

Virginia Scholar

Newsletter of the Virginia Association of Scholars

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VIRGINIA ASSOCIATION OF SCHOLARS*PLEASE HELP BY GIVING*

Virginia Scholar #1 was December 1993.

As well as to NAS & VAS members in Virginia, it goes to members of Governing Boards of the major Virginia universities, to media representatives, to NAS affiliates in other states, to such organizations as the Center for Individual Rights, and to an increasing number of individuals who heard of it by word of mouth and expressed interest.

There's no ready way to judge the impact we're having. But as Editor I treasure:

- a Governing Board member who joined NAS after reading *VS*
- alumni who did likewise
- a few alumni and others who wrote to university administrators on matters *VS* had brought to their attention.

That's the sort of thing that helps me stay enthusiastic about the job of Editor; if it were just a newsletter to distribute among our own members I would not find it worth the effort.

NAS, which has fully funded our activities up to now, believes State affiliates should become financially self-supporting.

If you're a member and want to help us continue and expand our activities, please consider making an extra donation.

If you're not a member of NAS or VAS but have been getting *VS* and enjoy it, please consider making an occasional gift (for addresses see inside back cover)

PLEASE HELP BY DOING

Share *Virginia Scholar* with as many people as you can. Pass it around. Tell us where to send complimentary copies. We have extras of many back issues. Ask us for a bunch and **send them to the Departments on your campus** with a request that they be circulated among the faculty.

VASNET

VAS members can communicate with one another through our electronic bulletin board.

To subscribe: send the following message to listproc@gmu.edu:

subscribe vasnet {your full name}

To unsubscribe: send the following message to listproc@gmu.edu

unsubscribe vasnet

Join up now. You may not need to use the list often, but if you do it's likely to be invaluable.

Back Issues of *Virginia Scholar*

Issues #6-10 are at

<http://fbox.vt.edu:10021/faculty/aaup/index4.html>

We have a few spares of most issues and would be happy to send them to interested persons or groups. Apart from VAS business matters, tidbits, and so on, the main features were:

VS#1: Why going to college

has become so expensive in Virginia, Part I

Bibliography on the Mandelstamm Affair

VS#2: "On loyalty and whistle-blowing" (ed.)

Why going to college

has become so expensive in Virginia, Part II

VS#3: Focus on budget-cutting and re-structuring

Why college has become so expensive, Part III

The 1.5% solution

VS#4: Why college has become so expensive, Part IV.

M. Krauss, "When you face the PC inquisition"

VS#5: Lani Guinier at Tech

Schadenfreude (ed.)

Books: *Kindly Inquisitors; The Voice of Liberal Learning - Michael Oakeshott on Education; The Culture of Disbelief; The Imperiled Academy; A Professor's Duties*

VS#6: "How I got here: an open letter from the files"

Alexander Weiss, "Affirmative action and me"

VS#7: Theophilus Whiteman, "Gremlins, Part II"

Reviews of contrarian books about AIDS

VS#8: *La Trahison des Clercs* (ed.)

Sal Choudhury,

"The price of intellectual freedom"

More contrarian books about AIDS

VS#9: Culture and multi-culturalism (ed.)

Affirmative action:

a major threat to intercollegiate athletics

Darrell Stump, "Barbarians at the gates"

Hans Christian Rott, "On anonymity"

"Diversity and identity"

VS#10: Theophilus Whiteman,

"Sexually transmitted dis-ease"

"Let them eat cake" (ed.)

Academic standards

Generation X Goes to College

VS#11: Academic standards - many reports

Experts, science, and common sense (ed.)

VS#12: Neil Postman's books on modern culture

Howl 1998 - For Academe; Ginsberg's classic applied to politically correct academe

RESPONSES & FOLLOW-UPS

from the Editor

In July, I was interviewed by Ian Zack for the *Roanoke Times*, about *Virginia Scholar* and the Virginia Association of Scholars. When on August 15th I saw the front-page headline, "Rush Limbaugh has nothing on him", I'd turned the page before it registered that the accompanying photo was of me.

Others as well as I, let me hasten to add, have judged Zack's reportage balanced and fair: editors and not reporters write the headlines. At any rate, the story brought fan mail – from faculty, students both undergraduate and graduate, and towns-people:

I didn't think that anyone else in this benighted town felt the way you and I do... Could you put me on your mailing list and send me some back copies?

I am a part of the 'silent majority' who agrees with you... I would like to join the Virginia Association of Scholars. Is it open to graduate students?

I knew there were other dissenting voices on campus, but most times they seem to fall back in disgusted silence after the 'University' goes ahead and does whatever it had planned anyway...

I continually shake my head at the way things are railroaded through here, how it is claimed money is tight for academic programs and support, and yet massive showcase projects continue to be funded

how nice it is to know there is at least one voice in academia for reason!... Would love copies of your newsletters

I find it comforting to know there is a professor at Tech with the nerve to say what is right

And from a retired Department Head at Tech:

I... applaud your stand on political correctness—particularly in a university environment... The idea of putting that kind of money into a position, called vice-president for "multicultural" affairs, seems like over reaction to the flurry of publicity caused by the unfortunate discovery of an infamous prank of young Claudius Lee... And I think the administration should work hard to avoid even a hint of nepotism in filling university posts.

In any event, I want you to let you know that many of us appreciate your efforts to keep the university administration looking over their collective shoulders to see who is back there.

I hope that those administrators, Board members and others in authority to whom we send these

newsletters, will recognize how much support there is for the values VAS and NAS espouse. For every student who ever makes the effort to thank a teacher, there are dozens or hundreds who feel the same way but never get around to writing that letter; for every reader who sends an author a fan letter, there are hundreds or thousands who feel the same way but never get around to writing that letter. So when that article brought me a dozen or two approvals, I was delighted in the knowledge that VAS and NAS **do** have a large measure of public support (and it is no secret that the new Director of SCHEV, William Allen, is a member of NAS).

Administrative spokespeople continue, of course, to deny that political correctness exists, and to be evasive and incoherent as they do so. Thus Larry Hincker, Associate Vice-President for University Relations at VaTech, was quoted as follows in the mentioned newspaper article:

I don't quite understand the venom that a professor like that has for administrators. We've all got jobs to do.

Let me try to explain.

Finding a place in academe was the culmination of my fondest dream: to become part of a community of scholars and learners dedicated to seeking and speaking the disinterested truth.

Not only is that a wonderful life for the scholars and learners. Universities that hew to that mission accrue, over the longer run, social prestige and status and all sorts of other rewards. Their accomplished, educated graduates become leaders throughout society and do nice things for their alma mater. Business and industry vie to make use of the expertise and wisdom of its distinguished professors. Surrounding communities become affluent.

All those good things follow – **follow** – from the existence of a community of scholars and learners dedicated to truth-seeking and truth-speaking. They do **not** follow automatically from the mere labeling of some institution of higher education as a "university" or a "research university". Indeed even a moderately successful university, one that has honestly sought and spoken truth, will find those side-benefits

disappearing if it turns away from honesty and makes commerce and prestige its direct, primary aims. For what shall it profit a university, to gain the whole commercial world and lose its scholarly soul? Nothing at all, for it will find that it loses the commerce along with the soul.¹

A university is greater or lesser according to its faculty and its students. Without great faculty, even the best students cannot realize to the full their innate talents. Given great faculty, great students will come. Thus the university's prime strategy must be to attract **and keep content** the best possible faculty; so the criteria for appointment must be substantive, intellectual, scholarly – not political, not social, not commercial.

Political correctness and greedy merchandising are destroying the merit system and thereby the traditional function of universities. That couldn't happen – not as much, not as fast – without the connivance of policy-making administrators; they bear responsibility for it. It is no excuse, that “the Governor” or “the Legislature” or anybody else demands inappropriate things of the university: administrators have the duty to educate media, public and politicians about what is proper for a university.

Our leaders are not doing that.

The point is not that we all have jobs to do, Mr. Hincker, but what those jobs are and how we perform them. The professors' job is to seek and speak the truth.

What, Mr. Hincker, is **your** job?

What is our leaders' job?

✦ ✦ ✦ ✦ ✦ ✦

Why do I feel so strongly about these matters? My reply, as published in that article:

My own best guess is that my childhood experience of racial persecution convinced me that fairness, justice, equal opportunity for all INDIVIDUALS can only come through NOT in any official way categorizing people by “race” (which is intellectually invalid both culturally and biologically).

For people with my background, Mr. Hincker's “We've all got jobs to do” bespeaks ignorance of 20th-century history. Take one of Tom Lehrer's ditties:

If the rockets go up,
Who cares where they come down?
That's not my department,
Says Werner von Braun

¹ “For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?” – Matthew 16:26

Werner von Braun was one of the Nazi scientists whose V2 rockets (Vergeltungswaffe – “vengeance weapon”) killed a lot of people in Britain even after it was clear that Germany could no longer win W.W.II. The Nuremberg Tribunal, convened by the victorious Allies to bring war criminals to justice, established for future generations the principle that just doing one's job, doing what one's told to do, is no excuse if that job is to do things that are **wrong**.

Now it's **wrong** to categorize human beings by “race”. There is no agreed cultural or biological criterion for determining what “race” is; and

Distinctions by race are so evil, so arbitrary and invidious that a state bound to defend the equal protection of the laws must not invoke them in any public sphere.

So spoke Thurgood Marshall. He was right. He remains right.

What then shall we say, when administrators admit students and make appointments on the basis of “race”? When they create whole bureaucracies whose sole function is to categorize by race and to promulgate racial stereotypes? Shall we then go along with it and say, “I'm just doing my job?”

Not, surely, if we remember Adolf Eichmann.

A reminder:

Annual VAS Meeting

will be on

October 24

at

Radford University

Among the speakers will be

William Allen

Director of SCHEV

Elizabeth McClanahan

Chair of SCHEV

Bill Wilson

University of Virginia

Brad Wilson

acting president, NAS

TOWARD ACCOUNTABILITY

a very modest proposal for the improvement of academe

by Josef Martin with Henry Bauer

For 30 years or so, administrators have invited students to comment anonymously about their instructors. An oft-used justification is the benefit that instructors supposedly derive from such unfettered feedback that guides them toward making their instruction ever more effective.

These benefits have unjustly and unnecessarily been denied to others, in particular to academic administrators. They would derive great benefit from learning what their staff and faculty really think of their efforts, from learning to see themselves as others see them. As a small step toward achieving this desirable end (goal), former Dean 'Josef Martin' drew up for us this draft questionnaire.

Faculty Perceptions of Administration

This opinion survey is being made for the benefit of the administrators concerned. Express what you feel, and please do not sign this form. If you wish to make fuller comments than the questions permit, write on the back or attach extra sheet(s).

Mark the column NA when the question doesn't apply or is inappropriate.

W = woeful, F = what you'd expect of most administrators, G = good, U = unbelievably good

HOW I RATE THIS ADMINISTRATOR

1. Honesty (opposite of double-talk, evasiveness, hypocrisy)	W	F	G	U	NA
2. Consistency (says same at different times and to different people)	W	F	G	U	NA
3. Acceptance of responsibility and blame for mistakes	W	F	G	U	NA
4. Loyalty toward subordinates	W	F	G	U	NA
5. Recognizes value of hearing differing opinions (opposite of vindictiveness toward those who disagree)	W	F	G	U	NA
6. Apparent knowledge of the substance of what is being administered	W	F	G	U	NA
7. Success in communicating what s/he does and why it matters	W	F	G	U	NA
8. Degree to which what s/he does is <i>actually</i> relevant to learning and scholarship	W	F	G	U	NA
9. Degree to which s/he inspires those administered to do their best and to feel appreciated	W	F	G	U	NA
10. Concern and respect for faculty as individuals	W	F	G	U	NA
11. Concern and respect for staff as individuals	W	F	G	U	NA
12. Concern and respect for students as individuals	W	F	G	U	NA
13. Fairness in making evaluations	W	F	G	U	NA
14. Organization (for example, how often are amendments of memos, revisions of policies and clarifications of earlier memos necessary?)	W	F	G	U	NA
15. OVERALL RATING OF THIS ADMINISTRATOR	W	F	G	U	NA

HOW I RATE MY OWN SITUATION AND PROGRESS UNDER THIS ADMINISTRATOR

1. I am (female, male, NA = other)	F	M			NA
2. I am (M = entitled minority, N = non-entitled minority, NA = other)	M	N			NA
3. Years spent in relevant occupation	≤1	1-2	2-5	5-10	>10
4. Number of comparable administrators worked under	1	2	3	4	>4
5. My gains from working under her/his leadership	W	F	G	U	NA
6. Working under her/him is, from a <i>professional</i> viewpoint (W = wouldn't do it if I had a choice; F = that's life; G = I'm awfully lucky; U = I can't believe I'm in heaven)	W	F	G	U	NA
7. Working under her/him is, from a <i>personal</i> viewpoint (W = wouldn't do it if I had a choice; F = that's life; G = I'm awfully lucky; U = I can't believe I'm in heaven)	W	F	G	U	NA
8. As a role model or mentor s/he is	W	F	G	U	NA

FACING REALITY

We are not sanguine about the chances that the forms provided on the preceding two pages will be adopted in the nearer future. Until then, the least one might expect of academe is that those who work there be offered contracts that specify with clarity what the actual duties and obligations are.

Herewith a specimen draft prepared by *Josef Martin & Henry Bauer*

Herewith a CONTRACT OF EMPLOYMENT between VIRGINIA INSTITUTION FOR HIGHER TRAINING and

VIHT agrees that above-named instructional employee holds a tenured appointment with all traditional appurtenances and benefits of academic freedom provided and for only as long as s/he

1. agrees to administrative exhortations, injunctions, or suggestions, no matter how counter-productive or ill-founded and
2. accepts the full blame for the consequences of implementing said exhortations, injunctions, and suggestions and further
3. pretends to believe that the administration knows what it is doing and is not itself part of or all of the problem and furthermore
4. does whatever it takes to please every single student in every class and
5. agrees that any failure to learn on the part of any student is wholly and entirely the fault of the instructor and moreover
6. accedes to any wish or opinion expressed by the parent or guardian of any student, no matter how uninformed the said parent or guardian may be of the actual situation or of the actual conduct of the student concerned and moreover
7. takes necessary steps to ensure full compliance with all Federal and other regulations respecting equal access, non-gendered and non-sexist language (no matter what damage may thereby be done to the proper use of the English or American-English language) and further
8. takes all necessary steps to ensure retention of all students and equal progress toward graduation of all identifiable minority groups and in general
9. gives higher priority and agreement to administrative judgments and pronouncements than to any conflicting provisions of professional organizations or traditional academic values and
10. agrees not to voice disagreement with administrative actions or pronouncements, conceding that upward institutional loyalty takes precedence over federal laws respecting whistle-blowers, whether or not the upward loyalty is accompanied by corresponding loyalty downward from administration to the employee.

Any of these provisions may be changed at any time as deemed desirable by the administration in order to make the Institution fully responsive to the needs of and requests from the Commonwealth of Virginia or any of its constituted agents or from any business or industry or from any citizen's group or citizen or from any other party that could be construed as having a right, no matter how tenuous, to demand something from the Institution.

Signed..... (employee) Date.....
 (responsible administrator)
 (independent witness)

WHERE DOES THE MONEY GO?

It will not be easy to find out

by Henry Bauer

Governor Gilmore, addressing members of boards of visitors, asked Virginia's colleges and universities to spend their money wisely¹. Edward Flippen, chairman of the Governor's Blue Ribbon Commission on Higher Education, is aware of the problem:

The process of demystifying funding and spending habits at our colleges and universities, and making prescriptive recommendations for those habits, will not be easy. Some of the issues... are seldom understood by anyone other than chief financial officers.²

I hope Mr. Flippen is also aware that it is to the interest of those chief financial officers (CFOs), and the administrations to which they belong, that what they do should not be understood by others.

KNOWLEDGE COUCHED IN PROFESSIONAL JARGON
IS ELITISM DISGUISED AS LEARNING³

Here are a few tips:

Don't accept the CFOs' manner of categorizing expenditures.

For many years, VaTech has boasted having "one of the leanest administrations in academia"⁴. But that may tell us more about the profligacy of academia than about any virtuous responsibility at VaTech:

According to the U.S. Department of Education, administrative expenses at colleges and universities over the last 20 years have risen at a rate beyond what is attributable to increasing enrolment⁵

Increases in	
Students	17%
Faculty	25%
Executive administrators	43%
Non-faculty administrators	124%

How much, I've often wondered, does intercollegiate athletics cost Tech? That would be no simple matter to discover. One would need to identify every person whose duties have to do with athletics: ticket sales, publicity, marching bands, maintenance of athletic facilities including administrative offices – not to speak of coaches and their staff of secretaries; and then there are the cost of utilities, travel expenses, etc. A very careful study⁶ showed that the merest handful of college athletics programs manages to cover its own costs fully – a literal handful of perhaps half-a-dozen. It's safe to say that Tech is not

among the most affluent half-a-dozen athletic programs in the United States. Ergo, its intercollegiate athletics loses money.

From where does that money come?

The time-worn shibboleth, the unproven myth, is that colleges need intercollegiate athletics to provide the visible activities in which alumni can join and that secure continuing financial support from those alumni. But when Tulane abandoned its intercollegiate basketball, its alumni actually **increased** their giving!

But presume for the sake of argument that the shibboleth-myth is true. Now compare public and private colleges and universities. Who needs private donations more? Obviously the private schools, for they have no other source of income than tuition and gifts. Therefore, if top athletic programs really do help bring in gifts, then one would expect that the top athletic programs would belong to the top **private** universities. But they don't. It's the **public** universities that represent the greatest number of leading intercollegiate athletic programs. Why?

I suggest, because public universities are able to hide the losses from their athletic programs by paying with state-provided funds for utilities, landscaping, maintenance of facilities, various categories of staff (for example by having coaches be professors of physical education or the like), and more.

Don't presume that CFOs and other administrators are deliberately trying to hoodwink you

Many of them would be as shocked as you, if they knew the actual details of things done under such guises as "diversity", "student support interventions", and the rest:

NEVER ATTRIBUTE TO MALICE WHAT CAN BE EXPLAINED BY INCOMPETENCE⁷

The major difficulty in controlling costs is that it cannot be done without "micro-managing". But under micro-management, people who don't properly understand the details are trying to control the details.

Still, it's a plain matter of fact that most of the people managing universities are intent on spending increasing amounts of money on activities that are at best peripheral and at worst antagonistic to learning and scholarship:

I understand that it is indispensable for the university to

devote an ever-greater share of its budget to non-teaching functions. While I have deplored this in the past, I now see that it is necessary to meet the demands of a truly enlightened, properly administered university.⁸

So global or overall budget cuts, like micro-management, cannot do the intended job of cutting “fat” or “waste”: by and large, the politically correct administrations cut academic budgets but leave the “diversity” stuff and nonsense alone.

The only solution is to replace politically correct administrations with people who hew to traditional (pre-post-modern?) academic values.

A COMMITTEE IS
SEVERAL MINDS
ROLLED INTO
NONE⁹

Don't accept that the way things are done now is the only way they could be done

For example, VaTech defended in the following manner its decision to increase administrative salaries more (by 5.8%) than funds provided by the legislature (3.1%) would allow:

“It’s an equity issue,” Tech spokesman Larry Hincker said, referring to the lower-level employees who would be getting smaller raises than instructors

But would it not be possible to provide those 5.8% increases only for those lower-level employees and not for the highly paid executives? Why does the same **percentage** raise have to be applied to every salary, so that the **extra** dollars received by top administrators are almost as much as **the whole salary** of the lowest paid staff?

Among the highest-paid **faculty** at Tech, after all, there are some who have **volunteered** to accept lower **percentage** raises so that their less highly paid colleagues could receive larger percentages.

The argument commonly made against any suggestions of this sort is that Tech is in a national market and must offer competitive salaries. That is undoubtedly the case **as to faculty**. When it comes to administrators, however, the case is by no means clear. Only in recent times have university administrators become a profession separate and apart from that of being a faculty member. Well within living memory, even the University of Virginia chose its president from among its own faculty. Some of the greatest damage to morale at Tech was done, in fact, by executive administrators imported directly from

the “national market”, who failed to respect the institution’s unique, honorable history and tradition.

Here are some suggestion for the future:

- Department heads are chosen from the faculty, and return to their faculty duties after their term as Head.
- Deans are chosen from among those who have been Department Heads in the respective College. They too return to regular faculty status after serving their term.
- Provosts are chosen from among those who have served as Deans, and can also expect to become regular faculty members again.

When faculty take up these administrative appointments, their salaries are increased, if only because their appointments call for 11/12-month duties rather than the academics’ 9/10 months. Upon returning to faculty duties, there is a corresponding decrease in remuneration.

Such an arrangement has many advantages. Administrators would be familiar with Tech’s traditions and style. They would be much less inclined to forget what it is like to be a practicing teacher and scholar. They would be less likely to adopt the lifestyle of a different social and fiscal class, less likely to say, “Let them eat cake”, when told that bread is in short supply. To illustrate:

A number of years ago, Tech introduced charges for parking on campus. The rates (\$40 per year) were set the same for faculty and for staff. In at least one academic department, the faculty recognized that this charge would be a much greater burden on secretaries and technical staff than on the faculty; so that Department decided that it would pay the parking charges for its non-faculty staff.

Down from Central Administration came an edict forbidding such use of Department funds.

A similar edict had come down some years earlier, forbidding a certain College from introducing annual awards to recognize the sterling work done by secretaries and technical staff.

Yet when Central Administration wants to raise administrative salaries by 5.8% rather than the State-funded 3.1% — Lo and behold! It can find without difficulty \$700,000 per year.

That \$700,000 can “come from existing salary budgets, with dollars built up from the university’s state-mandated cost-saving efforts throughout the 1990s... [T]he university has saved more than \$30 million... Tech eliminated more than 400 positions, including at least 11 senior administrative jobs”⁴.

That explanation further illustrates why it is so difficult for outsiders to understand the realities behind what CFOs tell them. A little common sense always comes in handy. Thus the mere fact that we have “saved” a certain amount doesn’t mean we have to spend it, let alone on salaries, let alone on top administrators’ salaries. And when those 400 jobs were eliminated, by what percentage was the number of faculty positions decreased? By what percentage the number of staff positions? And by what **percentage** the number of administrative positions?

And how many administrative positions were subsequently created again after some had been eliminated?



The manner in which administrators have become a separate social class is illustrated by changes in salary structure: “now, the president... makes 21 times... [the salary of] a Grade 1 employee... [but] in 1981, the ratio... was about 7:1... [T]he salary of the president... has more than tripled (an increase of \$172,000), while the salary of a Grade 1 worker has virtually remained the same for two decades (an increase of only \$1,686 over 17 years).” ¹⁰

Don’t believe that what the regulations state is what actually happens

Faculty know that the relation between a course’s catalogue description and its actual content may be purely coincidental – which is by no means necessarily a bad thing, given the unproductive bureaucratic hurdles to be surmounted if one wants to change a catalogue description. But when it comes to administrative practices, the difference between verbiage and practice may be more problematic. For example, who would imagine that “Affirmative Action Incentive Grants” could be other than a benign thing? Not until one found out what they pay for, that is:

Enhancing Recruitment of Diverse Graduate Students in Sociology:... The continuation grant will allow the department’s minority recruiter to expand and solidify minority-student recruitment efforts for the doctoral program in social inequality, to make additional progress on curriculum development for the concentration in diversity studies, and to work closely with the directors of women’s studies and black studies on this new graduate program¹¹

Why new graduate programs in social inequality, diversity studies, black studies, women’s studies?

Don’t accept that everything being done now needs to be done

In *V.S.#1* we pointed out that “teaching has far from

the highest priority within the university... because independent empires exist – Student Affairs” etc.; and further details were given in *V.S.#3*. We would be delighted to supply extra copies of those to interested parties, as also of other back issues including #2 and #4 which had other parts of our series on “Why Going to College has Become so Expensive in Virginia”.

Political correctness exacts huge costs, directly through Affirmative Action Grants and the like administered by hordes of supernumeraries on all sorts of payrolls. Yet those (relatively) visible costs may well be the least of the damage. As the example immediately above illustrates, such things as “Affirmative Action Grants” seduce faculty into spending their time on matters of social engineering dictated by political ideology rather than on scholarly pursuits.

I had once intended to write an editorial on this point, but found that it had already been written⁵:

The connection between preferential treatment and high dropout rates

is one non-fiscal – merely human! – cost of affirmative action and diversity initiatives. It leads to administrative demands for “higher retention”, which in turn produces further grade inflation and yet more cynicism among the faculty, and

remedial courses which sap the resources of institutions and further dissipate the academic credit-worthiness of degrees

Some of the other students come to resent those preferentially admitted...[who] are not fools. They see plainly that their performance is not competitive... Many will become belligerent and defensive... Administrators go along... Rabble rousers thrive among the students and the faculty

for example, crying “racism” and demanding reparations **now** because a 100-year-old student yearbook made a joking reference to the KKKlan; or because one student forwarded to his fraternity brethren from the Internet a parody on Ebonics – to name the incidents that led VaTech to create a Vice-Presidency for Multi-Culti Affairs.

[M]isguided administrators set up freshman orientations...[with] indoctrination in the politics of racism and... [proclamations] that only whites can be racist

which might seem unbelievable to those who did not hear for example Cornel Morton, late unlamented Director of AA at VaTech, publicly say that; or, privately, that he wouldn’t give weight to character references written by whites.

[S]tuffs whose whole function is to oversee the

affirmative action effort... also come to wield power in the general administration and may... have a strong say in undergraduate admissions and the ordering of student life. Like all bureaucracies, they will seek to expand their staffs, their budgets, and their power.

And who dare refuse such requests? When that immediately brings charges of racism?



Among things that don't need doing are the endless series of bulletins, newsletters and the like that flood our mailboxes. We've commented on this **bumf** in several previous issues. It is characteristic that those who publish them really have nothing that needs saying, so that reading the result can be a consciousness-deadening experience, thus¹²:

This program encourages more than just the study of culture... [It] gives the student broad-ranging and practical knowledge grounded in history, geography, literature and language

which, are we supposed to infer, are separate or different from "culture"?!

[T]he Office of International Development (OID) changed its name to the Office of International Research and Development... The evolution of OID to OIRD was a significant development for Virginia Tech's international programs.

Just so.

Among the most useless bumf are the reports – titled by some subtle humorist as *Quality Improvement in Action* – from the Academic Assessment Program, which purvey "information" that is either erroneous or banally obvious, for example in May, 1998 that "Drinking and Smoking Do Significantly Impact Academic Performance".



When a "newly-formed position" has "no pre-established structure"; when "We did not want to define the job position; we want the person to invest their own strengths and visions into creating the right atmosphere" ¹³, chances are that there's no pressing need to do the things that the newly-created position will set in motion.

Don't presume the old ways are superseded

I've always thought my job as teacher was to select the most significant material relevant to each course that I teach; to arrange and explain that material; to be available to students so that I could help them surmount the difficulties that all learners encounter. That, it seems, is the bad, old-fashioned way. Among its disadvantages is that it leaves no room for **Inno-**

vative Projects for which **Grants** can be awarded.

Call for Proposals for Student Success Projects¹⁴

Fostering success among undergraduate students is a major aspect of the Academic Agenda. To that end, the University will continue to help students to succeed by offering vital learning support programs. The Student Success program is one avenue for creating new programs and improving existing interventions. This initiative is designed to identify interventions promoting learning and development among undergraduates [like, may I (dis)respectfully suggest, **studying?**]. For the 1998-99 academic year, the Student Success program will offer funding for two types of endeavors: Innovative Programs and Research Projects.

I would like to give my 100 students per semester each copies of the overhead transparencies I use in class, so that they could concentrate on what I'm saying and make their own notes instead of needing to copy down what is being projected. But my department only allows me 400 copies per month. My syllabus runs 3 pages, and I give 5 quizzes of 2 pages each – that blows my quota for the whole semester. Here's a modest proposal:

Suspend all Projects and Innovations until further notice, and use the money thereby saved to allow each instructor to distribute a useful amount of handouts.

Just in case the given quote has not left you sick to your stomach, here are the Selection Criteria:

The proposed projects will be evaluated according to the reviewers' overall impression of the interventions, with preference given to projects that:

- Foster collaboration between Student Affairs and Academic Affairs;

[Why? Do students spend too much time on academics?]

- Include student participation in the planning process;

[Clearly a better way than studying, for students to spend their time]

- Include undergraduate involvement (e.g., peer mentors, facilitators, group leaders, etc.) in the operating plan;

[Again, "undergraduate involvement" clearly doesn't mean "studying"]

- Demonstrate the ability to implement a strong evaluation plan;

[Because without a strong evaluation plan there would be no way to demonstrate the wonderful effectiveness of the new interventions]

- Increases student interaction with faculty;

[but not, of course, in the classroom or office]

- Involves students in small group activities; and
- [**Don't** give too much thought to what students' small-group activities might be]
- Are new innovations.

[by contrast, of course, to **old** innovations]

Don't presume that because universities cannot be trusted to lay bare what they do, that therefore SCHEV staff or other experts can safely be relied upon to measure what is really going on

The trouble is, there is only one way to gauge how good a university is: people who understand what universities ought to be, must use judgment. But we have gone so far down the road of not trusting one another that we demand "objective" measures; but

**OBJECTIVE MEASURES
CANNOT CAPTURE
THE MOST MEANINGFUL ASPECTS
OF WHAT UNIVERSITIES DO**

Twenty years ago, the Commonwealth of Virginia funded its colleges by a rudimentary "objective" formula that worked quite well, **because it was not very detailed and because there was enough money to go around**. Each university could decide on class sizes, student-faculty ratios, etc., and vary them by discipline and by student level, etc., as seemed judicious after incessant to-and-fro negotiating between Department Heads and College Deans and Academic Vice-Presidents.

But as money became scarcer, SCHEV began to enforce demands like, each "program" must produce a minimum average number of graduates. An utterly ludicrous criterion: Arts & Sciences does half of all the teaching in the university, but about half of that is of students majoring in other colleges. **It's absurd to decide the number of physics faculty needed by the number of physics graduates produced**, because engineers and many other programs need to be taught physics. But, absurd or not, that's the sort of "objective measures" SCHEV has devised and imposed, with increasing rigidity and increasing absurdity, over the past decade or so.

The Core Performance Measures for Virginia Institutions of Higher Education¹⁵ devised by SCHEV can only have a further considerable deleterious influence on the quality of Virginia's colleges.

Endnotes:

¹ Christina Nuckols, "Gilmore to colleges: spend state money wisely", *Roanoke Times* 22viii98, B1,4

² Edward L. Flippen, "Charting the future of higher education in Virginia", *Roanoke Times* 23viii98, HORIZON 3

³ M. R. Montgomery, "Improving on nature"; review of Steven Vogel, *Cat's Paws and Catapults*, undated clipping from *New York Times Book Review*

⁴ Ian Zack, "Tech gives bigger pay increases", *Roanoke Times* 23viii98, A1,3

⁵ Barry R. Gross, "The intolerable costs of affirmative action", *Reconstruction* (1563 Massachusetts Avenue, Cambridge MA 02138), 2 (#3, 1994) 58-63

⁶ Murray Sperber, *College Sports Inc.: The Athletic Department vs. the University*, New York: Henry Holt, 1990

⁷ 'Josef Martin' (a.k.a. Henry Bauer), *To Rise Above Principle: The Memoirs of an Unreconstructed Dean*, University of Illinois Press, 1988, p.154

⁸ Daphne Patai, "Justice comes to U.Mass", *Chronicle of Higher Education* 25iv97, B8

⁹ Paul Louis Corio, ca.1997

¹⁰ T. J. Kerekes III, "College presidents' salaries soar, but not others' — Academia follows the corporate path of elitism", *Roanoke Times* 3viii98, A7

¹¹ *Spectrum* (VPI&SU) 21v98, p.5

¹² *The University Abroad* (VPI&SU), 11 #1, Spring 1998

¹³ Matthew Winston, Office of University Relations, cited in Tabatha Spitzer, "Diversity addressed by administration", *Collegiate Times* (VPI&SU) 27iii98, A1

¹⁴ To Deans, Directors and Department Heads, April 9, 1998, from Vice Provost for Academic Affairs, VaTech

¹⁵ *Spectrum* (VPI&SU) 26iii98, p.8

A TEN-YEAR ANNIVERSARY INTERVIEW WITH DEAN JOSEF MARTIN

In 1988, 'Josef Martin' published *To Rise Above Principle: The Memoirs of an Unreconstructed Dean* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press). Did he have second thoughts about what he wrote? Is there a sequel in the works?

V.S.: If you could revise your memoirs now would you change anything? What?

J.M.: *To Rise Above Principle* is up-beat. Nowadays I can't summon the optimism I then had about academic life.

But the question is moot. The book would hardly find a publisher today, it's too politically *incorrect*.

It's hard to bear in mind just how very recent the hegemony of political correctitude in academe is. The very term "political correctness" stems from Dinesh D'Souza's 1992 *Illiberal Education*.

V.S.: Is political correctness why you're not now optimistic about higher education?

J.M.: It's certainly part of it, quite a big part, but only a part of it. The basic necessities of teaching are being ignored while effort and money are poured into thoughtless "innovations" and "initiatives" like "information technology" and distance learning.

Not, of course, that there's anything inherently wrong with those things. Many people in Australia benefited for decades from radio-broadcast interactive schooling. But nowadays too much is being done as though all that's needed is to get on-line and we'll have education fit for the 21st century. That's bunkum. Nothing on-line is going to be better than the people who put it there. Shoddy curricula don't get better by putting them on-line. Irresponsible teaching doesn't become responsible on-line. Education doesn't become high-quality just through being put on-line.

It's actually rather the opposite. To set up first-rate stuff on-line requires an enormous amount of experience and trial-and-error. But we're inviting every instructor to do it themselves. That's as absurd as having every instructor write their own textbook or produce their own videos.

V.S.: So what basics are being ignored?

J.M.: That the quality of education depends on the spirit, the enthusiasm, that the faculty bring to the endeavor. The faculty's time and good

mood are what administrations should most jealously guard and foster.

As it is, however, for too many of us, unfortunately, the excitement of a new semester is destroyed by lack of support for teaching, by administrative actions that disrupt rather than assist.

V.S.: Generalizations like that are self-discrediting, you surely know. Our readers can plausibly pass them off as the bitterness of someone who is no longer an administrator and would like to be. What if any are the facts your opinions are based on?

J.M.: Well, for instance that it's not good for professors not to have an office, or to have one that's too small to confer with students in, or one that's unbearably hot or unbearably cold.

Twenty years ago as Dean I drew the attention of Central Administration to two large departments where faculty offices and classrooms lacked air-conditioning, or where two or three instructors had to share the same room. In these twenty years, conditions in those departments have barely improved while offices in Central Administration have been refurbished *several times*.

Perhaps the greatest advance has been that faculty have at last been permitted to install window air-conditioners – provided that they bought them themselves.

When I returned to teaching after being Dean, my departmental office wasn't ready until 2 months after the academic year had begun, even though there had been more than 6 months notice given of my move. When, half-a-dozen years later, I moved to another department, the same thing happened again.

Both my present and former offices have heating devices that cannot be prevented from making the rooms between 85° and 95° in the winter; I often have to run my self-purchased air-conditioner during winter months! So I spend as little time as possible in the office, which of course is hardly desirable, neither from my point of view nor the students'.

Our campus has long prided itself on being at the forefront of computer usage; yet it took 12 years before I was provided in the office with a computer as serviceable as those I bought for my own use at home.

V.S.: Perhaps the enemies you'd made while Dean were wreaking revenge...

J.M.: Were that the case then I'd be less pessimistic than I now am. In point of fact I've been treated with the greatest consideration by almost every *individual*. But somehow *the system* doesn't work to make teaching the enjoyable activity that it could be.

V.S.: Is it mainly a matter of unsatisfactory offices?

J.M.: Far from it. Classrooms are often as unsatisfactory as offices. While teaching large classes – up to 300 students or more – I was traipsed from one end of campus to the other; for a couple of years, off-campus in an abandoned cinema with tattered seats and holes in the floor.

I asked for a reserved parking space to help with transport of quizzes and hand-outs for 300 students. Our Parking Committee rejected that plea. I'm told the Director of Parking said, "Over my dead body". Well, years later that same Director is still doing his best to make things inconvenient for the faculty – he's alive despite the fact that we *did* get that parking space, courtesy of the Provost over-ruling the Parking Director – in fact *two* spaces so that instructors arriving and instructors leaving class could both be accommodated.

V.S.: So you *weren't* being singled out for unpleasant assignments...

J.M.: That's what I'm saying. But very few other faculty *complain* as I do.

The others using that cinema thanked me for getting the parking spaces assigned – they'd taught there for longer than I but had simply put up with things, no doubt out of the discouragement and demoralization that are now so rampant among faculty. *Faculty don't expect any support from the administrations*. They see administrators enjoying the same facilities as they themselves are denied. Show me an administrative office that restricts the use of its copying machine; yet we faculty – at least in my department – are limited to making 400 copies per month.

V.S.: That sounds like quite a lot; isn't it ample?

J.M.: Think a moment. Let's say you're teaching 100

students, and your syllabus is a few pages, and you give a few quizzes,...

V.S.: You mean that 400 copies includes for class use? Surely you can apply for more?

J.M.: Yes, of course. When you've used up your quota, you can ask for more. You can search for the person in charge. Like as not, you can't find her. It all makes an instructor's work so much more convenient and enjoyable.

V.S.: I hope we're approaching the end of the horror stories.

J.M.: Just one more for the moment. Nowadays I teach two classes "back-to-back" – 2 to 3.15 p.m. and 3.30 to 4.45. In both I use slides and videos as well as overheads. It took some time before my department was able to persuade the Registrar's Office that I should have the same classroom for both classes.

V.S.: Why should that be difficult to arrange?

J.M.: I can't answer that.

At any rate, finally that desirable goal was achieved. It was nice to be able to stay behind after the first class and chat in leisurely fashion with some of the students. I could arrive early before the first class, set up the projectors and so on for both classes...

V.S.: Excuse the interruption; you mean you have to set up these devices yourself?

J.M.: Of course. When I was teaching those large classes, every now and again the battery in the microphone would be dead, or the cord broken, and no phone in the room for me to summon help.

The Audio-Visual Support Services – who by the way do a phenomenally excellent job with what little resources they have – had suffered major budget and position cuts. I should have thought a support service like that would have been the *last* to be cut, but it was among the first. Teaching would be greatly assisted if all the resources now going to the Center for Excellence in Undergraduate Teaching were re-assigned to Audio-Visual Services.

At any rate, it was nice to have the same room for both classes. But a funny thing happened to me on the first day of the new semester. I was waiting for my second class to arrive when another instructor appeared, followed by students, and told me that *she* was scheduled for that room.

With some of my own students in tow, I

walked to our department – you shouldn't imagine that the classrooms in which we teach are in the same building as our offices. The scheduling officer consulted computer screens and bits of paper, and confirmed that the Registrar's Office had indeed switched my second class to a room in a different building than my first class.

V.S.: Without letting you know? Without consulting the instructor?!

J.M.: Correct.

V.S.: Did that sort of thing happen when you were Dean?

J.M.: Yes and no. There was, among middle management, a similar insensitivity to matters affecting the quality of faculty-student interaction. But we tried to do something about it. Some of my happiest memories are of fights waged by the College Administration for things like having the Director of Admissions agree that forms filled in by students applying for admission should show all the majors available in the College.

V.S.: You can't be serious.

J.M.: That's the absolute literal truth. Several people beside myself can vouch for it. And if you find it hard to accept, you probably also won't believe that the reason the Admissions Director gave us for not having those majors shown was that there were too many of them and the form couldn't be designed to show them all and anyway the computer program wouldn't accept that many.

V.S.: You're right; I don't believe you.

J.M.: Truth can be stranger than fiction. In academe, **much** stranger.

V.S.: So you're despondent about life in academe today

J.M.: because top priority isn't given to the circumstances under which quality learning is most likely to occur.

The saddest indication of our plight is the attitude of people who were loyal servants of the institution and of academe for two and three decades and even longer. Twenty years ago, even ten years ago, people didn't want to leave. But when an early retirement option was offered two or three years ago, many jumped at the opportunity.

Saddest of all I find the bitterness with which so many look back on the institution to which they gave devoted service for so long.

Somehow – in my view by not paying attention to basics, by not thinking about **congenial circumstances** for faculty and students, by going hog-wild into politically correct social engineering – we've embittered former University Distinguished Professors, former administrators at all levels from Departmental to Central, faculty formerly very active in research, faculty who devoted their whole time to teaching, secretaries who gave unstinting loyal service...

It's just very sad indeed. And our leaders seem blissfully unaware of it.

JOSEF MARTIN: A TIP FOR ADMINISTRATORS

GOAL: To act **contrary** to faculty wishes

STRATEGY: To **appear** to act **according** to faculty wishes

(for example, in deciding where and how budget cuts are to be made)

TACTIC: 1. Appoint a series of task forces

- to take wide perspective and clarify principles
- to look in detail at all aspects
- to prepare specific recommendations

2. Arrange campus-wide discussions of the reports of the various task forces

3. Have the task forces revise their reports pursuant to the feedback given in these focus groups and discussions

4. Set up a series of interlocking working groups to prepare detailed plans for implementing the achieved consensus

In the meantime – and that of course represents a period of years – you do just as you please with the budget and with everything else. After all, things have to be kept running while the faculty makes up its mind, and it's not your fault that these things take them so long, is it?

ACADEMIC STANDARDS

compiled by H.B.

“Students who don’t study”

Courtesy of Larry Crumbley, my essay of that title is now on-line at <http://www.bus.lsu.edu/accounting/-faculty/lcrumbley/sfirtas.html>. It brings fan mail, including from VaTech faculty:

I have observed many of the traits you described...
I also agree with your observations of the CEUT.
Every time I read one of their newsletters, I become incensed... ‘thanks for telling the truth’

“CEUT” is Tech’s Center for Excellence in Undergraduate Teaching. It organized a discussion of how to handle large classes. Its expertise on the matter may be illustrated by the fact that “the number of large classes even surprised”¹ the Director of the Center...

That same Director, by the way, had responded thus when I asked him about two years ago, what he thought about the deterioration in students’ attitudes:

I don’t believe it.

Perhaps I had known what was going on, a couple of years ahead of him, because I was teaching and he wasn’t (he was teaching people how to teach).

❖ ❖ ❖ ❖ ❖ ❖

Last fall, professors became upset enough at student demeanor that they formed a Climate Committee, which met with student leaders... Students surprised them by saying ***they were paying for their educations and could come and go in classes as they pleased*** [emphasis added]

That Climate Committee surveyed the faculty; ostensibly in accord with its mission to look into students’ increasingly inappropriate behavior, somewhere along the line it turned into yet another exercise in political correctitude. The survey questions included:

- I often feel that I don’t “fit in” very well socially with other faculty members in my department or unit
- In recent searches for new faculty, my department or unit has made a serious effort to hire racial/ethnic minorities and women
- There is a desire among my colleagues to enhance diversity in my department or unit

- It is important to me to incorporate ethnic and/or gender perspectives in my courses or programs
- please rate the climate in your department or unit at Virginia Tech [on a 1-5 scale, as to racism, sexism, and supportiveness for “non-heterosexuals”]
- Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with
 - Diversity is good for Virginia Tech and should be actively promoted by students, staff, faculty, and administrators
 - Virginia Tech is placing too much emphasis on achieving diversity
[a total of a dozen questions about diversity and the like]

As to actually assessing the climate of student attitudes, the closest the survey gets is

- Respect by faculty for students of different racial and ethnic groups
 - Respect by students for faculty of different racial and ethnic groups
 - Race relations in the classroom
- and so on.

“Recentering”

The essence of political correctness is the attempt to make the world conform to wishful notions of some egalitarian utopia, for instance by rewriting history (see *V.S.#11*, p.18). That has now happened with SAT scores: “About 74 points are being added to verbal scores and 25 to the math”, to make both averages 500 (again – that’s where they started before the performance of American students began its decline several decades ago). Naturally, this is **not** any lowering of standards or any attempt to hide the fact of that historic decline; it is²

recentering

to make it easier for students to understand their scores in relationship to each other and to the national average

and

to reflect more accurately the diversity of students now taking the test.

But “even... the ETS’s designer... ‘wouldn’t lean that heavily’ on the diversity argument. Rather,

the change will yield 'better measurement within the middle range and at the lower end'."

I suppose the kindergartens to which those experts went failed to introduce them to such powerful fairy tales as that of the Emperor's Clothes.

Students evaluating teachers

Larry Crumbley³, John Damron⁴, Robert Haskell⁵, and a few other brave souls have collected much material showing that student evaluations of professors are not valid measures of student learning, and therefore not valid measures of "teaching ability". Perhaps the wide circulation of the *Chronicle of Higher Education* will bring more impact from the demonstration by Stephen J. Ceci that one can score higher on "knowledge, organization, fairness, and even the quality of the textbook" by changing only one's style of speaking⁶.

An essay on objectivity in one of my Spring 1998 classes included this passage⁷:

I frequently ask students about their teachers. I have never had a student with a low grade tell me that the professor of the class was good. I hardly ever take advice from students with poor grades because their opinion is biased due to their motive (justifying their bad grade). I find that I get better advice about teachers from other teachers. The reason I get a more accurate assessment from another professor is because they usually have no motive distorting their assessment.

Who is responsible?

The Maryland State Board of Education proposes that students should have to pass tests in English, math, history, and science before graduating from high school. The cost of testing would be \$23 million a year, and an estimated 50% of current students would fail.

VaTech's student newspaper editorialized⁸ against the idea, suggesting the money be spent instead "on teacher training or improving equipment and teaching materials in the schools", on ensuring "that teachers are qualified to teach the material".

Of course! It's always **the teacher's fault** when students don't learn. Even when those students simply stay in the dorm to watch *General Hospital*, or when teachers are prevented by State law from requiring that assignments be done (V.S. #11).

Nevertheless, in Fayette County (KY) the Superintendent of Schools wants to judge teachers by how students progress⁹.



One can lead a horse to water
Twenty cannot make him drink

and no one can make bureaucrats refrain from the most arrant silliness. The Colorado Commission on Higher Education proclaims what percentage of degrees shall be awarded to minority students and penalizes campuses that don't meet this quota – pardon me, "goal"¹⁰.



Central Michigan University is another institution that knows that it is the University's responsibility to see that students graduate, no matter what the students themselves might do.

CNN ran a story about the new trend in colleges/universities to expedite graduation. CMU is spearheading the idea with "guaranteed-graduate in 4 years" or they pay the tuition and expenses. Parents love the idea because they can save money. And as one mother noted "I think it's great because it takes the pressure of graduation off academics and tuition, after all they have to get the grades to complete the degree".

CNN mentioned as a reason for the new direction that 45% of undergraduates have not been able to complete their degrees in less than 6 years¹¹.

The students know better than the education "experts"

Half of all teenagers... said their schools failed to challenge them to do their best. Two thirds said they could easily do 'much better' if they tried harder, and eight in 10 said they would learn more if they were challenged and if they were forced to complete homework and turn it in on time...

How can America's schools win the respect of their students? Set tough standards – and then enforce them,... teenagers say...

61 percent said the standard should be enforced even if some well-meaning students are left behind...

America's teens want... 'More challenge and structure – for someone to take them seriously enough to demand that they do their best' ¹².

The students know what our educationists ignore or neglect: that even young children know when they are being patronized, talked down to, treated as intellectually inferior. It is complimentary to them – **and so promoting of their self-esteem** – to show that one believes them capable of great things and expects them to perform accordingly.

Textbooks?

What are they??

E-mail from our campus book-store¹³:

A recent survey published by the National Association of College Stores revealed that 75% of faculty on college campuses strongly felt that using textbooks would improve their students' grades. JUST 51% OF STUDENTS AGREED!

We would like to change these statistics on our campus. The survey stated that students were more likely to purchase textbooks for a course when the professor made it clear that the text material would be included on tests and assignments. We need to make this information available to the students when they come to the bookstore to purchase materials. We are asking you, the instructor, to provide this information. When submitting course requests, please indicate how course materials are to be used (i.e., students will be tested on the text material, text is reference to support lectures, or text is outside reading.) Please let us know if students should come to class before buying any materials.

To help you see the results of this effort, we will provide, upon request, a utilization report on each of the books used in a particular course. The report will detail how many books were ordered, when the books were available to students, how many books were sold, etc.

By doing these things we hope to encourage students to purchase materials that will enable them to improve course grades and participation.

More observations

John Patrick Diggins¹⁴:

Rather than expanding the horizons of knowledge, multiculturalism lets a hundred fragments bloom, each in its own garden

✦ ✦ ✦ ✦ ✦ ✦

C. Vann Woodward, Sterling Professor of History Emeritus, Yale University¹⁴:

By 1990 students could graduate from some 78 percent of American colleges without taking a course in the history of Western civilization.

✦ ✦ ✦ ✦ ✦ ✦

"It made me feel better to read that other professors were having the same problems that we've seen at Cal State. The attitudes, grading demands, attendance problems, poor preparation for class, and poor grammar...

One... [student] was bitterly disappointed that she did not get an 'A'... I went through the grading criteria with her twice... [but] she... was considering filing a grievance. It was only after I read her my clinical notes, which included... charting an assessment of an extremity that had been amputated, but not reporting that pulses were missing in the remaining extremity, that she dropped her demands".

The reasoning used by the student editorial referred to above would, of course, blame the teacher for that student's potentially life-threatening mistake.

✦ ✦ ✦ ✦ ✦ ✦

(Mathematics, senior-level course, Virginia):

"Here is an anecdote to add to your collection... a student asked a rather good question; this student is actually one of the better members of the class. I took a couple of enthusiastic minutes to answer the question, which involved some writing on the board. When I finished and turned back to the student who asked the question, he was asleep."

✦ ✦ ✦ ✦ ✦ ✦

At Old Dominion University, 30% absenteeism was typical in biology classes¹⁵.

In January, two experimental bar-code scanners that monitor student attendance were installed... Students are now required to slide their student ID through the scanner when entering and exiting.

A faculty member noted that "The goal is to build responsibility... not to force kids to go to class – it's to show them there are consequences for not going". But – surprise? – the students aren't pleased:

I'm offended by the idea of being a number. I don't like the idea of electronic tracking. It makes me feel like I'm in a concentration camp

and

I think it's a pain in the ass to actually have to worry about having my ID card every day.

Maybe if he kept it with his class notes and textbooks he'd always have it with him anyway?

✦ ✦ ✦ ✦ ✦ ✦

A fellow I met in the swimming pool turned out to be a school-teacher. I asked him, "Have you noticed any change in students' attitudes over the last ten years or so?"

He gave an hysterical sort of laugh: "At school, that's all we talk about", he said. "I teach phys ed. Five years ago I switched from teaching high-school to teaching elementary, because I couldn't handle the high-schoolers".

This from a very fit man in the prime of life.

From Australia: "a growing number of science teachers are now regularly confronted by the open boredom of their students" ¹⁶.

✦ ✦ ✦ ✦ ✦ ✦

I thought I was being clever in suggesting to a friend that we might couple "distance learning" with drive-in classes, so that students could enjoy class as much as we used to enjoy drive-in movies. Then, sorting through my long-neglected pile of clippings of possible items for VS, I came across a fine article entitled "Higher ed turns into drive-thru disgrace" ¹⁷.

School-to-work

Among the secret weapons being designed for the

21st century by the same experts who brought disaster to American education in the 20th, is “school-to-work” programming. In a nutshell:

School should prepare students for the useful commercial activity that will engage their adulthood.

Forget about self-development, a liberating education, and all that old-fashioned clap-trap. After all, what’s more important than earning a living and being a proper cog in the nation’s productivity?

Should you suspect me of bias and distortion, here’s an authoritative statement¹⁸:

work-based learning for all students from kindergarten through post-secondary educational tracks... to prepare students for career paths and to provide relevant instruction that promotes problem-based learning and development of appropriate work skills.

VaTech, as so often, is at the forefront of the cutting edge: “The Piedmont school-to-work initiative... is an example of Public Service programs’ commitment to putting knowledge to work”.

Aha! **That’s** what they mean by that slogan about putting knowledge to work (see p.20).

In another country and long ago, we had selective schools and parallel tracks for those heading to college, those graduating after high-school, and those entering apprenticeship and trade programs. The perennial concern was to ensure that children from the non-college tracks who found an academic vocation after all could always switch to the academic track, no matter how far they might have gone on another one. The School-to-Work program solves this problem (“problem-based learning” in action, no doubt) with beautiful simplicity: **no one** shall enter a liberal-education track.

Just out of curiosity: how does one decide, as early as kindergarten, whether the child shall be a dentist or a plumber?

Misery loves company

In Britain, at Cambridge:

We now regularly give firsts to candidates who can neither write, spell nor punctuate...
nobody much cared for their education... we are

becoming a post-literate society

in 1967... you did history or English, maths or natural sciences; now you do sports management and media studies with special reference to Diana, Princess of Wales. Can standards really have been maintained? Smooth-talking spokesmen from the Department of Education and Employment and the universities assure us they have; common sense suggests otherwise¹⁹

Endnotes:

¹ Ian Zack, “Masses in classes perplex professors”, *Roanoke Times*, 19viii98, B1,4

² Constance Holden, “RANDOM SAMPLES — SAT pulls up scores”, *Science* 265 (19viii94) 1030

³ <http://www.bus.lsu.edu/accounting/faculty/lcrumbley/sfrtas.html>

⁴ http://vax1.mankato.msus.edu/~pkbrando/Damron_politics.html

⁵ <http://www.une.edu/sbs/haskell.html>

⁶ “Footnotes”, *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 14iii97, A10

⁷ David Salvaggio, HST 2354, Spring 1998

⁸ “Maryland’s schools — think again” (ed.), *Collegiate Times* (VPI&SU) 4ii97, A8

⁹ Kent Fischer, “Teachers win delay in tying evaluations to student progress”, *Lexington (KY) Herald-Leader* 14iii97, A1,13

¹⁰ “Ways & Means”, *Chronicle of Higher Education* 25iv97, A28

¹¹ D Fri, 20 Sep 1996 08:45:13 -0400 (EDT) from BUSHM <bushm@aa.wl.com>

¹² Richard Morin, “A matter of respect — or lack of it”, *Washington Post* 17ii97, p.34

¹³ From: Kimberly King <kimk@vtsV88.bookstore.vt.edu> Mon, 10 Mar 1997 13:28:59 -0500

¹⁴ “Teaching American History”, *American Scholar* 67 (#1, Winter 1998)

¹⁵ “Scanned and delivered”, *U. Magazine*, March 1997, p.5

¹⁶ Peter Fensham, Emeritus Professor of Science Education at Monash University (Melbourne, Australia), citing Baird et al., “The importance of reflection in improving science teaching and learning”, *Journal of Research in Science Teaching*, 28 (#2, 1991) 163-82

¹⁷ Ann Willner, “Higher ed turns into drive-thru disgrace”, *Richmond (VA) Times-Dispatch* 1xii96, F1 (cr. *Washington Post*, from Lawrence KS)

¹⁸ Ellen Agee & Catherine Doss, “Virginia Tech leads Piedmont School-to-Work Initiative”, *Spectrum* (VPI&SU) 19iii98, pp.3,8

¹⁹ David Starkey, “Graduates? They’re first-class illiterates”, *Sunday Times* (UK) 5vii989, NEWS REVIEW 5:9

B I T S & P I E C E S

BROUGHT TO THE EDITOR'S ATTENTION

More costs

Among the **intellectual** costs of political correctitude are the labored euphemisms administrators continually have to devise as each of their circumlocutions becomes unmasked. There is a certain worry, following recent Court decisions against racial discrimination, about having programs separately for "minorities". VaTech's College of Arts & Sciences solved that dilemma with its Peer Mentoring Program for¹

students of non-dominant cultural background.

Isn't that cute?

In a previous issue, we noted that the United Negro College Fund (founded in 1944) had changed its stationery to become "The College Fund/U.N.C.F." – it "was not changing its legal name, but was merely trying to 'update' its moniker"². But now it's decided to revert, "to capitalize on the value associated with the original name".

As they say, "What's in a name?"

Appearances and realities

While universities and their leaders want to be seen as truth seekers dedicated to the public interest, they often are seen by the press as rich, elite, and insulated enterprises³

The author of those words, Peter Magrath, is a former university president and now presides over the National Association of State Universities & Land-Grant Colleges.

Question:

Would the press have that impression if universities and their leaders **behaved** like truth seekers?

Scholars and administrators regularly evaluate how well they are performing the missions of higher education

wrote Mr. Magrath.

"How are they doing that?", he should be asked. It reminds me of the time that our Provost reported to the Deans of the Colleges that all the administrative offices reporting to him – Admissions, Registrar, Computing, Library, etc. – had been evaluated. We were more than a little surprised, since we had not been invited to give our views. Administrators

evaluate one another. What sort of evaluation is that?

Another dead give-away, of course, is that plural "missions" of higher education. Somehow I don't think Mr. Magrath was thinking of scholarship and learning as that plurality.

Perhaps there was a time when advertising and public relations were a matter of emphasizing certain true values or benefits of the products or people being sold. If you built a better mouse-trap, it was necessary to let people know about it. Nowadays it often seems as though only the cuteness of the slogan is what matters. As colleges and universities join the Gadarene rush to commercialism, they have adopted the sloganeering that large companies have long indulged in. Thus, "Virginia Tech – a university putting knowledge to work".

Is that intended to mean that **other** universities, other **land-grant** universities, **don't** put knowledge to work? And exactly **how** is Tech putting **which** knowledge to work? What does the slogan **mean**?

Why does a university need a slogan? And if it needs one, what was wrong with Tech's traditional motto? **UT PROSIM** – "That we may serve".

George Mason University says, "Learn without limits", "a one-liner to relay our philosophy". A university whose "philosophy" has to be purveyed by such a one-liner would seem to be in deep trouble. But then a university that allows public-relations puffers to determine what its public image is going to be, is indeed in deep trouble. Thus Tech's spokesman:

It's very, very hard to explain a university.

Especially, sir, when you yourself don't understand what a university is about. Some professors at Tech didn't like "putting knowledge to work" because it didn't "represent the full breadth of the university's mission. Creating knowledge... was left out"⁴.

As blue-ribbon committees examine the cost of higher education, perhaps they may consider why we need to have on the payroll people whose function seems to be to say things that don't need saying and that cause needless annoyance to faculty and others when they **are** said.

Diverse expectations

It's not easy to find a newspaper or magazine piece, let alone a memorandum from a university administrator, that doesn't find some way of getting the word "diversity" in there. VaTech's College of Arts & Sciences even has created an Associate Deanship for Diversity & Instruction. Sometimes indiscriminate use of the term causes confusion, as illustrated by the following letter (not published) to Tech's *Collegiate Times*:

Dear Editor:

Before "Swan Lake" was performed on our campus last Tuesday night, the Collegiate Times... reporter said that the ballet would be enhanced by "the diversity of the backgrounds of three performers from Singapore, South Africa, and Boise, Idaho."

Now, the contributions of Boise, Idaho to ballet are, of course, well-known so I wasn't too much interested in that. But I did go to the ballet eagerly anticipating the improvements which the diversity of Singapore and South Africa would bring to Swan Lake.

You can understand my consternation when I opened my program and read that the ballerina from South Africa was named Irene Hogarth. Irene Hogarth!? What kind of South African name is that?!! When the swans fluttered onto the stage, there was one lovely dark-skinned ballerina, but how could I be sure she was Irene Hogarth? I lived in Africa for several years while I was in the Peace Corps, and I know that most of the darker people over there (the ones that perform for good money here and in Europe) have names like Shana Burning Spear. There are also lots of white folks in Africa too, and it occurred to me that Ms. Hogarth was one of the white ballerinas. But do white South Africans qualify as an important part of the diversity pool? How was I to know who I should be watching for the benefits of South African influence in ballet?

I thought I'd have better luck watching for the Singapore (mostly ethnic Chinese) influence. But Zounds! -- there were TWO Asian ballerinas! And worse, the program listed the ballerina from Singapore by the name of Mary Barton! Mary Barton?!! What kind of Chinese name is that?!! How was I to know which ballerina was from Singapore? One or both of the Asians may have been only garden-variety California - Chinese-Asian-Americans or even east coast Vietnamese-Asian-Americans whose parents settled somewhere like Potluck, North Carolina. Obviously, the consequences could be serious if I got them mixed up. What if I attended a cocktail party and attributed certain Singaporean aspects of Swan Lake to the wrong person? Imagine, there I am expounding on how I noticed that a Chinese step had been inserted into the pas de quatre in the Dance of the Swans and it turns out to be an Appalachian clog! Wouldn't this be culturally insensitive?

I'm very concerned about the correct method of handling this diversity conundrum. Perhaps our campus should insist that performers wear a colored ribbon to designate their contribution to diversity. Don't we have a campus committee to handle this problem? Thanks very much.

Sincerely,

David McKissack

Of witch-hunts and fanatics

This struck me as a good summary of the era of political correctness:

Fanaticism, cynicism, fear and greed were found throughout the leadership... Some bureaucrats... seemed above all interested in power... Moguls of the popular media, professional anti-racist witnesses and blacklists (shakedown artists who demanded a price for clearing one's name from list of alleged racists) had a financial stake in the witch hunt. And there was no shortage of true believers...

It was really about McCarthyism, and I just needed to replace "Communist" with "racist"⁵.

Scholars of the humanities

The 1997 Delegate Assembly of the Modern Languages Association approved the usual number of resolutions of the usual sort, for example

- "the inclusion of disability as a value in academic hiring"
[*This is not, please note, the unexceptionable determination that there should not be discrimination against those with certain disabilities but otherwise able to carry out the relevant duties. But then, an acquaintance with actual hires over the past decade or so reveal that intellectual disability seems to have been a highly prized "value".*]
- "Whereas those mounting recent attacks on affirmative action, not coincidentally in the wake of *The Bell Curve*, have compounded the trend toward racial segregation, even as they indicate that racial discrimination is a thing of the past and that the US is now 'color-blind,'
Be it resolved that the MLA urge its members to speak out against all doctrines positing biological and/or cultural theories of 'racial' inferiority."
[*BRAVO! Since there is no such thing as cultural or biological inferiority, there is no basis for "affirmative action" and we should refuse to classify people by "race".*]
- [Prison statistics and commercial work by prisoners] "reveals that the capitalist system cannot provide full employment at a living wage"

Among the characteristics of such Marxist-style dis-

course is the dogmatic assertion of “facts” based on ideology but not on any evidential statistics; the MLA thrives on such assertions, for example:

- “workfare has driven thousands of students – disproportionately students of color and single parents – out of bachelor’s degree programs and into dead-ended, poorly compensated employment”.

Had those who evolved this statement really gathered the numbers?

Internet Humor

CONGRESS PASSES

AMERICANS WITH NO ABILITIES ACT

WASHINGTON, DC — On Tuesday, Congress approved the Americans With No Abilities Act, sweeping new legislation that provides benefits and protection for more than 135 million talentless Americans.

The act, signed into law by President Clinton shortly after its passage, is being hailed as a major victory for the millions upon millions of US citizens who lack any real skills or uses.

“Roughly 50 percent of Americans--through no fault of their own--do not possess the talent necessary to carve out a meaningful role for themselves in society,” said Clinton, a longtime ANA supporter. Their lives are futile hamster-wheel existences of unrewarding, dead-end busywork: Xeroxing documents written by others, filling in mail-in rebates for Black & Decker toaster ovens, and processing bureaucratic forms that nobody will ever see. Sadly, for these millions of non-abled Americans, the American dream of working hard and moving up through the ranks is simply not a reality.”

Under the Americans With No Abilities Act, more than 25 million important-sounding “middle man” positions will be created in the white-collar sector for nonabled persons, providing them with an illusory sense of purpose and ability. Mandatory, non-performance-based raises and promotions will also be offered to create a sense of upward mobility for even the most unremarkable, utterly replaceable employees.

The legislation also provides corporations with incentives to hire non-abled workers, including tax breaks for those who hire one non-germane worker for every two talented new hires.

Finally, the Americans With No Abilities Act also contains tough new measures to prevent discrimina-

tion against the non-abled by banning prospective employers from asking such job-interview questions as, “What can you bring to this organization?” and “Do you have any special skills that would make you an asset to this company?”

“As a non-abled person, I frequently find myself unable to keep up with co-workers who have something going for them,” said Elaine Gertz, who lost her position as an unessential filing clerk at a Cleveland tile wholesaler last month because of her lack of notable skills. “This new law should really help people like me.”

With the passage of the Americans With No Abilities Act, Gertz and millions of other untalented, nonessential citizens can finally see a light at the end of the tunnel. Said Clinton: “It is our duty, both as lawmakers and as human beings, to provide each and every American citizen, regardless of his or her value to society, some sort of space to take up in this great nation.”

Bon mots

It’s awfully frustrating to conceive a brilliant *bon mot* only to realize that it can be understood by few people, demanding as it does being multi-cultural, familiar with cricket (British culture) as well as politics, American-style. Still, here goes:

**Spin doctors
bowl
nothing but
wrong-uns**

Endnotes:

¹ Pamphlet in information package for CAS Peer Mentoring Program

² *Chronicle of Higher Education* 29v98, A41

³ C. Peter Magrath, “Can news organizations and universities ever hope to understand each other?”, *Chronicle of Higher Education* 29v98, B7

⁴ Ian Zack, “Tech puts marketing to work”, *Roanoke Times* 19iv98, B1,6

⁵ Thomas C. Reeves, “Are you now...”, *New York Times Book Review* 14vi98, 22, reviewing Ellen Schrecker, *Many are the Crimes: McCarthyism in America*

THE VIRGINIA ASSOCIATION OF SCHOLARS

believes that rational discourse is a necessary foundation of academic life and of a democratic society. So we seek to foster and protect

- the free exchange of ideas;
- academic freedom: *Lehrfreiheit* and *Lernfreiheit*;
- the substance and integrity of scholarship and learning;
- respect for our intellectual heritage;
- rigorous standards of excellence in teaching, learning, and research;
- the evaluation of students strictly on the merit of their individual performance;

and we aim to

- create forums in which university life can be rationally discussed;
- provide informed comment on immediate and on perennial issues in higher education;

and we urge academic leaders to

- recognize learning and scholarship as the pre-eminent and primary purpose for which colleges and universities exist;
- behave responsibly in pursuit of that purpose;
- practice honesty with the public, with students and parents, with faculty, and with everyone else.

Further, we shall resist

- attempts to subsume academe under political goals;
- ideological corruption of teaching and scholarship;
- intimidation of students or faculty who voice unfashionable views;
- treatment of students, faculty, and others as ciphers or symbols of groups instead of as individuals worthy of individual consideration.

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