

## **1991 Distinguished Teacher of the Year**

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### *Shifting Priorities: Creating New Expectations*

President Catanese, Vice President Berry, colleagues and students, thank you. I stand humbled by the stature of the individuals who have preceded me. This acknowledgement is truly an unexpected surprise, but I must admit I embrace it with great delight. Thank you!

In the beginning, when I wrote my first paper for today, there were no pronounced crises affecting the university. My first paper was inspiring, optimistic, even Polyannic! Then the cutbacks began and for many teaching loads and class enrollments increased. Consequently, paper two was less inspiring and less optimistic. Then morale dropped. Lines, both tenured and non-tenured, were threatened, centers were closed and summer A was placed on hold. Paper three was downright neutral! Then on September 23rd a University-wide faculty meeting convened and for the first time conversations about quality teaching on the university level were legitimized! An invitation was extended to the faculty to identify criteria for examining quality teaching. Could it be that perhaps a shift in priorities may be occurring? Since that meeting, events have remained relatively unchanged. Next week, of course, the events may change, but for the moment my current fourth revision dares to broach the topic of teaching. My talk is entitled: *Shifting Priorities: Creating New Expectations*. Forgive me for this personal comment here, but after the faculty meeting on the 23rd I needed to know if the nomination and selection by the Student Advisory Committee were in any way "guided," directly or indirectly, by outside sources or criteria. I was reassured that the committee's actions were indeed independent. It appears this focus on teaching is strictly a coincidence.

During the confusion of these uncertain times, I felt it would behoove me to avoid the topic of teaching. Like others before me, I could elaborate on my area of expertise. The only problem: I teach teaching! I teach the structure of teaching and a Spectrum of Teaching Styles!

Consequently, teaching is not a light topic for me. I feel at this moment like the minister who came home from services and his wife, who had been ill, asked what he preached about.

"I preached that the rich should give to the poor," the minister said.

"Did you convince them?" the wife said.

"Yes," he responded, "I convinced the poor."

I teach pedagogy. It is my task to inspire and challenge students to perceive teaching as they have

never experienced it and to motivate them to accept a new paradigm about teaching. Teaching is indeed "a very special human connection..., a connection of many dimensions that simultaneously affect the learner and the teacher. Both are subject to a tacit agreement to share information, to deliver and receive accumulated knowledge, to replicate and reproduce portions of the past, to acquire and discover new information, and to construct and create pathways for the yet unknown. This connection, inevitably, invites feelings for one another – feelings of cooperation or discord, acceptance or rejection, anger or joy. It invites both the teacher and the learner to participate in a unique social context, with its special hierarchies, rules and network of responsibilities. Teaching inspires aesthetic sensations and seeks to expand the very boundaries of the self. It triggers the brain, stimulates the emotions and, at its best, uplifts the human spirit. The evolution of this connection is an inescapable process that is at the very core of human development. All cultures provide for it, all humans participate in it, and all educational processes and goals rely on it." <sup>1</sup> Such a description of teaching may seem lofty. But in reality it is teaching – it is education – that serves to shape mankind. Deliberate teaching is perhaps the most crucial profession of a society.

Although teaching is my present focus, theoretical and applied research on the structure of teaching occupied me for eighteen years. My colleague and I had ideal research conditions: eight years of money, minimum bureaucracy and unrestricted conditions to refine and develop our work; ideal conditions for experimentation, research and implementation of ideas. The next nine years were spent serving the public schools: testing the implementation of theory in the crucible of reality. The opportunities to implement these ideas were not only local, but national and international. The need to create, research and teach has been my passion for 23 years. Unfolding a paradigm shift does not come quickly or easily.

It is the relationship, not the separation, between research in theory and implementation that produces stimulating teaching experiences. Relevancy is related to practicality, and that leads to innovation and adaptations. These ingredients in a classroom intrigue and motivate students and professors.

It appears the present upheaval in the educational system is focused around a shifting of priorities - a transition, as Toffler delineates it, from the "second wave" (industrial age) to the "Third Wave" (information age). Toffler, Naisbitt and others have identified networks of patterns which motivate the operations within a society. The second wave (industrial age) acquired – the largest, the biggest, the most was the best. Quality was determined by quantity. The third wave (information age) is motivated by synthesis – an understanding of the relationship of the parts as they contribute to the benefit of the whole.

It is crisis that generally leads us from one reality to another. And so the financial dilemma this fall has officially entered us into the third wave. The past cannot be resurrected; therefore, the criteria which have served us for so long are no longer valid. It is indeed a time of creation – the creation of our new image. In creating this image we have a choice. We can delay the process by choosing criteria that are anchored in the second wave or we can abandon such notions and unveil new definitions and new commitments.

We are in a critical crossroads in our view of defining criteria for quality teaching. Our first instinct will be to replicate criteria of the second wave. We will try to quantify teaching just as we have

research: how many articles, in what time span, in which journals – how many classes, how many students, how long a syllabus, how many entries in the bibliography, how many essay assignments, how many rote questions as compared to "higher order" questions, etc, etc. Our most challenging task will be relinquishing the "synchronization of human behavior." <sup>2</sup> Quantifying teaching will retard our entry into the third wave and delay expanding our impact on students.

The judgments made in *Prof Scam* are unfair. Analyzing the structure of a second wave institution to a third wave institution is legitimate. But making judgments about a second wave institution based on the criteria of the third wave is unfair and questionable. The structure of the university in the second wave simply was not designed with the student as the primary recipient. Consequently, teaching was never a recognized asset to the university.

The third wave requires a different perspective of the relationship between university and student. I suggest that it is the student who gives us permission to call ourselves a university. Without our students we would be called a think tank, a laboratory, a center. It is our students who give us the privilege to be called university. And it is our graduates who define our reputation. Each university stands on the shoulders of its graduates.

It is our expectations that lead us and acknowledgement that drives us. During this time of creating new expectations let us not succumb to a single quantifiable standard of excellence; such will serve only to limit, to offend and to stifle.

Perhaps the expectation for the third wave need simply be **EXCELLENCE**. A policy that expects contributions but maintains the dignity of individual expression and diversity could create unexpected dimensions of excellence.

In summary, the ubiquitous act of teaching is not ubiquitously good. Yet, it is teaching that molds people and society. It is, indeed, time to focus on quality teaching and reap the joys of contributing to students who will create paths for the yet unknown.

Our students and their contributions serve as our legacy. Thank you.