

1989 Distinguished Teacher of the Year

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Balance between Teaching and Research – A Matter of Concern

President Ryan, Vice President Berry, honored guests, fellow faculty members and students:

I am honored, flattered, as well as somewhat surprised, to receive the Distinguished Teacher Award for the year 1988-1989. I appreciate this wonderful recognition from the students, whose evaluation – a clear reflection of the idealism of youth – is always the most objective one. Also, as an American of Indian origin, I sincerely hope that this award will help to reduce the concerns of certain academics about the instructional effectiveness of "foreign-born" teachers. Surely, the path of achievement must remain open to all!

When I was first informed about the award, I felt that this was the precise psychological moment to say nothing. With the owl as the mascot of Florida Atlantic University, I sought the rationalization of saying very little in the rhyme,

"A wise old owl sat on an oak;
The more he saw, the less he spoke;
the less he spoke, the more he heard;
why aren't we like that wise old bird?"

But, I could not be the wise old bird! Mr. Vice President, your award letter said that I would be expected to give a scholarly lecture. I am particularly intrigued about the emphasis on "scholarly." Perhaps, it is intended to enable this audience to evaluate the "Distinguished" teacher!

There are many who believe that "education is the inculcation of the incomprehensible to the ignorant by the incompetent." Others quote from Confucius that "those who know do not tell, and those who tell do not know." The task seemed so challenging that I procrastinated the preparation hoping, as all of us mortals do, that "if you ignore the

future, it would go away." But "time and tide wait for no man," and I am here to say something "scholarly."

I would like to share with you today some of my concerns about the dilemmas of academic institutions in the U.S.A. with reference to the balance between teaching and research. My talk is, therefore, entitled: "Balance Between Teaching and Research – A Matter of Concern." The "concern" relates to both students and teachers. Right at the start, I want to establish my objectivity in talking about this subject, at the risk of blowing my own trumpet. My comments are based on a blend of experience that arises from years of research, evidenced by many research grants and nearly 200 publications, teaching and administration at several universities in India, England, Canada and the U.S.A., and the added perspective of department chairmanship many years ago.

During the past 40 years, U.S. universities, big and small, have been giving increasing importance to research. This research ethic in higher education is a very desirable trend, as universities contribute significantly to the nation's demands for the advancement of knowledge and its application. The positive correlation of research and teaching is the central tenet of academic life. According to recent statistics, U.S. universities perform about nine percent of the nation's research and development with their funding only 2 percent of the national budget for it. The training of graduate students, associated with the research programs, provides a continuous supply of human capital in the form of highly educated manpower. It exposes the future leaders, managers and workers to the development of new ideas, increases their tolerance of change, charity of the mind and willingness to adapt and adopt.

Although research and teaching can, and should, be mutually supportive and complementary, many universities are transforming into research centers, with research replacing instruction as the primary institutional mission. An important reason for the winds of change blowing toward research and less teaching is the dependence on external funding to cope with increasing costs and shrinking budgets. Also, the strong aspiration to move up the "prestige ladder" is a motivating factor. The overemphasis on research productivity explains the apparent lack of faculty involvement in quality teaching. The quest for knowledge, for its own sake, has to distinguish the university from a research institute, and scholarship should be cherished above profit. Clearly, teaching is not viewed as an endeavor to be examined, discussed and revised! Faculty members are torn between the competing obligations of research and publication, and the commitment to effective teaching. Tenure, promotions and salary increases are being mainly linked to the sacred cow of research productivity. The "rat race" for research funding is associated with the desperate need for greater release time for research and lower teaching loads. Also, it creates an unfortunate "proprietary"

atmosphere with very little communication between colleagues about mutual areas of interest to avoid the risk of giving out money-based research ideas!

Grantsmanship has been raised to an art involving optimistic forecasts of possible achievements of future work rather than the end products of actual research. The compounding factors are political acceptability and the monopoly system. Applicants with track records of past funding are more likely to get it in the future. Sometimes the funding is discipline-biased; for example, in my own field of engineering, there is more funding for high technology than for conventional civil engineering. Funding pressures, which are incompatible with the traditional values of scholarship, result in spiritual exhaustion, a loss of idealism and, more importantly, a reluctance to try risky academic pursuits. In a recent article in the *Georgia Review*, Dr. O. B. Hardison has indicated that if the research productivity pressures are decreased and the anxieties reduced, "there would be less burnout and certainly less hypocrisy about the significance of work that is at best minor. There might even be a higher percentage of publications that truly merit the often-abused description, 'A major contribution to scholarship.' "

The role of teaching is broader than that of providing information, control and entry into the elite. The professor should be a role model who is self-demanding and contributes positively to the intellectual and personal development of his or her students. The enthusiasm of the professor, coupled with self-discipline, knowledge, capability and patience, can be contagious. Some students will respond to their professors as potential or actual models. As a result of the teaching, students should improve, even slightly, in several ways – fund of information and depth of understanding, problem-solving ability, intellectual curiosity and sense of values. The erosion of the value of teaching will deny many wonderful opportunities to future generations.

I would like to conclude this lecture with a philosophical note. As in every field of human endeavor, achievement in university professorial careers is evolutionary. After a time, some faculty members will excel as teachers, some as researchers, some as administrators and some as various combinations of these roles. Therefore, equal recognition and nurturing of excellence in all these areas of endeavor is essential to make the university a truly great center of learning.

By its very name, the university is a "universe." It was Karl Jaspers, the renowned German existentialist, who pointed out that "in any university, three things – academic teaching, scientific and scholarly research, and creative cultural life are indissolubly linked to each other. One cannot be cut off from the others without destroying the intellectual substance of the university. By isolating them, the spirit of the university perishes."

I hope you will forgive the somber tone of this address on a happy occasion which should be a celebration.

Thank you; you have been a wonderful audience.