

## Poem: The Committee on the Value of Pi

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A long time ago at Fernpepper U,  
Dean Quigley struggled with what to do.  
Now the dean was a man of very good heart,  
gentle and kind and unwilling to part  
from his key objective of widespread bliss.  
No contention, no challenges, just things left amiss.  
Whenever a problem would need a solution,  
a new faculty committee was the key resolution.

A new problem developed, which required much tact,  
on the value of Pi. Was it exact?  
So Quigley decided it would be a great pity  
to resolve the matter without a committee.  
He appointed sixteen but this proved too restrictive  
and the committee grew more and became somewhat addictive.

Now, academic committees have key characteristics;  
include all opinions, ignore all statistics.  
Deal only with emotion and tenure and rank.  
Never, ever, be concerned about money in the bank  
or whether or not the classes are good  
or whether the students are paying more than they should.  
One rule above all makes committees very nice;  
never consider an option that involves sacrifice.  
Procedures like these which function so lowly  
are why faculty committees get wrong answers slowly.

The committee faced the Pi problem with glee.  
“When we get done with Pi, we’ll then take on E.”  
They all agreed that Pi was all wrong  
Too complicated, too messy and much much too long.  
Three point one four one five nine  
two six five three five eight nine  
seven nine three two three eight four six.  
This was truly a problem the committee should fix.  
So the Committee continued its arduous work  
meeting weekly on release time, a wonderful perk.

One faction wanted the number reduced  
Because of the awkward trouble it induced.  
To have a value of 2 would be much more astute,  
much easier to remember, to use and compute.

Others wanted the value increased;  
pizza lovers mostly, from out in the East.  
Some suggested it's length was ridiculous,  
preferring instead to be much less meticulous.

Some suggested not much could be rearranged  
Pi was a ratio that could never be changed.  
"Pi is irrational, one can easily see."  
"That may be true, but then, so are we."  
But most concluded that it was absolutely imperative  
that Pi be considered a faculty prerogative.

The contention soon engulfed both Physics and Theology,  
Math and English, Engineering and Zoology,  
Journalism and German and French and Geology  
Chemistry, History, Economics and Psychology.  
All working on the committee and abiding by the rules.  
After all, as you know, these people aren't fools.

The debate continued year after year  
while Fernpepper slipped to a much lower tier.  
Quality declined because of this digression  
and enrollment plunged to a deep recession.  
Money became scarce, as we might have suspected  
and worthy projects were always rejected.  
Younger faculty, who showed the most potential  
were let go — having tenure was essential.  
Quigley passed on as did three deans following.  
But, the committee continued, undaunted and wallowing.

Not all participated in the fervent debate.  
Some continued doing work that was really first rate.  
They taught and researched and inspired the students,  
had new ideas and new concepts as they covered the rudiments.  
But these able few could not reverse the trend  
And Fernpepper continued its trend toward the end.

The question we ask is could we have saved it?  
By taking strong action, if we had braved it?  
Could we have made our classes better and better?  
Or focused our attention on things that really did matter?  
If we had helped the students to find sufficiency?  
Or done some things to improve our efficiency?  
Could we have been more demanding of ourselves and our peers  
and exemplified greater scholarship those past many years.

At the time of the Pi Committee, we were all overjoyed.  
But, as of this writing, we are all unemployed.  
And, the name, Fernpepper, is remembered by only a few  
along with Studebaker and Hudson and Dien Bien Phu.

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