

Students, 'An interruption to their professors'

In his novel, *Good As Gold*, Joseph Heller describes a faculty member who "never spent more time on campus than he had to and never went to faculty meetings."

"He posted a liberal schedule of office hours but did not keep them. Student conferences were by appointment only, and he never made any."

Mr. Heller's fiction portrays a reality. Last year, a guest columnist in *The Rebel Yell*, Christy Johnson, noted that students often "find they are an interruption to their professors' hectic schedules." What are we to think of these negative images?

To legislators, regents and administrators, the solution seems clear—we must beat our faculty into greater classroom productivity with more classes and more students.

This solution is elegant because it absolves the legislators and regents of any blame. The fact is that the decline of teaching is directly related to legislative, regent and administrative actions.

In the '60s and '70s, UNLV was a great teaching university.

The University of Nevada Code made the missions of the university clear: Faculty were to teach their students and serve the community; if there was any time left, research and publication were encouraged.

The mission statement, fashioned by regents and pursued by administrators, was substantiated by a legislative method of funding that allocated monies on the basis of one clear product—numbers of students taught.

The '80s and the '90s brought a drastic change. Everyone realized that to be credible, a university must have substance, must support research and publication.

The University of Nevada Code, as amended in the '90s, honors prior ob-

Guest Column

EVAN BLYTHIN

ligations and funding formulas; state monies to the university continue to be based on teaching loads.

But tenure, merit and promotion became based on publication. The faculty have

been hired to teach, but their job security and advancement depends on a second job—research and publication.

The situation is odd and has led to at least three negative consequences: diminished faculty/student interaction, a depleted faculty and a general erosion of quality in both teaching and research.

These consequences are readily apparent at UNLV and beg for action.

Ms. Johnson's report in *The Rebel Yell* only begins to document the reality of diminished student/faculty interaction.

To survive and advance as a faculty member at UNLV, you must figure out ways of getting out of the classroom.

If you publish and receive release from a class or two, the funding formula assumes that someone else will pick up the classes.

Administrators, too, obtain needed release from classes in order to take care of business—and their classes have to be assumed by other faculty. The more successful you are in administration or research, the more other classes must grow in size.

The pattern leads to ever-larger classes and strategies for dealing with larger and larger numbers of students.

If you are teaching four sections of basic math, and each section has 50 students in it, how do you manage to offer enough office hours to all 200 students? How much time do you have for individual students?

If you are a teacher offering a class that requires writing, just how many papers can you read in a 24-hour day? How much time can you take in the analysis of your students' thoughts

and words?

Ms. Johnson is right, students have become a serious "interruption in professors' hectic schedules."

Ms. Johnson addresses the problem from the student point of view.

A faculty point of view reveals another consequence of a code that hires faculty on the basis of student numbers, but rewards and advances on the basis of research and publication. The faculty are tired—they are working two jobs.

In one of his first tasks as university chancellor, Dr. Jarvis initiated a workload study. The 1994 "Workload Report" indicates that faculty here spend 35 hours a week on classroom activity, which is 58 percent of their university-related work. The other 42 percent of their time is spent on research, service and filling out workload reports.

According to the report, the faculty here are working 60 hour weeks; they are candidates for burnout.

The students see it, the faculty know it, administrators keep it as quiet as possible—but we don't like to talk about faculty burnout.

We don't talk about the chairman who hung himself in his lab, leaving behind a message about the conflicts and overwhelming burdens of trying to be the best teacher, the best administrator and the best researcher possible.

In funding the university on the basis of student numbers while maintaining and rewarding faculty on the basis of research, we diminish student/faculty interaction and we work the burros to the point of exhaustion.

There is one added consequence to the University Code and funding formulas: an erosion of quality in both teaching and research.

In his book, *Khrushchev Remembers*, the former USSR premier talks about troubleshooting in the tire industry. He notes that "we were learn-

ing that if you aim for a level of productivity which deprives a worker of a chance to do quality work, the product will be spoiled."

I have been on the line at UNLV for 26 years and I would argue that the demands of this system are spoiling both teaching and research effectiveness.

The solutions do not reside in beating an already beaten faculty. We need to move our legislators and regents to a code and funding formula that honestly reflects reality.

The code could be changed to reflect the relative equality of teaching, service, and research. The code could point out that faculty members can contribute to teaching, research and service missions in a number of ways: by emphasis in one of the missions, by blending of any two of the three missions or by all engaging in all three missions.

The funding formula for the university system would also have to be changed to reflect the contemporary demands and expectations placed upon a university and its faculty members.

If administration and research are important in a university, and they are, then they should be funded with a formula based on something other than the numbers of students taught.

The system is a mess and the consequences are diminished teaching services, depleted faculty, and erosions of quality. The problems are clear.

The easiest response is to portray the faculty as bad burros who should be forced to even greater efforts. But the problems will not be solved by administrative, regent and legislative posturing.

If we really want a good university, then our code and funding formula need significant review and revision.

—Dr. Blythin has been a teacher, researcher and administrator at UNLV for 26 years.

Politically correct curriculum: Will it get you a job?

PART 2 OF 2

Hand in hand with higher education's own responsibility for the attrition of opportu-

nities for college graduates is another culprit: government regulation. While Clinton panders to the twenty-something

crowd with his expensive AmeriCorps and student loan programs, his administration's regulatory policies are having a baleful effect.

Businesses are forced to spend vast resources on compliance with regulations rather than on expansion and hiring. Take the paper suppliers in North America: P.H. Glatfelter, spent \$180 million to satisfy regulatory requirements. That is \$180 million that will not be spent developing the business or hiring new workers.

The numbers are staggering. There are four times more federal regulations today than in 1965 and 14 times more than in 1950, totaling over 200 volumes and 132,000 pages.

Estimates show regulations costing the U.S. economy over \$500 billion annually. Employment quotas, for instance, set businesses back between five and eight billion dollars annually on direct compliance (government paperwork, mandated advertising in minority newspapers, etc.).

Many billions more, however, are lost in indirect costs due to the diversion of management time, resources and energy.

According to author Thomas Sowell, minorities have not

benefited from this loss. He says the relative economic position of minorities has actually fallen since the United States implemented employment quotas.

As a result of new and existing regulations, the jobs students have counted on are just not there. Rather than pay the price of expansion, businesses are either stagnant or cutting back. During July and August manufacturing jobs declined by an average of 38,000 per month.

Yet in August alone, government increased its payroll by 73,000 jobs. That is 73,000 new bureaucrats to write, revise and enforce regulations which are largely responsible for factories losing 120,000 jobs overall in 1995.

While universities educate students in *The Drama of Homosexuality* (Harvard) and *Spirit Possession, Shamanism, Curing and Witchcraft* (Cornell), the Clinton administration is doing little to plan for the employment needs of future graduates.

For instance, there are one million cosmetology grads who cannot find jobs in their field. Yet this year, there will be 200,000 new cosmetology students, many of whom will seek and receive assistance from

federal loan programs.

While the Clinton administration demands increases in student loan program funding, those funds are not granted to students according to any reasonable estimate of what the market can sustain.

Rather, this administration is more concerned about building demand for federal student loan programs than in planning for employment needs. Consequently, higher education continues to send graduates into ridiculously glutted markets, or no market at all.

Is it a wonder that over 50 percent of May's graduates are still looking for the jobs they hoped their degrees would lead them to? If we continue to ignore the obvious impact of an increasingly politically correct curriculum, staggering new and existing regulations, and poor investment planning with taxpayer dollars on the part of the Clinton administration, recent college graduates, once our brightest hope for the future, will be increasingly unwanted in the workforce.

—Kate Obenshain Griffin is director of Program Development for the Young America's Foundation.

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