

# 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 helped me stay enthusiastic about the job of Editor; if it were just a newsletter to distribute among our own members I would not have found 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.

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

**BE SENSITIVE!**

**STAMP OUT INTOLERANCE!**

**Back Issues of *Virginia Scholar***

Through the generous courtesy of the Virginia Tech Chapter of AAUP and the technical know-how of its president, Peter Rony, all past issues are now available on-line at

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

We also have a few spares from the printings of most issues and would be happy to send them to interested persons or groups. Some of the main features were:

***Why going to college has become so expensive in Virginia*** – four-part series, VS#1-4

VS#1: ***Bibliography on the Mandelstamm Affair***

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

VS#4: M. Krauss:

***When you face the PC inquisition***

VS#6: Alexander Weiss:

***Affirmative action and me***

Henry Bauer:

***How I got here: an open letter from the files***

VS#7: 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.)

***AA: a threat to intercollegiate athletics***

Darrell Stump: ***Barbarians at the gates***

Hans Christian Rott: ***On anonymity***

Henry Bauer: ***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***

VS#13: ***Where does the money go?***

***Evaluating administrators***

## ***President's Message***

Our annual meeting approaches! After the smashing success of our Radford meeting in 1998, the Tidewater conference on October 16 promises to be our best ever. All VAS members should by now have received a "reserve-the-date" post card (courtesy of Hans Rott at VPI). An all-star cast of speakers will join blockbuster keynote orator Alan Kors. And our closing banquet at the Clarion in Norfolk promises to be a tremendous follow-up to our inaugural dinner at Radford last year. A formal invitation letter from me will follow in early September. Virginia meetings are the best attended in the entire nation, and I hope to see you all in the beautiful Tidewater area.

The Virginia Association of Scholars' influence in the Commonwealth increases each year. Despite the recent departure (for personal reasons) of SCHEV Chairman Bill Allen, our views are constantly solicited by that body, and by the Education department and the Governor's office in Richmond. This past year your President has spoken before both the Governor's Blue Ribbon Commission and SCHEV. With a new President being recruited at Hampden-Sydney and a Provost at George Mason, we hope to expand VAS' authority shortly. If any members know of promising candidates for those or other executive positions at campuses across the Commonwealth, please inform me right away.

Elsewhere in this newsletter you will read our Treasurer's account of the 1999 annual NAS meeting in Chicago. Five VAS members made the trek to the Windy City last year – I hope many more can come to New York for the 2000 NAS meeting in November. I promise a Virginia reception in the Big Apple if enough of us manage to invade the North next year!

Join VASNET (e-mail me at MKrauss323@aol.com to find out how), attend our meetings, help form VAS "cells" at your institutions (I'm especially proud of the Virginia State contingent created this year), and in general help make your association stronger than ever.

My best wishes to all for a successful 99/00 academic year. May Y2K be a blip on all our computers, and may the year 2000 be a happy and healthy one for all.

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WHAT TOO FEW ADMINISTRATORS KNOW  
ABOUT AFFIRMATIVE ACTION, DIVERSITY,  
MULTI-CULTURALISM AND SENSITIVITY

***THERE IS NOTHING SO SMALL THAT IT CAN'T BE BLOWN OUT OF PROPORTION***

***COMPLEX PROBLEMS HAVE SIMPLE, EASY-TO-UNDERSTAND WRONG ANSWERS***

***THE CHIEF CAUSE OF PROBLEMS IS SOLUTIONS***

respectively Ruckert's Law, Grossman's misquote of H. L. Mencken, and Severeid's Law  
Internet humor courtesy of Nick Egoroff

## Editorial ..... SWAN SONG



Retirement has been on my mind – at the back of it, at least – ever since the Commonwealth encouraged its public colleges and universities to offer buy-outs to faculty a few years ago. I wasn't ready then. I am now. Early this year I told my bosses that I'd be retiring as of 1/1/2000.

That date allows me to offer some excellent reasons for the decision: maybe I'll avoid some of the anticipated Y2K glitches by being on different computer data-bases in 2000 than in 1999. And I can say to the unfortunate others, "Après moi, la délugé".

As to more genuine reasons, to friends who understand my flippancy, I've ventured that it's time for me to put aside childish things. Actually I've been doing a lot of that already; I've attended very few faculty meetings in the last couple of years.

Conflicting advice comes about retirement: on the one hand, it's said to be important to have definite things one intends and wants to do; on the other hand all my already-retired friends tell me they don't have time for all the things they want to do, that they're busier now than they were before retiring.

It does make a lot of sense, though, to be looking forward to specific activities, so that retiring doesn't feel like *giving up* things. So for some time now I've been contemplating which of my several pastimes I could look forward to spending more time on.

Editing *Virginia Scholar*, it seemed obvious, could be a more enjoyable, leisurely, less pressured task than when I was trying to fit it in among all the other things. That's what I *thought*. Yet it didn't *feel* quite right. And at last I've realized why it doesn't feel right, and why I won't continue serving as Editor after I retire from Tech.



**V**AS and NAS have positive aims and positive programs, and *Virginia Scholar* is intended to serve those ends. But inevitably a significant role of the newsletter is to underscore the need for change by drawing attention to outrages and deficiencies, to things that *shouldn't* be happening. The splendid initiatives mounted under NAS auspices have their *raison d'être*, after all, in the malfeasance and mis-steps of organizations and individuals who promote political correctitude, consumerism in education, and so on. So much in *Virginia Scholar* has been *criticism*. Constructively intended criticism, beyond doubt; necessary criticism, without question; but still criticism – pointing out mistakes made and things done wrong in certain places by certain people at certain times.



As far back as I can recall, when I thought criticism was due I've not hesitated to criticize: the bureaucracies in my university, my professional associations, my government; or businesses I dealt with that didn't give proper service. And I could always tender a bunch of excellent reasons for voicing criticism:

- Harping on what's *right* serves little useful purpose, except perhaps on a few ritual occasions.
- If no one points out deficiencies, then they won't be rectified. Things don't get better by themselves.
- According to George Bernard Shaw<sup>1</sup>, "progress depends on the unreasonable man" because the reasonable ones adjust to whatever the circumstances happen to be. "All progress has resulted from people who took unpopular positions", said Adlai Stevenson<sup>2</sup>. "Ah! don't say you agree with

**THE ONLY THING NECESSARY**

**FOR THE TRIUMPH OF EVIL**

**IS FOR GOOD MEN TO DO NOTHING**

me. When people agree with me I always feel that I must be wrong”, said Oscar Wilde<sup>3</sup>.

Pundits and historians know full well how badly a leader is served by a surrounding cadre of yea-sayers who keep the bad news from him. All too few leaders, however, understand how valuable criticism is. Among the many outstanding qualities of President Lavery (president of Virginia Tech during some of its best years) was an appreciation that criticism served him and the university well: on more than one occasion he went out of his way to assure me that he appreciated my speaking up about problems and deficiencies.



After World War II, Australia mounted a determined effort to increase its population through migration. Immigrants were offered free passage to Australia, free accommodation for the first months, assistance in finding work.

I was far from alone among those already resident in Australia in being upset at those among the immigrants – few in number perhaps but very much noticed – who gave no thanks but rather made free with criticism left and right from the moment they arrived.

But why should I, as an inveterate critic myself, have objected when others did the same?

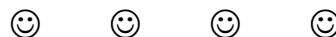
After the Hungarian uprising of 1956, a number of countries took in refugees. One town in Britain provided a free house and car for a Hungarian family. Barely had they settled in than they complained that the house being on a very steep hill was very inconvenient and made driving and parking difficult.

Why should I have been dumbfounded that they, like me, were ready to speak up and criticize?

From 1956 to 1958 I lived in an International House in Ann Arbor, Michigan. There were 50% Americans and 50% visitors from all over the world: Ethiopia, Thailand, Poland, Scotland, Australia, Taiwan, India, Pakistan, Colombia, Lebanon, many more. I found myself outraged to hear some (by no means all, of course) of these visitors criticizing the foreign and domestic policies of the United States. Often I even agreed silently with the substantive points

they were making, yet I believed they should not have made them.

Why not? What about all my good reasons why criticism is of benefit?



Because criticism comes with the greatest warrant from insiders. It is a glory of the United States, of Britain, of other democracies that citizens are free to chastise, reprove, condemn their government and its individual members, on the way to removing them peacefully from office at the next election (if not earlier by impeachment). But that **right** to criticize, that **freedom**, comes together with the obligation to pay taxes, to serve in the Armed Forces<sup>5</sup>, to uphold the Constitution. It is no part of a democratic republic that it needs to allow itself to be censured, denounced, reprimanded by non-citizens, by outsiders (and of course it sits particularly badly when the critics belong to countries or cultures that don't have the civil rights that Americans do).

Those early experiences led me to make possibly the only good resolution that I never broke. When in the mid-1960s I emigrated from Australia to the United States, I resolved not to speak one word of criticism of

anything American before I had become a citizen. I took citizenship at the earliest opportunity, and since 1969 that resolution has been moot and I've been free with critiques.

I made and kept a somewhat similar good resolution when I moved from the University of Kentucky to an administrative position at Virginia Polytechnic Institute & State University: never during my first year would I permit to pass my lips a comment that said or implied, "At Kentucky we used to do it this (better) way". I was reminded of that resolution recently when someone with whom I had then worked reminisced that during my first year or two as Dean, I had not exhibited the habitual critiquing of Central Administration that later apparently became regarded as my trademark.

As Editor of *Virginia Scholar* I've thought it entirely proper for me, a practicing academic, to speak out about what's wrong in academe. As a faculty

A bit of Internet humor:

**LOTTERY:**  
**A tax on people who are bad at math**

Seriously intended oxymoron from an investment advisor to universities<sup>4</sup>:

**The best way to build endowments through investing is to take "PRUDENT RISKS"**

member at Virginia Tech, I thought it entirely proper to point to matters at Virginia Tech that were making it a less great place than it might become.

As a former administrator, I thought I'd earned the right to criticize administrative actions. But I often felt a slight unease as I did so, because I think it's often a legitimate response to a critic to ask, "Are you prepared to take on the job yourself and show it can be done better?" And though I'd done so in the past, I wasn't prepared to do it again.

Still, unease or not, it's an **obligation** of academic citizenship to draw attention to flaws in academe and to needed improvements. But when I am retired, that obligation ceases; and the warrant to be a critic will begin to fade. As a **former** faculty member, a **former** academic, I will become increasingly an outsider. Any changes that I might argue for, in academe or at Tech, could no longer affect me directly; I would not have to live with whatever consequences they might bring. The baton of rights and obligations, of benefits and burdens, passes to another generation.



I don't insist that my view on this is the only legitimate one. Trusted friends have seen my point without finding the argument compelling. But **I** do find it compelling, which is what matters. Having thought about it over a long period of time, I woke up one morning knowing what I would do, as with most or all of the significant decisions I've ever made.



I don't wish to play the role of perpetual criticizer once I'm no longer under the obligation to criticize. During my years of more-or-less private critiquing within administrative circles while I was a Dean at Tech, and for further years of public critiquing as a faculty member, I've never denied to myself or to others that I personally have benefited enormously from my association with Tech and with the Commonwealth: my years at Virginia Tech were the most professionally rewarding of my life.

Indeed the **obligation** I was under, to draw attention to deficiencies and wrong turns, was mandated by gratitude and loyalty. The obligation was strong because the gratitude was great.

Since the coming of political correctitude, the obligation has stemmed in part from guilt that I had long benefited from so much better an academic en-

vironment than anyone can nowadays enjoy. Why should not future students and faculty be as blessed as I had been? I believe they could be, **if only**...

The atmosphere at Virginia Tech when I came there in 1978 was exhilarating. The university was engaged in a self-conscious effort to become an outstanding **university**, which was understood to mean becoming **intellectually** outstanding. Everything seemed bent to that. Attracting the best possible faculty was the prime goal, and so far as possible decision-making was decentralized to the departmental level: the Provost's Office didn't try to make central decisions about academics by deciding how money should be spent, it poured all funds for academics into the Colleges, which passed it on to the Departments.

Hiring, tenure, promotion were determinedly based only on the intellectual caliber of the person and the work. I don't deny we made mistakes. I don't claim that we always achieved the wisest balance among research, teaching, and service. But the mistakes made were rather honest ones, literally **mistakes** – the actions of human beings doing their fallible best. How very different that is from today's making of decisions based primarily or even exclusively on race, sex and dollars combined with the official hypocrisy of denying what is being done. It is ironic that my educational life began with ejection from school for belonging to a wrong race and now concludes in a similar environment of shameful race-labeling, after several glorious decades when **intellectual** activity was foremost.

In the 1970s and '80s, in that ambience where intellect ruled, I learned a great deal. Serving as Dean, I was able to spend time with and gain from people in all the traditional disciplines. I learned quite unanticipated things, pre-eminently perhaps about the **cultural** nature of the differences among "intellectual" or academic disciplines<sup>6</sup>.

Hitherto something of a knee-jerk anti-militarist, I gained enormous respect for the integrity and high intelligence of the Air Force and Navy officers who served at Tech in the ROTC Departments.

I came to appreciate even more – though this I had understood earlier as well – how much the atmosphere and quality of a college depends on the secretaries and the other non-faculty staff; insofar as my term as Dean was a well-regarded one, a very large part of the credit goes to my assistant<sup>7</sup>.

I learned a lot too, of course, about human nature, and I like to say that universities would work ever so

much better if every professor had at one time experienced an administrative role.



It feels very good, soon to be free of the duty to ferret out things that need fixing and instead to reminisce about the splendid people I had the privilege to encounter and the good things we did together. More than one unsuccessful applicant for the Deanship that became mine behaved toward me with the very utmost of kindly courtesy and unstinted loyalty. Many Department Heads honored me by sticking with me even when I treated their units less generously than perhaps they thought right. A truly extraordinary Provost backed me even when he didn't care for some of the choices I made. The office staff made the work as pleasurable and minimally irksome as might be. Almost without exception, my faculty colleagues extended me perhaps the greatest imaginable compliment: they treated me with no less friendly manner when I was no longer Dean as they had shown during the time I was Dean.

The 1970s and '80s were something of a Golden Age indeed, when funds were relatively ample. There was a camaraderie among the Deans of the several Colleges that permitted genuine mutual respect and friendly, relaxed lunches together despite the inevitable factor of competition. There was a mutual respect among the several levels of administration, made manifest for instance in the annual "roasts" in which we acknowledged and laughed at such personal oddities as Henry Bauer's complaining about everything all the time.

May such a time come again, that others too may enjoy as we did.

But that time will not come unless, when those of my generation put aside criticizing, our successors who are now the insiders and the workers will take over that obligation, that duty, to speak out plainly and loudly about what things might be better and why and how they ought to be made so.

**Endnotes:**

<sup>1</sup> George Bernard Shaw, *Maxims for Revolutionists – Reason*, p.282 in *Man and Superman*, Harmondsworth (Middlesex, UK): Penguin, 1946 (first published 1903)

<sup>2</sup> Adlai Stevenson, 22 March 1954, Princeton University (#22, p.558, *Dictionary of Quotations*, ed. Bergen Evans, New York: Avenel, 1978)

<sup>3</sup> Oscar Wilde, "The critic as artist", in *Intentions*, New York: Brentano's, 1907

<sup>4</sup> Julie L. Nicklin, "Prudent risks: Despite Common Fund loss, mid-sized universities move to bolder investing", *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 28vii95, A37

<sup>5</sup> It was odd, I thought, that as a postdoctoral visitor to the United States in the 1950s, on a temporary visa, I was required to register with the local Draft Board. Taking the obligation seriously, I went there in the first week after my arrival. The clerk asked whether I **really** wanted to register already, since I had three months in which to do it...

Anyone who knows me, knows that in the Armed Forces I'd be a very unhappy fish out of water. But my father was at least as non-violent a man as I am, I could not imagine him (or me) raising a fist in anger at anyone; yet he had wanted desperately to be allowed into active duty during W.W.II. Duty trumps other things, doesn't it? So I was raised, anyway.

<sup>6</sup> Henry H. Bauer, "A consumer's guide to science punditry", Chapter 2 (pp.22-34) in *Science Today: Problem or Crisis?* (ed. Ralph Levinson & Jeff Thomas, London & New York: Routledge, 1997); "A dialectical discussion on the nature of disciplines and disciplinarity", *Social Epistemology*, 4 (1990) 215-27; "Barriers against interdisciplinarity: implications for studies of Science, Technology, and Society (STS)", *Science, Technology, & Human Values*, 15 (1990) 105-19

<sup>7</sup> See for example pp.172-3 in *To Rise Above Principle: The Memoirs of an Unreconstructed Dean* by 'Josef Martin' (pen-name of Henry H. Bauer), Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988



"A \$200,000 bronze statue of a pioneer family sculpted to commemorate the 150th anniversary of the Oregon Trail was rejected by Portland's art board" because "it slights other cultures" and could have been described as "laughing European-American men standing on Native American corpses with torn-up treaties"

*USA Today*, 9iii94, p.3A



"For someone like me from another culture, [the feeling for Americans] is both love and frustration because you really can't get angry at them, you just look at them in amazement"

Uwe Reinhardt  
interviewed by Julie Rovner  
*MM (Modern Maturity)*  
November-December 1994, 64-72



## FOLLOW-UPS & RESPONSES

*from the Editor*

### Which, being translated...

In VS#13, I mentioned “public-relations puffers”; in VS#14, I discussed the truth as purveyed by Puffers, “spin-doctors and puff-meisters” practicing “puff-meistry”. I can’t now recall how that term “puff-meister” came to mind – I tend to think, from some commentary on political speech-artists like James Carville. At any rate, soon after VS#14 had been mailed out I had a call from an erudite German-speaking friend. He wanted to know how I had come to make that happy choice of words.

It turns out that “das Puff” translates from German as “bordello”, and “Puffmeister” as pimp...



In VS#13 (p.6) we remarked on the Puffmeister’s ability to “explain a university”, which it’s “very, very hard” to do in this “overcommunicated world”, by means of 15- to 30-second thought-bites.

The Puffer’s example – like all too many **bad** examples – was soon followed by others. The Division of Research & Graduate Studies arranged for Tech’s PBS radio-station to recognize “a specific faculty member for his or her outstanding research” by means of “14 **20-word announcements**”...

“We want to recognize individuals who have made a contribution to a body of knowledge,” said the responsible administrator. “Of course, it is a challenge to describe an individual’s research and its contribution in 20 or fewer words.”

Indeed. The description would have to be as meaningful as, say, the University’s own slogans: “A university putting knowledge to work”, alternated with “A university sharing the power of knowledge” – obviously distinguishing **this** university from all other universities, which neither share the power of knowledge nor put it to work. This is the age, it seems, where it doesn’t matter who is first in substantive achievement, what matters is to be the first with the most impressive slogan, whether it be justified or not, whether it convey any sensible meaning or not.

“Still,” continued the administrator responsible for

sound-bites about research accomplishments, “this is an opportunity to tell people what we are doing and to recognize the people who are doing it.”

Sure. And worth every penny spent on it and every moment of people-time devoted to thinking up and implementing this innovative innovation.

### Slogans and mantras

Do not the Puffmeisters and their co-conspirators and fellow travelers understand that short, snappy phrases can only constitute propaganda, over-simplification to the degree of being misleading? Or are they conscious practitioners of Machiavellian deceit?

It would be the most generous possible view, that indeed they do not understand. As too with those who bleat about the need for “diversity” and “affirmative action” and the beauties of “multi-culturalism”. They bleat those terms but do not define them. It serves their purpose to avoid such definitions, of course, for the actions they press for would only make sense if “diversity”, “affirmative action” and like terms are defined in a very perverse way.

“Multi-culturalism”, for example, takes for granted that “African-Americans” and “Hispanics” are members of cultures that are somehow foreign to America, which is implicitly defined as patriarchal and WASPish even though women have long been in the majority and actual WASPs a very small minority. How baseless and wrongheaded that notion is also from the viewpoint of religion: the United States was founded as “one nation, under God”, and Hispanics and African-Americans tend to be more devoted and practicing Christians than are white Americans; and how sharply African-Americans differ in this from the vast majority of Africans!

“Diversity” can mean anything (except, of course, diversity of social or political **opinion**). What does it mean, for example, to describe someone as “genuinely concerned about the welfare and **diversity of all people**”<sup>1</sup>, for example?

How frequently could the word be used in one story? How about 17 times in the first 6 paragraphs of a report on the university’s progress towards it?<sup>2</sup>

This “Diversity Summit” had “over 100 represen-

tatives from the university's diverse communities" and "suggestions from 16 diverse campus communities" that included "Appalachian, Native American, Jewish, black, Hispanic, women, Asian, sexual minorities, and persons with differing abilities"...

And here I used to imagine that every person had differing abilities from every other person! And that someone who is Jewish (say) might **also** be Appalachian and/or Hispanic or female and/or member of a sexual minority, let alone with a differing ability...

The occasion produced other words of wisdom as well, for example:

"viewing diversity as an obligation"

"planning strategically to mainstream diversity"

requiring a "core class on diversity"

creating "a more diverse executive body with responsibilities other than those related to diversity" [acknowledging, I suppose inadvertently, that the current executive body of the university is concerned **only** with "diversity"...]

moving "from diversity to multi-culturalism"

#### **Jobs in diversity**

In Spring 1999, the College of Arts & Sciences at Virginia Tech advertised for a "Graduate Assistant in Diversity" to work with the Cultural Diversity Committee and the Office of the Associate Dean for Diversity & Instruction in "developing the climate for a diverse and multi-cultural learning community in the College of Arts and Sciences".

The duties include maintaining the "College Diversity Web-site". Perhaps another duty should be to collect and publish all the definitions of "diversity".

#### **Hysterical contagion**

Hysterical contagion is the phenomenon of human beings **imagining**, so powerfully that reality does not outweigh what is imagined. Classic instances<sup>3</sup> are visions of the Virgin Mary<sup>4</sup>, the windshield pitting epidemic in Seattle in 1954<sup>5</sup>, the June bug<sup>6</sup>, and many other instances<sup>7</sup>.

Epidemics of hysterical contagion occur when stated "facts" and inferences based on them are accepted without further ado. Political correctness has spawned no end of such epidemics. One occasion now notorious at Virginia Tech occurred when members of a history class found in the Yearbook from **1896** this description:

Claudius Lee, E.E.; Danville, Va. — Captain Battery "E"; President Class during '95; President Maury Literary Society; President Engineering Club; Editor-in-Chief BUGLE '96; Athletic Association; High Arch Fiend Pittsylvania Club; Father of Terror, Few and Faithful; K.K.K.; Bachelor Club; Bassman Pleutonian; Shoat in rooters; 666.

Some naive persons – or shockingly insensitive ones – might take this as the sort of humor that one often finds in Yearbooks. But "K.K.K." stands for Ku Klux Klan; and to venture humor about that is even more risky than making jokes about bombs in an airport. Moreover that Yearbook also yielded the sinister listing reproduced below:

The guardians of contemporary sensitivity and diversity, lacking any sense of humor or proportion, failed to contemplate what the **real** K.K.K. might think, or might have thought in the 1890s, of being ascribed the motto

**Who! – Who-o!! – Who-o-O!!!**

or the object “To right the unrighteous”, let alone the description of officers as “of Terror”. Instead, a hysterical epidemic erupted because Claudius Lee had gone on to serve for 50 years as a respected professor at Virginia Tech **and a residence hall had been named in his honor!**

Demands for justice included re-naming the hall. But in the end the outcome was that a position of Vice-President for Multicultural Affairs was created, perhaps to ensure that no joking about the KKK would henceforth occur, or perhaps to stimulate more assiduous digging into the murky past, or perhaps for other reasons again.

A more recent hysterical epidemic erupted when a report on “Women and Minorities at Virginia Tech” revealed that “women are making gains... but very slowly” and the enrollment of black undergraduates has declined from 5.1% in 1993 to 4.2% in 1997<sup>8</sup>. This was “really troubling” to “one university official”; “I find it very disturbing, it’s very problematic for us”, said an associate provost. I demurred:

Henry Bauer... said the university ‘has been pulling out all stops to attract black students.’

‘Those who don’t come just don’t want to,’ said Bauer, a member of the Virginia Association of Scholars, which opposes affirmative action. ‘If they choose not to, maybe they have good reasons for it, quite separate from anything about Tech. Maybe they do prefer Princeton, for example, or... UVa. If the latter is the case, we should raise our academic standards to attract them.’

Not quoted were other comments I had made to the reporter, for instance that I might be disturbed if there were any indications that qualified black students anywhere in the United States were not able to attend a suitable college. But why on earth should we set the goal that at every university in the land, the percentage of black students and Hispanics and Native Americans should approximate the national average percentage of those persons in the population as a whole? Yet that is the yardstick being used.

One ironic consequence is that the traditionally black institutions are scrambling to attract good black students and resent the implication that they should go elsewhere, leaving those TBUCs without a useful mission in life. If however the TBUCs continue their honorable tradition, the percentage enrollment of

blacks at non-TBUCs **inevitably** must be lower than the proportion of blacks in the population.

All facts and logic aside, the Associate Provost presenting this report included several “Discussion Points” that sounded and read more like totalitarian imperatives<sup>9</sup>:

Our present search practices are not resulting in appreciable diversification of the faculty. The rate of change implicit in the outcomes of searches conducted in 1997 is simply unacceptable, particularly for African Americans and women.

While we must do what we can to make individual searches more productive, we will only succeed in diversifying the faculty if we broaden our perspective. Individual searches tend to have little flexibility in terms of both the desired expertise and the time frame for recruitment. A longer timeframe and greater breadth in possible areas of expertise should yield more prospective candidates from underrepresented groups.

*[Of course! If you can’t get a black or female professor of chemistry, why not appoint someone in Black Studies or Women’s Studies instead? Students don’t like chemistry anyway and would be happy to see us stop teaching it – Ed.]*

Diversification of the faculty must become a much higher and more visible priority for the institution as a whole, with all of those who play a part in faculty hiring taking responsibility and being held accountable for recruitment and retention of women and faculty of color.

*[I don’t know where this administrator has been during the last decade. Virginia Tech has seen many positions made available for filling only if a woman or black is hired. Holding everyone accountable is, of course, a favorite administrative device that deflects responsibility for the consequences from the administrators who do the accounting. The only outcome of this sort of imperative can be like the outcome of holding colleges responsible for retaining and graduating students: the goals will be met, if need be by appointing totally unqualified people into unnecessary positions, or, respectively, awarding passing grades to students who don’t deserve them. Oh Brave New Academe! How I will miss thee! – Ed.]*

### **Hysterically contagious learning**

Even as the Carnegie Commission on Higher Education knows that diversity **does not** equal excellence and Tech’s faculty know that there’s been **too much emphasis on diversity** (see p.13), unremitting propaganda misguides our students who are then rewarded for having been misguided. Thus the first Pamplin Scholar, Ashley Puig,

has proposed the establishment of a new student organization – Students for a Diverse Campus – that will work together with a variety of clubs, offices, and faculty to promote awareness of cultural differences and actively seek a diverse population at Virginia Tech.<sup>10</sup>

**Hysterical democracy**

“Discussion points” that turn out to be marching orders are matched by “questions” to which only one answer is permissible. The Office of Multicultural Affairs thus announced<sup>11</sup> the “President’s Forum on Campus Climate for Diversity”:

On April 29, 1999 every faculty member at Virginia Tech will have an opportunity to weigh in on the questions: “What’s the VT climate for women and minorities on campus?” [Ed.: surely either “VT” or “on campus” is redundant? ?] “Is diversity good for VT and should it be promoted?” [Ed: no prizes will be awarded, I suspect, for wrong answers]. In addition to these questions, the President’s Forum on Campus Climate and Diversity will give participants a chance to become part of the solution, instead of being viewed by some as part of the problem. [Ed.: this reference to “solution” makes clear, does it not, that the correct answer is already known to those “questions” on which we are invited to “weigh in” ?] Participation of faculty from each college would assure university-wide participation in the Forum. [Ed.: sic – or should it be “sick”? This last tautological sentence illustrates the non-pretty pass to which we have come, where words and sentences and memos serve only as propaganda, not as food for thought]

... Very shortly, a diversity strategic plan for Virginia Tech will be developed and implemented...  
The bottom line is that the plan will be built and we all will be expected to make our individual and collective contributions toward its full implementation.

Ed.: so what’s left to be said? Nothing but

**SIEG HEIL!**

**Don’t bother with the facts...**

The blather about diversity and affirmative action and multi-culturalism makes sense only if human beings in the United States could be validly and neatly grouped into 5 distinct classes: African-American, Asian, Hispanic, Native American and white. Anthropology and biology both know, however, that there is no valid basis for such a classification.

Culturally speaking, African-Americans are much more like other Americans than they are like Africans. One need talk only briefly with first-generation Americans to appreciate the extent to which they

recognize that their own children tend to be American more than they are representative of their parents’ culture. Jacob Bronowski’s account of human cultural development over the last 10,000 years<sup>13</sup> also illustrates how readily human beings can change culturally: every Sami (former called Lapp, but that’s now a politically incorrect term) child can choose whether to remain in the culture that follows reindeer herds or to join the modern Scandinavian one. Australian aborigines have for several decades had the same choice available, and those who choose “modern” become so during their own life-time.

It is, however, a choice. And the choice to go modern is in some ways and to some degree a rejection of the traditional, and with that a rejection of the parents’ culture. Not everyone wants to choose that option. Not everyone should be required to make that choice. A properly ethical “multi-culturalism” would, it seems to me, be content to let each individual make an individual choice.

But instead, the apostles of political correctness and diversity-AA-multiculti insist that every group they choose to identify as victimized should be equally endowed with the goodies that being modern brings – while however being exempt from the practices and beliefs that brought modernity into being. They want the benefits of science without the rational thought and attention to reality and its facts that have made science what it is. They (mis)appropriate the highest ideals developed over several millennia of “Western” civilization while rejecting “Western civilization”. Their case is utterly illogical and without empirical basis. But our society as a whole has refused to concede that these Emperors walk nude in their allegedly new regalia.

Biology and physical anthropology, like cultural anthropology, have long understood that human “races” are figments of ignorant or ideological imaginations. A consequence of molecular biology and the human genome project is that evidence to this effect piles up unceasingly<sup>14</sup>:

An analysis of three types of human genes that reveal the patterns of human evolution for the past million years concludes that race has nothing to do with the historical sublineages of humanity.

“Race is a real cultural, political, and economic concept in society... But it is not a biological concept and that, unfortunately, is what many people wrongfully consider to be the essence of race in humans – genetic differences.”...

85 per cent of the variation [in genetic sequences] among individuals was due to individual differences, with only 15 per cent attributable to “racial” differences.

“The 15 per cent is well below the threshold that is used

**WHEN A PROBLEM GOES AWAY**

**THE PEOPLE WORKING ON IT DO**

**NOT 12**

***Might this work in academe too?***

with Solzhenitsyn, John Paul believed

***'the refusal to lie was the most powerful means of provoking a crisis in any totalitarian state'***Carl Bernstein & Marco Politi, *His Holiness: John Paul II and the Hidden History of Our Time*, cited in William McGurn, "The most modern of men", *American Spectator*, January 1997, 66-68

to recognize race in other species... Humans are one of the most genetically homogeneous species we know of."

**and yet more absurdities**

One of my former colleagues was sent to jail... [because] he had sexually molested his own son. **And yet, he is not without his defenders, colleagues who believe he should be reinstated on the grounds that he posed no threat to students, since he never molested a young man who was not a member of his immediate family. I wish I were making this up.**<sup>16</sup>

**Just enjoy the delicious absurdities**

like the appointment of "Native Alaskan" John Smelcer in the Department of English at the University of Alaska, against the unanimous vote of the whole Department who said he had been recruited only because of his "ethnicity", not his qualifications. But Smelcer is really "Caucasian", the **adopted** son of a Native Alaskan. Under federal law, he is classed as a Native Alaskan.<sup>15</sup>

Just as non-Americans marry Americans just for the green card, so perhaps Caucasian males increasingly will have themselves adopted by members of under-privileged minorities in order to benefit from the advantages that the "under-privileged" enjoy in this topsy-turvy Wonderland.

**Endnotes:**

- <sup>1</sup> Dean of Arts & Sciences Bob Bates, cited in Matthew Winston, "Virginia Tech fills Vice President for Multicultural Affairs position", *Diversity News* (Virginia Polytechnic Institute & State University) , 5 #1, Fall 1998, p.7
- <sup>2</sup> Clara B. Cox, "Diversity Summit evaluates university's progress", *Spectrum* (VPI&SU) 18ii99, p.1
- <sup>3</sup> A summary with further references is given under "Group dynamics of unusual experiences", p.114ff. in Leonard George, *Alternative Realities*, New York: Facts on File, 1995
- <sup>4</sup> "Marian apparition", p.167ff. in George (<sup>3</sup> above) and references given there
- <sup>5</sup> Nahum Z. Medalia & Otto N. Larsen, "Diffusion and belief in a collective delusion: the Seattle windshield pitting epidemic", *American Sociological Review*, 23 (1958) 180-86
- <sup>6</sup> A. C. Kerckhoff & K. W. Back, *The June Bug: A Study in Hysterical Contagion*, New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1968
- <sup>7</sup> Charles Mackay, *Extraordinary Popular Delusions and the Madness of Crowds*, London: Richard Bentley, 1841 and many later printings, e.g. 1932 by L. C. Paige; ISBN 0-374-50276-5 from Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2nd. ed. 1952
- <sup>8</sup> Ian Zack, "Study shows Va. Tech as ivory tower more than ever", *Roanoke Times* , undated clipping (Fall 1998 or Spring 1999), pp.A1,3
- <sup>9</sup> "Women and Minorities at Virginia Tech", Status Report, Office of the Senior Vice President and Provost, Fall 1998, Patricia B. Hyer, Emet L. LaBoone, Eugenia Mottley
- <sup>10</sup> *Scirene Vultis?* (Virginia Tech Honors Program) X #1, summer '99
- <sup>11</sup> E-mail to ASLIST-L from College of Arts & Sciences, 23 April 1999, forwarding the original announcement from the Office of Multicultural Affairs
- <sup>12</sup> "Fox on problematics", Internet wisdom courtesy Nick Egoroff
- <sup>13</sup> Jacob Bronowski, *The Ascent of Man*, video series and book in many editions, still in print since the early 1970s
- <sup>14</sup> Kim A. McDonald, "Genetically speaking, race doesn't exist", *Chronicle of Higher Education* 30x98, A19
- <sup>15</sup> "U. of Alaska reviews appointment", *Chronicle of Higher Education* 6vii94, A4
- <sup>16</sup> Thomas Fleming, *Chronicles*, September 1997, quoted in *Chronicle of Higher Education* 19ix97, B9

**“Excellence requires Diversity”**

is one of the mantras recited by administrators attempting to defend racial discrimination. Not so:

In 1974, the Carnegie Commission on Higher Education warned that affirmative action was lowering standards and undermining faculty quality, as we recounted in VS#13 (p.18).

A recent survey of faculty at Virginia Tech indicates that warning was well founded: 40% of respondents said there was too much emphasis on diversity, 44% said it leads to hiring less-qualified faculty and staff, 56% said it led to admitting unprepared students<sup>1</sup>.

**And more surveys**

The Commonwealth surveyed its employees and published some of the results in *Commonwealth Currents* (March 1999; see also on the Web at www.dpt.state.va.us). We noted that a majority believe that promotion is not merit-based; 97% agreed “it is important to feel appreciated at work” but only 40% agreed that “people generally feel appreciated where I work”. A bare 53% were “confident in the leadership at my agency”, and 62% “sometimes doubt the truth about what management tells me”...

I was curious how the various responses varied across different agencies, in particular I was curious whether college staff had answered similarly or differently than others. I enquired, and was told that those data are not currently available.

**The rot is still spreading**

In a parking lot I encountered a history professor whom I hadn’t seen for some years.

“How are you?”, he asked.

“Fine,” I responded automatically. Then I pulled myself together and continued, “That is, fine just so long as I don’t think about how uninterested the students have become”.

He stopped dead in his tracks, turned back, and looked me in the eye: “You mean it’s not just me?”

And then he expressed some of his accumulated frustration, concluding with: “Why won’t anyone talk about it?”



A couple of weeks later I encountered another colleague, whom I see quite regularly at our common place of exercise.

“You might be surprised to hear”, he said, “that I’m

retiring as of the end of the year. I’m quite surprised myself. I used to think that I’d continue to teach until I dropped in my tracks. But I just can’t take it any more, sitting in front of a class that gives me no response at all.

It’s gotten appreciably worse in the last few years.”



An opinion piece in the local paper also reassured me that I haven’t been imagining that student attitudes and performance have become less desirable:

**Slacker students**

**College is a privilege, not a mandate**

By Tonia Moxley:

I HAVE spent the past 10 years... as a student and now as a faculty member... and I have come to the conclusion that most of the students attending college should never have been admitted to the university.

The students..., with some notable exceptions, only sporadically darken the door of the classroom. When they do, they exude an air of profound boredom. Some even claim they feel oppressed...[,] burdened by their assignments... Their response to learning is one of suffering, as if they have been sentenced to menial labor when they’re asked to write a research paper or read an intelligent essay.

In this age of “free thinking,” students are free to question or demean the classroom materials chosen by instructors and professors. I particularly enjoy the opinions of 18-year-olds who think that Plato’s “Myth of the Cave” is a “bunch of crap.” Perhaps students need to learn how to think under supervision before they are allowed to attempt it on their own.

Then, there are some who... claim that... Admissions kidnapped them, forcing them to spend their parents’ money on an education. There are a few who do not want to learn how to use commas properly because it squashes their “creative expression.”

[As] an undergraduate, I had a semester of rebellion. I skipped class too much. I partied too much. I paid the consequences. But never in any of that time did I lose sight of the fact that it was a privilege to be here – an expensive one. I also knew I had made my own choices.

College is not compulsory. It’s a hard-earned privilege.

That someone who had been a student a decade ago should have remarked on the decline in student performance and dedication was reassuring, since I have worried occasionally that it is only elderly curmudgeons like myself who claim to notice it.

**The generation gap**

I was among those who expressed surprise, at the survey that found a majority of younger Americans agreeing with President Clinton that oral contact with sexual organs does not constitute sexual relations. I was similarly surprised at the division of opinion

among my students about appropriate classroom behavior.

A class of 40, in an elective course with a range from freshman to senior, tendered these written, anonymous responses to my queries:

***Is it OK to carry on whispered conversations during class?***

Overwhelmingly the class agreed with my view, that it's ***not*** OK;

***but*** — most did not think that the instructor should do anything about it!

(Some thought it was up to the students themselves to police their peers. I don't disagree, of course, but that has not been very effective, in my experience.)

***Is it OK to pass notes back and forth during class?***

About half the class thought this was OK.

***Is it OK to come to class late, or to leave early, or to go in and out for drinks?***

About half the class thought it OK.

A few ventured that it was rude, but OK!

***Is it OK to sleep during class?***

By 2 to 1, the class thought it OK.

Several thought it rude but OK. A couple thought it OK but allowed that if they were the instructor, they would get mad about it...

**Those who don't remember the past are doomed to repeat it...**

colleges...had to rely upon tuition fees for financial support. The schools which could attract the largest number of students would be the most prosperous. The situation finally resulted in a vigorous competition for students. The colleges tried to increase enrollment by lowering admission standards, shortening the term of study, and reducing graduation requirements. As a result, the profession became flooded with men who in many cases could barely read or write

No, that was not written about American colleges of the 1990s. It is about American medical schools in the middle of the 19th century<sup>2</sup>. Now, at the end of the 20th century, Virginia's leaders are contemplating a new mode of funding colleges: instead of "micro-

managing", colleges will receive "block grants" that will be modified according to how well the colleges perform, for example with respect to student retention and graduation rates.

In this case, predicting the future is easy and 100% guaranteed to be accurate:

If such block funding is put in place, then student retention will rapidly rise to 100% and the average time to graduation will decrease to the shortest possible one. Colleges will soon rid themselves of any instructors who threaten to spoil such desirable progress by awarding failing grades under any circumstances at all.

But then, of course, we're well on the way to that already. More than one of my correspondents has gotten into trouble, in one case losing his job, because his grades (or his student evaluations) were too low.

☹ ☹ ☹ ☹ ☹ ☹

But what would it take to get a good evaluation from the student who earned a "D" in my class and thereupon sent me this e-mail:

I got my last Quiz back and you had indicated that I handed in only half the HW  
I hope you checked that for every HW assignment, I handed in TWO questions,  
just to make sure, I also know I attended class more than half the time.  
Please get back to me on this, I was thinking my grade would be between B- , C+.  
Thanks,

to which I had to reply:

> you had indicated that I handed in only half  
> the HW

If you were picking up your earlier quizzes you would have already seen from them that my records had you handing in only half. THAT was the time to check up on it

> I also know I attended class more than half the time.

I would say, less than half the time  
 Again: NO ARTICLES, means -10%  
 Two BAD quizzes, - 14.5%  
 and you're already down to a C+  
 I don't understand how you could have imagined it could be  
 HIGHER than that.

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**HARD WORK HAS A FUTURE PAY-OFF**

**LAZINESS PAYS OFF NOW <sup>3</sup>**

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Who would have believed, a decade or so ago, that a student would feel aggrieved at not getting a "B" when he had bothered to attend only about half the classes and had handed in **some** though by no means all of the assignments?

Grade inflation and inflated expectations on the part of students will not go away so long as administrators and legislators push for increased retention and higher graduation rates. Those who deplore these things might take a leaf from the following hand-out drawn up by Professor William Dowling of Rutgers:

Statement on Grading Policy (Rutgers, English Department)

William C. Dowling

**To my students:**

As most of you know, I have been strongly opposed to "grade inflation" as it is widely practiced at Rutgers. My position has been that grade inflation establishes a dishonest relation between teachers and students, lying to average students about the real quality of their work, and leaving no way to give meaningful recognition to work that is genuinely outstanding.

In practice, this has meant that I have been known as a "hard" grader, reserving A's for the best two or three students in an average-size class, retaining the B+ and B grade for students whose work is above average, and not hesitating to give D's and F's to students whose writing remained badly and consistently ungrammatical, who persisted in certain rudimentary patterns of error in spelling and punctuation, or whose performance on tests and analytic exercises showed that they had not been doing the class assignments.

**Change in policy**

This semester, certain events have made me aware that there is an element of unfairness involved in my continuing to grade on a scale markedly different from that encountered by students in most of their classes at Rutgers. As a consequence, I shall from this point on adopt the following scheme:

- 1) 200-level courses. In courses at this level, I will give A's to the top 30% of the class, B+ to students in the next 30%, B to students in the next 30%, and C+ to the remaining students.
- 2) 300- and 400-level courses. In these courses, I will give A's to the top 45% of the class, B+ to the next 45%, and B to the remaining students.
- 3) In grading essays, I will no longer call attention to ungrammatical writing, loose or illogical organization, or persistent errors in spelling and punctuation.

**Reservation Clauses**

- 1) I reserve the right to give grades of D or F to students who fail to meet the minimum demands of the course through uncompleted assignments and/or excessive absences.
- 2) The percentage scales given above are meant to be approximate. I reserve the right to adjust them in cases of "grade clustering" or other cases of statistical necessity.
- 3) I mean to pursue the policy stated above only so long as grade inflation persists at Rutgers. In the case that (a) academic departments at Rutgers cease to give inflated grades, or (b) the University as a whole adopts a system of "grade indexing" on student transcripts, I reserve the right to revert to a policy of **giving honest grades**.

April 21, 1995 [wcdowling@aol.com](mailto:wcdowling@aol.com)

**Information technology: distance “learning”**

We will not need many instructors once on-line education has really developed. Students will only need to spend a little time at a computer before their degree is awarded. Like other entrepreneurial colleges, mine is very keen on this digital information revolution, often called euphemistically “distance **learning**”. One of my colleagues taught an experimental “distance-learning” course last semester. Of 45 students enrolled, 44 were in residence on campus. The much-vaunted “discussion” that on-line courses are supposed to make easy and enjoyable was engaged in only by the one student who was not in residence.

In some of my own courses which are **not** digital or on-line, more and more students also indulge in “distance learning”: groups form, and one person in a group is selected to attend class and to carry away notes and assignments. What specific factors determine class attendance under this scheme is inscrutable. In one course last Fall, I had average attendance of 85-90% and steady and spirited discussion by the class. The following Spring semester, **in the same course**, attendance settled to an average of about 50% after the first few weeks, and toward the end of the semester I chalked up my record attendance to date (excluding a couple of experiences in freshman chemistry years ago): 16 out of 49! And another week later, a new record was set: 11 out of 49!! And then, at the third-last class of the semester, which I had foreshadowed would be a summation of the course – **eight out of forty-nine!!!**

⊗ ⊗ ⊗ ⊗ ⊗ ⊗

So our leaders are clearly running with the tide as they pursue distance learning as a way of “educating” (= pleasing) the students.

However, it may not be as easy as they seem to imagine, to reach those goals. The Math Emporium, where students can come and go as they like and helpful instructors are always available, is much praised: by administrators at every level and by those who speak publicly for the Department of Mathematics. But those who speak in private with students know that most of the students are much less than enthusiastic about it, and some go so far as to say that they hate it.

However, as with politically correct stuff, evidence or logic are here quite beside the point; the main thing is to keep trumpeting that whatever policies we happen

to choose are working out magnificently well. And in any case the Math Emporium will surely adjust its practices and standards until they are fully pleasing to students.

**Educational reform**

Between 1989 and 1995, the proportion of faculty in the United States who incorporate in their courses “readings on racial and gender issues” increased by about 50%, from 11% of the professoriate to 16%.<sup>4</sup>

Bearing in mind that most courses in mathematics, natural science, engineering and agriculture hardly allow this, it may be that in the humanities and social sciences such readings are now pervasive.



Grade-school education, of course, has been actively being reformed for quite a number of decades. What conclusion can be drawn from the fact that its results continue to get worse?

The most obvious one is rarely spoken in public: that the people in charge of the “reforms” are the ones whose ideas are responsible for the lack of educating that’s going on. Those are the professors of education.

The latest spin from these people is that it’s time to “get serious about standards”, according to one of their lobbying groups, the National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future (NCTAF). As J. E. Stone points out, however, while NCTAF proposes that there are too many untrained teachers, most critics agree that there are too many **badly** trained ones. Whereas NCTAF continues with the mantra of “learner-centered” education, most critics and parents want academics to be the central concern of the schools. Whereas NCTAF and professors of education continue to believe that their task is psycho-social engineering and the instilling of self-esteem, almost everyone else recognizes that the disastrous state of American grade-schooling is a direct result of attempting social engineering while neglecting the teaching of reading, writing, arithmetic, history, and other academically worthwhile subjects.<sup>5</sup>

Grade-school education will never improve so long as its “reform” remains in the hands of the professionals of education – no matter that a few among those may have their heads screwed on right. Research in education and the training of teachers must begin again from a base of **actual experience of children in classrooms** instead of a base of purely conceptual wishful thinking.

One hopeful sign is talk – and occasional implementation – of sound value-added assessment. Measuring the change **in each student’s learning each year** provides the raw data. Such a scheme has been used in Dallas (TX) since 1984, and in Tennessee since 1995. A critical analysis is given by J. E. Stone<sup>6</sup>.



Speaking of standards: a lawmaker intends to introduce a bill to disallow literacy testing, on the grounds that it gives an unfair advantage to those who can read and write.<sup>7</sup>

**Educational leadership**

What qualities should the president of a major research university possess?

In the good old days, almost everyone connected with universities was fairly clear about it. In modern-day confusion worse confounded, even those chosen to make the selection don’t know. The Search Committee seeking a president for Virginia Tech held an open forum so that they could be advised on what they are supposed to do.

Not unpredictably, the attendance was small. Not unpredictably, the attendees had axes to grind. Not unpredictably, those axes were the politically correct mantras. So a “recurring theme... was diversity, both in regard to the makeup of the university’s student body and to the composition of the faculty and staff”<sup>8</sup>.

It was nice to see an editorial in the local paper<sup>9</sup> responding that, nice as “diversity” might be, the **prime** requirements should be about such matters as support of research and budgeting.

Such practical commonsense will not easily win the day. One of the curious habits of academe is to entrust to committees of inexperienced people the most significant tasks, like selecting a president. The draft statement concocted to this end describes the desired attributes:

- An earned doctorate or equivalent terminal degree. [Editorial comment: What will they think of next?? But then perhaps this was inserted just to dissuade the backers of a former governor of the Commonwealth]
- a strong appreciation of research
- impeccable academic credentials [Those apparently don’t include an earned doctorate, for then the first attribute would be redundant]
- recognized as a scholar and an administrator [The pool of qualified people begins to get distinctly smaller right here]

- breadth of background essential to the understanding of the multitude of disciplines at Virginia Tech  
[This will necessarily be a shallow sort of understanding, won't it?]
- demonstrated ability to attract and retain a diverse and superior faculty, student body, and staff  
[Could we please have just one example of someone who fits this bill?]
- demonstrated record of achievement in building quality educational programs
- in-depth knowledge and experience in the issues that face higher education generally
- deeply knowledgeable of, and unquestionably committed to, the use of information technology [Who isn't? The question is, what constitutes proper and prudent and useful commitment by contrast with unthinking and unconscionably expensive faddishness?]
- adept communicator who writes, listens, and speaks well  
[But of course does not insist that students learn to write, listen and speak well]
- appreciates the vital and visible role of students and the equally visible role of intercollegiate athletics
- assumes a "global mission"
- "by example" encourages and supports excellence in teaching, research, and outreach activities.

And those, of course, are not the complete list.

Time after time, academic search committees draw up these wish-lists describing no human being who ever lived or would ever be allowed to live. Yet these committees behave with utter earnestness as though what they were saying and doing made sense.

Nowadays, of course, they are assisted in these tasks by the "head-hunting" firms hired (in this case for \$100,000) to help locate the best candidates. Why head-hunting firms should know how to do this better

than inhabitants of academe has never been satisfactorily explained. My own view, previously expressed on more than one occasion, is that this is just another example of hiring outsiders so that the responsible insiders can evade work, responsibility and blame.

(end-notes overleaf)

### Endnotes:

<sup>1</sup> Ian Zack, "Black professors: racial climate bad at Virginia Tech — survey taken in effort to improve race relations at university", *Roanoke Times* 4vi99, A1

<sup>2</sup> Martin Kaufman, *Homeopathy in America*, Johns Hopkins Press, 1971, p.49; citing Donald E. Konold, *History of American Medical Ethics, 1847-1912* (1962); Nathan Smith Davis, *History of the American Medical Association from Its Organization up to January, 1855* (1855)

<sup>3</sup> Internet humor, courtesy Nick Egoroff

<sup>4</sup> "Changes in teaching methods: 1989 to 1995", *Quality Improvement in Action*, November 1996 (Report from the Academic Assessment Program at Virginia Polytechnic Institute & State University, based on survey by Higher Education Institute at UCLA)

<sup>5</sup> J. E. Stone, "Will teacher training reform led by the schools of education improve student achievement? Not likely", Policy Brief, April 1999, The Foundation Endowment, 611 Cameron St., Alexandria, VA 22314; tfe@laser.net.

J. E. Stone heads the Education Consumers Clearinghouse, <http://education-consumers.com>

<sup>6</sup> J. E. Stone, "What is value-added assessment and why do we need it?", Policy Brief no.99-II, The Foundation Endowment, 611 Cameron St., Alexandria, VA 22314

<sup>7</sup> Is that so hard to believe?

Fortunately, this is not really a news item but from a cartoon by Bill Yates, "the small society", *Roanoke Times* 19ii95, p.G2

<sup>8</sup> John Ashby, "Presidential search now enters candidate-identification stage", *Spectrum* (VPI&SU) 6v99, p.1

<sup>9</sup> *Roanoke Times* 16iii99

### FROM THE CONVENTION OF THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF SCHOLARS

At our President's request, **Wayne Boese** gives his impressions of the Chicago meeting

I had never had the opportunity to attend a national conference of the National Association of Scholars until I attended the meeting held this year on April 16-18 in Chicago. Since the most recent *NAS Update* has such a thorough and well-written overview, I will just include a few personal reflections that members of VAS might find of interest.

The quality of the entire program was most impressive. The keynote address on Friday afternoon by John Searle was an excellent introduction to some of the dangers of multi-culturalism. The Saturday morning panel which included our own President, Michael Krauss, dealt with particular facets of professional education,

including the law, medicine, education, and business. All of the panelists acquitted themselves with both flair and thoughtfulness. Michael provided pertinent examples from his own teaching experiences here in Virginia and related a few horrific anecdotes involving one of his former students.

I was especially moved – as was the entire audience – by Joseph Horn’s acceptance speech after he received the Barry Gross award. Mr. Horn suffered a stroke in 1998 and his tenacity in overcoming this difficulty moved everyone.

Another highlight was the address on Saturday by Gertrude Himmelfarb who received the Sidney Hook Award. Her remarks, which were very effectively delivered, emphasized the absolute need for the pursuit of truth as we understand the *traditional* meaning of this term, not the postmodernist perversion of it.

I was gratified by the variety of professional opportunities available for the attendees to explore. For example, I attended the session promoting a new organization for historians, The Historical Society, which I subsequently did join; this organization provides professional and amateur historians a scholarly environment devoid of the excessive political correctness currently plaguing other professional historical societies.

Finally, I found the entire exercise primarily stimulating because of the variety of interesting and congenial individuals whom I met. One gentleman whose path crossed mine during the session for The Historical Society was one of the first assistant administrators of the Marshall Plan. Now in his early 90s, he is still active, vital, and intent on sharing his ideas on promoting Western Civilization. Having contact with so many talented and committed individuals who share the basic beliefs of NAS and VAS was both comforting and exhilarating. I would highly recommend that you attend the next national conference.

## LITERATURE

Tid-bits from and about books, articles, reports...

### The Last Plantation – Color, Conflict, and Identity: Reflections of a New World Black

by Itabari Njeri (reviewed by Patsy Sims, *NY Times Book Review*, 20iv97, p.23):

In the 1970’s, the journalist Itabari Njeri embraced Black Power, adopting an African name, wearing only African clothes and abandoning a love for classical music that seemed incompatible with her new cultural identity. She left the movement three years later, having come to believe that black nationalism too often led to “a kind of cultural chauvinism indistinguishable from racism”...

Ms. Njeri advocates the proposed multiracial census designation, which would allow the children of interracial marriages to embrace their total heritages. She is critical of black politicians who bury the issue because they fear blurring racial lines will erode their power base. “Race was once synonymous with community for African Americans... But the rope attached to the anchor has become a noose, choking off social growth... [T]hough our own communities have to be the base from which we act, the rope attached to the anchor should be long enough to allow us to move into other communities.”

### The Cowboy and the Dandy: Crossing over from Romanticism to Rock and Roll

by Perry Meisel  
was reviewed by Terry Teachout in *New York Times Book Review*, p.24 of an undated clipping:

The metaphor of the melting pot is now desperately unfashionable, but you cannot begin to tell the story of American music without recourse to it. Virtually every musical idiom that has left its mark on our culture – jazz, musical comedy, country, bluegrass, rock – has been the product of ethnic hybridization. Even the best American classical music bears its stamp: witness Aaron Copland, whose “American-sounding” music was composed by a Brooklyn-born Jew of Russian lineage who studied in France and salted his scores with jazz-derived syncopations, Mexican folk tunes and cowboy ballads.

The book is not easy to read, unfortunately:

Meisel’s sludgy style will come as no surprise to those masochists who keep up with high academic fashion. Small wonder that the fruits of contemporary scholarship in the humanities are so widely viewed with contemptuous incomprehension by non-scholarly critics and the common reader, since the members of the professoriate are so

reluctant to translate their ideas into the plain English of the public intellectual. In most cases, of course, translation would be an exercise in futility – jargon-jugglers are rarely capable of disciplined thought – but I suspect there is a genuinely worthy book lurking somewhere in the midst of “The Cowboy and the Dandy”, which contains unexpectedly shrewd comments on such varied figures as Muddy Waters and Willa Cather. Alas, Meisel has not taken the trouble to write it, and so it isn’t likely that very many people will take the trouble to read it.

### The Corrosion of Character: The Personal Consequences of Work in the New Capitalism

by Richard Sennett (W. W. Norton)

is reviewed in *New York Times Book Review*, 20xii98, p.16, by Alan Ehrenhalt. The book takes a view of current prosperity that is unconventional and has a certain ring of truth to it:

the working conditions of modern capitalism are eating away at loyalty, commitment and the kind of long-term thinking that used to make even the most routine work a central ingredient in orderly human life...

[The workers] are not angry, or alienated – they lack the necessary emotional investment for that. They are merely indifferent.

As universities too are becoming more and more essentially capitalistic enterprises, concern for the bottom financial line increasingly determines their policies. So Sennett’s diagnosis rings alarmingly true of academe as well as the wider society. Throughout

academe there has been a notable decline in institutional and professional loyalty, in commitment to the intellectual adventure, in thinking about timeless issues rather than those of the current moment. And while there are still a few angry ones among us, the level of sheer indifference is on the rise, as members of faculties shrug their shoulders and go along with grade inflation, intellectually vapid and ideologically corrosive curricula, and institutionalized racism and sexism – in every matter large or small, a count is taken of the numbers of men and of women, and of members of so-called human races or ethnicities.

### The Color of Our Future

by Farai Chideya

is reviewed by Alan Wolfe (*New York Times Book Review* 14iii99, p.28) in terms that fit any number of other contemporary discourses of political correctness:

“She sets out to discover America but never leaves the home of her ideological certainty”.

With hesitant optimism, Wolfe considers a different future:

“I doubt that we will ever have a ‘majority-minority’, but we may someday have no majority at all. Then we will be more likely to look at people as the individuals they are and not as the stereotypes their friends and enemies make them out to be.”

Amen.

#### A TIP FROM JOSEF MARTIN:

When someone prefaces their talk with an *annotation* about what they are about to say, **never believe them**

#### TRANSLATIONS:

1. “I’m going to be brief” means  
“I will **not** be brief”
2. “This is an ‘informational’ meeting” means  
“get ready for spin-doctored propaganda or **mis**information”
3. “To tell you the truth” or “I’ll be frank with you” means  
“The next words you hear will be lies”
4. “I want to hear your views” means  
“You are about to be harangued”
5. “I’m not going to lecture, I want to stimulate a conversation with you” means  
“You’re about to be earbashed”

**Editor’s note:** “earbashing” is what is done by an “earbasher”: a persistent talker, a bore  
(*A Dictionary of Australian Colloquialisms*, G. A. Wilkes, rev. ed. 1990)

The colorful force of Australian English may be enjoyed for example in the works of Robert Hughes (e.g., *The Culture of Complaint*) or Clive James (e.g. his autobiographies, *Unreliable Memoirs*, *Falling Toward England*, *May Week Was in June*). James is responsible for such memorable phrases as, to describe a meeting, “a **drone-in**”.

***BUT WHAT DOES IT MEAN?***  
*to have as a qualification,*  
***“Ability to value diversity”***  
*as demanded in an advertisement for*  
*Assistant to the V-P for Multi-culti Affairs,*  
*Spectrum (VPI&SU) 29x98, p.7*

**Within Reason: A Life of Spinoza**

by Margaret Gullan-Whur

was mentioned by Anthony Gottlieb in his very favorable review of Steven Nadler’s *Spinoza* (*New York Times Book Review* 18viii99, p.20):

Margaret Gullan-Whur devoted prodigious effort to establishing that Spinoza’s attitude toward women fell somewhat short of what one might expect from a late-20th-century college professor. In this she succeeded. It is also true that he smoked. But these shortcomings may perhaps be forgiven in a man whose philosophical vision was as powerful as any since Plato’s....

... Gullan-Whur... mainly sought to demonstrate that his philosophical attitudes were the product of a frustrated romance (which most experts believe never happened anyway)

**B I T S & P I E C E S**

*brought to the Editor’s attention*

**Politically correct sexuality**

Political correctness clashes with sense perhaps most drastically when it comes to matters of sexuality. On the one hand, it is politically correct to let others do their thing whatever that may be; on the other hand, we cannot quite ignore that what some people would like to do can harm others. So blunder is heaped upon absurdity:

- ***Euphemisms*** are employed in the attempt to mask what certain things really are;
- “Blatant heterosexuality” is taken to be oppressive or offensive;
- All sorts of physical markers of gender orientation are discovered – at the same time as we are told to believe that gender is purely a matter of choice;
- Hate crimes are now to be defined to include hate based on sexual orientation...

**Romeo & Juliet: OFFENSIVE!**

The headmistress of a primary school in the Hackney district of London refused free tickets for the children to attend a Royal Ballet performance of “Romeo and Juliet” “on the grounds that it was a ‘blatantly heterosexual love story’”<sup>1</sup>.

**Euphemizing euphemism**

Everyone recognizes that “euphemism” means “The act or an example of substituting a mild, indirect, or vague term for one considered harsh, blunt, or offensive”<sup>2</sup>. Such ***substitution*** is all too readily seen to be a subterfuge. So political correctnoids<sup>3</sup> now push for the ***re-definition*** of certain concepts that are offensive to them. Among the candidates for re-definition are “human sexuality, child-rearing, marriage, the family..., the arts, the budget deficit, American history, a public-school education and the American middle class”<sup>4</sup>.

Such re-defining is not just a theoretical, abstract exercise. At the University of Utah, education majors and public-school teachers were told to use the term “partner” instead of “husband” or “wife”, and to avoid words like “pre-marital” or “extramarital”<sup>5</sup>.

#### Animals as role models

Homosexuals and lesbians are to be taken on a special tour... to observe “gay behaviour” among animals.

The Beekse Bergen safari park at Hilvarenbeek {Netherlands} is holding the weekend-long event to highlight the fact that hundreds of species take part in homosexual acts...

“We cannot guarantee that the visitors will actually see gay acts taking place, that will depend entirely on luck. But we shall have guides on board who would be able to point out certain things and answer questions.

“One cannot say that homosexuality among animals is exactly like humans, but it does exist... Obviously the animals do not consider this to be unnatural in any way.”<sup>6</sup>

#### Gender & sex

We are swamped by information about the latest scientific discoveries, without warning that the latest “frontier science” is also very unreliable<sup>7</sup> and is, indeed, very likely to be retracted or modified quite soon (though the media do not always let us know about the retractions). I find a certain amount of amusement in reading about some of those latest discoveries which, I wager, will turn out to be spurious, for example that “the inner ears of lesbian and bisexual women function more like the inner ears of men than like those of heterosexual women”<sup>8</sup>.

#### Hate crimes & sexual orientation

The euphemistic generalization, “sexual orientation”, came into service as a less provocative way of making homosexuality officially OK, than if the term “homosexuality” had been used.

The trouble is, “sexual orientation” is a very inclusive term. Taken literally, it includes bestiality, pedophilia, sadism, masochism, every sort of fetish, voyeurism, self-exposure... Those institutions –colleges and universities being prominent among them – that claim not to discriminate on grounds of sexual orientation or preference, may find themselves in an interesting legal dilemma if someone with an unusual “orientation” decides to

make a court case of it when the authorities in practice **do** discriminate against their behavior, say hiding in the bushes to watch members of the opposite sex undressing. What harm does a voyeur do anyone, after all?

President Clinton is no mean practitioner of political correctness. In April 1999 he allowed that the definition of hate crimes ought to include hate based on sexual orientation. One supposes he had in mind gay-bashing, since there had been a particularly disgusting instance of that some months earlier.

But the inclusive language might cause trouble. Is it not a matter of hate based on sexual orientation, when communities seek to ostracize or force out of their midst, convicted sex offenders whose identity they have learned because of laws designed to allow communities to protect themselves when convicted and released sex offenders take up residence?

#### Teaching Business Ethics

A flattering observation of academic administrators comes from a recent *Chronicle of Higher Education*:

Nine out of 10 business schools offer ethics courses to students, but a new survey suggests that the deans could use a refresher course themselves...

48 per cent of the... [deans] said they would admit a clearly unqualified student if the applicant’s father had donated \$1-million to the school. And 37 per cent said they would allow a \$500,000 gift... to be back-dated, so that the donor could benefit from a tax deduction<sup>9</sup>

#### Salaries

In *VS#13* (at p.10) we gave an illustration of how administrators’ remuneration has grown much more rapidly than that of the peons. Where the IRS gets the authority to concern itself with that, I do not know, but:

top officials at non-profit organizations, including colleges, can be fined for profiting improperly from their positions... as well as the trustees who approve such transactions<sup>10</sup>

#### Other countries, other “races”

That “race” is an undefined term, whose very concept is denied by scientists in the relevant specialties, sometimes becomes troublesome as “race” is so widely used in the socio-political arena:

The question of whether or not the Scots and English are separate racial groups returned this week to the Employment Appeals Tribunal in Edinburgh...

Mr Power is claiming racial discrimination... [because] he was not on the short-list for the post of Chief Constable because he is English. Mr Power, born in Yorkshire, is backed in his case by the Commission for Racial Equality...

Advocate [for the plaintiffs]... said... that Parliament had never intended the 1976 Race Relations Act to apply to

the English and Scots...

[The] barrister for Mr Power... said the Commission dealt with many complaints of racial discrimination in England and the majority were from Scots, Welsh and Irish. If Mr Power... was not protected in Scotland, then the Scots, Welsh and Irish were not protected in England.

The Scots and English... had different histories, different legal and educational systems, different churches.

The English... liked roast beef and Yorkshire pudding on Sundays, cricket and Morris dancing. The Scots liked haggis, bagpipes, whisky and stovies.<sup>11</sup>

**Other countries, other laws  
— or are they really the same?**

The German High Court declared invalid a Bavarian State law that **required** schools to hang crosses in every classroom<sup>12</sup>.

In the United States, the Constitution is said to **forbid** such displays.

But is it any more a separation of Church and State to **forbid** something than to **mandate** it? I'm reminded of the late Tom MacAdoo who liked to cite the definition of a liberal as someone who is never sure which is more pleasing, to forbid something or to mandate something.

**Other countries at the cutting edge**

"Dial-a-shrink offers therapy in the comfort of your own home"<sup>13</sup>: a breakthrough by the British National Health Service.

Touch tone therapy has arrived in Britain. No waiting lists, no early morning appointments; just pick up the telephone, key in your PIN number and settle down for a session.

The techno-treatment for Obsessional Compulsive Disorder (OCD) means that the stress of sharing one's innermost fears with a real human being is replaced by a less demanding relationship - with a computer.

According to Dr Oscar Meehan, the psychiatrist at the Maudsley Hospital, in south London, who is responsible for co-ordinating the new dial-a-shrink service, the series of conversations with a computerised voice has the same success rate as a costly course of face-to-face counselling.

Of the 73 patients in the UK who have undergone the telephonic treatment, 80 per cent report themselves to be improved or much improved. One 47-year-old woman with a 39-year history of OCD has apparently watched her condition drop from severe to mild after just three weeks of calls.

The computer program is entitled BT Steps (with the BT standing for Behavioural Therapy), was devised by British and American psychologists. [Ed.: *On first reading when I encountered "BT" I had rather naturally taken it to stand for "British Telecom", the company that provides most of Britain's telephone services*] Their highly pragmatic alternative to conventional behaviour therapy takes three and a half months, during which time the patient can ring up the therapist as often as is required, at any time of the day or night.

The calls are free on the NHS and nothing is too much

trouble for the soothing American at the other end of the phone. "Hello," he says, in the same, cheery fashion. "Welcome to BT Steps. Please enter your identification number using the number keys on your phone ..."

One advantage of the telephonic treatment is the reduction in waiting lists – British sufferers currently have to wait around 12 months for treatment.

Another is that it is tailor-made for anyone who can't meet a therapist in person. "You can do it from home and you don't have to make an appointment," enthuses Dr Meehan. "You can do it over the weekend, in the evenings; whenever you are free."

Just like the distance-learning that is the current breakthrough in this country.

**Literary criticism**

Randall Jarrell was a poet and literary critic who also wrote a fine satire on academe, *Pictures from an Institution*. His *Selected Essays*, and a memoir of him by his wife, *Remembering Randall*, are reviewed in the *New York Times Book Review* (1viii99, p.4).

"Criticism *does* exist, doesn't it, for the sake of the plays and stories and poems it criticizes?" Jarrell asked wistfully and only half-jokingly, for too many writers appear to have forgotten this fact. English departments, then as now, are particularly guilty: "Our universities should produce good criticism; they do not – or, at best, they do so only as Federal prisons produce counterfeit money: a few hardened prisoners are more or less surreptitiously continuing their real vocation."

That last comparison nowadays is apt not only for English departments but for much of today's info-technical, dollar-sensitive, grade-inflated, politically correct academe.

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***Marxism is now  
the opiate  
of Departments of Comparative Literature,  
Cultural Studies,  
and English Literature***

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**Bon mots**

"In Southampton, NY, school administrators abruptly canceled a student production of 'Peter Pan'... [because] Shinnecock Indians protested the immortal song 'Ugg-a-Wugg,' during which the romping British children allegedly demean Native Americans by singing lyrics like 'Ibbity bibbity bibbity sab!'"<sup>1</sup>



**Endnotes:**

<sup>1</sup> Frank Rich, "Forum — Ugg-a-wugg", *Courier-Journal* (Louisville, KY), 15iii94, A9

<sup>2</sup> *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, 3rd ed., licensed from Houghton Mifflin Company by Microsoft Books 1994

<sup>3</sup> Ray Recchi, "Political correctnoids should keep their hands off fairy tales", *Roanoke Times & World-News*, 14iii93, EXTRA4

<sup>4</sup> Linda Burton, "Redefinitions in a broken-down world", *Wall Street Journal* 1xii93

<sup>5</sup> *Chronicle of Higher Education* 1iii96, A33

<sup>6</sup> Kim Sengupta, "Gays take a safari to study animal magic", *Independent* (UK), 29viii97, p.1

<sup>7</sup> Henry H. Bauer, *Scientific Literacy and the Myth of the Scientific Method*, Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992

<sup>8</sup> "Research notes – lesbians, heterosexuals differ in ear function", *Chronicle of Higher Education* 13iii98, A23

<sup>9</sup> "Give & Take", *Chronicle of Higher Education* 14viii98, A31

<sup>10</sup> Kit Lively, "IRS proposes regulations on pay for top officials of private colleges", *Chronicle of Higher Education* 14viii98, A29

<sup>11</sup> "Race question resurfaces", *Inverness Courier* (Scotland, UK), 29viii97, p.3

<sup>12</sup> "School-cross law falls in Germany", *Roanoke Times* 12viii95, p.A4 (AP, Bonn)

<sup>13</sup> Clare Garner, *The Independent* (UK), 29viii97, p.3

**HIS LAST SEMESTER**

He'd been planning to enjoy thoroughly his last semester of teaching. For several years now he'd taught the same two popular courses. One used the video series *The Ascent of Man* which, despite its vintage, struck receptive chords with many of the students. The other was illustrated with slides and videos he had collected over many years, describing bits of unconventional science that many students found interesting.

The classes were taught "back-to-back", 15 minutes apart; so a truly competent and experienced secretary had arranged for them to use the same classroom fitted with video player and slide projector. That secretary went on to better things.

On the first class day of the following semester, the teacher was putting away his notes from the first class and taking out those for the second, when another instructor came in, soon followed by several dozen of her students.

His second class had been shifted, and no one had thought to let him know.

Somewhat intemperately he confronted the Department's Associate Head, who got him back into the same room for both classes. And that, he thought, was the end of *that* hassle.

And so a couple more semesters went by; and his boss asked would he like to teach the same course in his last semester, and he said, "Yes please! Wonderful!" And he meant it.

But then came in the first Management Report for that semester: those back-to-back classes had been assigned rooms in two different buildings.

His boss said he would try to get that fixed. But when the *second* Management Report came in, the teacher's boss confessed that he'd been unable to get the change made.

Yet the teacher *knew* that it *could* be done. He consulted that knowledgeable erstwhile secretary and then took the matter up with the relevant responsible administrative office – being scrupulous to copy his

boss on the transaction. Nevertheless displeased, his boss told a (new, inexperienced) secretary to take the matter from there.

But she too soon left, and the next secretary was quite new to the university and even more inexperienced. Still she did her best, and told our teacher that she'd been able to get him into the same room for both classes.

Two weeks before classes were to begin, however, the teacher again heard from the secretary: "Your second class has been shifted again".

The teacher decided to inspect the two classrooms he'd been assigned, to see whether they were large enough to accommodate the requests, already beginning to come in, from students wanting to force-add the class. To his horror, he saw that neither was equipped with the video and projection facilities that he needed.

Mentioning this to his boss, he was met with a shrug: "You got it changed last time, I'm sure you can get it done again".

But the new and inexperienced secretary a few days later confessed herself unable to get anywhere with the Registrar's Office.

So the teacher told this tale of woe to his boss's boss, who put a more experienced secretary on the job, who a couple of days later forwarded to the teacher this response from the Registrar's Office: "We changed rooms for him last summer already. There are no other rooms available at those times, either with or without projection facilities".

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When the teacher forwarded this to his boss's boss, he got back a heartening response: "We're still working on it. Don't despair."

One of the classes had a limit set of 40 students. The first Management Report showed 60 requests. No one asked the teacher whether he would be prepared to teach a class of 60, though he would have been and though the whole purpose of early Management Reports is to enable such adjustments. No doubt to add insult to injury, a few weeks before classes started, someone added another freshman, and then a junior, changing the class size from 40 to 42 – of

course without consulting the teacher or his department and even though some of the students who had not been able to get in were graduating seniors.

So the injunction from his boss's boss, not to despair, came rather too late. Concerning the management of everyday matters by his boss and his college and his university, the teacher had despaired already long ago. It was only fitting that when he met his first class, in the less-than-adequate room, the perfectly adequate one next door stood unused.

*AVE ATQUE VALE*

**EDITORIAL MOKITA\***

That retiring teacher is, of course, well known to your also-retiring Editor. He writes essentially the unvarnished truth. (His seemingly unconcerned boss, incidentally, has in the meantime for his diligent competence been rewarded by promotion to full professor.)

In another country, when the wench was not yet dead, college administrators and their staff knew that students benefit greatly when their teachers feel appreciated and supported. It's only a few Provosts ago that Tech's Provost would often remark that his job was to please the faculty (and when he went elsewhere as President, the faculty there *were* mighty pleased during his tenure). Conversely, when teachers find that their work is *not* supported, indeed that unreasonable demand is heaped upon inconvenience by "leaders" ignorant of the state of affairs "in the trenches", the low morale and despair of the faculty seeps into their interactions with students.

A couple of decades ago, people retiring from VPI had little but good to say about their erstwhile employer. Not so nowadays with those retiring from Virginia Tech. In a remarkable number of notable instances, staff who served with the utmost loyalty for long periods of time have left feeling badly done by – for more than adequate reason, unfortunately.

- ☞ A former Dean and Department Head wrote me half-a-dozen years ago, "it is good to be away from that place!!... I did take an early retirement there, and simply got away! I had come to the point that I just did not want to see Burruss [Hall, the Central Administration building] again..."
- ☞ A much loved Department Head became second-in-command to a much-disrespected member of the Central Administration, and was properly and unfailingly loyal to him for years. His reward was to be publicly insulted by not being named "Acting" when his boss resigned, and privately insulted by the Search Committee seeking a permanent replacement for his boss.
- ☞ One of the most universally respected of the Department Heads and Deans was *several times* over the years *asked* to become a candidate for one or another administrative position, and each time was treated insultingly when he did become a candidate.
- ☞ A new Dean proceeded to make work so unpleasant for a long-serving and highly appreciated – by faculty and students – Associate Dean for Undergraduate Affairs that the latter took early retirement.
- ☞ The same new Dean peremptorily fired another long-serving Associate Dean, one who has over several decades publicly represented as well as served VPI in a number of prominent roles. He was fired by being handed without any forewarning a letter of dismissal when he came to attend one of the regular staff meetings.

At that time the Commonwealth was offering an attractive early retirement scheme for 12-month administrative staff. That fired Associate Dean wished to take advantage of it. He would have been eligible had his dismissal been deferred by a couple of weeks. His request for such a delay was refused.

Not only former administrators have suffered this sad sort of experience:

- ☞ An outstanding young scholar left because his Department Head was not satisfied with his much lauded publications but expected him also to bring in large grants, no matter that his specialty does not lend itself to grant-grubbing.
- ☞ A most loyal teacher for three decades was promised a small job for a year or two after he retired. Having retired, he immediately saw the promise broken.
- ☞ Several of the university's most Distinguished Professors retired with unfriendly feelings. They had been harassed with demands that they undertake regular undergraduate teaching, though the specification of duties of Distinguished Professor, under which they had been appointed, made such demands improper.

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\* truth that we all know but agree not to talk about; see VS#6, p.20

All these things and more – those lists are, regrettably, far from complete – have occurred at a place that proclaims itself as becoming “the model land-grant university of the 21st century”; a “university putting knowledge to work”, “sharing the power of knowledge”.

Progress there has undoubtedly been; but progress toward **what?** The largest-ever capital campaign was very successful. Virginia Tech’s ranking in football has soared. But its ranking among research universities has faltered, and the climate has become less and less conducive to teaching and scholarship.

What a bargain!

By hindsight, it seems that the rot set in a little over a decade ago. The Mandelstamm Affair (see VS#1) signaled it: the university’s best – and nationally renowned – teacher of huge classes was dressed down and harassed by a newly appointed feminoid Women’s Affairs officer for allegedly offending, through his classroom discourse, less than one percent of his audience. (Would that most teachers could offend so few of their listeners!) What Mandelstamm then found, *over a period of several years*, was that Department Head, Deans, Provost, and President ignored his feelings, his longing to be an appreciated member of the scholarly community. Instead, his administrative “leaders” deferred to the demands, ranting and organized campaigns of the radical feminoids. Thus political correctness came to Virginia Tech, soon to be entrenched by an unscrupulous Director of AA/EEO, Cornel Morton<sup>†</sup>.

The incongruity between high-falutin slogans broadcast by the university and the lack of material and moral support for faculty, staff and general infra-structure brings to mind a family tale. Great-aunt Elsa Reiss was a well known and much praised and loved teacher – see for example the chapter “Miss Elsa and Miss Sophy” in Peter Drucker’s memoirs, *Adventures of a Bystander*. In her younger years she had been courted by a wealthy gentleman. He showed her his rather stately home which included an impressive library – walls of shelves of well-bound volumes in a number of attractive colors – white, brown, red, blue...

“Das nächste Buch wird nun wieder ein Blaues sein”, he remarked during their conversation: “The next book I buy will again be a **blue** one.”

Great-aunt Elsa died a spinster. Never, she said, could she have married a man who was so concerned with externals to the neglect of substance. “Schau’ immer auf’s Inn’re” – “Always look to the essence of a matter” – was one of the sayings she ingrained in my mother and which the latter duly passed on to her children. Even now when I hear “blue book”, it never means to me something in which to write examination answers, it is an exhortation not to be superficial, to keep in mind what really matters.

Virginia Tech would do much better, as a **university**, to eschew the sound-bite slogans and spin-meistering that have become increasingly prominent and to pay more attention – once again, for VPI did so in the past – to what matters in the interactions between students and teachers.

**N**ot, of course, that Virginia Tech is unique in putting Mammon before honest education and in treating despicably some of its most distinguished faculty. Erwin Chargaff had a similar lament<sup>‡</sup> upon retiring from Columbia University after four decades of world-renowned work, some of it essential to Watson-and-Crick’s discovery of the structure of DNA:

[T]he movers came. Certain things had to be left behind because they required individual attention... When we returned, we could not get into the laboratories... all locks had been changed at somebody’s order.

Were I given to metaphorical writing, I should say that what happened, and especially the way in which it happened, has broken my heart.... [But since] at Columbia one left hand never knows what the other does, it was quite fitting that less than six months after they had changed the locks on me at the medical school, the university gave me an honorary doctorate.

As Virginia Tech seeks to become an outstanding university, of the caliber of places like Columbia, could it not try to do as the **best** things are done at Columbia rather than the worst? Is it really inevitable that no left hand here ever seems to know what the other does?

<sup>†</sup> (see VS#6, pp.3-4; VS#13, p.11). Once when I’d agreed to present the unpopular anti-PC case at a public forum, Morton was not present. But he came in at question time and, without having heard anything I said, began his remarks with, “Negative people like Professor Bauer and Jesse Helms...” That earned me some friends. Cornel went on to become Assistant Vice-President for Diversity at Central Michigan University

<sup>‡</sup> Erwin Chargaff, “Vanishing into dust”, *Chronicle of Higher Education* 30v1978, p.48

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