



# The GW Hatchet Online

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## Column: Administrators tip line is bad policy for GW

By John Banzhaf

The Trachtenberg administration has quietly mailed to many faculty members a telephone number they can use to lodge anonymous complaints against any student or fellow faculty member. The complaints can be based upon alleged violations of any University rule or policy, or anything the caller thinks might be unethical. The administration has promised to thoroughly investigate all such complaints and to take appropriate action if warranted.

At its last meeting, the Faculty Senate unanimously condemned the new program because it "compromises academic freedom." Because the administration ignored the condemnation, the Faculty Senate is now preparing to demand that the program be discontinued.

In retaliation for the program, a new Web site has been posted to permit students to report on the members of the administration and on individual University trustees. The Web site also provides other opportunities for students and faculty to strike back, and for the exchange and dissemination of damaging and embarrassing information about those who control the University.

This controversy comes less than a year after the Faculty Senate voted unanimously to condemn a proposed policy that provided for secret investigations of students and faculty accused of vaguely-defined "sexual harassment" – including allegedly offensive speech during classroom discussions and discipline without any hearings at all.

As a result of this condemnation and national publicity about its denial of any normal protections to those students or faculty who might be unjustly accused, that proposal was scrapped.

This new anonymous-snitch policy seems to be even worse because it covers not just sexual harassment but also allegations of violations of any university rule, policy or

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anything anyone thinks might even just be plain unethical.

Ironically, when confronted by an angry unanimous Faculty Senate, University President Stephen Joel Trachtenberg did not even attempt to defend the new policy. Instead, I've been told, he claimed that the entire program – including the establishment of the office to run it and the mailing of brochures to the homes of faculty members – was done without his knowledge by underlings. Even though Trachtenberg was clearly put on notice of it by the Faculty Senate condemning it, the program still apparently remains in place.

I believe that academic freedom isn't safe for anyone if any student or faculty member can be the target of an anonymous complaint and investigation about a fabricated comment – or one taken entirely out of context by someone with a possible axe to grind.

In the meantime, students and faculty can visit the Web site, [gwlaw.info/e-rat.html](http://gwlaw.info/e-rat.html), to make anonymous complaints about those who want others to snitch to them.

*-The writer is a GW professor  
of public interest law.*

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