

# REACHING THROUGH TEACHING

A NEWSLETTER HIGHLIGHTING CLASSROOM PHILOSOPHY AND PRACTICE AMONG KENNESAW'S FACULTY

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THE EDITOR CONSIDERS . . .



## WHEN THE FLAME FLICKERS

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*“ . . . For the candles you set burning, Lighting paths of love of learning, Kennesaw we will cherish thee . . . ”*

There it is, tucked away in the first stanza of Kennesaw's Alma Mater, that often-used metaphor equating teaching with fire. It's a good comparison. Good teaching should glow with the fire of enthusiasm and radiate a warmth produced both by the love of the subject matter and the love of students. Teaching (and learning) can be like the slow, controlled burn of a candle, like the fast, controlled burn of an acetylene torch or, occasionally, like the urgent burn of a firecracker fuse, where there is that expectant rush ending in a eureka experience — an explosion of the mind!

The problem is, tapers burn to the candlestick, torches run out of fuel and firecracker fuses get soggy and fizzle. So it is with the fire in the bellies of teachers. Who among the seasoned faculty has not experienced it at one time or another? Faculty who have been spared burnout symptoms could

be counted on Venus de Milo's fingers. Lack of interest in that lower division course we've taught forty times, apathetic attendance to faculty meetings, passive committee involvement, dread of advisement sessions and lackluster attempts at our research projects all signal a flickering of the flame that drives us as professors of our chosen and cherished disciplines.

What are we to do? Whatever burns is ultimately consumed. How do we keep from letting our lights go out too soon? Let us approach the solution negatively by pointing out some things to avoid.

**Avoid a vacuum.** Even a professor of music knows that fire, deprived of oxygen, dies immediately. If we, as faculty, keep to ourselves too much and fail to feed intellectually upon one another's ideas, we shut off one of our most vital resources. Sharing of ideas is the intellectual oxygen of an academic community. Serendipity often occurs when we, in a simple exchange with a colleague outside our field, share some question or problem about teaching. Perhaps we have all but given up finding a solution. But that colleague, by looking at the world from a different perspective, almost off-handedly provides the answer. The reason this doesn't happen more is that we don't try it more. The fresh breeze of a different point of view can bring the

needed oxygen which fans one's flame back to life.

**Avoid wind tunnels.** In too strong a blast one of two things happens to fire: it is made to burn too rapidly and dies too soon, or else it is snuffed out in an instant. Wind tunnels are everywhere in academe, especially where a highly motivated faculty is found. The feel of the rushing winds of activity may be exhilarating to a point, but good judgement must prevail. We have our flames fanned too fast when we overload ourselves in any way. If one major project is so desirable, then two must be twice as good. The tendency always to say yes, even when we should say no, can often place us in the position of having our candles blown out. “Know thyself,” is good advice. Know what your productive limits are. Do not, for very long, exceed those limits.

**Avoid wet blankets.** Oh yes, the Indians used them effectively to send smoke signals (an early form of the memo), but they are not useful commodities when trying to impart light and warmth. Thankfully, a wet blanket is seldom encountered at Kennesaw. Those few we meet have only lapsed temporarily into that state. Wet blankets put out fires by covering them with doubt, criticism and gloom. Avoid the wet blanket at all cost. Otherwise you may see your dreams about teaching go up in smoke. (cont. pg. 11)

