The SENATE Forum

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ACADEMIC AFFAIRS FORUM:

Student Learning Outcomes in General Education

Sylvia Alatorre Alva

Sylvia Alva is an associate professor of child and adolescent studies. She is currently Chair of the ad hoc GE Committee and is past President of the Hispanic Faculty & Staff Association.

The Academic Affairs Forum provided a valuable opportunity to discuss the development of student learning outcomes in GE within the broader context of Robert Barr and John Tagg's suggestion that we consider the implications of shifting our institution's mission from one that *provides instruction* to one that exists to *produce learning*.

For many of us, it has *always been our intent* that general education should produce undergraduate students who have the *knowledge, skills, and attitudes* to be active, contributing members of society-whether as parents, citizens, participants in the arts, or in any walk of life. However, focusing on student learning makes *explicit* the need to determine what are the essential skills, knowledge, and attitudes we want our students to acquire as part of their general education.

In both Barr and Tagg's article and Reid Johnson's presentation on institutional effectiveness and assessment (February 7, 1997), we were reminded that a conversation about student learning takes place today in a climate of serious public concern about the quality of education. One view of our institutional responsibility and stewardship of public resources would argue that we must move beyond good intentions and find ways to measure validly what our students know and can do as they prepare for specialized skills and knowledge they will acquire in their major or minor.

The present structure of our GE program is governed primarily by Title 5 of the State of California Education Code and Executive Order 595.These governing documents *do* include statements about learning goals. However, for the most part, they are broadly stated student learning goals and include terms that have no simple or single definition. The term "lifelong-learning" is a key

example. The Executive Order simply states that students are required to complete "a minimum of three semester units or four quarter units in study designed to equip human beings for lifelong understanding and development of themselves as integrated physiological and psychological entities." Thus it is, for example, that the greatest number of new GE course proposals are in the Implications, Explorations, and Lifelong Learning category.

Under the current GE structure, we take new GE course proposals and review them according to our campus' *Guidelines and Procedures for Reviewing GE Courses.* These guidelines are stated *only* in terms of course descriptions and syllabi, rather than in terms of student learning. Under the Instructional Paradigm, we tend to judge new course proposals by comparing them to existing courses in GE. This process is commonly referred to as "turf battles." Moreover, our internal guidelines and procedures are almost ten years old, and the CSU framework makes no mention of such important learning goals as technology and information literacy or the ability to work in collaborative teams, which are so critical in today's work environment.

Another glaring weakness of our GE program has been the lack of a systematic review of the program, including the lack of assessment of the overall outcomes of GE. To some extent, professors who teach GE courses assess student learning by giving grades. We need a broader form of assessment so we can "grade" ourselves collectively and work systematically as an institution to improve student learning in GE. But before we can assess our GE program, we need clearly stated student learning outcomes for GE.

In the most recent issue of our newsletter *Rethinking General Education*, the Ad Hoc GE Committee published a draft of student learning outcomes in GE. We welcome your responses to this first draft. Our goal is to develop a university-wide definition of student learning outcomes in GE and to update our guidelines and procedures for developing and re-viewing courses for GE inclusion to reflect student learning goals and objectives. The Ad Hoc GE Committee hopes you will welcome the

opportunity to take collective responsibility for GE and participate in a campus-wide discussion about our progress and challenges in achieving student learning goals.   ❑

Selected Comments on Academic Affairs Forum :
Keynote Address: "From Teaching to Learning: A New Paradigm for Undergraduate Education," by Robert Barr & John Tagg, Palomar College.

❖   "Both Barr and Tagg had useful ideas, presented well, and gave a message we all need to hear and reflect upon. I'm struck with the similarity of themes presented by Carl Rogers in *Freedom to Learn* and even A.S. Neill's *Summerhill* and John Halt's *How Children Learn and How Children Fail.* I have long been an advocate of experiential learning and focusing on significant learning of students--rather than merely covering content...It was *good* that students were included in these discussion sessions."

❖   "I felt that a simple dichotomy was presented that did not reflect our institution. We *already* do much if not most of what they propose. To imply otherwise was vaguely insulting. Professors who care passionately about their subject matter and also care deeply about how they convey this to students do not need to listen to much of this self-evident exhortation."

❖   "Too slick/salesman like, but greatly appreciated the content. However it didn't do too much beyond the article, which it seemed not a lot of people read. I was amazed at the resistance and bitching in the room which went on non-stop throughout the lecture. Perhaps the speakers' somewhat arrogant tone was necessary to communicate with the greatly arrogant old audience."

Academic Affairs Forum:

Faculty Roles & Rewards

Albert Flores

W hat aspects of faculty work are emphasized in a learning-centered university? What incentives (and obstacles) exist to support faculty in this endeavor? As we undertake the deliberate process of shifting our orientation towards a more sustained emphasis on a learning-based model of instruction, as articulated in our University's Mission & Goals, it is critical that we begin to think carefully about the changing role of faculty and develop suitable reward structures that acknowledge the importance of these efforts.

While a great deal of our discussion time was devoted to responding to our keynote speakers Barr and Tagg, who defended a learning paradigm, a number of fruitful issues were raised about the changing role of faculty in this new environment, in the two breakout sessions held during our recent campus-wide Faculty Affairs Forum.

S ome wondered if we have not already incorporated learning-centered activities into out teaching when we conduct seminars, laboratories, workshops, tutorials, service-learning and other independent study activities with our students. This view was further supported by the ever-growing reliance on new technologies that are becoming commonplace throughout the university, as faculty are increasingly making use of the Internet and e-mail as new modes of faculty-student interactions.

It was also noted that while learning-based instruction seeks to engage students to participate actively in the learning process, this should not preclude continuing to use lectures as an efficient and effective mode of instruction that can set the stage for and reinforce learning-based activities. A good lecture can still stimulate lots of learning, the real issue is properly balancing these two modes.

Nonetheless, some thought it diminished our unique skills and expertise as *scholars* to assume the role as mere "coaches." Others feared the diminution of our special authority and the loss of control in the classroom as we undertake learning activities. Still others worried about an inability to cover content, resulting in a watering down of our courses, thereby disadvantaging our best and most talented students.

It is generally agreed that faculty scholarship contributes substantively to enhancing student learning by deepening our preparedness, thereby making us better teachers, but it is worth wondering what the significance of research and publication becomes if our primary role is to enhance learning.

M oreover, when it comes to evaluating faculty for retention and promotion, how do we practically assess their contribution to student learning? Is it fair to hold faculty responsible for matters that may be beyond their control when students come unprepared to learn? We may need to develop a variety of indicators beyond grades and student opinion forms to do this, but is the outside world ready for this? And will we have the resources, time and energy to undertake effective assessment activities of both faculty and students?

When we looked at the current structure of the university in terms of much larger classes, expanding faculty workloads and the obligation to meet increased FTES targets in a context of diminished resources, we rightfully wondered whether all this talk about *learning* was nothing more than that "just talk!" How realistic are proposals for change when we are already stretched to the limit and see no immediate relief? Faculty have been asked to assume a host of new duties from mentoring to fund-raising to community service that have left them fragmented and exhausted. Are faculty appreciated for what they do currently and will they be properly rewarded for undertaking changes in pedagogy that may not fit well with existing institutional resources and realities? Time will tell as we forge ahead. ❑

Albert Flores is a professor of philosophy and member of the ad hoc Committee to Revise UPS 210: Personnel Guidelines.

Alternative Structures and Calendars for Learning

Susan Parman & Barry Pasternack

The topic of alternative structures and calendars for learning carries with it both sinister and empowering connotations. On the sinister side is an image of the university as an industrial factory that churns out products 24 hours a day, 365 days of the year, making full use of its "resources" (animate and inanimate). On the empowering side is the image of a flexible system that responds creatively to learning possibilities: two-week classes that teach language-learning intensively; six-year distance-education classes that steadily enhance the assimilation of complex mathematical skills; and so on.

> *"...we need to recognize that a university serves many needs. The calendar should reflect these diverse needs. We need to think of our various audiences."*

The participants in the discussion group spent at least as much time responding to the ideas of the presenters, Robert Barr and John Tagg, as they did on the specified topic of alternative structures. Some of the points raised in the discussion group included:

- Deciding what is to be learned is a key issue.
- Content should be emphasized along with skills.
- Where are citizenship and values taught and how are they assessed?
- Learning definitions differ from discipline to discipline.
- Will blending of disciplines assist students in a work environment in which people will change careers several times?

- Where is the pressure for change coming from?
- Will time to complete a program be the new way to measure graduates?
- Do what works. Some students will need more motivation than they are currently getting, others will need less.
- Don't we already have alternative structures, for example, independent study, challenge exams?
- The university should be able to respond to innovation quickly.
- Innovation must be bottom up (come from faculty).
- How does an organization learn to learn? How do we foster learning at the university?
- How does the reward structure reinforce learning?
- RTP rewards faculty member learning, not necessarily student learning.
- Both faculty and the institution need more feedback on learning,
- The diversity of the student body should be recognized in developing a calendar.

Some of the new structures that might be considered include the incorporation of service learning, the development of portfolios, the use of exit/entrance assessment, and the encouragement of interest groups. We need to pay special attention to what Freshmen need, as there is a very high drop rate after the first year.

Another suggestion was to provide just-in-time administrative support for innovative ideas. The innovations should be faculty-driven rather than imposed by administrative fiat, and means should be devised to support innovative ideas as they develop.

Faculty input after the meeting emphasized the development of structures that facilitate interaction. One suggestion was to reorganize offices on campus so that departments were broken up as units to en-

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courage cross-disciplinary communication.

Additional concerns raised included:

- What are the constraints that limit the development of flexible structures and calendars?
- What are the advantages, beyond using the resources of the university more effectively?
- What are the implications of moving away from calendars and units of instruction to learning units and assessments?
- What exactly is our model of a university? Is it a competitive filter to cream off the high-performance students and give them high-paying jobs or is it a nurturant system that tailors learning experiences to the different needs of the learner (different languages, different learning styles, different lengths of time needed to learn things)? Perhaps rather than trying to be all things to all people, we need to develop a university culture of commitment to learning and promote a sense of student responsibility to participate in this culture.

The group noted that we need to recognize that a university serves many needs. The calendar should reflect these diverse needs. We need to think of our various audiences (but also work on developing a common university culture).

These issues are linked with issues of assessment (defining who our students are, where they are coming from) and advisement (putting students into the right places/schedules/programs). Some students may be motivated, self-guided, well prepared, and capable of self-directed learning, using on-line modules, distance education, e-mail. Others may need more one-on-one seat time or collaborative support. Faculty need to develop these schedules and define learning experiences (these should not be imposed from a centralized source).

Diversity of student needs presupposes a diversity of programs. But whatever the program, the university should promote a culture of higher education. ❏

Individual Learning vs. Learning in Communities

Loydene Keith, Sheryl Fontaine, & Ellen Junn

A group of faculty, staff, and administrators, who teach or supervise students, joined a group of graduate and undergraduate students for lively discussions on learning styles. During both the morning and afternoon sessions, participants offered distinctions between *individual learning vs. learning in communities* and many argued for the value of creating an educational setting that includes both.

> *"While some participants expressed reluctance or even resistance to the idea of learning communities and the related notion of 'collaborative learning,' most were already convinced of the importance of both."*

While some participants expressed reluctance or even resistance to the idea of learning communities and the related notion of "collaborative learning," most were already convinced of the importance of both. Support ranged from the theoretically-based assumption that all learning is a social activity to experientially-based arguments drawn from the lives of students and teachers. Students were particularly forthcoming with stories from classes they had taken in which the "learning community" became a group of students either assigned to work together or self-created by mutual needs.

In addition to identifying the learning communities that can be created through collaborative learning in the classroom, participants noted that learning communities easily extend beyond this setting and into the academic environment itself. They cited numer-

ous instances of learning communities that cross departments or programs or even reach outside the University itself.

As time ran out, questions were raised about the essential and defining features of a "learning community" and the processes by which such communities form and claim membership. Participants agreed that the discussion of this topic should continue, growing from the information learned from the Academic Affairs Forum and from the experience and knowledge of other teachers and students who could be included in the conversation. The goal becomes, then, to use such discussions to help create a comprehensive and effective learning environment for this University. ❑

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Academic Affairs Forum:
Using Technology to Redesign & Improve the Learning Environment

Sorel Reisman

The Studio Classroom is a new, state-of-the-art computer classroom located in Room 102A in Library North. The site consists of 32 networked personal computers, each of which can be monitored via a central, instructor workstation. That workstation is outfitted with a variety of devices that allow the instructor to communicate with groups or individual PC users, via enhanced voice, image, video, and direct PC-to-PC technologies. In an effort to demonstrate methods by which attendees at this session might best understand how to use technology in their own instruction, the facilitators decided to utilize the Studio Classroom as a vehicle. As one attendee commented, for this session, the medium was the message.

"One of the more interesting features of the Studio Classroom is the availability of instructor software...that allows students to brainstorm on-line..."

One of the more interesting features of the Studio Classroom is the availability of instructor software (a Group Decision Support System -DSS) that allows students to brainstorm online, to anonymously comment on the brainstorming interactions, and even to provide an objective consensus of the brainstorming session. During the day, the Studio Classroom and the DSS were used to facilitate "discussions" regarding participants' views on a few topics.

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Unfortunately, the experience bore too much resemblance to a *real* technology-based instructional session in which 1) equipment has not been properly tested, 2) technical support is inadequate, and/or 3) instructors are not properly trained. The reasons in this case were that when we planned the session a few weeks earlier, we had been too optimistic about the availability of the classroom and its technology. While we had intended for all the hardware and software components to have been installed and ready at least one week earlier, in fact, they were not ready until after the first session of the day. Consequently, we had a bad news, good news day.

First the bad news. When the first discussion group visited the Studio Classroom in the morning, all the software had not been installed, all the hardware had not been tested, and worst of all, we instructors had little to no experience with those parts of the system that were working. Fortunately, or so it seems from (most of) the comments of the attendees, the combined hundred years or so of instructional experience of the workshop leaders enabled us to convey mostly how the Studio Classroom would work. While attendees were disappointed in being unable to use the features of the system, they seemed to believe our description of how the system would function, if it was in working order.

The good news part of the day took place during and after lunch when the system was made completely operational, allowing us to demonstrate almost all its capabilities in the afternoon session. During the afternoon session we were able to use the DSS part of the Classroom to "discuss" a variety of issues with the attendees.

One of the first exercises we attempted was to solicit participants' perceptions of how Studio Classroom-like facilities might be used to facilitate student learning. Within a period of about 5-10

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minutes after the question had been posed, almost 30 (anonymous) suggestions had been entered by the dozen or so attendees. And within another 5-10 minutes, all the participants were able to view all the suggestions of their colleagues, enter their own comments regarding those suggestions, and then "vote" on the suggestions with which they agreed, thereby causing the system to generate a ranked order consensus list. One of the general themes that was apparent (to me) throughout many of the suggestions, is that the kind of technology represented by the Studio Classroom encourages individual students to *more actively participate* in their learning processes.

Clearly there were lessons teamed from our use, that day, of the Studio Classroom, - both by the "instructors" and by the attendees. It was clear to all of us that the use of technology requires instructors to be well prepared in the event of unforeseen circumstances. And in the case of technology-based presentations, it is best to be prepared for the inevitability of those unforeseen circumstances. Furthermore, use of Studio Classroom-like facilities requires instructors to carefully plan the exact nature of their lesson materials, both in terms of content as well as in terms of format. How many of us remember old Prof. So and So back in our own undergraduate days who could be seen wandering towards his next class, jotting a few notes on the back of his pack of cigarettes? Certainly, few of us today can be accused of similar kinds of (mal)practices, and it's not, I hope, because most of us don't smoke! But regardless of how compulsive we may be in preparing our own classroom materials, the use of technology requires a greater degree of attention to detail than is typical for a conventional classroom session. But based on the responses of the attendees at our sessions, and based on the subsequent early demand by instructors to use the Studio Classroom, the extra work is well worthwhile, both for instructors and for the students. ❏

Toward a Culture of Learning

Susan Parman

A little learning is a dang'rous thing;
Drink deep, or taste not the Pierian spring:
There shallow draughts intoxicate the brain,
And drinking largely sobers us again.

Alexander Pope

As educators who have made learning a preeminent topic of discussion at CSUF, we run the risk of becoming intoxicated with the subject by consuming quick, frequent, shallow draughts. We are being offered numerous sips these days, and need to sit down under the trees, drink deep, and reflect on primary definitions and processes. What are the implications of shifting to a focus on learning? What, as university educators, do we want to accomplish?

I suggest that much of the controversy surrounding the keynote presentation by Robert Barr and John Tagg on the topic of the Academic Affairs Forum, "From Teaching to Learning: A New Paradigm for Undergraduate Education," stemmed from the fact that they did not attempt to address these issues, and in fact did not even appear to be interested in doing so. They began with certain premises: that learning is a product; that universities are businesses that produce learning, and like businesses should try to improve performance over time by developing assessment measures that enable us to say that over time we are getting better at what we do. Instead of measuring productivity as the cost per hour of instruction per student, we should measure productivity as the cost per unit of learning per student.

Aside from the fact that the language of the presenters was jarring--many faculty feel uncomfortable with the concept of the university as a business, learning as a product, and "measures of productivity"--the tone of the day may have been affected by the need to address other issues first, such as: 1) *What are the implications of shifting to a focus on learning?* and 2) *What exactly do we as university educators want to accomplish?* What is the culture of learning in which we wish to participate?

What are the implications of shifting to a focus on learning? The shift from an instruction paradigm to a learning paradigm (to use the speakers' terms) may reflect a fundamental shift occurring in American society. The instruction paradigm may reflect a competitive model in which the university functions within society as a filter to select higher-performing students for the job market. In the instruction model, everyone is given the same lectures, readings, and seat time. It may or may not be recognized that people have different learning styles; this is not considered an important issue. Society with its various biases has selected a certain set of skills it wants to reward, and it does so by imposing a standard instruction platform and assigning grades to measure performance. The curve is an evaluative mechanism that sorts high-performers from low-performers and sends the high-performers into the job market with stronger recommendations.

> *"If we are serious about focusing on learning, we should confront the possibility that it is difficult for university-age students to learn new things, and it may take longer and use more resources than the old instruction-based model."*

The learning paradigm, on the other hand, is a more nurturant model. It takes seriously the idea that everyone has different learning styles. It tailors learning experiences to the needs of the learner. It accepts the idea that some people take longer than others to learn. Are we prepared to deal with the implications of it taking someone ten years to learn something? And why do we assume that we can handle more students more quickly if we focus on learning?

How does effective learning occur? For a book call-

ed *Creativity*, Mihaly Czkicksentmihalyi asked creative people what their most effective learning experiences had been. The predominant response: long-term, informal mentoring from other creative people. I seriously doubt that the state of California will agree to fund a bunch of peripatetic learning forums where small groups of students go on long walks with faculty who discuss everything from the latest films to music theory--however effective such learning experiences are demonstrated to be.

If we are serious about focusing on learning, we should confront the possibility that it is difficult for university-age students to learn new things, and that it may take longer and use more resources than the old instruction-based model (which may not have been very effective but gave the appearance of moving students through a sequence of educational experiences). I think we should guard carefully against creating a situation in which faculty, students, and administrators are forced to lie, to create the illusion of having shifted to the "learning paradigm" because they know it is important but don't have the resources to do it. *If we are not clear, careful, and honest in how we assess what we want to do and obtain the resources we need to do it, then I predict we will experience a plethora of pretense.* We will have an avalanche of narratives about incredible learning experiences that create the appearance of having achieved the goals of the learning paradigm--while in reality they conceal the complexities and perhaps the impossibilities of dealing effectively (and cheaply) with the goal of accomplishing what we think we want to accomplish.

Hence the significance of the second point: *What do we want to accomplish?* Tagg and Barr made it clear that they were talking only about assessment, about improving the ability of a university to produce a product that they called learning. But there is a tendency among education specialists to reify *Learning*--to spend endless hours discussing measurement of learning, assessment of learning. The popular model to use in higher education these days appears to be a business model: what are we producing? who are our consumers? are we delivering the goods? And if we

have a good assessment technique, preferably one developed and administered from a central standardizing agency outside the university, it looks as if we are fulfilling an ideal of rational education--a kind of industrial model of scientific production.

I'm much more interested in discussing what should be learned--that is, what is the business of a university? If the business of a university is to produce a set of mechanical skills, we can use Cal Poly's "rhetorical syllabus" that defines specific skills and techniques to measure level of skill; it is conceivable that someone passing the test could graduate immediately (thus greatly reducing seat time). If the business of a university is to provide each person with an experience of transcendence, the opportunity to reflect on unexamined assumptions and to develop multiple perspectives, what does this mean for an industrial model of scientific production, and how do we assess such a learning experience? Perhaps an important assessment tool would be complex narratives, individually evaluated by faculty who know the student very well--hardly a device that lends itself to centralized administration and to large numbers of students.

Listening to Tagg and Barr convinced me that we need to spend at least as much time talking about what kind of learning experiences distinguish a university education as we do about assessment of learning. Also, rather than trying to be all things to all people, responding to all learning styles, languages, and cultures, perhaps we should spend more time developing a university culture of commitment to learning, and encourage our students to take responsibility for participating in and adapting to this university culture.

It may also be necessary to spend more time drinking deep from the cup of assessment--with the intent of understanding, as Reid Johnson suggested during his visit in February, that to do so is not to reify Learning or Assessment but to recognize that the more we take over our own definitions of learning and assessment, the less likely we are to be co-opted by centralized authorities who, in the absence of Pierian springs, are just as happy to measure the shallow waters of a cesspool. ❑

A Skeptic's View of Faculty Day

Mark H. Shapiro

Mark Shapiro is a professor of physics and the former chair of the department. He is currently a member of the Academic Senate and serves on the Long Range Planning and Priorities Committee.

At the outset I would like to note that I am *not* skeptical of the idea of having a "Faculty Day" at the beginning of each semester. Certainly, it is a good idea for faculty from all schools in our University to get together to discuss common issues and problems. Rather my skepticism focuses on the magical thinking contained in the two recent Faculty Day keynote addresses.

Recent demographic predictions, which suggest that "Tidal Wave II" may result in some 450,000 additional students for the California State
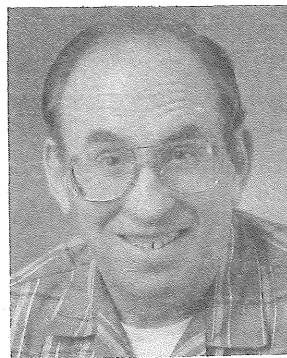
> *"Suggestions of ways in which the University might become more efficient in the use of resources are to be welcomed. However...the CSU system already is one of the most efficient systems of higher education on the face of the planet."*

University System, appear to be the driving force behind the ideas presented in these two talks. In the first of these Alan Guskin, Chancellor of Antioch University, suggested that by radically altering the *structure* of the university we would be able to cope with the large number of new students without the need for any significant increase in resources. The second talk by Robert Barr and John Tagg of Palomar College suggested that by transforming the *business* of the university from "teaching" to "learning" we could cope with the expected increase again without the need for increases in resources.

My reaction to both talks was similar. Each sounded like a cross between an "infomercial" promising a perfect body if only one would purchase that $295 exercise machine and a harangue from an itinerant preacher promising me everlasting life if only I would believe in his message without question and with total acceptance. In both cases a good deal of wishful thinking is involved, and more is being promised than can be delivered.

Suggestions of ways in which the University might become more efficient in the use of resources are to be welcomed. However, we should keep in mind that the California State University System already is one of the most efficient systems of higher education on the face of the planet. With utilization factors for physical facilities that exceed 90% and an average yearly cost per FTES of less than $6,000, it is highly unlikely that we are going to realize additional large savings in what it costs us to educate students no matter what changes we make.

Alan Guskin is Chancellor of Antioch University, which is primarily a small liberal arts college where both per student costs and per student revenues far exceed those in the CSU. In his world it may well be reasonable to suggest that changes in organization can reduce costs by substantial amounts. My own experience as a teacher and an administrator both within and outside the University suggest that it may well be unreasonable for Guskin to extrapolate his Antioch experiences to the world of large, urban comprehensive universities. I would argue that the level of cost savings that he proposes are unattainable in this system unless, of course, we are willing to lower drastically the quality of the education that our students receive. I think some of

us feel that the budget cuts we absorbed in the first half of this decade already have lowered educational quality by an unacceptable amount.

Barr and Tagg, and to a lesser extent Guskin, also promise that we can achieve great savings by changing the basic paradigm under which we operate. That is, that by transforming from an institution that stresses teaching primarily through structured lectures to one that stresses learning through student-centered activities, we can greatly reduce the number of faculty, who are both costly and somewhat pesky from the administrative point of view. Guskin would accomplish this through a very heavy dependence on technology to deliver instruction and aid learning with less dependence on individual interaction between professors and students. Barr and Tagg propose that by abandoning dependence on the "passive" lecture mode of instruction and adopting a variety of "active" learning techniques students would be able to learn more on their own while instructors would become "coaches" rather than "teachers." In fact, Barr and Tagg suggest that so little learning takes place through the "teaching paradigm" with its heavy dependence on lecture that we should abandon it altogether.

But this is really a straw man argument. The passive lecture mode of instruction (with the professor talking and the students dutifully writing down notes and with almost no interaction between student and professor) has never been the dominant mode of instruction here. From the outset the campus was designed to minimize the number of courses taught in large lecture format. The majority of our courses are taught in ways that encourage active student involvement in the learning process. Even though some observers may feel that we have focused more on teaching and research than on learning, those of us who have been here awhile know that we always have focused first and most clearly on the learning process. In fact, when it comes to research neither

> *"The passive lecture mode of instruction (with the professor talking and the students dutifully writing down notes and with almost no interaction between the student and professor) has never been the dominant mode of instruction here."*

Alan Guskin nor Barr and Tagg have much--if any-- appreciation for the role that faculty scholarship and creative activities play in learning. However, a recent study by Francis Oakley, who is President Emeritus of Williams College and Chair of the American Council of Learned Societies, shows that as a group faculty who are actively involved in research are considered to be more effective teachers by their students.

We have a diverse student body and a very diverse range of disciplines represented in the University. We can argue about which teaching and learning techniques work best in a given discipline. However, I think most of us would agree that the techniques that seem to work best generally require a high level of interaction between student and instructor. To be sure technology may help us mediate and extend that interaction, but we also know that at some point most students need some direct help from the instructor in order to understand a concept or gain insight about an idea.

Can we really be certain that the heavy reliance on technology will enhance learning and lower costs? Personally, I find the idea of reducing the professor's role to that of a coach demeaning, and I doubt that the students will learn much in the process. There are some insights that students gain from one-on-one interactions with faculty that they can't obtain from computer learning programs, CD-ROMs, or videotapes no matter how well constructed they might be.

In my view the error that Barr and Tagg make is to equate the acquisition of information with the development of understanding and insight. In order for Guskin and for Barr and Tagg to get us to accept the promise of a cost-free technological solution to the dilemma of "Tidal Wave II," they have to get us to agree that what we have done in the past has not worked and that our salvation lies in the blind acceptance of their new paradigm for learning. How-

"Putting the Cart Before the Horse," "First Things First," and Other Famous Sayings

Alan Saltzstein

To help students acquire the skills needed for the "high tech" world, three years ago I included significant work with spread sheets, graphics and statistical analysis in a graduate seminar. The class obviously requires the use of a computerized classroom. On the first night of class, this semester, about half of the computers in the only computerized room assigned to our school were frozen. Fortunately the class is small but some time was taken up finding machines that worked. The projection screen was visible only if the lights were out. Hence I had to either forgo the use of the projector or place waste baskets in front of the doors to bring in some light from the hall. The printers weren't working; thus it was difficult to know what concepts were getting across. The next week all these conditions were the same though the computer technician and the Associate Dean had been contacted. By the third session printers still could not be used.

Another course deals with the problems of poverty in the cities. Given the prominence of welfare reform it was important to find new texts. On December 20th of last year I ordered a book that had made a brief appearance on the best seller list during the past year. To my surprise it was not on the shelves during the first week of class. I was told it would be there shortly. After several calls and no books by the start of the third week I called "Bookstar" in Brea. Over the phone I was told that while they did not have the book in stock they could get it in *five days*. The clerk had tapped into their computerized inventory and located the books at a warehouse in Oregon. (At the start of the fourth week, the books did arrive in the campus store.)

And I could add similar problems. The computer room has always been hot and musty. To make the temperature tolerable large fans must be turned on, increasing the noise level. Last semester I taught in a room where the black boards (and they were *black* boards--no felt pens) were rarely cleaned.

For the past year the faculty have been treated to nice all day programs (with good lunches) where we have been told of the need to look into new teaching methods. Consultants have been hired to look at the General Education and the personnel process. The Academic Senate and the Chairs go on retreats. Generous grant possibilities for inter-departmental collaboration and more collaborative approaches to General Education are available.

A new paradigm is in the air. Assessment of student learning is primary; collaborative learning through interactions with the community and other departments are suggested.

I favor all of these things. I coordinate a masters degree program that has been governed by such requirements for several years; as a major player in the accrediting agency, I have had a role in developing these requirements. We adopted much of this in our program and were praised by the site team last year for our efforts. We think we have developed a better degree as a consequence of this effort.

However, my teaching would improve immensely this semester if the teaching lab were in proper condition and the bookstore could order my books at the start of class. These concerns should take precedence over those that are more visionary.

Couldn't the funds spent for the above mentioned items more profitably be used for concerns like mine? If learning is really "pre-eminent" here, concerns directly related to the current classroom should precede the charting of the future.

An important influence on my learning in graduate school was the writings of Herbert Simon, (the only

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person in my field to ever win a Nobel Prize). Simon argued that organizations change when slack resources exist. Thus if change is desired, initially we must be certain that the basic conditions of organization life are at least minimally satisfied. Without that, change will be opposed by the organization and it is unlikely to be successful even if it is generally desired. Thus why don't we search more carefully for those things that are now being done badly which directly interfere with the educational process? Then perhaps we can chart our "Bridge to Whatever" knowing that our old goals are at least being satisfied, and learning in the traditional way is provided as the best means to succeed. ❏

Shapiro (cont.)

ever, I would argue that we should not be that gullible. Over the years we have heard many "reformers" who believed they had found the Holy Grail of learning. When I first began teaching in the late sixties it was Piaget's philosophy. Then constructivism became the rage. This was followed by cooperative learning which, in turn, was followed by discovery-based learning. Now the popular buzz words are "distance learning" and the "service learning." Each of these probably has added a little bit to our arsenal of techniques, but none of them have proved to be substitute for good preparation, motivation, and hard work on the part of both teacher and student.

Given these criticisms, what then should be the role of Faculty Day in the life of our University? I would argue for a program that is rich in the diversity of ideas and challenges it presents to us. I also would argue that it should be a program that is modestly respectful of our values, traditions, and collective wisdom as a faculty. It should be a program that respects the differences inherent in the diversity of disciplines that constitute the University. In particular, our own faculty should be invited to offer their insights and ideas. The program should help us both to learn new ways to help our students, and to strengthen existing approaches that have served us well in the past. Finally, if it is to have any value it should provide us with some small but useful ideas that we can put into practice quickly with modest effort. ❏

Community-Based Learning at CSUF: A Progress Report

Judith Ramirez

How does community-based learning relate to our Mission and Goals?

The *CSUF Mission Statement* includes the following: "Through experiences in and out of the classroom, students develop the habit of intellectual inquiry, prepare for challenging professions, strengthen relationships to their communities and contribute productively to society."

In addition, there are the following relevant goals: *Goal II:* "To provide high quality programs that meet the evolving needs of our students, community, and region, we will... (g) provide opportunities to learn from external communities through internships, cooperative education, and other field activities;" *Goal III:* "To make collaboration integral to our activities, we will... (a) create opportunities in and out of the classroom for collaborative activities for faculty, staff, and students;" and *Goal VII:* " To expand connections and partnerships with our region, we will... (a) develop mutually beneficial working partnerships with public and private sections within our region;...and (c) develop community-centered programs and activities, consistent with our mission and goals, that serve the needs of our external community."

What is the extent of our involvement with community-based learning here at CSUF? The following ten points summarize our activities beginning in the Summer of 1995 though the current academic year:

(1) Summer 1995 - We sent a six-person team to the California Campus Compact Summer Institute on Integrating Service with Academic Study. Team members were: Team Leader Judith Ramirez, Child, Family, and Community Services, Fred Zandpour, Communications, Lorraine Prinsky, Sociology,

Chuck Buck, Student Affairs, Elena Macias, VPAA Administrative Fellow from CSULB, and Marianne Blank, community representative from Saint Anselm's Multi-cultural Center in Garden Grove.

(2) August 1995 - We hired Jeannie Kim-Han, former Executive Director, California Campus Compact, as Assistant Director of Student Life, in charge of community-based learning, Greek life, and student clubs and organizations.

(3) Fall 1995 - We formed a Community-based Learning Committee (CCBL) chaired by Judith Ramirez and comprised of the 1995 Summer Institute Team (minus the Administrative Fellow); Tom Klammer, Associate Vice President for Academic Programs; Jeannie Kim-Han; and Sally

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"The Department Chairs Survey supported our belief that experience-based learning is already an important part of the CSUF curriculum... [with a] total of 176 identified courses..."

Cardenas, Director of the Center for Internships and Cooperative Education. Since that time, the committee has expanded to include additional faculty, including Vikki Costa, Secondary Education; Julia George, Nursing; Kathy O'Byrne, Counseling; Hazel Warlaumont, Communications; Patricia Szeszulski, Child and Adolescent Studies; Lori Sheeran, Anthropology; Richard McFarland, Student Health Professions; as well as Bob Emry, Acting Vice President for Student Affairs and Joe Arnold, Director of the Institute for the Advancement of Teaching and Learning.

(4) 1995-96 - We received three $2500 California Campus Compact Curriculum Development and Action Research Grants and $1000 for consultants (all funded by the Corporation for National Service) to support the following activities to increase

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campus awareness of community-based learning: *Curriculum Development and Action Research Mini-Grant* ($2500): One of these grants was awarded to Ellen Junn, Child and Adolescent Studies, Kathy O'Byrne, Counseling, and Soraya Coley, Human Services. The project involved faculty and students from three different departments, in interdisciplinary participation in action research teams at six highly respected policy-oriented programs affiliated with the United Way of Orange County, for the purposes of deepening students' understanding of action research and the implications that this research has for public policy and civic participation. A second $2500 grant was awarded to Lori Sheeran, Anthropology, to develop ethnographic sites for community-based learning activities in anthropology classes.

Faculty Incentive Awards ($625 each) presented to Patricia Szeszulski, Child and Adolescent Studies, to incorporate community-based learning in a class on adolescent development; to Hazel Warlaumont, Communications, to include community-based learning in an introductory communications class; to Carol Lindquist, Psychology, to incorporate community-based learning in an upper division community psychology class; and to Dan Brown, Religious Studies, to infuse community-based learning in a peace studies class. Consultants included Bob Franko, from Kapi' Olani Community College, Hawaii, and Dr. Tom Ehrlich, CSU Distinguished Scholar.

(5) Spring 1996 - We developed and distributed a Department Chair Survey of courses which incorporate community-based learning activities. (The survey was sent out late in Spring 1996 and redistributed in Fall 1996 to those departments which had not responded.) A summary of results appears later in this report.

(6) Spring 1996 - We submitted a joint Academic and Student Affairs initiative to create a Community-based Learning and Service Center (CLASC) linked to the Office of Student Life. Although the initiative was not funded, a stream-lined version of CLASC was established in Fall 1996 with funds from the Vice President of Student Affairs.

(7) Summer 1996 - We sent a four-person team to the California Campus Compact Summer Institute on "Integrating Service with Academic Study." Team members were: Judith Ramirez (Team Leader), Joe Arnold, Bob Emry, and Patricia Szeszulski.

(8) Fall 1996 - We received a $5000 California Campus Compact grant to pay for a part-time graduate assistant for CLASC.

(9) Fall 1996 - We received support to include Dr. Benjamin Barber in the lecture series funded by the President's Initiatives. Representatives from California Campus Compact member campuses were invited to attend the lecture and follow-up activities on Friday, March 14, 1997.

(10) Spring 1997 - We are currently working on a "Learn and Serve" grant to greatly expand the work of the CCBL and CLASC.

Results of the Department Chairs Survey: As expected, the Department Chairs Survey supported our belief that experience-based learning is already an important part of the CSUF curriculum. Thirty-four departments responded to the survey, all of which indicated that they currently include some form(s) of community-based learning in their curriculum. Of the total of 176 identified courses, 61 consist entirely of student fieldwork or internship for academic credit, 31 are seminars linked to a fieldwork requirement, and 84 are other courses which include out-of-class or field activities of a required, optional, or extra credit nature.

Future Plans: The work of the CCBL and the CLASC will focus, in the coming years, on helping students and faculty define and assess learning outcomes of community-based experiences.

If you are interested in being actively involved in the work of the *Community-Based Learning Committee* (CCBL) or the *Community-Based Learning and Service Center* (CLASC), contact Judith Ramirez (714-278-3861) or Jeannie Kim-Han (714-278-7622). ❏

A Response to Critics of My *"Towards a Post-Modern Approach to GE"*

Michael Parker

The articles by Nancy Fitch and Robert Ayanian (*Senate Forum*, Fall 1996) have several points in common. They argue that my assertions about the multiplex contingent nature of all knowledge are self-contradictory and wrong-headed. They even see my articulation of post-modernism as dangerous and poisonous to general education.

First, Nancy's assertion that my main argument is that "foundational knowledge is contaminated," is inaccurate since I asserted that there is no foundational knowledge to be contaminated. The beliefs that endure and that we hold dear are not in some special Platonic domain called *Truth* that is separate from the rest of our knowledge-such beliefs have just continued to be useful and satisfying. We rely on them and so we think of them as basic.

Second, the self-contradiction that appears to Nancy and Robert in the claim that "knowledge is contingent" is itself a non-contingent claim--a statement of foundational or universal knowledge that exempts itself from its own assertion of contingency. From my perspective, however, the post-modern claim of contingency is provisional and simply another moment in the discourse. A more compelling redescription of our conundrum will probably appear shortly. In addition, one of the most frequently mentioned hallmarks of post-modernism is its self-referential irony. It is ironic that in our search for universal truth our own critical powers seem to demonstrate that we cannot make non-contingent claims. My assertion was that since knowledge seems to be contingent let us build this into our general education. Instead of continuing to pretend to be the interpreters of the universal truths

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of each discipline, let's share our own critical powers with our students. Let's share the experience of seeing the content of each discipline as professors do--as a professional discourse that evolves in the face of newly identified social conditions and newly discovered contradictions in our discipline's narratives.

Robert asks the related question of how we could ever know that knowledge is provisional since this contradicts its own claim to truth? Since Robert comes from the discipline of economics, the topic of the evolution of economic theory might serve to clarify my claim that contingency makes knowledge *different* from the western tradition, but not meaningless.

When I studied Economics as part of general education in the mid nineteen-sixties, Paul Samuelson was at the height of his influence with his university text *Principles of Economics*. In my class we received the impression that finally economists had pretty much worked out how economics operate. Dividing the discipline into *micro* and *macro* components was the final breakthrough and the coming years of research would empirically validate the theory.*

The belief that the current consensus would be the enduring or *True* one was not new, however. At the beginning of what we now call "economic theory" during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, theorists such as Adam Smith and David Ricardo searched for an impersonal, suprasocial or natural order in the dynamics of wealth and scarcity. They thought that they had discovered a science-like lawfulness in the market's constrained drive for capital and in the function of rents, tariffs and so forth. That their work unquestioningly assumed the aristocratic class system of English society to be

natural was not clearly exposed until Marx articulated the social causes behind the supposed "natural economic forces" in classical political economy.

By the twentieth century conditions had changed and so had economic theory. For example, Alfred Marshall articulated the reciprocal dynamics of supply and demand, costs and benefits, and other constructs related to price formation. The "classical economics" of Smith, Ricardo, and J. S. Mill had little support in this much more analytical approach. But Marshall, too, was soon to be displaced as the vessel of economic truth when, subsequent to World War I, conditions had changed again. John Maynard Keynes' theory shifted the focus of analysis from marginal utilities and costs to the wider topics of characterizing national savings, investment output and employment. He brings these constructs to the task of understanding market failure and, with the great depression, how to create government policies to induce growth.
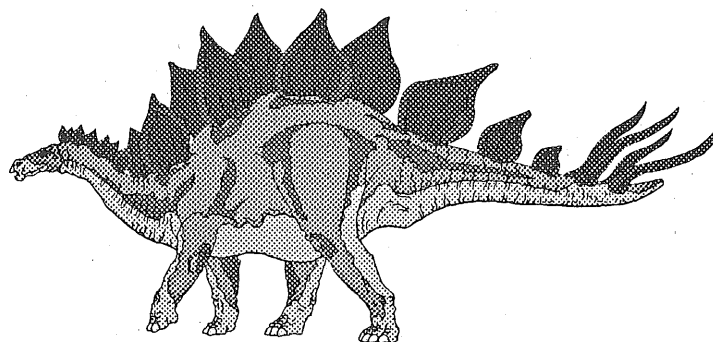
In the case of each of these economic models over the last two centuries, they garnered widespread support at the time and even expressed a consensual outlook lasting several decades. When social and historical conditions changed, however, a new model replaced the old one. During the zenith of influence, each model was considered to be essentially accurate and all-encompassing, yet each was replaced. Keynesian theory, of which Paul Samuelson's model was a late expression, lost its hegemony in the nineteen-seventies for several reasons. Per capita income had risen substantially for over two decades, making the model created to contend with depression less topical; moreover, decades of research had failed to link macro and micro analysis

* See: E. Roy Weintraub, *Stabilizing Dynamics: Constructing Economic Knowledge*, (Cambridge University Press, 1991); William Milberg, "Natural Order and Postmodernism in Economic Thought," *Social Research*, 60 (No. 2, Summer 1993) pp 255-277; Paul Feyerabend, *Against Method: Outline of an Anarchistic Theory of Knowledge*, (London, New Left Books, Humanities Press, 1975); Robert Heilbroner and William Milberg, *The Crisis of Vision in Modern Economic Thought*, (University of Cambridge Press, 1995).

into a coherent whole. In the practical realm the Keynesian model proved inadequate to explain inflation or to predict stagflation. By the nineteen-eighties, those ideologically opposed to government regulation of the economy were in power and

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"...[there is] a fear that the post-modern condition invites total anarchy and that the western intellectual tradition's desire for absolute knowledge, if abandoned, leaves the academy without a purpose and professors without jobs."

Keynesianism was treated with derision. At present a mix of models, i.e., "New Classical", "Monetarist", "Post Keynesian", "New Institutional", and "rational expectations," all compete unsuccessfully for dominance.

Using economics is a good example of a general education focus (perhaps in a unit on enterprise) that displays the post-modern approach. Rather than conceiving of the course as sharing the current received view and as the interpretation of a canon, students could benefit from examining the conditions under which each model was created, came to dominate, and subsequently declined in influence. Teaching the construction and critical evaluation of knowledge would not, nor should not, be postponed until and unless the student went on to higher studies.

At one point in her critique Nancy argues that "for postmodernists, experiences are constructed though language, history, and culture." I could not agree more. I simply do not understand how she then suggests in the next sentence that the post-modern approach offers students experiences devoid of this understanding of how "experiences" are constructed. These two sentences seem contradictory.

Nancy also argues that the holocaust is not a text (to be deconstructed) and Nazis' butchery is not a product of textual representation. However, all our speech and conversation *about* the holocaust is text. Although Stalin exterminated perhaps even more

folks than Hitler, our discourse for that tragedy is different. The holocaust has captured the American imagination in ways that the Russian tragedy has not, though this is probably not true for the Russians. Deconstructing texts of horrific events furthers the discourse and our understanding of them. Besides, what post-modernism suggests is that such events are a likely outcome of *modernism's* unquestioned or noncritical faith in an ultimate ideological absolutism and a push-button technical rationality that makes totalitarian intolerance part of an accepted social order.

I suspect that the "danger" or "poison" that Nancy and Robert seem to be afraid of is *absolute relativism* in both knowledge and values. They seem to fear that the post-modern condition invites total anarchy and that the western intellectual tradition's desire for absolute knowledge, if abandoned, leaves the academy without a purpose and professors without jobs. Weaving intellectual history and critical thinking into each general education segment will not close the academy, however. Having students wrestle with the conditions and assumptions that produced a particular knowledge claim will not eliminate their formation of values and commitments.

"Something much more immediate than 'basic truths' or 'universal foundations' undergirds general education, namely, our common social context, our community, and the similarities in our individual purposes."

Something much more immediate than "basic truths" or "universal foundations" undergirds general education, namely, our common social context, our community, and the similarities in our individual purposes. Our ability to learn to consume received wisdom with caution and to be able to adjust to accelerating change without the gut wrenching process of abandoning one absolute truth for another, these are the hoped for outcomes of a post-modern general education.   ❏
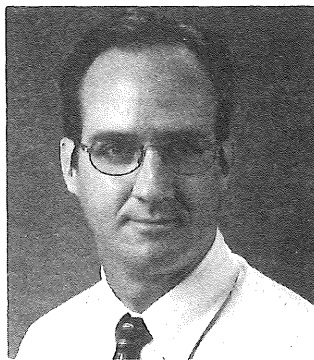
Fitch & Ayanian on Parker's Postmodernism: Wrong & Wrong

Stephan Walk

Stephan Walk is an assistant professor of kinesiology & health promotion, specializing in sports sociology. He serves on the Academic Standards Committee.

I am continually perplexed by responses, nay *reactions*, to the still emerging redescriptions of knowledge by scholars of Postmodernism. The inexplicably hostile responses of Professors Fitch and Ayanian to Michael Parker's piece on postmodernism in the Fall 1996 issue of this publication represent incomplete understandings of postmodernism, its arguments about knowledge, and especially how we might use its insights to guide discussions of General Education at CSUF. I would like to respond to these pieces and cast Parker's ideas in a more positive light.

Ayanian's objections appear to stem from a fundamental lack of familiarity with postmodernism, and, disturbingly, what Parker actually said about it. If you check Parker's references, you'll find that deconstructionist linguistics are only part of the array of postmodern scholarship, which includes philosophy, history, art, sociology, literary criticism, and, alas, economics (see e.g., Donald McCloskey's *The Rhetoric of Economics)*.

While not reading this extensive scholarship is perhaps excusable, not reading and nevertheless rejecting Parker is not. What Parker presented is an entirely historicist account of our intellectual and pedagogical traditions, where he argues, and Ayanian doesn't notice, that the pursuit of timeless, universal truths has not paid off, not that such truths have been "shown" to be incorrect. Postmodernism, in short, is a label for a collection of *arguments* that some, myself included, find useful and persuasive as redescriptions of Western intellectual traditions. Buying into postmodernism is not a way to say that the metaphysical premises of the West were "wrong." Some ideas, like the "laws" of the natural sciences and the principles of liberal democracy, seem to be worthwhile. On the other hand, some of our practices and traditions no longer have much use.

Ayanian's self exception charge against Parker is the definition of specious, beginning with the *non sequitur* that if there is no timeless knowledge then postmodernism is a politically motivated and self-serving fad. Ayanian is only half right, in the sense that postmodernism is indeed politically motivated. He misses the implication that those who are proponents of timeless knowledge also are ensconced in politics, the very reason he argues that postmodernism will "poison" his peaceful present. That is, although he did not explicitly identify it, Ayanian has in mind his own replacement narrative for Parker's postmodern account. Since he is arguing for "what got us here," let us assume that his argument is that the ostensibly apolitical status quo ought to guide general education; i.e., since he recognizes postmodernism as political, he presumably is in touch with some apolitical context within which to locate it.

It does not require a great intellectual leap to argue that such appeals to apolitical grounds, that is, to immutable "facts" that prevail because they somehow exist outside human interests, are the most suspect of all, since presumably those facts must be no one's at the same time as they function as ways of organizing the culture. These historical "foundations" constitute paradigmatic examples of the very self-excepting fallacy Ayanian paints on Parker; i.e., the history of Western thought, like Ayanian's retort, is a colossal example of various self exceptions in the form of appeals to these metadiscourses that presumably "transcend" all of us.

By way of example, Ayanian should know that a thorough critique of Marx's metaphysics (i.e. "historical materialism") is among the most persuasive examples of postmodern scholarship-- postmodernism is made more persuasive, not less, by criticizing work like that of Marx. Indeed, historicizing metahistorical claims and documenting their manifestations in history is a consistent theme in postmodern work. There will naturally be differences in these historical accounts, making which one(s) we mark as authoritative themselves a matter of persuasion. But that has always been the case. Hence, Parker and postmodernism's account argue that all claims to truth--including postmodern ones--cannot escape historical contingency and cultural construction, and also that we should be very suspicious of those who claim that they are in touch with timeless realities.

Fitch's response to Parker contains mis-understandings of the "consequences" of post-modernism, beginning with the second sentence of the piece, where she states that "Postmodernism has demonstrated beyond any reasonable doubt that all foundational knowledge is contaminated because it was produced discursively to construct power relationships" (p. 7). No postmodernist I know of would make such a claim, and Parker does not. The term "contaminated" makes little sense in a post-modern epistemology. To say that the production and use of knowledge is "contaminated" pre-supposes that it is possible for knowledge to be in some sense "pure" or independent of human interests or projects, which no one could plausibly claim. Indeed, the notion that there is some neutral epistemological position from which to "objectively" compare competing knowledge claims for "accurate correspondence to reality" has been called "A God's Eye View" by Hilary Putnam and the "View From Nowhere" by Thomas Nagel. Postmodernists, including Parker, correctly point out that it is silly to continue believing that such a view is possible and that we and our students should abandon the notion that it is.

Fitch's next argument is that postmodernism is just another foundation, similar to those foundations it claims to reject, and that Parker is contradicting

himself in suggesting that postmodernism is an anti-foundational replacement for the grand narratives of the West. The claim of Parker is not that post-modernism has established a *new metaphysics* as a permanent replacement for older ones based on some new "discoveries" about knowledge--although we may observe that those who link their claims to metaphysics have also held a disproportionate amount of social power. Rather, Parker, as a pragmatist in the tradition of Richard Rorty, is arguing that the appearance/reality distinction and the notion of eternal knowledge are not useful concepts--that we're better off without them, *not* that we have discovered that they don't correspond to reality. Postmodernism is a way of reframing intellectual discourse and debate with the assumption that all truth claims, and some social and political ones in particular, have always and everywhere been tied in with human projects. It is *not* an establishment of a new metaphysics.

I haven't the slightest idea where Fitch finds Parker suggesting that we and our students ignore the interplay of the metadiscourses that so dominate Western intellectual life. Quite the contrary, I find Parker and Fitch on the same side in suggesting that our students critically engage these discourses, *qua* discourses, and find their historical and con-temporary manifestations both interesting and compelling. Ironically, although she accuses Parker of insufficient scholarship, Fitch appears to be insufficiently read when she then argues that postmodernism is weak for its nihilism. I find postmodernism utterly dependent on nihilism, if what one means by that term is that it is no longer useful to locate our hopes for coherence and meaning in some non-human story or an ineluctable human essence. Unlike Fitch, I find this conse-quence liberating not disheartening, and certainly not part of any "postmodern dilemma." It is liber-ating to think, for example, that the dominant discourses of positivism, and particularly those that have colonized the social sciences, might eventually be displaced by those that take seriously the "reality" of human intersubjectivity.

Fitch then points to what is perhaps the most difficult objection to postmodernism *vis-a-vis*

general education: Any approach to general education requires that the multiple realities postmodernism asks us to take seriously must be coherently reconciled by the University, if in no other manner than in its selection of one content area over another. How, so the objection goes, are we to teach students about reality if reality itself is partial, inherently unstable, culturally constructed, historically contingent, and power laden? If any knowledge claim is potentially valid depending on the current relations of power, on the basis of what, for example, do we teach students astronomy instead of astrology? What if a persuasive community of astrology scholars emerges, asserts itself as a science, and receives widespread scholarly acclaim? On what non-modernist basis could we reject one over the other? Doesn't postmodernism eliminate our grounds for rejecting some discourses over others?

This is the common though unnecessary objection that, under postmodernism, all knowledge is relative and thus "anything goes" because we have no way of resolving multiple truth claims. Again, this is a misunderstanding. The "success" of astronomy is a matter of its usefulness in explaining the extra-earthly universe. Human beings and their projects determine this usefulness, not the universe; i.e., for unavoidably contingent and culturally constituted reasons, we are more apt to call astronomy sentences true than we are astrology ones--astronomy has survived criticisms of its truth claims that astrology has not. This is the case by virtue of the criteria "we" have agreed upon that will mark claims about the universe as worthy, not because the universe has told us that our astronomy sentences are true and our astrology ones false. Kuhn and others have shown us that the criteria for truth claims within any discipline shift over time, shift for cultural and not empirical reasons, and, at least within universities, have not shifted in astrology's favor. To be sure, this is a "victory" for astronomers, but it is a cultural victory, not a metaphysical one, and it doesn't mean that astronomers, by virtue of the method they use, have cozied up to a permanent truth that should allow them to tell us the meaning of human life.
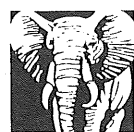
The principal criticism of the CSUF GE package is that the current collection of courses and requirements is incoherent both for students and faculty. If "incoherence" refers to the sheer number of courses from which students must make selections, I would agree. On the other hand, if our assumptions and conceptual frameworks for GE are variously incoherent, I am afraid that to a large extent this is the "postmodern condition" for general education and CSUF is not unique in this regard. Perhaps we should discontinue our search for coherence, if what we hope to find in such a search is a master framework within which to locate the partial perspectives that constitute a vast array of often incommensurable scholarship. Perhaps our postmodern task is to teach students how to critically reflect upon and work within an academy composed of such scholarship, in anticipation of finding a similarly complex and contradictory world that such scholarship attempts to capture.

Hence, achieving what we are prepared to call "coherence" and "integration" in general education ought first be a matter of negotiation about the meaning of these terms. We postmodernists will argue that we don't need a master narrative or a guiding metaphysics to accomplish these goals. Nor, incidentally, do we need a metaphysics to determine what is and is not human cruelty, and thereby to find Nazi death camps, and *especially* their materiality and historical facticity, abhorrent. I would like to suggest that one of the jobs of the academy is identifying and eliminating cruelty in all its obvious and subtle forms, regardless of the flag under which it occurs, rather than identifying and precipitating, through political activity, presumably transhistoric contradictions in political systems. At bottom, we should insist that change in the culture at large, and in the University culture, be a matter of persuasion, not force.   ❏

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