

A Special Feature Article...

"Scholars and Ghosts"

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No one likes ghosts, but most everyone likes ghost stories. This morning I'd like to take a theme from a famous ghost story. Some of you have read *Hamlet*; others will after coming to Louisiana Tech. But for all of you, this ghost story will have a familiar ring; you have heard it or heard about it before.

The opening scene of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* is at Elsinore, in front of the castle of the Danish King, where it is rumored the night watch has seen on two occasions a Ghost resembling Hamlet, the lately deceased king.

Horatio, a friend of young Prince Hamlet, who is also a student at the University (both had come home for the funeral and remained for the wedding right on the heels of the King's funeral), has no faith in the rumor. Yet, he has, at the request of the sentinels, consented to share the watch with them.

Suddenly, the bell tolls one o'clock and high on the ramparts, the Ghost, exhibiting the unmistakable features of the Old King, appears.

The officer, Marcellus, turns to Horatio, the student, and speaks: "Thou art a scholar; speak to it, Horatio."

The officers and the guards do not have the power to speak to a Ghost. It was believed that exorcisms (ceremonies for the expulsion of evil spirits) were performed in Latin; hence, only by scholars, whose curriculum consisted in the sixteenth century only of Latin.

"Speak to the Ghost, Horatio . . . You have been to school . . . Surely you have learned whatever is necessary to appease this supernatural creature. The ordinary citizens are asleep and unaware of this presence. We of the military are unable to cast him out. But you are a scholar; you speak to it."

With apologies to Shakespeare, I should like to put you on the ramparts of college life, which I hope you will occupy for the next four years at Tech, and point out some of the ghosts, the threats, which walk the ramparts. You will be a scholar; you must speak to the ghosts which interfere with a student's becoming an educated person.

I. GOING TO COLLEGE

I wish I were an artist; I'd present a picture. I'm not, so a word picture will have to do. But if I were an artist, I'd draw these ghosts. The first ghost which threatens the person who wants to be educated is a two-headed one. His name is *Going to College*.

There is the student who comes to Tech with the idea that going to college will pass a miracle. This process looks like magic to him, just as purely magic as the fairy godmother's wand can work. Oh, yes, he knows the magic wand will have to wave for four years, but just going to college will do for him everything he needs to have done. This head of the ghost, though a very flattering view of college, is still a ghost. It needs to be exorcised, or expelled, or spoken to, if the would-be educated person is to become so.

The other head of that first ghost labeled *Going to College* is a less rosy-colored vision. Each year there is at least one person in the freshman class at Louisiana Tech who considers going to college a necessary evil.

"If I'm ever going to get anywhere," he says to himself, "I'll have to crack that closed circle and get that BA or BS stamp on the back of my neck."

To this would-be college graduate the name college graduate is important. He forgets that educated men are manufactured in all kinds of ways — in private study, in work training situations, in correspondence study, by reading alone, by group study in church or other organizations, through enrollment in the school of hard knocks, through travel, through mass media like newspapers or TV.

Until the beginning Tech student has dispelled the two-headed ghost labeled *Going to College*, he's not likely to end his Tech days as a truly educated person. Once you're here, the world will say to you, "You're a student; you must know what going to college means to you," or in Shakespeare's words, "Thou art a scholar; expel that ghost."

II. GETTING THROUGH COLLEGE

If the first ghost had too many heads, the second one would have to be drawn with an excess of legs — let's give him six — for he's in a terrific hurry. This ghost is named *Getting through College*.

Because this ghost haunts each student who plans to come to Tech, let's take a close look at how you will recognize his work. You can tell where he has been and whom he has haunted by listening to student conversations:

—In the registration line, in answer to the question, "Are you a senior?" there comes the heartfelt answer, "I wish I wuz!"

—In the Student Center, the question, "Are you going to student devotions down at Wesley?" brings the answer, "My churchgoing's got to wait for June; from now to then, I've got to hit the books."

—In a dormitory, when a formerly active high school citizen is asked to run for a class office, there comes the response, "Who, me? With a chemistry major? You've got to be kidding!"

—In the post office, to no one in particular, "No letter again. Looks like they'd know at home how busy I am and keep the news and the green stuff coming even if I haven't written."

—On a campus bench, while a guest group performs in the auditorium, "I need the relaxation more than I need the culture."

Each speaker has seen the ghost named *Getting through College*. As soon as he has completed that four-year sentence labeled college, he'll start living, really living. He'll be a more respectable age, he'll be religious, he'll be a good citizen, he'll improve himself on his own, he'll be a decent family member, he'll acquire culture with a capital K — yes, he will, he says. But will be — with four years of nothingness in these areas of life? And, worse still, he's assuming he will be around to pick up all these threads. Let's ask him to get that in writing, shall we?

The ghost of *Getting through College* rides across the scene on every campus, through all years of a college career. He has been seen out beyond college in statements like these: When I have finished that first job — When I get married — When I get the house paid for — When the children are in school — When that last one is through college — When I — When I —

The world will say to you, as a college student, "You're a student; college life is life, too, now," or in Shakespeare's words, "Thou art a scholar; get rid of that ghost *Getting through College*."

III. GRABBING THAT C

Again, if I were an artist, the third ghost would have at least six hands, neatly manicured, cautious hands, at the end of very short arms, not able to reach far, but grabby just the same. This ghost, a gentlemanly type, in spite of his grabby tendencies, is named *Grabbing that C*. He inhabits the best of us, for after all, average is good enough, and he speaks for every student at some time or another in words like these:

—How many pages do I have to read?

—On both sides?

—How long does the essay have to be?

—What do you count off if it's 249 words instead of 250?

—How many tardies make one absence?

—One more cut, then I'm stuck in class for the semester.

* * *

Unfortunately, this ghost inhabits the working world also in terms of:

—When can I retire?

—What's the quota?

—Friday's the best day for sick leave; you've got a long weekend that way.

The ghost of *Grabbing That C* sounds so harmless. After all, C will keep you out of deans' offices and off probation, in social organizations and out of the blacklist. C is average and what does it get you to try harder? If, by chance, you should miss that C by one point, there is always Basketweaving you can take to gather quality points. And in this area, there's a little danger that a Navajo would enroll in a class like Basketweaving and raise the curve so high everyone else fails!

This is a world in which excellence is needed as never before. All of us see how necessary excellent quality is in building, in behaviour, in performance. All of us bemoan the sloppy product built to sell, not to last; the punk who feeds on the good nature of society; the thief who robs our homes. Yet, by someone's standards, there is probably an average sloppy product, an average type punk, an average run-of-the-mill thief.

This morning human life is orbiting the earth in a man-made gadget. How would you like to take that chance if the vehicle whirling through space had been made by people who thought average was good enough? In this assembly you are sitting in a man-made building, under a rather long reach of steel and concrete. Don't you rather hope that the builder considered average something less than good enough? And did anyone include in his breakfast a pretty good egg? We don't even tolerate mediocrity in the efforts of a chicken.

Now will someone explain to me how we have come to decide that average is good enough in scholarly pursuits, that the get-by is all we need in academic circles, that a pass will do? Why do we, aiming

at the ranks of the educated, decide that nobody should appear too eager, too intelligent, too conscientious, too ambitious, too well-motivated? The ghost of *Grabbing That C* has been at work. As a would-be educated person, you will hear the world charge you, "You're a student; we expect your best," or, in Shakespeare's words, "Thou art a scholar; speak to that ghost."

IV. GRAVITATING TOWARD A CURRICULUM

The fourth ghost has an open mouth and a huge torso. He has sat still and swallowed anything and everything that came along. Some of it weighed little, others a lot. As a result, what's happened to him is what happens to anyone who swallows often and moves little — his sand settles. This ghost can be named *Gravitating toward a Curriculum*. Once his sand has settled, there he sits.

Let's look briefly at a hypothetical student who enters college. He doesn't choose a curriculum, a program of work, not even a general one. He just enrolls and takes the line of least resistance. First he discovers that he does not have to choose Saturday classes. Next he discovers that 8 o'clocks are not in the must category either. Lo and do tell, some teachers prove to be not quite so hard as others. Also, in some courses he need not buy a textbook. In others, library readings are scarce. Some fields involve laboratory hours, others don't. A friend is a whiz and can help him through a certain area. This may go on for three years or so before someone corners this flitting creature long enough to choose a major and a minor in an effort to organize his program of work. With his chewing a bit here, swallowing whole a chunk there, and nibbling away in the other corner, about the only thing that remains to be done is to count up what he's swallowed, then pile in enough more to call him a candidate for sitting and swallowing for another year.

Of course, the picture is overdrawn, but the ghost of *Gravitating toward a Curriculum* threatens every sincere would-be educated person. We have been taught to honor an education, to respect colleges. It is very easy to go one notch further to the conclusion that everything in a college program is equally valuable to everyone, therefore it does not matter what you take. That's the work of this ghost named *Gravitating toward a Curriculum*. He sounds like a relative of the earlier three ghosts; he is, with even the same initials.

The world around you will demand of you, "You're a student; you should make an intelligent choice," or in Shakespeare's words, "Thou art a scholar; exorcise that ghost."

V. GRADUATING TOO COMPLETELY

The last ghost I would like to parade past you this morning will not walk past you during college days; he'll roll. He's called *Graduating Too Completely* and he's as

round as a two-foot snowball after 27 third graders have rolled it down a hill. He can very well be round; the force of his trip has thrown off all the loose ends and wrapped the bundle as neatly as possible. There's no individuality about him; any effort of the same size would produce another like him.

There are ways of finding out who has been influenced by this ghost of *Graduating Too Completely*. The college student who has given this ghost house room can be identified by these habits:

- He *sells his texts* at the end of each semester.
- He owns no other books, not even a dictionary.
- His notebooks are passed along to a friend.
- His test or exam papers have long since reached the wastebasket.

COOKEVILLE—A team from Tennessee Technological University has won the Southeastern Regional Soil Judging Contest sponsored by the American Society of Agronomy.

Tech scored 1717 points to 1680 for second-place University of Tennessee. Clemson University was third with 1673. Other schools, in order of finish, were North Carolina State University, University of West Virginia and the University of Kentucky.

—Reading cards, reports, themes, and laboratory workbooks have filled garbage cans regularly.

—No home addresses or telephone numbers of friends clutter his little black book.

—The alumni news won't reach him.

—His two years of *Tech Talk* to alumni can stay on campus.

—Homecoming Day will find him on the lake, not the campus.

—Three years after Commencement Day he will recognize no one who taught him or who shared his dormitories and classrooms.

He's self-sufficient, like our snowball ghost; he has been graduated completely and has rolled out of sight of his college with all loose ends cast off, with all attachments thrown away. The ghost of *Graduating Too Completely* was certain to

appear to him, for he had been troubled by the other ghosts with the same initials:

Going to College;

Getting through College;

Grabbing That C;

Gravitating toward a Curriculum.

For four years he had ignored the world around him when it said to him, quietly, often, and with deadly earnestness, "Thou art a scholar; speak to the ghost."

My wish for you is that throughout four years at Louisiana Tech, you will, when threatened by any one of these ghosts, listen to some small, urgent, earnest voice which says to you, "Thou art a scholar; speak to it."

*An address to Tech Day Assembly for high school seniors. Louisiana Polytechnic Institute, December 10, 1965.

Tech's Harold Carpenter of Greenback, Tenn., was the high-point individual with a 607 score. Other members of the winning team were Roger Black, Jamestown; John Bryant, Bone Cave of Van Buren County, and Don Grady, Oldfort, Tenn. Wilbur Frye of the university's agronomy faculty is team coach.

Tech and U. T. are eligible to enter the National ASA Soil Judging Contest, scheduled at Cornell University next May.

The regional contest was held at Virginia Polytechnic Institute Oct. 21-22. Teams were required to evaluate basic physical properties of soil and make interpretations from the properties regarding other characteristics of the soil.

Students judged such properties as texture, structure, infiltration capacity, water - supplying capacity, surface runoff of water, and color of the soil.

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