director of Academic Support Services

APPROVED

DATE

5/26/97
April 28, 1997

Professor Steven M. Oberhelman  
Speaker, The Faculty Senate  
Texas A&M University

Dear Steve:

The purpose of this letter is to respond to your letter to me dated April 22, 1997. I fear that I cannot change my opinion on the question of a posthumous honorary degree for Dr. Paul Erdos. I know from my own experiences in mathematics that Dr. Erdos is a person that has made profound scholarly contributions. It is a regrettable set of circumstances which caused him not to receive the degree last May.

My views on this matter were formed without a study of the policy which governs Honorary Degrees. In recent days, I have reviewed the policy and found that it does not allow for the possibility of a posthumous degree. Thus, my decision was anticipated by the group that formulated and proposed the current policy.

I am sorry that I cannot see a way to be more accommodating on this matter.

Sincerely,

Ray M. Bowen

cc: Dr. Ronald G. Douglas  
Dr. William L. Perry
Ray Bowen  
President  
Texas A&M University  
m.s. 1246  

Dear President Bowen,

You and I have had recent conversations regarding the posthumous award of the honorary degree to Dr. Paul Erdos that was to have been given him last December. You stated that you did not support the giving of this degree, since you were afraid of the precedent that could be set, and also because Dr. Erdos would not be able to fulfill the post-award obligations set forth by University policy.

At our April 8 meeting, I expressed my agreement with you. On further deliberation, and after subsequent discussions with members of my Executive Committee and with Dean of Faculties William Perry, I am requesting that you reconsider your position. I believe that this situation is unique and would reflect favorably on Texas A&M University. The purpose of the honorary degree is to reflect credit on Texas A&M University by recognizing outstanding individuals who have a real connection with this university. Dr. Erdos was a regular visitor here at least every other year since 1974. He had a good working relationship with faculty here, and he was a co-author with three of our faculty (Professors Itshak Borosh, Charles Chui, and Arthur Hobbs). He last visited the campus in January 1996. Thus he already satisfied the requirement of developing an ongoing relationship with Texas A&M University.

Dr. Erdos was the most prolific mathematician who ever lived, producing more than 1400 papers. Many of these were ground-breaking, including the first elementary proofs of both the prime number theorem and Chebyshev's Theorem. In addition, he founded or was the prime developer of several fields of mathematics, including partition calculus, extremal graph theory, extremal number theory, probabilistic graph theory, probabilistic number theory, and Ramsey Theory. He was the recipient of many important awards, including the Wolf Prize, the most valued prize in mathematics. The list of universities from which he received honorary degrees includes Cambridge University and the
University of Illinois; Texas A&M University would have been the sixteenth. Thus an award to Dr. Erdos of this degree would unquestionably reflect credit on Texas A&M University and demonstrate to the world his long-standing relationship with us.

Of course, we would not want to get into the business of awarding honorary degrees posthumously. However, this is a very special case. Dr. Erdos was told in January of 1996 that we wanted to award him the degree, and he agreed then to accept it. He would have accepted it in May of 1996, except that he had a prior engagement in another country. So he made plans to come in December, and had he not died in September, he would have received the degree he so richly deserved.

A second reason for reconsideration is the uniqueness of the case. It is extremely unlikely that similar circumstances will arise again, that is, an honoree is awarded a degree, after faculty and administrative approval, agrees to accept it, but then dies before he can receive it.

I would like you to consider charging the Honorary Degrees Program to take this matter under advisement and to articulate a policy which would cover the very rare situation such as this. The Honorary Degrees Committee may agree with your position and so recommend no further course of action; or it may recommend a change in policy. Please know that I am in full support of not awarding honorary degrees to any deceased person, but I think that a degree already granted to, and accepted by, a person of exceptionally illustrious international reputation would be appropriate. The chances of this situation being replicated are extremely remote.

I hope that you will consider charging the Honorary Degrees Committee to make a recommendation to you regarding Dr. Erdos. Thank you very much.

Sincerely,

Steven M. Oberhelman
Speaker, 1996-97