

The Mission of Teaching

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Introduction

From the very beginning, the university was above all a place where teaching was important.

- o In twelfth-century Bologna guilds of students came together to hire teachers and then to monitor the performance of their instructors.
- o In Paris, a university emerged as masters formed guilds-- to control the training and certification of their fellow teachers.
- o In 1215, the Pope agreed that the newly formed university should have the authority to license teachers.

This victory--the freedom of the university to decide who would teach--was widely recognized as the university's most distinguishing and most essential function.

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Almost everyone can vividly recall at least one professor who has left a lasting impression on his life. And Fredrick Rudolph reminds us that very often these classroom virtuso--were at least in legend--"characters" on the campus.

The great teachers he said may have been:

Beloved or unloved,
tyrannical or permissive,
stern or playful,
tall or short,
skinny or fat,
young or old.

But above all they were strong and often colorful human beings.

A great professor Rudolph said, was someone students played tricks on, and if he found a cow in his classroom one morning somehow he would turn the disaster into a personal advantage.

The great teacher was probably famous for that very special lecture of his, the one that brought the Battle of Thermopylae right into the classroom. That hat, the one he wore twelve months of the year, even though it was too small, too old, too odd--that made him a character, too.

This description of Mr. Chips is a "caricature" to be sure but the point is that great teachers are always impressive and almost universally admired.

The early American colleges, were small and every faculty member was important.

- o When the University of Michigan achieved constitutional independence in 1850 it had 20 members of the faculty.
- o In the 1850's Harvard enrolled about 400 students.
- o And the major public universities of the in the mid-nineteenth century enrolled about one hundred students each.

- o In those early days, the American college wanted men like: Professor Fletcher A. Marsh, who in 1866 hauled manure all day so that the grounds of Denison College might be more beautiful.

- o The colleges wanted men like John Smith of Dartmouth, whose appointment papers said that he would be a "professor of English, a professor of Latin, Greek, Chaldee, and such other language as he shall have time for."

- o What the American College wanted was a man like Father William Stack Murphy of Fordham who, in the 1840's would-while shaving and gesticulating with his razor, listen to his students practice orations and then go off to conduct classes which were a wonder of charm and interest. (Rudolph)

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II.

The American college wanted above all, those who loved teaching more than money.

- o In 1805 the Dartmouth salary was \$600 annually.
- o At the University of Georgia in 1815 it was \$600.
- o Bowdoin paid a whopping \$1,700 in 1825.
- o While at Emory in 1855 professors got \$775 for a years instruction.

In those days poverty was a virtue along with chastity and piety--and the very thought of professors making money was considered to be almost immoral.

- o In 1883 the New York Times editorialized that "no professor worth his salt" ever devoted himself to learning for any other reason than that he loved learning."
- o And in 1908 President Eliot of Harvard declared that "the profession can never be properly recruited by holding out pecuniary inducement."
- o As recently as the 1930's The Nation editorialized as follows:

"Boost the professors as a group into the high salaried class. . . and you create a strong entrenched university with a vested interest in the status quo. . . Rich professors, The Nation said, are all too often 'social bourbons'."

Low pay was justified not only to keep professors from becoming social bourbons but also because working conditions were attractive and the psychic rewards were very high or so it seemed.

Psychic gains will not feed the kids, of course, but vital statisticians do report some interesting facts about today's professors.

- o College professors have better than average life expectancies.
- o Professors succumb less often than do manual laborers as to alcoholism, violence, and tuberculosis--although they are more likely than the average to have hardening of the arteries. The report doesn't locate exactly where the hardening takes place.
- o Professors rank low among all workers in job-related accidents and ills. Although in 1828 the Dartmouth College faculty met 51 times to discuss the problems and disorder of the students.
- o Except verbally, perhaps, the air of the lecture hall is relatively unpolluted.

- o And only during student flareups is the classroom plagued by noxious sounds and smells.
- o Incidentally, the "olfactory tradition" of the professorate has a long tradition.
- o Medieval towns tried to hold on to their masters by offering them quiet quarters on a fragrant street.

In recent years, the fringe benefits for teaching include far more than a quiet room on a fragrant street.

- o About half of the faculty of the nation have access to a campus swimming pool.
- o Nine out of ten private institutions waive some or all tuition for faculty children.
- o About 60 percent of all academic institutions own houses or apartments for the use of faculty.
- o And about one-seventh have a faculty club a golf course or at least a putting green.

The profession of college teaching in America has come a long way since the era of George Blaetterman, Professor of Modern Languages at the University of Virginia who was subject to stoning by his students "and who in 1840 was dismissed from the Virginia faculty after having twice during the previous week beaten his wife, once on a public road." (Randolph)

III.

Still, with all of the progress we have made, college teaching is truly a troubled and insecure profession.

- o Faculty are rewarded not for teaching, but research.
- o The rising optimism of the post war boom has faded.
- o And many faculty feel trapped with little opportunity for mobility or advancement.

In the 1980 summer issue of Liberal Education George Bonham wrote:

- o "A damaging sense of cynicism now prevades...the faculty.
- o Many academics now seriously question their earlier decision to select teaching as a life time career.
- o They sometimes spend a private hell of ten or fifteen years of studying in the same place, in the same classroom with the same colleagues.
- o If it is not outright downward mobility, it feels like it.
- o This is, at best, only a horizontal improvement."

(Bonham)

A 1978, National Education Association survey revealed that while 72 percent of the college teachers surveyed rated their own morale "very high" or "high" only 58 percent felt the morale of their colleges was high.

From these data one is tempted to conclude that it's more popular to complain on campus than to talk about one's satisfactions.

Still, we do know that the condition of the faculty have been changing:

- o The percentage of faculty members with tenure has increased from 54 percent in 1979-80 to 67 percent in 1981-82. (Minter-Bowen) The prospects for promotion for young faculty have diminished.
- o The Carnegie Council estimated that by the year 2000 the modal age of tenured faculty will be 56-66 and that there will be far more faculty members 66 and older than 35 and younger.

Faculty will not go elsewhere because in the main, there will be no were else to go. There are exceptions to be sure.

Competition with industry for engineers and scientists and competition with business and the other professions is very keen and a bimodal salary schedule is emerging.

- o In 1981-82 the average faculty salary for all ranks was \$28,120;
- o for business faculty it was \$30,800;
- o about \$32,00 in engineering; and
- o over \$44,000 in law.

By contrast, the liberal arts were lagging.

- o Faculty members in foreign language and in letters were below \$26,000.
- o And social science professors were only slightly higher.

IV.

But when all is said and done, we confront one essential truth. Excellence in education means excellence in teaching and we must find ways to give recognition to teachers at all levels who give themselves authentically to the coming generation.

- o When I first went to school, I asked my mother if I would learn to read. My mother said I would not read my first day at school but it would happen soon.
- o That first morning, I joined 28 other anxious, eager six-year olds who sat silently and with anticipation in front of a marvelous teacher named Miss Rice.
- o Miss Rice, a maiden lady as they used to say, seemed almost angelic hovering somewhere between heaven and the earth below. Miss Rice was warm and thoughtful and demanding and yet quite gentle. She was firm and yet she cared.
- o On that first day, Miss Rice stood tall, looked at 28 eager youngsters and said: "Good morning class, today we learn to read."
- o I just met my first outstanding teacher someone who showed me, by example, that good teaching is a marvelous blend of inspiration and clear goals.

Some years ago late at night I tried to recall all the teachers I had had.

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- o Many had been lost in the recesses of my mind, but I remembered four who were absolutely brilliant.
- o There was Miss Rich, of course, and a sixth grade music teacher, a history teacher in senior high, a philosophy professor in college and a graduate school instructor.

Everyone was different--and yet they were all alike.

- o All of my great teachers loved their subject, inspired students and were willing to reveal themselves not just as scholars but as human beings.

Several months ago, I was in a junior high school in New Haven.

- o A group of sixth grade students were clustered eagerly around their teacher reading Oliver Twist.
- o The students knew all about the good guys and the bad guys in the Charles Dickens' classic and they were pulling hard for the little urchin, who was trying to survive in a hostile world.
- o The teacher had quite literally brought London to New Haven.

The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching is now completing a two-year study of the American high school.

- o We are convinced that the single most important goal is to give recognition to our teachers not just in terms of salary but in other ways as well.

Several months ago, I was having dinner with Father Timothy Healey of Georgetown University and we got on this subject of teacher recognition. Father Healey said that about two years ago he called 15 Georgetown students into his office. All were graduates of the Bronx High School of Science and he asked who was their best high school teacher they had had. They did agree--quite quickly and Father Healey called the principal at Bronx High School of Science to make sure the students weren't giving him a fictitious name. Sure enough, there was such a teacher who had been there for many years. "Yes," the principal said, "he is outstanding." That spring commencement time Father Healey said, "I would like to introduce a candidate for an honorary degree. He teaches school at Bronx High School of Science. He is one of the great educators who has made Georgetown possible." The audience was deeply moved. Clearly, we must invest in the teachers of our children.

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For the second year, I have been honored to chair CASE's selection committee for professor of the year.

- o This has been, quite frankly, one of my most rewarding tasks.
- o With colleagues I have reviewed the credentials of dozens of superior teachers and I have read testimonies of students who have been inspired and whose lives have been forever changed.

At the end of our selection session a month or so ago, we all sat back exhausted and exhilarated too. We had discovered brilliant teachers on campuses from coast to coast dedicated men and women who every day were inspiring generations of new students to think critically and to dream creatively and to act responsibly as well.

And when I thought about the many touching tributes we had read I recalled the lines of James Agee who wrote "that with every child who is born no matter under what circumstance the potentiality of the human race is born again."

Great teaching is helping the human race stretch to fulfill it's full potential. And, I congratulate the Council for the Advancement and Support of Education for honoring those who teach.

This, it seems to me, is still the university's most essential mission.

PROFESSOR OF THE YEAR FINALISTS

Anthony F. Aveni, Colgate University

accepting: James Leach
Director of Communication
Colgate University

David W. Brooks, University of Nebraska-Lincoln

accepting: James Martin
Vice President
University of Kansas Endowment

Sol Gittleman, Tufts University

accepting: Clark R. Egger, Jr.
Director of Development
Tufts University

Richard Kieckhefer, Northwestern University

accepting: Ray Willemain
Director of Alumni Relations
Northwestern University

Kenneth S. Norris, University of California - Santa Cruz

accepting: Colette Seiple
Assistant Chancellor University Relations
University of California-Santa Cruz

Daniel G. Sisler, Cornell University

accepting: Robert Barlow
Assistant to the President for Federal and
State Relations
Cornell University