

SENATE FORUM

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Student Assessment:

*What are the practical, philosophical
and ethical implications of the methods
by which we assess our classes?*

*And, on a larger scale, what does the
future hold for faculty as the public call
for outcomes assessments grows louder?*

The Senate Forum takes a look.

Also inside

- * Faculty reactions to Lyceum
- * General Education gone awry?

What is Quality?: The Ethics of Evaluation

Albert Flores
Department of Philosophy

Socrates, one of the great teachers in the history of western civilization, believed that no one who possessed knowledge would willingly choose to be an immoral person or to act unethically. For Socrates knowledge is virtue. Education is thus the indispensable foundation of a good life and those who act unethically make an error no person of knowledge could ever make.

Of course, while it may be too much to expect academics to be paragons of virtue simply because of their unique education it remains reasonable to believe that a fundamental part of being a good teacher and scholar involves a commitment to excellence, including that excellence of character we describe as moral integrity. The essence of this integrity involves making decisions that recognize four generic considerations, generally described as taking the "moral point of view." First, being aware that our behavior has consequences that can beneficially or harmfully affect the welfare of others. Second, recognizing that moral judgments are justified on the basis of rational considerations and not by an appeal to authority or other arbitrary grounds. Third, that making moral judgments involves transcending self-interest in a manner that allows us to universalize our actions consistently. And finally, that such judgments must be impartial, especially where questions arise of giving others what they justly deserve.

While it is clear that these are considerations any morally good person must acknowledge, the unique authority that academics possess requires that they be very careful to avoid the abuse of power that their special position makes possible. This is especially so when we make judgments of quality about the intellectual work of students, colleagues, and others. These evaluations often have consequences of significance to the individual who is being evaluated and thus require that application of standards that are fundamentally rational, truthful, and fair.

To illustrate the range of moral concerns this implies, consider the following. What specific grading standards and methods are appropriate and how should these be applied? Should a student be evaluated only on the work presently completed or on the potential they may exhibit? Should each student's work be compared to the work of their classmates resulting in a "curved" grade? Does this create a competitive atmosphere and might it be antithetical to learning well?

How should educationally disadvantaged students be evaluated and how should improvement be factored? Can grades be used as an inducement for improving the quality of work and how may a negative grade or comment undermine motivation to learn? What should one do with a student who completes only some of the work or repeatedly hands it in late? How does one deal

with academic dishonesty?

Can one avoid using subjectively biased standards of quality, especially when evaluating written work and other creative projects? What about grade inflation and is it fair to assume that not everyone in a course can earn an A? What does the way we grade say about us as teachers and would we willingly submit to being subjected to a similar evaluation?

Students rightfully expect that the grading of their participation in class and their work on quizzes, exams, papers and other projects will be based on essentially objective standards and not on subjective or other arbitrary grounds not related to the quality of their academic work. They expect to be informed about the nature of these standards, the requirements or satisfactory performance, and basically what it is that they are required to know in preparation for tests and various other kinds of work on which they are to be evaluated. These standards must be applied impartially and fairly, without regard to one's personal feelings or other factors of bias. A responsible teacher recognizes the power that this task creates and the importance of meeting these expectations and requirements as well as is reasonably possible.

Despite such guidelines, grading is one of the most difficult tasks any teacher must face. The questions it raises are fundamentally questions of values inviting examination into the nature of what is good, academically. There are, too, very basic questions of justice involving issues such as the kinds of evaluation procedures and methods that are employed; how best to assure that evaluations are conducted fairly and result in the evaluation that is deserved; and what to do when evaluations are unfair?

Similar issues arise when the activities and qualifications of colleagues are evaluated. These include their skill as teachers and scholars; the quality of their research and published work; the nature of their contribution to the growth of their discipline and the reputation of the institution; and their value as co-workers willing to assist in meeting the sundry tasks that sustain institutions of higher education. It is, moreover, a considerably more demanding and serious exercise because the career consequences are critical to achieving success in academia. The academic benefits at stake range from being tenured and promoted to receiving honors such as fellowships, sabbatical leaves, funded research grants, invitations to lecture, selection to honorary societies or election as an officer of a professional group, not to mention the distinction and respect entailed by the publication of books and articles of intellectual merit.

What values do we expect a good colleague to exemplify as a teacher and scholar when making hiring or promotion decisions? By what evaluative criteria should one's activities as a teacher or scholar be judged and how are these standards to be

rationally justified and measured? What advice should be given to a colleague who fails to measure up to expected standards? And how should proven examples of dishonesty, plagiarism, fraud, or professional misconduct affect the evaluation process? In short, what ideals can we rationally expect our colleagues to exemplify if they are to be regarded as worthy of our respect and admiration?

While teaching and research may be complementary, often these activities create conflicting demands requiring the sacrifice of serious efforts in one area, usually teaching, in order to secure success in another. Should one's scholarly success as judged by publications and funded research projects secure one's status as a tenured professor, regardless of the quality of one's skill as a teacher? Does the increasing emphasis on publications, combined with heavy teaching loads, undermine faculty commitment to undergraduate education? Should dedicated teachers be valued less than high profile scholars? How should research at the cutting edge be compared with scholarship that deepens our understanding of already accumulated knowledge?

What value should be given to work outside one's primary discipline involving interdisciplinary activities? What about the value of contributions to university governance, community affairs, and other activities typifying intellectual skill and knowledge? What virtues is it reasonable to expect of those who assume positions of responsibility as chairs, program coordinators, and administrators, and how should these judgments be made?

One general answer for many of these questions is to appeal to policy statements and other rules that define the standards, methods, and procedures that have been adopted by institutions such as ours for resolving these issues. While this approach has been proven both effective and reasonable, it does not completely obviate the need to make fundamental judgments regarding which are the best standards to adopt. Moreover, rules always suffer from indeterminacy because adopting rules requires taking into account exceptions. At best, rules can provide a framework for decision-making but not the decision itself. There will still be a need to exercise judgment. As Aristotle noted long ago, in matters such as these we should only expect as much rigor and precision as is logically possible. These are value questions regarding what is just and good about which reasonable persons can disagree. The expectation that there are clear and universal principles on how best to resolve these dilemmas is folly.

Instead of rules, Aristotle and, later, John Stuart Mill suggest that we should consult those who are regarded as possessing wisdom in these matters to see how they would decide such issues. The experience of a wise judge can help give us direction and overcome the feeling that we must abandon ourselves to contingency and caprice. Indeed, the principles and rules we

currently adopt are generally the product of the wisdom of those who have contributed to the traditions that define what is good in academia and in the academic life as a profession.

While the foregoing discussion has focused on only one moral difficulty in the professional life of an academic, teachers and scholars engage in a wide range of activities that have moral consequences of significance to individuals and society. For those of us who teach, the basic question is what is the nature of the knowledge that is essential to being moral and can it be taught? And how should we do this if we are to be considered ethical, ourselves?

Because academics are professionals with significant authority and responsibility, the importance of how this task is satisfied raises issues of central importance to the professional ethics of academia. At stake are such basic professional issues as what is to be taught and studied, how this knowledge should be disseminated, and who should participate in these activities. These are important questions for academics since it is reasonable to expect that they should exemplify the standards of moral integrity basic to an ethical person. How we carry out these activities and what we do with the knowledge we develop will inevitably have implications for the tradition of knowledge and the institutions of higher education of which we are an essential part. A commitment to practice the ethical ideals of justice, truth, and reason is recognized as the best way to meet our responsibilities as heirs to the legacy that the life of Socrates illustrates.



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Student Assessment for Whom?

James Blackburn
Director of Admissions and Records

In the recent literature and life of higher education, one cannot avoid running headlong into the often spirited discussion of assessment. As with so many other trendy innovations, it would be easy to assume that assessment is indeed new. Such is not the case. Assessment in academe has taken place since the age of Plato. Any time we award grades, we are assessing. In the faculty evaluation process, we are assessing. In the budget process, there is often assessment.

Many of the recent emphases of the assessment movement involve general student learning. There have been calls for the measurement of changes in student behavior which can be shown to be attributable to higher education. The results of assessment are obviously useful to students, to faculty both individually and collectively, and to administrators. It would be foolish to argue against the usefulness of assessment to any of those persons or groups.

What appears to be somewhat new is the consideration of educational assessment by persons outside the university. Such persons include taxpayers, donors, politicians, policy analysts, and a throng of others. The new found interest in assessment on the parts of these persons has created a grist for the mills of conferences, the merchants of standardized testing and a host of other academic cottage industries.

In the case of California State University, Fullerton, we should pay special attention to the usefulness of assessment to the state legislature. Assemblyman Hayden has shown himself to be very interested in the topic, and has introduced legislation which would require some sort of assessment activity. It may seem shocking to some, but the legislature does have a right, if not a responsibility, to find out what we do with the over 70 millions of dollars which are provided to CSUF each year. The findings of the American Council on Education indicate that about two-thirds of the states are involved in the assessment of student performance.

Our rivals for state tax dollars have a certain edge over universities. If prisons manage to keep the bad guys in and the good guys out, the taxpayers are usually happy. The degree to which highways are effective is all too apparent. How do we assess student learning in general education in a convincing manner?

We can and do provide through the Chancellor's Office and other agencies a tremendous amount of data with regard to

full-time equivalent students, full-time equivalent faculty, "mode and level," and myriad other things. Few, if any, of those data appear to be relevant to the question, what have students learned as a result of attending our university? It is not particularly useful to indicate that the students have this or that grade point average. What does a college graduate know as a result of having earned a 3.5 gpa? He/she probably knows a great deal of something, but that's about all that can be said with confidence.

How then do we answer the reasonable question of the taxpayers, "what have you done with my money?" Why should the taxpayers continue to send millions of dollars to this or any other institution? It seems that part of the answer is simple and another part is substantially more challenging.

This university offers degree programs which come in three parts. There are the majors and the minors; there is the substantial general education program, and there is what is left over—the electives. The learning that is a part of the majors, minors, and concentrations is often easily substantiated. If aspiring and qualified engineers, nurses, school teachers, accountants, and/or artists graduate, secure gainful employment, and/or make positive contributions to their economy and/or communities, it can be asserted that good use has resulted from the expenditures of the taxpayers' dollars. Such is the case for a majority of the professional curricula at this or any other university.

Student learning in the many professional and liberal arts majors can also be assessed by means of examinations. The Graduate Record Examination (GRE) is an example of a widely available and carefully normed examination. There is a plethora of other duly acronymic standardized tests, e.g. GMAT, LSAT, MCAT, NTE, etc., ad infinitum. The quality of such instruments has been widely argued, but they are worth considering.

The faculty members of some academic majors and/or programs may wish to consider or expand the use of departmental examinations. Such efforts demand a tremendous amount of work, but they may be a useful option for some academic units.

The assessment of student learning in the general education programs is much more challenging. There are more theories and models for general education even than there are for assessment. Some GE programs offer students a few options, while others provide a smorgasbord of choices. Probably the student learning attributed to the smorgasbord is more difficult to assess than that which might result from the more narrow and classical type of program. Academics cannot agree amongst themselves on the purpose of general education or, therefore, on how to measure

whether it has been attained. Such arguments within the academy are very confusing to lay persons. It makes us appear to be unaware of what we are doing, and some taxpayers are understandably unwilling to finance an activity which appears to have shaky objectives and unconvincing assessment.

In a way, we are fortunate at this university and at the other campuses of the CSU. Our general education program has objectives (CSUF Catalog page 194). Our graduates are able to read, write, think and compute. In addition, we claim that they have acquired appreciable knowledge about themselves, their bodies, and the world and culture in which they live. Finally, we say that they will have come to an understanding and appreciation of human inquiry. These are laudable objectives, but how do we assess how well our students accomplish these?

How do we assess student learning in terms of thinking, inquiring, reading, speaking, and knowing? Do we imitate the patterns of our British cousins with their extensive and all-inclusive written examinations? The probable costs of such an exercise are overwhelming. Do we enter into the psychometric heaven of an omnibus multiple choicetest? Or is it more appropriate that we imitate the model of the medical doctor, who has said for generations, "Physicians know best how to assess medicine, and lay persons should leave us alone"?

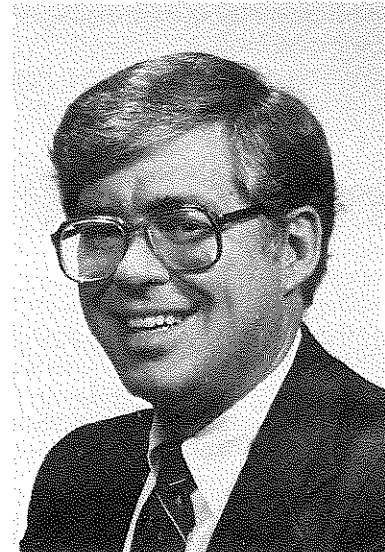
Several models have bubbled to the surface of the assessment gumbo. There is the "value added" model, which received strong support in Tennessee as a result of an ACE project and the support of a reform-minded governor. One of the regional universities in Missouri has achieved notoriety by way of its "competency based" assessment of student learning. Alverno College in the upper midwest has, for some years, been measuring student learning via a seemingly generalized assessment of students' values. There are other models and syntheses of models including several which call for the use of nationally marketed examinations, e.g. COMP, a product of the American College Testing Program. Given the fascination of "education types" with innovation, one or more of these models may shortly become a paradigm, and whole careers will then be founded on the rediscovery of assessment in the second half of the 20th century.

Once the question of how shall we assess student learning in general education is answered, there will be other problems to be faced. What kind of thinking, inquiring, reading, knowing, etc. are we going to assess, and to what standard? Do we return to the metaphysical first principles, which were espoused in Chicago a half century ago? Is a classical education a la Bloom

(The Closing of the American Mind) what is needed at Cal State Fullerton? Should we consider the more targeted approach which Hirsch has encouraged in his book *Cultural Literacy*?

For too long people in higher education have waited for Chicago, Harvard, or Yale to "set the pace" and make the decisions in general education. Alverno College, the University of Tennessee, The American College Testing Program, etc. do not have the certain and perfect answers for Orange County, California either. The best method of assessment for CSUF is also not apparent. A truly adequate solution to the problem of assessing student learning may lie in some synthesis of all of the models discussed plus some others.

It is unclear whether the current fascination with assessment of student learning in college is a passing fad or a fact of life for the foreseeable future. Given the relative tightness of the state and federal purses, we would be well advised to prepare for a long season of public and legislative interest in assessment. Perhaps we should spend as much time determining how to assess our general education program as we do trying to change it.



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Outcomes assessment ignored at our peril

Don A. Schweitzer
Dean, School of Humanities and Social Sciences

Whether one likes the increased interest in Student Outcomes Assessment, we in the academy must see that interest for what it is and bring our expertise to bear on any plans that that interest might foster. We cannot afford to stand by while others debate this topic. Why? Because the outcome of that debate will have far-reaching ramifications for our institutions. Indeed, it may entirely reshape higher education in this country.

The notion of assessment is neither new nor unique to higher education. Faculty have graded students almost as long as there have been universities and have been informally assessing their performance even longer. Similarly, leaders, officers, and administrators have assessed the performance of their subordinates for as long as there have been hierarchical social systems.

What is different about student outcomes assessment? Two things, I think. First, it is a search for an overall measure of what happens to students during their undergraduate careers. An academic "bottom line," if you will. Second, despite the name, it involves an attempt to assess institutions, not students.

Those responsible for funding higher education—donors, trustees, legislators, taxpayers, and tuition payers—are asking tough questions about what they are getting in exchange for their money, and, make no mistake about it, they no longer find our traditional answers adequate. They don't want vague platitudes about ill-defined increased earning power, preparation for fuller, richer adult lives, or assertions concerning moral or ethical superiority. They want to know in quantifiable, comparable, and succinct terms, what it is that we "produce."

The second difference is that, though it is referred to as student outcomes assessment, and though it is students who will provide the data, it is institutions, not students, who will be assessed. Traditional kinds of student assessment have measured the ability to master information, attitudes, and skills determined by the faculty to be important. The outcomes assessment being talked about would measure the transmission of information, attitudes, and skills important to those outside the academy.

How best to assess students is easily engenders considerable debate. However, there seems to be agreement that such assessment is possible and the faculty should do it. There is far less agreement about how best to assess faculty members and in some quarters there are even lingering questions about the possibility of doing so. Given all this, it is easy to understand why institutional assessment has difficulty finding support among the faculty.

Just as with students and faculty, there had been informal assessment of institutions for a very long time. The difficulty with this new interest, however, is the attempt to formalize and quantify that assessment. As with any attempt to measure and predict, there are issues of reliability and validity to address. If the

faculty opts not to become involved, others, perhaps less aware of the difficulties inherent in testing, will decide what outcomes should be tested and how.

In the context of testing, reliability refers to a test's ability to measure consistently. Those involved in assessing human behavior have devised a number of ways to determine how well any test measures the same thing over time and in varying situations. Validity, when used in the context of testing, refers to a test's ability to measure what it says it will. Issues of reliability and validity are inextricably bound together. Addressing those issues begins with a concern about what the test is supposed to measure.

One troublesome thing is that people rarely agree about what they want a test to measure. Within the same department, one colleague may believe that the final exam should test mastery of course content, while another may believe that it should be a test of one's ability to apply the general principles presented. Imagine how hard it is for departments to agree about comprehensive exams dealing with the major. And, imagine the entire faculty agreeing about an assessment of the complete baccalaureate experience. If that boggles your mind, remember there are those outside the academy who believe that they can make that assessment. If, by our own inaction, we allow others to determine what should be assessed and how the assessment should be done, then we let them set the agenda for the institution.

Ignoring the current increased interest in student outcomes assessment is a luxury the faculty should not afford itself. Those who favor this attempt to find an overall measure of colleges and universities should become actively involved in the planning so that the matters of reliability and validity are properly handled. Those who oppose this attempt should enter the debate concerning the appropriateness and value of such an effort. If those within the academy are not involved in shaping its future, then those outside the academy will do it for us.



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Essays are ideal for measuring critical thought

Bruce Wright
Department of Political Science

I have been asked to describe and justify how I assess student performance in "Political Philosophy," the single required upper division class for Political Science majors. It also meets a General Education humanities requirement. This is not to suggest that my method of assessment is the only appropriate one for this, or any other class. Indeed, my senior colleague, Julian Foster, will present an alternative view based on his experience in teaching the same class. We have amicably shared responsibility for class for many fruitful years. We once taught a different class on a team basis with little difficulty in assessing students together.

Assessment of student performance is at the heart of teaching. Without a continuous assessment of what students already know it is impossible to aid them as they continue to learn. My students read original works of political philosophy, beginning with Plato and ending with Marx. Discussions are organized around fundamental questions about the nature of politics raised in the readings. Students are expected to develop a capacity to read classical works and to discuss basic questions about the nature of politics orally and in writing, using their understanding of these issues to develop their own political arguments.

Assessment occurs in my teaching practice at several levels, the most important of which help each student to develop his or her own political values. Continuous intercommunication is essential, at least in dealing with questions such as those raised by reading Aristotle's *Politics* or Rousseau's *Social Contract*. Thus I use much class time assessing the arguments that students raise in discussions relating to major issues of political philosophy. This assessment is meant to communicate directly to students about their ability to maintain serious positions of their own. It helps students improve their arguments. But, I have not satisfactorily turned this primary assessment into an official "grade."

For grades I assess essays in response to instructions on the syllabus. There are no surprises. Students know the "questions" from the beginning. They write essays related to their readings in the primary sources of political philosophy which require answers to complex arguments developed to raise basic political issues.

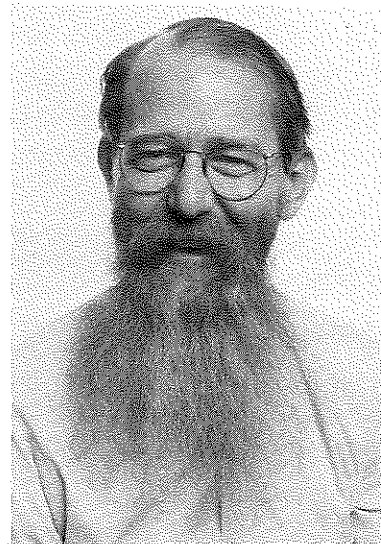
Assessment of the essays consists of reading each and commenting upon it in detail. I try to provide as much criticism of the "good" ones as I do of the "bad" ones. My general rule that the paper should look "bloody" from red ink, and that I should write almost as much as the student has. I also provide a general assessment of the paper to the student in comments that explain the virtues and defects of the essay. "This is an excellent and well written paper that shows good understanding of the issues at hand," is easy to write. A lengthy analysis of the problems of a student's essay which shows that s/he is "working at it" but not really succeeding is more difficult to compose. In the most frustrating cases I ask the student to discuss the problem with me. All

of this, though difficult, is much more pleasant than the ultimate official assessment of a "grade."

The grade communicates to the student, often forcefully, but it communicates to an audience outside of the classroom. I assume that this audience is interested in whether the student in question is able to communicate about serious issues in a clear and coherent manner. I believe that my grades reflect student capacities rather well. My best students seem to obtain good grades throughout their academic career. Some become professors, others attorneys or political practitioners. Some do better in areas that primarily require other skills. Yet, most of those who do poorly in my assessments end up with low overall GPAs.

My most important moments are when students improve their overall performance after they have taken my classes. Usually the reason their work improves is because they have learned to communicate clearly about abstract issues. This is when my assessment has served its primary purpose.

Of course, every class has its content. In political philosophy, as in political practice, the content is contentious. Thus, I prefer to assess the quality of the arguments students raise rather than their response to questions where I have determined the possible answers in advance. Grading essays is tedious, but rewarding, work. Constructing multiple choice questions or short answers is an art. Perhaps it can be exercised so as to assess the critical capacities of students of political philosophy. I have not yet been able to assess students in that form. I prefer to critically evaluate the creative answers of my students to determine if they can pick out what I consider to be the "right" answer. Thus, at the risk of being considered reactionary in my teaching, I will continue to assess student work with a careful evaluation of essays.



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Even political philosophy can use 'Scantrons'

Julian Foster
Department of Political Science

A lot of students have trouble with political philosophy. They complain that it is "hard to pin down" or "so abstract" or that "there aren't any facts in it." What probably bothers them is that there is nothing in political philosophy which can sensibly be quantified, and that it is not concerned with describing patterns of behavior or institutional settings, as most of political science is. Political philosophy focuses on questions of value in politics — on what ought to be, rather than what is.

By common consent, however, the field does have a core. The student must encounter and understand the ideas of Plato, Aristotle, Aquinas, Machiavelli, Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, Burke, Bentham, Marx and Mill. This list (plus or minus a name or two) provides the organizing pattern for dozens of textbooks and hundreds of courses. Earlier in my teaching career, I structured by course chronologically and laid heavy emphasis on students remembering who said what.

People who teach welding, volleyball, public speaking, German or accounting have the satisfaction of knowing that their successful students can go out into the world and practice their subject. But what does a professor of political philosophy accomplish? This question used to bother me, particularly when insomniac at 4:00 a.m. and psychologically at low ebb. Why have I chosen to do this in life? I have filled reluctant heads with information about Plato and the rest so that they can regurgitate it (more or less) to me on examinations. And then, of course, they start forgetting it all. In five or ten years, there'll be nothing left, and those who took my course will be indistinguishable from those who didn't. (A grateful returning student did once tell me that a girl he met at a cocktail party was so impressed with an insightful quote he got from me about life being "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short" that she went to bed with him that very night. He rather spoiled the effect by attributing the words to Rousseau instead of Hobbes, but never mind.)

Political philosophy can be taught as the history of ideas, and many of my colleagues do that. I prefer to leave that perfectly respectable approach to the History Department. Underlying this piece of intellectual generosity on my part is my belief that only a very few are likely to find this material and approach memorable. However well I communicate my own excitement with the field, I cannot believe that in a course required for all majors which also attracts people fulfilling GE requirements, such an approach can have much lasting impact.

The best reason for students to study political philosophy, I have decided, is so that they may develop that skill of seeing how ideas relate to one another. I organize the class to link similar approaches, even if they were enunciated two thousand years apart (Aristotle and Madison, for example). My basic rationale for all this is that if one learns a skill one retains it, whereas if one learns facts, one probably forgets them if they are not of use. If my former students do not remember who Aquinas or Burke or Bentham were, I don't mind, if I have managed to equip them with the ability to conduct an intelligent discussion of rights or equality or freedom or authority, or to detect when a politician is offering illogical or shoddy observations on such matters.

Assessment should, presumably, reflect the instructor's judgment about how well the students have achieved whatever they were supposed to achieve. Since memorization is not amongst my objectives, I never require people to close their notes or their books during any examination. The circumstances of the traditional examination strike me as a curious kind of game, which will have no counterpart in later life. (Are junior executives or law clerks ordered to write a report on something, "and no cheating, mind you, no looking at the books"?)

Some of my colleagues who would agree with this would go further, and base their assessments entirely on student papers or on that curious hybrid, the "take-home examination." I am reluctant to do this, being both a bit cynical about students and feeling that any assessments I make must be as fair as I can make them. With a paper, you can never know how much help a student had. If you choose offbeat topics, you are probably insulated against the products of the term paper mills, but you can never guard against assistance from closer to home. So while I assign papers, I make it clear that their quality is not the critical element which will determine a grade.

Writing skills, and deficiencies of young Americans in them, is a favorite topic these days. Of course people should learn to write; but my job is to teach political philosophy. I ask for either a variety of short papers or else one long paper not because I want my students to write but because I want them to read and to think, and a requirement of written work is a practical way of pushing them to do that. I thus give them some incidental writing practice, and mark spelling, grammatical, stylistic and organizational failures. But identifying and curing such defects is not the point of my course, so basing my assessment on them would be illogical.

I also use the traditional essay format for the mid-term examination—but I don't like it much; it is too subjective. Like most who struggle through piles of blue books, I can be seduced

by a fluent writing style into overlooking ambiguities of content, and I can be rendered uncharitable by ugly, near-incomprehensible handwriting. Then there is that familiar complaint one so often overhears on the way out of an examination—"I never thought he'd ask that. If only there'd been a question about (X), I'd have had an easy A." Self-serving commentary no doubt—but most students do, for one reason or another, give much more attention to some topics than others, and so an examination which offers a limited choice of essay questions is something of a lottery for them.

More fundamentally, assessing essays is inescapably subjective and being fair to ESL students presents particular problems. I dislike determining people's futures with my unconfirmed opinions.

By a process of elimination, I arrived at the widely despised multiple-choice, objective, computer-scorable "Scantron" test for my final examination. Many of my colleagues seem convinced that these are used only by faculty too lazy to read papers and who are content to focus on trivial details. Students are quick with complaints that such tests are a guessing game in which one must try to psyche out which of the available right answers the instructor thinks is the "most right." These opinions convince me that there are a lot of people around who don't think very hard about assessment.

The procedure I use is to focus on some small segment of the course—a day's lecture or a section from the readings—and identify the central theme. I formulate a question about that, and write a one-sentence but indubitably correct answer. I then concoct three or four alternatives, each of which is demonstrably wrong, yet with enough surface plausibility that someone who doesn't understand the subject might accept them. Alternatively, I use an example which illustrates a larger general theory:

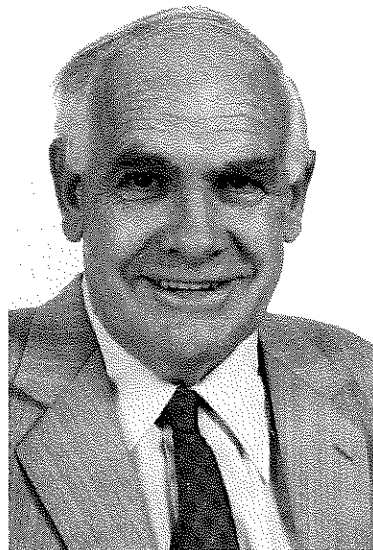
Machiavelli suggests that it is better to kill defeated enemies than to appropriate their family property because:

- a. *The social contract was designed to protect property; breach of it will absolve the citizenry from any duty to obey the ruler.*
- b. *Force is to be preferred to fraud.*
- c. *In meting out punishments, it is immoral to impose one that would be directly to one's own advantage.*
- d. *Property can be recovered; corpses cannot be revived.*

Anyone choosing (a) may have Machiavelli confused with Locke; the social contract plays no part in his thought, and indeed would be entirely incompatible with it. Answer (b) seems to suggest that Machiavelli positively revelled in violence, while finding fraud

distasteful. Nonsense; of course, Machiavelli holds no brief for one approach over the other—success is his only criterion. The third alternative, with Machiavelli as some sort of principled altruist, is laughable. The fourth alternative is correct; Machiavelli warns his readers that while the desire to revenge the death of a father is transitory, heirs to property which you confiscated will never cease scheming against you to get it back. Anyone who understands what has come to be known as "machievellianism" should be able to work out the answer to this one even if they have never read *The Prince*.

My students have about two minutes for each of 70 questions of that kind. They can look up anything they like; they know in advance they shouldn't waste their time trying to memorize dates or obscure details. The examination covers the entire course. It discriminates between students very effectively—the range of scores is normally from a low of 35% to a high of 85%. To satisfy myself that the right answers are right and the others clearly wrong, I have several times invited groups of bright students to post mortems, challenging them to find flaws (which they sometimes have—the test gets more reliable the longer I use it). If the method is fair to students, comprehensive as to coverage and truly related to the purpose of the course, what more could one want?



Julian Foster is now serving his second consecutive term as chair of the Academic Senate. He has been a member of the CSUF Political Science faculty since 1963.

Musings on Student Academic Appeals

Dave Van Deventer
Department of History

Bias, prejudice, capriciousness, lack of timely teacher-student communication over course requirements, an unfair grading system—such are the general charges that students bring against faculty in the academic appeals process. More specific examples could be paraphrased as follows: "My teacher is sexist (or racist) and gave me an undeservedly low grade because of my sex (or race)." "My teacher is from some non-U.S. country and applies higher standards to American students in the class than to students from his geographical and/or cultural background"; "My teacher changed the dates for handing in major writing assignments and then gave certain students extended deadlines for turning them in that he refused to allow for me"; "Six weeks into the semester my teacher changed the course requirements in such a way that only my grades were adversely affected"; "My teacher gave an 'A' to a student whose class average was 85%, but gave me a 'D' when my class average was 69.7%—on the grounds that the best student in the class should get an 'A'; "I consistently received the highest grades in the class but received only a 'C' in the course (no one received higher than a 'C)"; "Because I asked questions and was outspoken in the classroom, the teacher gave me a low grade in the course"; "I received an 'F' when I had a 'C' average going into the final exam, and the part-time teacher is gone, has lost my final exam, and has no permanent grade book to leave for the Department's records"; "The teacher has both accused and punished me for academic dishonesty solely on the hearsay evidence of a man in the class with whom I just broke up."

The Academic Appeals Board, on which I have served perhaps seven times in the last fourteen years, and the Coordinator of Academic Appeals have dealt with such issues and many more. What seems amazing, given the diversity of our faculty, their grading practices, and the thousands of grades assigned yearly (around 150,000), is that the Board has never handled more than forty cases annually. Moreover, about 90% of the cases involve grade appeals and 10% academic dishonesty appeals, and generally the Board upholds the faculty grade assigned in at least 80% of the cases it hears (in at least two years it has upheld 100%). However, in academic dishonesty appeal cases the Board usually rules in the student's favor.

Some have suggested to me that the paucity of appeals and the generally overwhelming findings for faculty, support a contention that our appeals process is both unfair to students and a failure. While I believe there are some important problems with our present appeals system, I am not ready to see the process as either unfair or as a failure. Admittedly, I am biased as I am both a participant in and partial creator of the present appeals process.

Why are there so few appeals before the Board and why do the faculty usually win them? Undoubtedly, the vast majority

of CSUF faculty have grading systems and practices that enjoy the confidence of our students. Moreover, large numbers of our students just cannot be bothered with "hassles" over grades, and the whole process is very time-consuming. Students who are concerned about their grades should meet with their teacher as soon as possible, and, if unsatisfied, quickly meet with the teacher's department Chair or supervisor. It is at this point, when the department Chair is exercising his role effectively, that most legitimate student grievances get resolved. The department Chair knows, if the teacher does not, that the next step for the student is the School Dean and the Academic Appeals Coordinator and that unless the teacher has substantial support for this position, the reputations of the teacher, the department Chair, and perhaps the department may suffer. While there is no accurate way of knowing, I believe that the department Chair's intervening role at this point is the primary reason for the paucity of student appeals beyond that level and for the fact that in most grade appeals beyond the department the faculty position is upheld. Of course, there are the exceptional grade appeal cases where the teacher involved is stubborn, arrogant, or is convinced that a fundamental principle of some sort is at stake or where the department Chair refuses to become involved (for temperamental, political, or other reasons) that are carried through the entire appeals process—and the student wins.

Academic dishonesty appeals are so few because the burden of proof in such cases is with the faculty member, because students are usually caught "redhanded" and do not appeal, and because most department Chairs do not allow flimsy accusations to go further. For a student to consider appealing an academic dishonesty charge, he must believe the teacher's supporting evidence to be relatively weak. This latter point helps explain why such cases, when they make it through the appeals process, tend to be won by the students.

What does the Academic Appeals Board want from faculty? Why do faculty lose cases before the Board? In grade appeals the burden of proof rests with the student so students usually have some striking allegations in their appeals for the Board to consider investigating them. The Board expects three types of material from faculty: a clear, point by point discussion and/or rebuttal of each allegation; a copy of the class gradebook with all student names except that of the student involved whited out, including a brief but clear explanation of the grading system; and any unreturned student papers that were a part of the grading process. When faculty do not provide these materials, they tend to lose the case. Also, the Board expects a timely response (within a month); and if it does not get one and believes the teacher is "stonewalling" the process, it may find for the student and send the case to a departmental Ad Hoc Committee to assign the grade.

Other obvious reasons for faculty losing a case include: treating one student differently than others in determining a

grade, having a class grade profile extremely different than CSUF norms (all 'D' and 'F' grades for example), changing course requirements in the middle of a semester without consideration for students' special problems, and not following the grading patterns and requirements set out in the class syllabus.

In academic dishonesty cases faculty tend to lose when the case is based solely on hearsay evidence; when the teacher monitored a classroom exam, saw no evidence of cheating, and the exams in question were not exactly alike in all respects; and when faculty instructions regarding the assignment in question were ambiguous or inconsistent.

Is the Appeals system fair to students? Yes, in most cases, it is. The people involved in it certainly seek to make it so. Although the Board consists of three faculty and two students, most decisions are reached by consensus and usually unanimously. When faculty refuse to change a grade in accord with a Board decision and an Ad Hoc Committee is convened to do so, in almost all cases the Committee carries out the Board's recommendations. (I have found only two exceptions.)

Nevertheless, the system has some problems: it can take too long to go through, there has been too much turnover in Coordinators, and the Coordinator's role is complex and difficult to the point of becoming controversial.

Appeals cases usually take at least nine months to complete and sometimes as long as two years. Procrastination by both students and faculty helps to create this problem. Sometimes the student is not aware of the appeals process, and it takes him six months to become aware and to get to the point of filing an appeal. When the teacher is confronted by the appeal and by the Coordinator asking for his response, he often postpones dealing with it. Two months may pass before the Board receives the faculty input necessary for it to begin a serious investigation of the appeal. At that point it may have a series of questions of clarification for both student and faculty that need answers before the Board can decide whether or not to convene a hearing. Obtaining this documentation usually takes another three weeks. Then if the Board decides to have a hearing, more time elapses as numerous schedules have to be accommodated. The hearings take about two hours and if the issues are thorny, the Board may have to meet again to reach a decision. Generally, grades contested from a Spring semester are not resolved until the following Spring. At present the Board is considering a case arising from grades assigned in the Spring of 1986. It probably will not be decided until November 1987. If "justice delayed" is "justice denied," then our process treats some students unfairly—but it is not intentional.

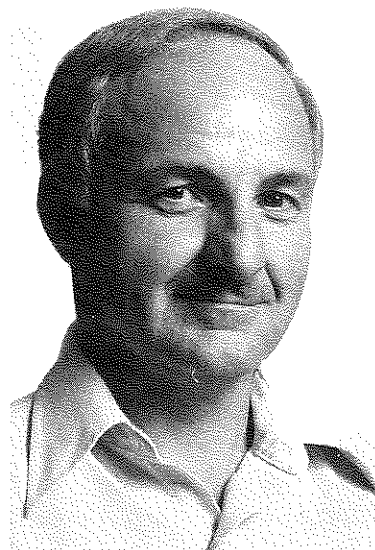
My suggestion to alleviate this problem would be to involve the Coordinator in the process sooner—right after the student meets with the teacher—so that a student's procrastination declines as he becomes aware of what is involved in the system. Faculty tend to shun this idea because they fear that the Coordinator will influence students to file appeals, but they misunderstand the Coordinator's role which is primarily as a mediator. Moreover, faculty should not fear the Appeals system as it usually supports them so long as they have substantial

contentions. If they do not, they should resolve the issues with the student and get out of the process.

The Coordinator has a complex role in the Appeals process—a sympathetic but neutral listener to student complaints, a sympathetic but neutral listener to faculty responses, a mediator wherever possible, a fact-finder and authority figure for the University in the Appeals process, and the organizer and presenter of cases to the Appeals Board—a role that is not mastered in a few months. It takes a year or two for Coordinators to become expert (if they can) in this role. Unfortunately, we have had three Coordinators over the last three years in a job that requires stability and longevity of personnel, and, consequently, a few problem situations have arisen.

The problem situations have brought the Academic Appeals process some special attention from campus administrators and faculty Senate members, leading to such proposals as putting the process under the Vice President for Academic Affairs rather than under Student Services or having an emeritus faculty member serve as Coordinator rather than an administrator doing so. The present structure, given some stability and longevity in personnel, should prove effective. In fact, if we should be moving in any direction on this matter, I would suggest the creation of a full-time University Ombudsman who would handle all sorts of student problems as a neutral fact-finder, trouble-shooter, and mediator. The Academic Appeals process would comprise about half of this administrator's responsibilities.

Finally, my experiences on the Board have convinced me that the University needs a formal orientation for new and part-time faculty which would include discussion of grading systems and University grading patterns and record-keeping requirements. Too many part-time faculty have become involved in grade disputes that reveal their ignorance on these topics.



Dave Van Deventer was a member of the Faculty Council in the early 1970s and has served many times on the Academic Standards Committee and the Academic Appeals Board. He currently chairs both committees.

The Evolution of General Education

Bruce Weber
Department of Chemistry

Any historical process that evolves within boundaries of tradition and external constraints will seldom appear conceptually coherent. But if we look at the trends of the last three years of evolution of GE at CSUF a philosophical view can be discerned. The reformulation of GE in the 1987 catalog arose from a desire to resolve and reduce a number of contradictions and complexities in the program in the 1985 catalog. This earlier program was itself the result of an initial attempt to bring GE into conformance with the Chancellor's Executive Order 338.

Our current program has essentially a tripartite structure. The first part consists of Basic Subjects and Historical and Cultural Foundations (categories I & II) comprising 21 units. The Basic Subjects and Historical and Cultural Foundations provides our "core" experience in which there are twenty courses to meet seven categories. Four of these categories have only one course in them. The second part consists of the Disciplinary Core Courses (category III) also comprising 21 units. The Disciplinary Core Courses provide an introduction to specific disciplines in the arts, humanities, sciences and social sciences, and as would be expected given the complexity of our university, there is a wider range of courses to meet the requirement. (The Disciplinary Core contains 90 courses to fulfill 6 categories.) The final component consists of Implications, Explorations and Life-Long Learning (category IV) that comprises nine units. There is a logical progression through the program with the overwhelming number of upper-division courses in the final exploratory category, most of which have prerequisites of completion of courses from the earlier categories. Implications, Explorations and Life-Long Learning, along with Alternatives in Science, provide the student with an opportunity for exploration, mostly at the upper-division level, through a choice of 281 courses over four categories.

This structure and course distribution should be evaluated in a context of a bipolar model. At one pole is the principle that all students should have the identical GE experience and have few choices. At the other pole is the principle that students should be free to explore and grow individually within very lightly applied constraints. While there are articulate advocates of either principle, neither principle alone is likely to obtain the consensus support of the faculty. We have to live with the resultant tension between the principles, a tension that I regard as essential and creative.

Having said that, however, there is clearly considerable room for debate as to how to combine principles and how to structure the program. The Basic Subjects and Historical and Cultural Foundations represent a reasonably structured set of categories. If anything, I suspect that there are those who would like to see either more courses in some of the subcategories or that some subcategories be eliminated altogether. Either possibility would strike me as an error although I could imagine an interdis-

ciplinary course or two providing a reasonable alternative.

The exploratory categories (IV) represent nine to twelve units, with nine units mandated and the remainder representing an election of the science alternatives. It is here that the principle of lightly constrained exploration seems reasonable after completion of 42 units of GE coursework. In my own experience of advising health professions students, I have found that there is much to commend a wide diversity of possible classes here, especially at the upper-division level. Not only health professions students, but students in the sciences, the arts, business and pre-professional programs have few, if any, electives. For them the nine to twelve units of exploration are often the only chance to pursue subjects of special personal interest.

When the GE Committee and the Academic Senate undertake the five-year review of GE in 1988-89, careful thought should be given to the Disciplinary Core Courses to see if there could be a reasonable reduction in the number of courses and more "core-type" experiences. It would be instructive to start with one's own department's offerings in category III to see how the number could be reduced or combined in an interdisciplinary core course.

In the Disciplinary Core category, departments could cooperate to develop interdisciplinary introductions to their areas. I would be happy to see a restructuring in terms of the ideals and values embodied in the reports of recent national commissions on higher education. For example, there might be developed a Humanities Core course, and Social Science Core course and an Arts Core course that would provide introductions to these areas and satisfy 9 units of the requirement. However, there are many a Scylla and Charybdis to be navigated to produce such effective courses and not run afoul of special school and departmental problems and constraints. Moreover, any such major reformulation must be done with considerable care and wisdom lest we produce a program that is less coherent than the one that has evolved to this point. Another possible direction for improvement that I could envision would be the evolution of the Historical and Cultural Foundations category, especially the civilization classes, in the direction of a humanities core similar to those at the University of California. Such courses would retain their historical perspective but also provide students with the experience of analyzing and interpreting key texts from our cultural heritage in the manner typically done in humanistic scholarship. Also, I would hope that western civilization would be seen in a broader context through judiciously selected cross-cultural comparisons.

It would be possible to reduce the number of courses in GE by putting quotas on the number of GE courses a department can offer. This, however, would not reflect the fact that some departments are reasonably more heavily engaged in GE than others. Also, any such restriction would shift the focus of dialogue on GE from issues of the quality of a proposed course and its congruence with the Committee's guidelines to those of the political arena. I foresee major problems for the coherence of GE if there

is repoliticization. During the GE restructuring there has been a decreased role for political considerations and an increased focus on how to enhance the coherence of GE.

In conclusion, as we prepare for the five-year review, attention should not be overly focused on structural questions but on the improvement of the internal articulation of the program and enhancement of quality. The development of a realistic policy on student writing in the Basic Skills category and its reinforcement throughout GE should remain a high priority. Further evolution within the current structure should be encouraged. Several avenues for creative development are now possible. Cultural diversity courses are now placed in the same category as the explorations courses, so that a more tightly defined set of criteria for cultural diversity courses would not automatically delete some fine upper-division courses from GE. The Life-Long Learning category is positioned as the culmination of GE and this should encourage departments to develop interdisciplinary capstone courses there. Problems remain with the Introduction to Humanities category. Many students, especially those electing to study a foreign language, will graduate without taking a literature or philosophy class, the traditional core of a liberal education. I am confident that solutions to these dilemmas will evolve over time.

Although I expect change and development in GE and look forward to possible creative improvements, I do hope that these will occur within the context and tradition of our current GE rather than through a radically restructured program. The Class Schedule currently lists three separate GE programs. Over time this should evolve to updates of one program. I hope that in a few years we will not have to list four or five GE programs that are then currently in force.



Bruce Weber was a member of the General Education Committee from 1983 to 1987, serving as chair the latter two years. He was an at-large member of the Academic Senate during the 1986-87 academic year.

Quo Vadis, General Education:

Leon Gilbert

Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures

Contrary to popular opinion, committee meetings occasionally provide moments of significant insight. Such a rare moment occurred recently in, of all places, a meeting of the University Petitions Committee, as we were acting on a substantial stack of petitions submitted by students for whom our currently approved 406 GE courses apparently did not provide sufficient options and alternatives. The committee considers petitions to approve course substitutions in GE monthly, but since the focus is always on the appropriateness of specific courses for specific categories, we rarely, if ever, pause to reflect on whether or not our whole GE program makes any sense. But that day, one of the petitions on the agenda contained a statement which, although the student clearly didn't intend it that way, seemed to me to raise serious and fundamental questions about our current program.

In stating his case, the student argued that he had been advised to take a course "by a paid university official, whose duties are to instruct students to the quickest route to graduation," and concluded that, in the interest of justice, we should allow him to substitute that course for "X-101," offered by the same department, "which is basically the same thing, or similarly related." Interestingly enough, the course in question already was an approved GE course, but it didn't count in the area in which the student was deficient. His advisor had undoubtedly lost track of that subtle difference, scarcely surprising given that there are at least four separate GE programs currently in effect on our campus,* and that in the last decade the number of approved GE courses has increased from about 230 to over 400. In the context of such a plethora of courses and programs this student lost whatever sense he may once have had of the categories and purposes of General Education as we practice it. His belief, then, that one course from the department in question is pretty much as good as any other is quite understandable, particularly since the subject matter of the two, as he put it, "is basically the same thing, or similarly related."

Where have we gone wrong? On the one hand, we have faculty advisors who are hard pressed to keep up with the constant shifting of GE on our campus; on the other, students who probably couldn't explain in 25 words or less the goals and purposes of what is arguably the most important portion of their curriculum. Dim recollections of my own undergraduate education told me that things once were different. So to verify and

sharpen that memory, I dug out my transcript from the University of Colorado and have extracted from it what is probably a typical early 1960's GE program.

By comparison to CSUF the Colorado program of that era was straight-forward, drawn along clear lines with clear purpose, and allowed the student relatively few options. Its intent was threefold: 1) to develop essential writing and critical thinking skills, 2) to provide a solid foundation in the basic disciplines and 3) to insure a fundamental facility in a foreign language. It totalled 59 units including two years of a foreign language, a semester of college math, one year of a social science (there were only 6 options, Anthropology, Economics, Geography, Sociology, Psychology and Western Civilization), a year of a Physical Science and a year of Biology (both with a lab each semester), a year of English (one semester each of grammar and composition), a year of literature (English and American), and a year of Philosophy (Ethics and Epistemology).

Without cheapening them into buzz-words or reifying them into separate GE categories, writing across the disciplines, cultural diversity, and critical thinking skills were incorporated into the program as defined. Essay exams and papers were required in almost all courses where it made sense to have them. Sensitivity to cultural diversity was a logical outcome of foreign language study. (The preeminent Swiss cultural historian Jakob Burckhardt describes language as the most permanent material in which a people record the substance of their culture.) Most of the syllabus in epistemology was devoted to critical thinking skills. The total number of courses in the GE program at Colorado in those days probably numbered no more than 50 or 60.

By comparison, our current program and its immediate predecessors are an impenetrable thicket of courses and categories, a source of confusion to both students and hapless faculty advisors seeking to guide their charges, as our student put it in his petition, "to the quickest route to graduation." To be sure, some categories (for example, Basic Subjects, the American Institutions and Values requirements, Science and Mathematics, and to a certain extent, Social Science) have remained relatively meaningful in that they are clearly defined and allow comparatively few options. But other categories, whose definitions range from broad to fuzzy, have become great dumping grounds for highly disparate courses. For Introduction to the Humanities a student could take "Fundamental Chinese" or "Introduction to Christianity" or "African Literature" or any of 43 other courses, any one of which can, apparently, substitute for any other. Implications, Explorations and Lifelong Learning involves choosing three - 3 unit courses from a list of 245.

Some argue that what we have now is at least preferable to the "cafeteria" approach embodied in our pre-1978 GE program. At that time, the only GE requirements were broad discipli-

* As long as students stay enrolled continuously, they are subject to the GE program in effect with their entering catalog.

or Is it Time to Get Back to Basics?

nary subdivisions and, like an elaborate buffet, students could fill their GE plate with any course within the discipline. The development over the last few decades of a whole variety of new and emerging disciplines has necessarily led to a diffusion of classical disciplinary boundaries and definitions. Let's remember, after all, that a few years ago, when the Chancellor's Office raised questions about how our GE program was meeting the minimum humanities and social science requirements imposed by Executive Order 338, we responded that History 110A is a humanities course while Hist 110B is a social science course. But with all due respect to the wisdom of Golden Shores in agreeing with us, such arguments are more self-serving than factual.

Who, or what, is then responsible for the incoherent gestalt of our GE program? It seems to me that one does not need to get into heady philosophical debates about the changing nature of General Education in the late 20th century to answer that question. On the contrary, it is abundantly obvious that GE on our campus is much more a product of the curricular politics of an FTE-generated allocation system than of dispassionate educational planning. In our system the size of academic units is not primarily determined by the nature or inherent complexity of the discipline, but rather by student demand. That simple fact has, in turn, left an indelible impression on our GE programs.

Given that fact, one might incorrectly assume that large, politically strong departments would have a correspondingly large percentage of their courses liberally distributed throughout the GE programs. In fact, quite the opposite is the case. A survey of the Fall 1987 class schedule reveals that large departments typically have a significantly lower percentage of their courses designated as meeting GE requirements than do the smaller ones. Thus, Biology, English, History, Mathematics, Political Science, and Speech Communication (critically situated departments in the GE program) have only from 14%-25% of their scheduled courses in GE. Communications, with over 2000 majors the single most popular department on our campus, has but one GE course in its entire curriculum and is offering only 3 sections of it in the Fall.

In smaller departments, on the other hand, the picture is starkly different. Here the percentages range from 49% at the low end to over 90% on the high end. Indeed, there is one department in which every course in the Fall schedule, with the exception of 499, is approved for one category of GE or another. It is these departments' courses which populate the great dumping grounds of the GE program, "Introduction to the Humanities," "Implications, Explorations and Lifelong Learning" and, to a certain extent, "Alternatives in Natural Sciences and Mathematics," a reflection of their desperate attempt to maintain a solid FTE base by capturing many tiny pieces of the GE pie. In reality, of course, these departments are competing amongst each other for small crumbs.

The deciding factor in the FTE game is not a question of the number of courses a department has in the GE program, but rather where they are placed, and at CSUF the critical gateways, and with them a major portion of the GE (and FTE) pie are controlled by a relatively small number of politically powerful departments.

Quo vadis GE? Unless we can overcome the root evil, FTE-based allocations (and the resultant large department stranglehold), it is unrealistic to expect concern for educational goals to assume a primary role in the determination of our philosophy of General Education. Turf wars will continue to prevent us either from embracing a new vision rooted in purely academic considerations, or from returning to an older, more coherent canon, which, at least in my opinion, did a better job of General Education than anything we've devised since. Until such time as GE is depoliticized, however, and in spite of our constant tinkering around the edges, CSUF's GE program will be, at best, an ill-defined mish-mash of traditionally valued disciplines, state-mandated requirements, and local priorities or, at worst, the mutant offspring of callous FTE politics, and the University Petitions Committee will continue to meet monthly to consider an ever-growing stack of GE petitions submitted by confused and misadvised students.



Lee Gilbert has served several terms on the Academic Senate. A former chair of the Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures, he now coordinates student academic affairs for the School of Humanities and Social Sciences.



The 1987 Faculty Lyceum, held in the University Center October 1, was officially hosted by President Jewel Plummer Cobb. Coordinating the event was Dr. Robert McLaren. Panelists were Dr. Henry Giroux of Miami University, Dean Patricia Albjerg Graham of Harvard University, and Assemblyman John Vasconcellos of San Jose.

Faculty Lyceum panel looks at the role of the University in American society and three CSUF faculty respond

This year's Faculty Lyceum, entitled "The University in Society: Education for What?," reflected President Cobb's commitment to encouraging discussion about the role of the university in the larger community. The Lyceum panel consisted of Dr. Patricia Albjerg Graham and Dr. Henry A. Giroux, both educators, and John Vasconcellos, Assemblyman from the 23rd Assembly District (San Jose). Since the earthquake on October 1st prompted the more prudent among us to stay away from large buildings, at least early in the day, we summarize below for those who could not attend the Lyceum the key issues raised by each of the speakers and our impressions of the discussion.

Vasconcellos's views consistent with CSUF academic traditions

Sandra Sutphen
Department of Political Science

Assemblyman John Vasconcellos has been known as a "friend of education" (particularly higher education) during most of his 20 years as a state legislator. Most recently, as chronicled by Garry Trudeau in Doonesbury, Vasconcellos has been responsible for the "self esteem" task force, a commission established to investigate the availability of community resources concerned with issues of personal growth, mental health and the quality of community life. In his presentation, Vasconcellos maintained that California was a prototype for the nation and the world, a pacesetter state where the concept of higher education available for everyone represents a model for all others to follow.

Vasconcellos outlined four "revolutions" occurring in our time which have created an environment of extensive change. The first is the revolution of technological change, particularly in computers and communications facilities (the "Silicon Valley" phenomenon). The second is the emergence of women into positions of leadership and the acceptance by both men and women of the philosophy of feminism. The third is the changing demographic character of modern American society and the importance of increasing ethnic diversity. The fourth is the changing attitude toward self, a striving in Vasconcellos's words to "become a person," seeking wholeness, spirituality and intimacy.

In light of these changes, Vasconcellos urged that universities focus upon an optimistic conception of human nature and create educational strategies designed to encourage personal and social responsibility. He recalled a moment when he realized with great clarity the polar extremes available in conceptualizing human nature. A woman in one of his audiences characterized educators as "thinking of children arriving in this world as little monsters to be tamed" instead of subscribing to the Carl Rogers vision of people as life-affirming and whole.

Vasconcellos also found Robert Bellah's denunciation of individualism (*Habits of the Heart*) too extreme, believing that an emphasis on self can lead to a positive sense of responsibility. The Assemblyman concluded by plugging his newly created "California Human Corps," which proposes that all public university students engage in 30 hours a year of community service as part of their educational experience.

Taking their remarks as a whole, both Giroux and Vasconcellos stressed the changing nature of the university and society because of the emergence of new groups (women and ethnic minorities) seeking status and power. Their emphasis differs, however, as Giroux focuses upon the need to democratize the university to make it more responsive to changing demands. This is not the issue which concerns Vasconcellos.

What Vasconcellos is really talking about is the representative nature of the university, not the democratization process. There is a great deal of difference between democratization and representation. At this university (not all, surely), democratization is relatively a way of life. We participate in the critical decisions which affect us through peer review for promotion and tenure, by determining policy through the Academic Senate, through control over our curricula, participation on search committees and so forth. Sometimes we complain about the demands on our time which these participatory efforts require, but the opportunity to have input into the decisions which affect us is present, and most important, meaningful. Of course, we participate in trivial decisions (lots of them), but if one chooses to exercise it, the opportunity to have input into the most critical decisions is available.

Representation, on the other hand, is a totally different matter. In politics we expect (and the data often support) that persons from different backgrounds bring different values into the political agenda. The esteemed political scientist, E.E. Schattschneider, called this the "scope and bias" of the system. He meant that those participating in the system—whatever their good intentions—would naturally be limited to a narrow scope of issues and a bias towards solutions based upon their own value preferences. The only way to expand the options in the choice of political solutions lies in expanding participation to include new sets of preferences. This can be accomplished by enfranchising new groups, or, for Vasconcellos, extending educational opportunities to those currently excluded, and in general encouraging and facilitating participation by groups currently outside the leadership circles. In short, this means that power must be shared more widely.

Unfortunately, the lessons from politics teach us that usually people with power don't like to share it. Our experience from the civil rights movement and the women's movement has shown us that benevolent, well-intentioned leadership chooses tokenism over loss of control at every opportunity. But once that door cracks a bit ajar, even with tokenism, the prospects for change can be dramatic. Again, our own university provides an example. Prior to Jewel Plummer Cobb's presidency in 1981, even though proposals had been circulating since 1972, there was no women's studies program on this campus. Within 18 months after her arrival, a women's studies minor was established and in the past three years, at least 15 new courses dealing with women's issues have been added to the curriculum. To use Giroux's phrase, more women on this campus feel empowered by Cobb's leadership, and the university has expanded to include a new complexity, diversity and opportunity for groups which were hitherto unrepresented. Sharing power has its positive side: the university is richer because of new contributions to its curricula and increased participation from at least one previously alienated group.

Garry Trudeau has a point: California seems to have its share of bizarre politicians, from Jerry Brown's "Governor Moonbeam" to Vasconcellos's concern with sensitivity and "touchy-feely" public policy. That's good: humor has a place in political assessment. Behind the humor, however, Vasconcellos's vision of the university as one where personal and social responsibility are preeminent concerns is a worthy goal, appropriate to our time.

Graham points to American tradition of applied disciplines

Dennis S. Tierney
Associate Professor of Secondary Education

I am very pleased to have been asked to respond to the 1987 Lyceum speakers. My comments will focus on the remarks of Patricia A. Graham, Dean of Graduate School of Education, Harvard University.

Dean Graham was asked to speak to the topic of "The University as Transmitter of Cultural Tradition." She took that to mean a review of what our colleges and universities have meant to the nation since the founding of Harvard in 1636. She suggested that American higher education has never really adhered to the classical ideal of the "liberal arts," and the pure transmission of culture without concern for other, more utilitarian, virtues. Moreover, most of the changes that have shaped our institutions have come from external forces and agencies. There were, of course, promoters of the classical tradition which emphasized the preparation of a select group of men for public service of the "noblesse oblige" variety. Even George Washington wanted a national university to ensure the transmission of proper virtues.

Other voices quickly added to the cacophony, ranging from Justin Morrill who wanted to keep the agrarian myth alive to the Presidents of Amherst College who, in serial order, proposed the purpose of higher education as, 1) education for Christ, 2) the development of character, 3) the creation of well-rounded men, and 4) to develop men with an intellectual grasp on life. These foci blended into what Dean Graham argued was a triangle of purposes - academic development, personal development, and social productivity. Little serious debate has occurred about these three since the turn of the century; the arguments have been over which one should dominate.

She gave, as prime example, the impacts of the "GI Bill." While its intended purpose had been to absorb a sufficient number of white males from the potential work force as the country returned to a peace-time economy, one secondary outcome was the enormous expansion of educated men whose new skills and knowledge fueled our post-war economy and, presumably, fostered happier and more personally productive lives. She noted that most of the presidents of our elite universities opposed the bill, suggesting it would be the ruination of higher education. She did not say whether those institutions refused the tuition money from such students.

In closing, Dean Graham proposed that fundamental uncertainty over the purpose of higher education is endemic to America. We are washed with periodic storms of criticism about purpose and value from within and without the academy. Such events do not necessarily imply success or failure for higher education. It is clear, however, that the members of the academy must work harder at articulating what purposes they feel are most important.

President Coffman of the University of Minnesota was fond of telling the story of Adam saying to Eve as they were driven from the Garden of Eden, "You must understand, my dear, that we are living through a period of transition." For most of us in higher education, regardless of when we started, our entire careers have been carved out in times of transition. We have been buffeted by demographic and economic forces that have overpowered our own efforts at creating a purpose. When we were astonishingly prosperous, we called it a problem. When we were not, we asked to be saved by outsiders. As Howard Bowen has noted, we spend all the money we raise and 10% more. We are cheerfully inefficient and frequently glory in the most archaic traditions and beliefs. From a national viewpoint, we are a crazy quilt of institutions - public, private, secular church-affiliated, large, small, rich, poor, selective, open to all, comprehensive, and incomprehensible. It is to be wondered that a mere handful of purposes covers the territory.

I suspect that the Lyceum of 2037 will feature a discussion of the question, "The University in the Universe: Education for What?" And I further suspect that such endemic uncertainty signals our strength rather than marking a weakness. Our students have resisted the notion that the path to a better society is well-defined. To be sure, it is annoying to some that our students have materialistic interests, but it is a healthy reminder that, in the marketplace of ideas, some stalls have to run "fire sales" while others expand rapidly. Such ebb and flow may be discomfiting to faculty, but it is to be preferred to the orthodoxy a single national purpose would bring.

In sum, I think Pat Graham is right to point out our basic enduring unwillingness to pick a single purpose for higher education. I see it as our best attribute; one that indicates our creativity and risk-taking. The rise of the land-grant institution, the community college, the GI Bill, and other American innovations in post-secondary education all suggest that the ambiguity that plagues us also makes us unwilling to accept the status quo. From my perspective, I hope the debate rages on forever.

Giroux challenges faculty to develop 'transformative' role

Jesse Owens Smith
Departments of Afro-Ethnic Studies and Political Science

Henry Giroux, the second speaker, spoke on "The University as an Innovator." He is a professor at Miami University School of Education and Allied Professions. His school recognized him with its renowned scholar award for 1986-88 and its distinguished scholar award for 1984-86. He is a prolific writer and his research is recognized as being on the cutting edge of new discoveries.

Giroux endorsed Graham's position that education should be an equilateral triangle that consists of academic excel-

lence, personal development, and good citizenship. He argues that this philosophy is worth fighting for because it is essential to our education institutions. Many of the recommended public school reforms either sidestep or abandon those principles which provide the foundation for democratic citizenry developed by John Dewey. Particularly, these recommendations ignore the role teachers must play in education.

He takes the position that teachers are losing control over their work, and our future task is to organize and defend schools as institutions not just a place of employment, but as a catalyst to maintain democracy. Above all, we must portray ourselves as transformative intellectuals who combine scholarly reflections and practice to train students to be responsible citizens.

He is highly critical of the Reagan Administration's reform proposals. He conceives them as having too narrow an economic role for education, and of deliberately ignoring the questions of social inequality. One of the dangers of these proposals is that they have a hidden agenda which the critics fail to question.

Giroux has examined the ways in which tradition and critical educational theorists have attempted to relate the issues of school knowledge and control to the notion of power. He endorses some of the contributions that these theories have made to our understanding of how school life is influenced by power and knowledge.

Giroux is an arch opponent of the movement to link the outcomes of education solely to the needs of the business community. He takes the position that this philosophy of education may prove to be a threat to democracy; it has the propensity to undermine our efforts to equip students with skills necessary to analyze sociopolitical processes at work.

The theory which Giroux is most critical of in our schools is the use of management and administrative jargons as language of school analysis. These jargons tend to compartmentalize teachers' thinking into a narrow mode. The role we must take, he argues, is to develop a new discourse and mode of analysis which are capable of explaining the notion of schooling in such a way so that it would indict its shortcomings and at the same time reveal new possibilities.

Giroux discussed the relationship between education and the capitalistic society. Essentially, he argued that there are three positions taken in this area. First, there are theories of social reproduction which emphasize the relationship between the process of schooling and economic life. Second, there are the theories of resistance which examine the issues of conflict and consciousness between schooling and capitalistic society. Finally, there is the theory of domination which examines how hegemonic ideologies are mediated in school discourse and rituals.

Giroux finds the major positions of theories of reproduction and resistance to be inadequate as a foundation for a critical science of schooling. He takes the position that these theories should contain an understanding of how the power of resistance and human agency can become dominant in the struggle for social justice. Our society cannot afford to accept the concept of ideology as a basis for emancipatory pedagogy. We need a critical theory of schooling that is based on the view that ideology recognizes people's ability to know, to criticize, and act upon the world.

I endorse Giroux's argument that teachers should fight for an educational process which links the nature of learning with

dreams, experiences, histories, and languages that students bring to school. This process will confirm student experiences so that they are supported. This approach is essential to maintaining democracy.



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SENATE FORUM

The Senate Forum is a publication of the Academic Senate at California State University, Fullerton. It is designed to stimulate discussion, debate, and understanding of a variety of important issues which the Senate addresses. Individuals are encouraged to respond to the materials contained in the Forum or to submit their own contributions.

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