

Partners in the Search for Teaching Excellence — Faculty and Administrators

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It is a *sine qua non* that excellence in teaching is a goal to be achieved in all subject matter areas from Agronomy to Zoology. The administrator's role in seeking skillful teachers for the classrooms in a College of Agriculture is thus no less significant than that in any other area of the university.

Teaching is teaching, and it covers the entire spectrum from bad to good wherever it occurs. The responsibility of the administrator is to assure that the good teaching in his college far exceeds the bad and that, hopefully, all poor teaching will be eliminated. Comments by students and alumni suggest that no panacea has yet been discovered to eliminate the lower end of the spectrum. All shades of quality still exist. The administrator plays a key role, however, in determining the direction in which the quality of teaching will move or whether it changes at all.

If one were starting *de novo* to assemble a faculty he would, of course, make every attempt to employ only the most gifted teachers — those with a proven record of excellence in the classroom. Most administrators, however, find that they must begin the task of improving teaching with a given state of the art in their college, and that there is often limited opportunity for the addition of new positions or the replacement of the inept with the skillful. Most administrators would hope that all of our teachers would be like those described by President Glenn Frank during a Welcome Address to the freshman class at The University of Wisconsin in 1925.

"You cannot be long on this campus without discovering the kind of teacher who represents the authentic (university) tradition. The university . . . is not interested in teachers who are mere merchants of dead yesterdays; it covets and captures men who are guides into unborn tomorrows, men who have objects as well as subjects, men who refuse to put conformity to old customs above curiosity about new ideas, men who are not content to be peddlers of petty accuracies when they are called to be priests and prophets of abundant living. You will find among the scholars of these faculties men who know how to be great specialists without becoming specialized men, men who have reverence for their materials, men who have mastered the facts in their respective fields, but men who see that all facts are dead until they are related to the rest of knowledge and to the rest of life. In short, you are to have the **high privilege** of associating with distinguished scholars who know how to 'relate the coal scuttle to the universe,' men who are shepherds of the spirit as well as masters of the mind."¹

Although all of our teachers do not fit this description, there are in most every department one or more individuals who are recognized by their peers and students alike as being outstanding teachers. The characteristics of such individuals are, of course, varied, but they all seem to possess certain common attributes such as a comprehensive knowledge of their subject, an ability to communicate effectively, a genuine interest in students, an intuitive sense of the teachable moment, and a greater desire to teach than to engage in any other endeavor. In other words, it is their life and they want to live it to the fullest. All teachers seem to possess these characteristics to a degree, but it seems to me that their

effectiveness as teachers is directly related to the intensity with which they are imbued with these attributes.

The role of the administrator, given the existence of a nucleus of such gifted teachers on his campus, is to encourage them to assist in any way they can in the development of similar qualities in their colleagues. The place to begin is with the young or newly employed faculty. A regular program can be carried out in each department or subject matter area whereby the talented teacher works with the young teacher during his early years of employment. There is probably no one procedure which will ensure that every newly employed faculty member will develop into an outstanding teacher. But, where one possesses such potential, the chances of it being realized will be greater if he is given the opportunity of working closely with someone who has achieved some measure of success in the art of teaching. Many departments do have such a program and it is the role of the administrator to encourage the continuance of such programs and to encourage other departments to follow their example.

The administrator must continually convey to his faculty that he attaches great importance to good teaching. He must do this not only in word, but in deed as well. Good teaching must be rewarded. There is no longer any place for the cliché that the latter is difficult because good teaching is hard to measure. Good teaching can be measured. The administrator and teachers, however, must work together to identify those who are effective teachers, or are helping others to become effective teachers, and reward them as others are rewarded for excellence of performance.

The following quotations from an editorial in *SCIENCE* further illustrates the importance of faculty and administrators working together in the evaluation of teaching so that good teaching can be rewarded.

"In the short run, various means can be used to increase the number of teachers, but the basic problem cannot be solved unless the status of teaching is enhanced in the eyes of present and prospective faculty members and the supporters of higher education. One point is clear: the status of teaching is not going to be enhanced by lowering the status of research. Any attempt in that direction would deservedly fail. A second point is clear: if great teaching is to be rewarded, the great teachers must be identified. And here there is a problem for those who contend that the quality of teaching is unmeasurable.

"... Yet the fact must be faced: if the prestige of teaching is to be enhanced, there must be agreement on who the good teachers are. As a start, it should be possible on any campus to collect independent ratings, preferably on firsthand evidence rather than on hearsay. If it turns out that there is reasonably high consistency in the judgments, good; the point has been made that the ablest teachers can be identified. If there is no satisfactory consistency, that is another story, but at least the effort would be good local propaganda for calling attention to the importance of teaching.

"The teacher who wishes for enhanced status must therefore make a choice. He can cooperate in efforts to see if the ablest teachers can be identified reliably. If that turns out to be the case, then rewards, privileges,

and other means of enhancing prestige can follow. Or he can insist that good teaching is essentially a private and unmeasurable affair. But he cannot hold this view, plead that the ablest teachers be given special recognition, and also honor consistency."²

A procedure often followed by young faculty to increase their competency in teaching is to audit or sit in on the class of a senior professor in the same course they will be teaching. This has certain advantages and is often helpful. However, unless the young faculty member has given considerable thought before auditing as to how he might conduct such a class, there is the ever present danger that he may become a mimic. Each individual must develop his own personality and use only those procedures and methods which he can effectively employ. The administrator thus must recognize that extra time is needed by the young faculty member in preparation for his instructional assignments. Adjustment in actual contact hour assignments must be made so that adequate preparation will occur.

Visual aids and other devices that the teacher employs must all contribute to the learning process. They should be an extension of the teacher, not an end in themselves. It should never appear that the visuals are employed because it is the vogue or it makes a nice show. Sometimes the visuals are as out of place as in the following example once employed in a student skit to show the absurdity of some things that go on under the guise of teaching.

The actor was discussing the green pigment in plants and said, "This pigment is called chlorophyll and it is green in color. Let me spell that for you," and he quickly placed on an elaborate flannelboard a neatly printed sign which read, "GREEN."

The best visual aids are those which live up to the definition of aids. When properly employed, one remembers the message they conveyed and is not overly conscious of the mechanical devices employed.

Much of our teaching could be improved by the effective use of visuals. Here the administrator can be helpful by recognizing the need to supply funds so that qualified visual artists can be employed to work with faculty in developing visuals for use in the classroom. Many good teachers do not have the time nor the skill to prepare charts, graphs, slides and other visual aids. A staff competent in the preparation of visual aids, working with faculty, can do much to insure that the maximum learning environment will prevail. Expert advice

and assistance by such individuals can also be provided in the development of auto-tutorial programs.

Another procedure that can be employed for the improvement of teaching is to conduct on a college or departmental level, sessions in which faculty present before their colleagues a preview or rerun of one of their classroom meetings. A critique following the presentation would assist the teacher in understanding what aspects of his teaching were most effective. Video taping of the presentation and playback during the critique helps in an understanding of the points of concern expressed.

Opportunity should be provided for faculty to become familiar with the most modern laboratory and classroom designs so that when new buildings are being constructed or old classrooms and laboratories are being remodeled, appropriate facilities can be recommended so faculty who will use these facilities can be most effective.

Administrators should encourage innovation in teaching techniques. An administrative policy for providing faculty with released time to devote to development of new and imaginative teaching programs for their courses would contribute significantly to the improvement of teaching. Faculty often remark that one major deterrent to improvement of teaching or development of innovations is over-commitment to other assignments.

A significant amount of teaching also goes on outside the formal classroom. A strong program of student advising should be developed throughout the college. The administrator needs to make everyone aware that student advising by the faculty is considered a part of the faculty member's responsibilities and that performance in this area will also be recognized and appropriately rewarded.

In the final analysis the quality of instruction is determined at the faculty-student interface. The administrator's role is to use every means available to him to employ individuals who have the greatest potential for becoming outstanding teachers and to encourage teaching improvement and innovation through allocation of time and resources. He must also demonstrate beyond any doubt that excellence in the classroom is rewarded.

¹ Modern Eloquence, Volume VII, New 1932 Edition, Modern Eloquence Corporation, New York, page 159.

²The Great Teachers, SCIENCE, Volume 146, Number 3650, December 11, 1964, (Dael Wolfe).