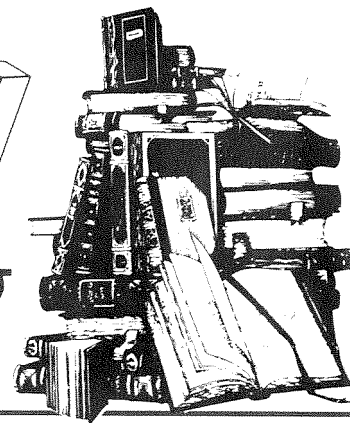


Reaching THROUGH Teaching

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Postcards from Bankers, Doctors and Video Store Operators

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*Excerpts from Keynote Address at the Georgia Conference
on College and University Teaching, April 1996*

*Last December, John Lancaster wrote in the New Yorker of a plethora of books appearing that bore the title "The End of..." as in Peter Ward's *The End of Evolution*, Jeremy Rifkin's *The End of Work*, and Simon Garfield's *The End of Innocence*. Lancaster noted that we have a special attachment to millennia—"epochs when people believe that the world (or at least the world with which they are familiar) is coming to an end."*

Many in higher education sense (and some proclaim loudly) that we are nearing the end of one age in higher education and are about to embark upon a new era. For some, this occasions much remorse, if only because the coming age seems so novel and so much more uncertain and threatening than the one we have lived through.

I come to you with a modest suggestion, that we think about the future of college teaching by looking to the experiences of other professions that have undergone, are undergoing and will undergo similar types of transformations as are frequently predicted for ours. The analogies are stretched, but I ask that you indulge me in considering the transitions or, as those who have experienced these changes suggest, the abrupt and radical departures that have come to some sectors of contemporary American life and the roles of the people in those sectors.

Bankers: From "Closed Wednesdays" to "Open 24 Hours a Day"

You all remember the banks of your childhood: the imposing marble and granite monuments that occupied prominent sites in downtowns of every major city and small town. They opened at 9 a.m., closed at noon Monday through Friday, reopened at 2 p.m., except on Wednesdays, when they closed for the rest of the day.

Developments of the last few years have had profound impact on the banking industry. Stand-alone branch banks are closing while grocery stores are rapidly becoming favored locations for branches.

The parallels between the banking industry and higher education may not be readily apparent, but indulge me. Colleges and universities were housed in bucolic settings with lush grounds and structures of architectural significance. They operated mostly in fall, winter and spring, and on a four-and-one-half day schedule. Classes took place at fixed times and in set places. Consider also the centrality of teaching and faculty in higher education. Even in community colleges teaching, not learning, held priority.

This is not to suggest that higher education, any more than banking, has failed to

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CAMPUS CONNECTIONS: *We are A Community of Learners*

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Students, classrooms and pedagogies have changed since we began our educational odseys. The accouterments of higher education are rapidly changing, but the reason we entered this profession remains the same: we want to teach and we want our students to learn. The reality is that teachers must keep learning to keep students learning.

The strong participation of colleagues in the university system at the recent Georgia Conference on College and University Teaching, held at Kennesaw State University, reflected our commitment to both teaching and learning. Participants in the conference represented 27 institutions of higher education. An examination of the session evaluations indicated to me that the information discussed at the conference needed to be shared with a larger audience of teachers who are committed to their profession. This issue of *Reaching Through Teaching* was written by colleagues who presented their ideas, philosophies and strategies at the teaching conference. •

change to accommodate “clients.” Remember that branch bank? Reflect on the growing number of off-campus sites at which classes are now offered. Consider the ATMs and compare those to the growing number of courses offered via video cassette, cable television, GSAMS, the World Wide Web, and the like.

These efforts notwithstanding, the needs of learners, not teachers, will occupy center stage and colleges and universities will either adapt to that new focus in how they operate or else see truly viable competitors and alternatives emerge.

Instead of assuming, as most institutions do now, that students have relatively abundant time that can be used in a flexible manner to respond to classes and services offered, we will need to recognize that time is a very scarce commodity for students and that education should be available at various times and at remote places.

Doctors: Finding vs. Creating a Better Class of Patients

We may look back on the period from the end of the Second World War to the latter part of the 1990s as the “golden age of doctors.” After WWII, doctors’ status rose, their incomes improved greatly and they became “miracle workers” of contemporary professions.

By the early 1990s, questions of increasing urgency were being asked of health care providers and the medical profession in particular, especially with respect to what was viewed by many as alarming increases in the costs of health care.

Physicians who only recently held tremendous status and more or less dictated the financial terms of most aspects of health care are now employees of HMOs and see that the costs to be paid for services are no longer accepted, but are determined by third parties, primarily insurance companies.

What the medical profession faces now is a rather daunting task: nothing less than the creation of a healthier class of patient to avoid the higher costs of dealing with the effects of everything from smoking to bad diet to stress. The health care system must also intervene earlier in the lives of individuals and be active partners with other public service providers.

There is a parallel between the world of doctors and the task confronting teachers in higher education. Colleges and universities

used to be presented with a “better class” of student because most of the people who sought entry were the offspring of families who were themselves educated; hence, students were better prepared for college than are current enrollees. Now we too face the challenge of creating more learners from among an extraordinary diversity of people.

We too are told it is our responsibility to engage students much earlier and well before entry to college. Partnerships with faculty from K-12 are deemed essential. Rather than wait and enroll students not pre-

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pared for collegiate learning, we in post secondary education are admonished to get involved with the schools and thereby prevent the problem from arriving on our doorsteps.

But the cost of higher education does persist as a major public issue, especially as the cost index from college exceeds that of the consumer price index. The response to date has been to add costs of new ways of teaching and learning, especially the cost of information technology, to existing costs. “Efficiency” and “productivity” are terms as alien to higher education as they were to the world of health care.

And although few faculty and staff are insensitive to the prices charged for attending college, few can tell you the actual cost of a course or of a year of study. Moreover,

since our costs are not as yet “unbundled,” costs of different elements in a college education are often difficult to sort out. A tough truth is that the principal costs in the price of college are salaries and new technology. So when the search begins for ways to lower prices or at least reduce the rate of their growth, special scrutiny has to turn to personnel costs.

Health care in America is undergoing very rapid change and we need only listen in on a few conversations with physicians, nurses and other health care professionals to glean some sense of what we in higher education might expect.

Video Stores: One Generation Industry

Virtually everyone can recall the opening of the first video store in their neighborhoods. Most of us will also witness the closing of the last video store. In less than one generation, an entire industry will have emerged, prospered and disappeared. Consider also that VCRs succeeded in permeating American households despite the fact that their use was anything but “user friendly.” People were and are prepared to endure enormous frustration to have the convenience and control of viewing programs on demand. One observer noted that home computers are destined for success since those devices are far easier to use than VCRs.

If I am correct in my forecast for video stores, are there lessons to be learned for those of us in education?

A fairly large number of the nearly 4,000 post secondary institutions that now operate came into existence within the last 30-40 years. I anticipate that fewer than half will exist by the year 2015. Moreover, the various off-campus centers that now serve students in order to solve the problem of geography will also go the way of the small video stores. When so much information in so many forms is available to so many people at so many places on terms and at times that each person can determine, will we still need to congregate for learning to take place or will it suffice that participants to a learning experience interact either directly and personally or synchronously and vicariously?

The Real Messages from the Postcards

If my postcards from bankers, doctors and video store operators have any relevance, I am tempted to inquire of you, “Are
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you pondering what I'm pondering?" Allow me to suggest a few lessons I distill from the experiences of my colleagues.

First, we will not, we cannot, avoid the forces of change that have so altered other professions. College professors enjoy special status in the eyes of most Americans,

"We cannot overcome in a few quarters or semesters the learning deficiencies of twelve or more years of elementary and secondary education."

but so do doctors and bankers, and they are experiencing wrenching changes to everything they do. Will change be as profound for us? I think so. Consider that our current system emphasizes very much the role of the teacher in the instructional process.

If we shift emphasis to the needs and the constraints of the learner, imagine the changes that could occur. By acknowledging that different persons learn in different ways and at different paces, we would create learning experiences that accommodate those differences and seek to expand the diversity of ways by which learners interact, but not necessarily congregate.

I have used the term "bundling" several times. If we accept the needs of students, especially their need to renew education and training on a more or less continuous basis throughout their lives, then we should consider "unbundling" what we now think of as courses and curricula and disaggregating them into smaller, more finite bodies of knowledge and competencies which students could select to acquire instead of an entire course or curriculum.

The "unbundling" of education also implies that we would "unbundle" our pricing.

If a student only requires a portion of what I will call a "learning experience," then it will be difficult to defend charging for an entire course.

We cannot overcome in a few quarters or semesters the learning deficiencies of twelve or more years of elementary and secondary education. You will work closely and on a sustained basis with our colleagues from P-12 schools to ensure that students arrive for college ready to learn at higher levels.

Recognizing that those of us in public higher education have an obligation to prepare students for a world beyond our campuses, you will welcome employers and "lay persons" from that world, listen carefully to what they say they need of citizens and employees to be successful as businesses and communities. You will engage these people as more or less permanent sounding boards for assessing the effectiveness of our learning processes.

Whether we like it or not, the period in American history when public education was deemed most effective and therefore worth investment was when our schools and colleges "fit" with the needs of the industrial economy. That economy has gone and we did not change quickly enough and so are seen as not being effective. But if we invite persons from the worlds outside our campuses to become part of us, and we in turn encourage faculty to be part of those "outside" worlds, we can more surely address needs and, I believe, retain our vital role.

There is and will be a place in colleges and universities for lectures and conventional seminars and technology may be only a supplement or support or even be absent. Some students do learn best in those environments and they too can and should be accommodated.

The experiences of our colleges and universities for lectures and conventional seminars and technology may be only a supplement or support or even be absent. Some students do learn best in those environments and they too can and should be accommodated.

But the experiences of our colleagues in other professions suggest to me that we should begin now to move technology to more of a central role in the learning process. Another more practical reason for using information technology as a central element in future learning is that that technol-

ogy may be the only way of dealing effectively with the dramatic increases in the numbers of learners who might show up at our doors, real and virtual.

"I left this state a quarter century ago after being one of the 48 per cent of all high school graduates in the late 1960s who went onto college. Today, slightly more than half of all high school seniors enroll in post secondary education. Not much progress, it seems."

"And what about college teaching here in Georgia...?"

Those of you who have been part of Georgia post secondary education for a decade or more are very much aware of the current frenzy of activity. Veterans relate to me that everything seems to be in flux, with

heard, for example, that converting from quarters to semesters carried a price tag of \$13 million for one institution even though most colleges and universities have operated for many years now on a semester calendar. If that change is difficult and expensive, what will happen when we take on what I consider to be far more challenging changes?

Reflect, if you will, on the fact that Georgia with a population of 7 million operates 115 public and private colleges and universities, while Virginia, with only slightly fewer people, has 86 institutions. Moreover, most observers would likely rate Virginia higher education as stronger than that of Georgia.

Consider also that Virginia public colleges and universities have the dubious honor of charging the highest tuition in the southeastern United States and still our colleagues there relate how painful the past decade has been for them and how desperate many of them view their current state of affairs. How will we respond when the current strong economy weakens or when the remarkable support provided by state leaders to education ebbs?

We have invested millions in GAMS interactive video and only begun to exploit its capabilities and the passage of the Telecommunications Act of 1996 promises to make possible far more advanced video and teleconferencing within a few months. Atlanta's and, to a lesser extent, Georgia's telecommunication system is, as the public relations pronounces, one of the best to be found and may afford us opportunities for its use that surpasses most other parts of the country.

But we are struggling to make some faculty comfortable with computers; how will they respond to providing learning opportunities to remote sites via teleconferencing?

Moreover, catching up to other states and their institutions' practices may only take us down paths that are not only well-trod but which also lead to places I am not sure I wish to be. I applaud, for example, the raising of admission standards and we elected to do so in advance of any mandate.

The change we here in Georgia face is, at once, formidable and timely. I left this state a quarter century ago after being one of the 48 per cent of all high school graduates in the late 1960s who went onto college. Today, slightly more than half of all high school seniors enroll in post secondary

education. Not much progress, it seems.

I am very grateful for the undergraduate education I received here in Georgia, but experience and perspective tell me that that education was not as good as those received by my counterparts in many other states. I feel certain that my alma mater is producing far superior graduates today, but I am sure that that university and my college are not good enough.

“Just as important as money is the encouragement of innovation. The urgency with which some leaders and decision makers in Georgia view the state of public education is causing them to consider alternative ways of doing things.”

I, for one, continue to hear complaints about the competence of American's college graduates wherever they come from. Being among the best when the best is deemed wanting is not good enough. And catching up to the rest when the rest remains ill-prepared for the world in which they will live and work is difficult but surely not what we should aspire to accomplish.

No, our challenge is far more formidable. We should aspire to do nothing less than to transform teaching, learning, and the ways we administer Georgia colleges and universities. If we want to maintain the pace of economic growth here and improve the quality of life for more Georgians, we should begin by asking ourselves what will be required for students to learn effectively and efficiently 5-10 years from today and then again thereafter for the rest of their lives.

Their learning, not our teaching, must be our first and principal concern and we need to start now to bring about the changes needed to make even more productive learning happen.

Take heart, however. The task before is indeed a challenge and a formidable one at that, yes; but the timing could not be better. I discern a real change in the attitudes of public leaders here in Georgia. They know that the future of this state rests with the quality of its citizenry and its workforce and does not depend on ownership of natural resources *per se*. I hear concerns expressed about the quality of education in Georgia, but I also hear expressions of commitment to seeing to improvement.

No clearer indicator of this state's commitment to education and its improvement is available than the H.O.P.E. program. No state in the nation other than Georgia provides pre-kindergarten education for all four year-olds. No other state provides funds for the costs of tuition, fees, and books for any student who earns a B average. No other state is investing the equivalent of an additional 10 percent of its total annual budget in education.

Just as important as money is the encouragement of innovation. The urgency with which some leaders and decision makers in Georgia view the state of public education is causing them to consider alternative ways of doing things. Now, this is not and likely will not be license to experiment whole cloth: Georgia public education at all levels is not noted for *laissez faire* administration. Given a chance to become charter schools and be free of virtually all state rules and regulations, only three schools have done so thus far in Georgia and most observers consider the legislation that authorized charters to be more restrictive than those passed in other states.

Still, the time is ripe for some colleges and universities to break free of old habits and practices and to try and create new ways of teaching, yes, but more importantly, new ways for students to learn. My sense is that faculty are out there in our colleges and universities ready to experiment and to create. I believe that the leadership of this state will sanction and support experimentation and innovation. Students seem to me eager to experience alternative ways of learning. All of the elements are in place, now is the time to begin to change. •