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Corporatization of Higher Education: the Move for Greater Standardized Assessment Programs

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Manuscript

Corporatization of Higher Education: The Move for Greater Standardized Assessment Programs

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Preface

I have grown weary of authors, particularly authors of non-fiction, who tell us how much their work has been a "labor of love." There is no denying that writing can, and likely should indeed involve a passion for a given subject, but academic writing, at least sometimes, can involve as much angst over a lack of understanding of why more people aren't interested in what interests the author, as it does passion for the subject matter. I have had a love/hate relationship with the writing of this book. I have loved parts of it, struggled through others, but mostly, I've written it because of a need I've perceived to defend the virtue of my profession and address the hypocrisy so ever present in many of those who "assess" it. All too often people take "principled" stands less out of principle than out of the reality that the principle might get them out of doing something they view as burdensome. I am hopeful that any such beliefs one might have about me, might be overcome by the nature of my arguments. I am confident that the reader will be able to discern that this is not a case of self-interest presenting itself as principle.

As so often happens to our best laid plans, life tends to get in the way and sometimes renders our discussions irrelevant by the time we really devote the effort to "assess" our positions on the issues of the day. In this instance life has, of course, gotten in the way of mere "academic" arguments, but this time life events have only buttressed the arguments made in this work. This is a book about higher education and not a book about politics but as all readers have no doubt experienced, politics is a way of life within all institutions and is certainly a part of all of that happens in social policy. The political nature of human interaction may explain our tendency to seek accountability for some, but not for others, as it is only natural to be more forgiving of

friends and less tolerant of those with whom we don't have positive personal relationships. The political nature of things can be seen in institutions throughout society, but perhaps nowhere can it be seen as importantly and as symbolically as it is within the executive branch of government. The President of the United States commutes the sentence of a political crony who may or may not have had something incriminating to say about the administration. Perhaps it is only cynical to presume that the President has encouraged obstruction of justice and has actively participated in covering up his and his Vice-President's role in quieting critics of the Iraq war. Perhaps his commutation of Scooter Libby's sentence is nothing more than the legitimate exercise of his power in pursuit of "justice." In either event, the victim seems to be the "culture of accountability." The President, the Vice-President, and now Scooter Libby do not (beyond probation and a fine) need to be accountable to the public for their actions. It would seem to betray common sense that these individuals are, in any way, contributing to a culture of accountability. Indeed, it would seem likely that, symbolically if not realistically, this administration has taken yet another step towards illustrating for the rest of us that not everyone pays for their sins, and that crime does actually sometimes pay. As I write this section, the Democratic Congress threatens to hold hearings "investigating" the commutation of Scooter Libby. Those opposed to those hearings are not saying "bring it on, nothing wrong has been done," but instead seek to shift the focus upon pardons and commutations handed down by past Presidents. In essence, if you investigate me, prepare for me to investigate you and those you support: mutual assured destruction as deterrence theory. It is difficult to become enthusiastic about accountability in such an atmosphere. Is genuine accountability all but dead? Is it true that only dupes and naïve persons actually pay all of their taxes, and that the vast majority of citizens

fudge those numbers here and there? Who among us says to others "Criticize me, follow me around, take a look at all that I do and hold me accountable." Yet many among us seek to hold "others" accountable, from those with whom we work to those in front of us in the supermarket. In this case, educators are those "others" upon whom this book is focused. Almost forty years ago, Postman & Weingartner (1969) wrote eloquently about accountability as it pertains to education and the "subversive" nature of genuine education. Their words, far better than mine, pertain even more to education in our present climate:

> "In our society, as in others, we find that there are influential men at the head of important institutions who cannot afford to be found wrong, who find change inconvenient, perhaps intolerable, and who have financial or political interests they must conserve at any cost" (p. 2).

Accountability, therefore, is all good, so long as it pertains to those who might be considered less than influential. If questioning becomes subversive in this context, as Postman and Weingartner suggested, then it remains to the educators to promote that subversive and inconvenient truth that questions things which need to be questioned. Assessment needs to be questioned, not as a concept in itself, but insofar as we need to understand whose interests are being furthered and what agenda is being advanced. To not understand the agenda of assessment is really not to understand the very nature and purpose of that assessment, and with that level of misunderstanding…what could possibly be the point of assessment?

I presume that any higher education book which concerns the topic of "assessment" may be less a labor of love than a cry for help. The help I'm seeking is for the reader to consider the proper place and proper form of assessment in higher education. That we should assess the work that we do is not in question, for that is a given. That the students should continue to evaluate our

methods and even, sometimes, our madness, is again, not in dispute here. What is a concern is the on-going and growing louder drumbeat for "external" assessment, done by people who know a college when they see one, but they have seldom if ever liked what they have seen. It may not behoove the future of the professoriate or of higher education more generally to feature increased assessment by those who consistently diminish the value of higher education.

It's not that the criticism of my profession has been so overwhelming that it has consumed my ability to function day-to-day, but it has cast a disheartening shadow over what I still believe to be among the most honorable of professions: the professoriate. If the professoriate loses what prestige it still carries, and education continues to lose its status as the one method of upward mobility as well as the most likely means of achieving an examined life, and therefore a life worth living, then all of us can look forward to a very different society. One in which less reflection will lead to less debate, less challenge, and almost inescapably, more and more flawed public policy.

I hope that this new work will contribute to the debate centering upon whether or not greater assessment within higher education serves a practical purpose toward the enhancement of undergraduate education. I also believe that it might increase the scrutiny given to "mandates" both real and perceived that higher education must be made over to conform to the image of corporate America, increasingly seen as our "structural role model" by more trustees and administrators alike. Ultimately, I sincerely believe that there exists a need for a book describing why much of how we attempt to assess higher education programs actually devalues rather than adds value to the educational experience for students and professors alike. This is a book about the dangers of the triumph of style over substance within academia, and as practiced by what

“corporate” America does, from the Executive branch of Government to more typical corporate America. While academia has been encouraged to focus more upon “real assessment” it is really merely another symptom of our society’s increasing value of more and more style and less and less substance.

I further hope this will serve as a foundation for what will become an on-going debate about assessment within higher education. As of now, assessment is treated like motherhood and apple pie…never questioned, always valued. Perhaps it is time to question what assessment will really mean, long term, or at least what it may mean, if we don’t properly create, use, and evaluate assessment measures.

There are, of course, two strands of higher education assessment which need our consideration: (1) assessment of the professoriate; and (2) assessment of our students. Both strands need to be assessed with a level of fairness and neutrality that so far at least doesn’t seem to exist. This book focuses upon the professoriate and the context within which professors practice their crafts. It will do so by considering the larger context in which we operate, a context in which “No Child Left Behind” and other aspects of the “accountability movement” have garnered much press and consequently, much public attention. Given the “No Child Left Behind” focus of this President and his government, and the on-going criticism of this program, this book is written to begin to develop and shape the debate at the collegiate level. It is finally time to address critically what “No Child Left Behind” and what “teaching to the test” might mean conceptually to higher education.

Accrediting agencies focus upon assessment and colleges and universities fear those agencies, and thus…the cycle begins, whether or not the time spent on higher education

assessment has any real value or impact upon improving higher education. Berliner and Biddle's work *The Manufactured Crisis*, is an excellent book concerning the motives of some behind the creation of a "crisis" but that is really the only book that received anything approaching a level of success in addressing the critics of education. This book addresses critics of higher education, and particularly critics whose own credibility should, it would seem, call into question their reasons for addressing the perceived and real shortcomings within higher education. Knowing the source is critical in assessing any bit of information. Students are taught to critically assess sources they might use in the writing of any paper. Knowing the source is also very mainstream advice, as often when confronted with criticism or with any number of surprising statements, a common refrain is "consider the source." We've done too little of that in higher education when it comes to understanding and analyzing the many negative things that are said about us…it's time we indeed "consider the source." Shulman (2006) wrote *Undermining Science* in which he assessed the degree of suppression and distortion in the Bush administration when it came to scientific inquiry. Shulman's book centered upon scientific knowledge about the environment, AIDS, stem cells, and other issues in which "scientific fact" cannot be disputed (or should not be disputed); this book centers upon something far less scientific, but in which the suppression of facts known and the distortion of other "facts" seems to still play a significant role. All of this is must be taken in the context of the words of the ex-surgeon general, Richard Carmona, who similarly lambasted the Bush Administration over their approach of burying any information he might put forth which didn't fit into their ideological, theological or political agenda. Carmona asserts that he was told, for example, not to speak out concerning stem-cell research during public debate over that issue. Again, it seems that accountability to anyone, even "friendly"

critics has been rendered as unacceptable in this administration (Lee, 2007, p. A01).

Education is perhaps more art than science, (a "fact" debated by a number of authors over the years), but Shulman's book is an important point of departure for this work for another reason: "consider the source." If the Bush administration has been willing to distort "facts" known to those in science, imagine the possibilities of distortion that might lie in other less accurately assessed endeavors. The Bush administration is not the only group of persons blameworthy in assessing the assessors, but their positions of power and authority make them worthy candidates for critical inquiry, as it is the overlaying "culture" of the administration that must be viewed when considering our sincerity as a people when we contemplate our "culture of accountability." Those who want to hold others accountable for their actions and their results, might see sustainable progress if we believed that they held themselves to a similar standard. Whether a leader is a President of the United States, a university president, or merely some "lesser" boss, the importance of consistency in message and in accountability is paramount. It is impossible to attain any organization's best results if the perception of disparate treatment overtakes any perception of common purpose.

Introduction

As this is written, and despite the optimism that accompanies the election of a new President, there is a pervasive atmosphere of gloom and doom that necessarily follows us as we watch our economy continue to sink. We cannot be sure we are nearing the bottom of this economic crisis or if that bottom remains far lower than we want to imagine. During these dark economic times, in which previously golden corporations like Microsoft, Caterpillar, and even Starbucks continue to lay off thousands of workers, and the "big three" automakers plead for their economic lives, a book about "assessment in education" seems perhaps a bit less important than it might otherwise have been. The reality, however, is that in such times, a "re-assessment of assessment" is desperately needed. Greater scrutiny and regulation is a matter of increased importance in a climate where resources are scarce, and how we use what we have more fully engages our imaginations.

Thriving in an environment where resources are scarce has long been the province of many educators. This book addresses the on-going push for greater assessment in higher education, within the larger societal context in which a push for accountability and transparency has been rather selectively imposed. Addressing this context is done by means of addressing the specific higher education assessment literature, as well as such topics as unionization in higher education and the increase in "merit pay" schemes that diminish the collective power of union members and radically change the concept of academic freedom on college campuses. It addresses "dead weight" faculty that burden our institutions and drain our resources away from where they could be best spent. But, above all, it addresses the concept of assessment. While the

focus of this work is upon assessment in higher education, it hopes to examine that growing phenomenon within the greater context of the larger social framework where assessment is lauded by the masses, but often frowned upon by those who may be the subject of any such assessment.

Corporations are laying off workers and seeing their stock prices plummet, and yet many of their chief executives continue to lavish themselves and other top management with huge bonuses and other forms of seemingly "extreme" compensation. Who is minding the store? How much should government involve itself? Is this a clarion call for greater government regulation? Do we need to better assess how our corporations are managed? Many people are torn between what may be an inherent distrust of bigger government with a growing realization that greater freedoms enjoyed by corporations have led to greater corruption and an abuse of shareholders and taxpayers. Perhaps this is the perfect context in which we might spend some time assessing assessment. How can we get more out of the resources we spend, whether those resources are devoted to private corporations, government, or both private and public education? Of course we need more scrutiny of what others do. But do we need more scrutiny of what we ourselves do? The hypocrisy so ever-present in all of us as we examine the words and deeds of others a bit more carefully than we might examine our own, is all too present on a macro scale when we consider the messages sent by government and industry as they seek to lay their hands upon the educational system. We continue to hear that our schools are failing, and that our colleges are not always providing the workforce with well prepared workers. There is little doubt that those of us who work in education can collectively do better. That we should be called out for our failings and face greater scrutiny is probably just. This book doesn't question the need for greater

assessment, generally. It questions how we are going to engage in that assessment process, what we hope to improve upon, and whether or not assessment in higher education can be done in a vacuum. Is a more careful evaluation of what it is that teachers and professors do and how they do it, more important than a similar examination of what other professionals do and how they do it? I don't mean to be an apologist for professors everywhere, but still, is more scrutiny of the complex work that they do, the very best use of limited resources?

If a college president wants to more carefully examine his/her faculty, shouldn't that president and all the president's men and women subject themselves to similar scrutiny? If a United States President seeks to hold educators "accountable" shouldn't he hold himself and his staff to similar high standards of accountability? If those at the top fail to engage in the practice of transparency and accountability, why should the rest of us take their missives seriously? It continues to be a mystery to me how the concept of greater accountability can be preached as it is so clearly not simultaneously practiced. Perhaps the 44th President of the United States will truly usher in a new era of "universal accountability," unlike his predecessor who seemingly, at least, operated his branch of government with more secrecy and less accountability than most, if not all, previous occupants of that office. This book isn't about Presidential power, but we cannot ignore the real and symbolic importance of what our leaders say and what they do. As a college professor, I participate on a daily basis in the great mystery that surrounds much of teaching and learning. Much of what the very best professors do is shrouded in mystery, just as how the best students learn is not always something that can be easily transferred to others. So goes the reality of the higher educational process. Let's begin to earnestly assess the concept of assessment. We cannot simply support it because it sounds good, indeed we must truly examine what we hope to

gain from it and how we can improve the transparency of what we do, so that the good things we do can be studied, copied, and translated across campuses, just as surely as the bad things can be eliminated. I'm all for it, but not unilaterally. I wouldn't suggest to my students that they should read something that I wouldn't read or study something that I wouldn't deem worthy of further examination. I am hopeful that we can all see the importance of assessment on a wide scale rather than as a selective endeavor that those with power impose upon those with less. I see no reason why we can't start thinking about more universal assessment and greater accountability in education and out. Professors should play a role in leading the way…but not alone.

> "The effects of classroom doings are always mysterious, something that should be pounded, intellectually of course, into every legislator in the nation. Too often tests measure the ability to take tests and not much more" (Pickering, 2004, p. 25).
>
> **"**We need a climate in which colleges and universities are less imitative, taking pride in their uniqueness. It's time to end the suffocating practice in which colleges and universities measure themselves far too frequently by external status rather than by values determined by their own distinctive mission" (Boyer, 1990, p. xiii).

Ernest Boyer's reputation in academia is hardly questioned. His analysis in *Scholarship Reconsidered* has become the gold standard for much of what passes for deep thought about higher education and about those who comprise the faculty at institutions of higher learning. So it is among my first of a series of considerations when I wonder why his words have so often gone unheeded. Why is higher education turning away from individuality toward "general assessment" schemes that seem overly corporate and overly "consumer" driven?As I write this, I am hearing a voice in my head begging me not to write the millionth treatise on "educational reform." For decades, and particularly since 1983's now famous "A Nation at Risk," the "need" for education

reform has been endorsed with such hyperbole, that it is a wonder that children still attend, that parents still go to parent-teacher conferences, and that graduates continue to go on to engage themselves in higher education. Many political leaders and perhaps even more media pundits have made careers for themselves by bashing the "intellectual elite" and diminishing the value of education.

> "Americans have been told since the 1950s that their children can't read, can't write, can't think, and can't keep up with the rest of the world. They have also been told that most of this failure is due to a lack of educator 'accountability'—teachers and administrators are choosing not to work hard enough, do not care enough, and often are not even qualified to do their jobs" (Alsup, 2006, p. xiii).

Like Alsup, I do not agree with the premise that seems to support teacher blame as the root of all educational shortcomings. Unfortunately, many of the policies that have emanated from this pervasive culture of teacher blame focus on the accountability of teachers to the detriment of the educational process. Interestingly, as George W. Bush and others suggest that rather than examine too closely any failings of his administration, we might be better served by looking to the future, they remain quite able to heap significant doses of blame upon teachers and others who haven't always been the administration's most ardent of supporters. I am reminded of Mark McGuire's "steroid" testimony before congress in which he deflected any questions about himself and any past transgressions toward his desire to only talk about the future. There, of course, is nothing wrong with a focus upon the future, but ignoring the past doesn't allow us much context from which to understand how we might make improvements. Simply saying "mistakes were made" without taking any responsibility for those mistakes makes for a cynical public and a public less likely to take seriously any attempts at improved accountability.

Similarly, accountability requires transparency rather than secrecy. There have been a series of articles written about the secrecy within the Bush Administration, and the penchant for secrecy on the part of Vice-President Cheney, up to and including his defiance in the face of questions from Congress, from the Courts, and even in failing to comply with executive orders. *The Washington Post*, for example, seems to have had several articles a week for much of the past several years concerning Cheney's penchant for keeping things away from public scrutiny, from what goes on behind the doors of closed prison cells in Guantanamo Bay to what goes on inside the Executive Branch of government. [A series of articles written by Peter Baker, in June of 2007, have appeared in *The Washington Post*, and were used as source material for this section.] Cheney has gone so far as to refuse to comply with Congressional oversight, because of his need to comply with separation of powers and his status within the executive branch, and then seemingly simultaneously, use his status as "President of the Senate" to insist that he's a member of the legislative branch and therefore not subject to the scrutiny heaped upon other Executive branch members. Hmmm….whether one agrees with Mr. Cheney's logic or not, it is quite clear that his health issues are not confined to the status of his heart, but also include severe allergic reactions to scrutiny. This book is not meant to be a political diatribe against Mr. Cheney or Mr. Bush, still, it seems necessary to point out the abject hypocrisy involved in the rhetoric of accountability that has come from these two highest ranking members of government. It is this hypocrisy that flavors the mix that is the climate in which greater assessment for higher education is contemplated. It is the hypocrisy so ever present in the "climate of accountability" for some set against the "climate of complete freedom from criticism and oversight for others" that drives the arguments of this writing. Why do we so willingly allow criticism from the

“outside” and particularly when those who do the brunt of the criticizing have put themselves above any criticism?

Chapter One

"Heightened Scrutiny"

> "It's not worth saying; it's already been said; and it's impossible to say anything adequate in any case. This is the trouble with doing research" (Truss, 2005, p. 3).

Indeed it's already been said, but inexplicably it hasn't been written down, so I'm taking this opportunity to put to print that which many of you have been thinking. Perhaps if I provide nothing more than a citation to provide you with cover for your arguments, I have done something of note. Let me begin chapter one with the crux of my argument "against" the conventional wisdom that simply "accepts" heightened scrutiny and greater assessment as a positive influence on the educational system. The primary problem with "greater accountability" through greater assessment lies in who determines who is doing that assessing, what standards should be used, and what judgments should be rendered after the assessment has been completed. In essence, I have a suspicion that if my mother is selected as the one to review my writing; the review is likely to be favorable, maybe even glowing. If, in contrast, the reviewer disagrees with my politics, my premises, or even my writing style, the review is less likely to grace my office wall. Who does the reviewing matters every bit as much (actually more) than the quality or inferiority of the product reviewed. If this is our reality, our natural cynicism when it comes to reading and depending upon reviews of books, movies, and other literary works is well placed. To extend this a bit further, the first question we must address when the topic is higher education assessment is: who will be doing the assessing? Will the assessor be a natural friend or a natural foe of higher education? What should be assessed? If what our students should know is exhaustive, how could it possibly be properly assessed? In contrast, if what our students should

know is narrowly defined, who is in charge of creating those narrow definitions? Should the experiences of minorities, women, and immigrants, be priorities for students of history, or mere footnotes not significant enough to be tested upon? What political theories matter? Who decides what matters? Who will decide whether professors are teaching that which they ought to be teaching or whether they have exceeded the boundaries of "proper" knowledge? Who will determine how someone else (a student they've never met for example) learns and whether they are learning appropriately?

As is so often the case with my writing and my thinking for that matter, I have merely refined that which I have stolen. Many people share some level of apprehension over "greater accountability" but perhaps nobody puts the hammer to the nail of my argument quite as well as James Freedman (2003) who wasn't even writing about assessment when he stated the following: "Something has gone wrong with liberal education when it does not rigorously question the prevailing paradigms of the moment" (p. 63). It seems to me that there has been and continues to be very little questioning of the prevailing paradigms that surround greater levels of assessment. Even those who bemoan "no child left behind" at the elementary and secondary levels, usually merely bemoan it without actually challenging it. Every author probably seeks to change the prevailing paradigms and make a name for him or herself as an original thinker and creator of new found wisdom. My sights are (probably necessarily) set much lower: I'd simply like us to assess the prevailing paradigm, that adopting standardized methods of assessment is a good thing for "consumers" of education. If such standardized assessment is actually good for higher education, then so be it, I shall fall in line with my brethren; if not, however, we must shift the prevailing paradigm by challenging the onslaught of pressures from a variety of sources seeking

to tell us how better to do our jobs and what it is that we should be doing in those jobs. I'm not above arguing that many of us can do our jobs better (see succeeding chapters in this very book), but I am reluctant to accept criticism and standardization from critics of higher education who have seldom, if ever, actually engaged themselves in the teaching/learning process and are questionable critics of the higher education enterprise.

With all that has been written about the sky falling on our educational systems, it is difficult to muster up a credible reason for reading yet another diatribe on what's wrong with education. So…I didn't write one. At some point predicting the end of the world (see millennium bug) should cause those who predicted it to be dismissed if indeed the world doesn't end. In political terms, isn't it tiring to endlessly hear that each upcoming election is "the most important election ever?" I often wonder if we analyzed the tapes of political commentators from 2004, we'd hear the same people saying the same things as they did in 2000 and in 1996. Déjà vu all over again is amusing when Yogi Berra suggests it, or even when it seems to happen in our daily lives, but when it becomes the stuff of political and social commentary, it's less amusing than it is annoying. What a colossal waste of time it must surely be to talk about the same things over and over but never really do anything about them (faculty meetings aside). To that end, this work isn't about rehashing what has already been rehashed repeatedly, in fact I am here to proclaim that the world of education hasn't ended, and that many things remain quite similar to the way in which prior generations would remember them. Still, there is a disturbing tendency that, I believe, is worthy of addressing: it is the seeming "need," no doubt consumer driven, to make certain that a quantitative value can be placed on everything. I blame e-bay, where the used chewing gum of celebrities and sandwiches that resemble the Virgin Mary can be sold on-

line…but I digress. The "crisis" in education and particularly in higher education where relatively well paid professors teach relatively privileged young adults subject matter that often seems esoteric at best, and irrelevant at worst, can hardly be considered a genuine crisis. So like much of what most professors write, this work should not be taken as a version of the apocalypse, but rather an opportunity to reflect upon an aspect of our system of higher education that is worthy of our informed consideration. In these first pages, I should perhaps use self-assessment to consider why I would write something about the concept of assessment. It's only fair, if I ask the reader to give me his/her time in reading this work, that I should explain why I respect your time enough to deem your spending it on me to be a worthwhile endeavor. Surely there are others more qualified than I who could write with more eloquence about the topic of the assessment of higher education. Why should you read what I have to write about this? I can really think of no reason stronger than my passion for what it is that I do at the university: teach in a manner which I hope will result in learning that transcends the daily subject matter and might even inject in my students' a life-long interest in reading more, talking more, and thinking more about a variety of possibilities. When I inject standardized testing into my teaching, I genuinely believe that both students and the process suffer. I truly believe that genuine education is stifled, creativity is banished, and student interest in learning more than what is simply "required by the test" is lessened.

Most academic writing differs a bit from other forms of writing. Sometimes it's a labor of love, or a passion for the subject or story, as many novelists would have us believe. Other times it's merely a means to an end: such as a project that might gain the writer tenure and/or promotion at his/her institution. Maybe it was done simply to impress. How can a reader separate

that which is worthwhile for a mass audience, from that which is just worthwhile for the author? I am hopeful that just a few paragraphs more might convince a prospective reader that this project transcends any benefit that may accrue to me for writing it, and actually contributes to the literature and the thought surrounding both the benefits and the detriments of higher education assessment.

Much of the conventional wisdom surrounding educational assessment and assessment within higher education in particular, is much more about convention than it is about wisdom. Ironic, given our positions within higher education as the "learned" within our society, that we would so easily succumb to convention with barely a whimper of protest and most disturbingly, barely a trace of inquiry. What happened to the inquisitive nature of this enterprise? How can we bash the President of the United States for what many have perceived to be his failure to be "intellectually curious" when it would appear many of us have lost our curiosity as well? When did we start focusing on assessment programs that, for many of us, haven't been studied, haven't been analyzed, and frankly, haven't even been considered prior to implementation? This isn't a project about why assessment is bad or why it is good…it's really not even that advanced…this is a project about why we haven't even really considered whether assessment is bad or good. In essence, and with no small amount of irony, we haven't really assessed whether assessment will lead to positive outcomes for higher education, or whether it will diminish what we do. In fact, simply talking about assessment can end a good party. "Mention educational assessment around a group of teachers. Add up all the flinching and cringing in the room, subtract those who swear it's the work of the devil and divide the result by the number of people who really, really wish you'd change the topic" (Tougas, 2006, p. 18). Assessment is a touchy topic, but it's definitely

not a touchy, feely, warm, and fuzzy topic. Venturing into any discussion of it must be done with trepidation. The problem with the nature of any discussion of assessment has been the culture of teacher blame that quite naturally raises the defenses of those in the education profession whenever assessment programs are discussed (or even worse, when they are not discussed, but simply implemented). Teachers and now professors can often become disenfranchised through the process of standardizing assessment. They have little to nothing to say about what standardized tests actually measure and the content of the tests is often irrelevant to their curriculum. Costa & Kallick (2000) wrote that "in effect, the tests tell teachers they are 'incompetent' to assess student achievement on their own, and the observations they make in the classroom every day are suspect and inconsequential" (p. 27). Usually, we've learned from a very early age (later reinforced by our own parenting experiences) that positive reinforcement tends to work better than negative reinforcement, and yet the "accountability" movement seems to largely believe in the merit of negative reinforcement. Deterrence may work for those contemplating crime, but must educators be put in similarly stifling intellectual situations? Milburn & Conrad (1996) wrote of the "punitive society" in which schools (as well as other social institutions) suffer from distortions in public policy that result from "pervasive punitiveness" (p. 107). Punitiveness is the result of authoritarian attitudes, that can be extended beyond such "simplistic" responses as corporal punishment into the realm of assessment of "lesser" individuals. If those in authority positions can feel the security that comes with being free from the challenges of others, there seems to be a greater willingness to challenge those below them. Assessment programs often suffer from this authoritarian attitude that some people need to be assessed and carefully scrutinized, while others, in the same organization, do not. It is difficult to foster an environment

in which all can thrive and succeed at what they do, when there is a clear distinction among those with "power" and those lacking any professional autonomy. Cynicism is the natural by-product of such a "do what I say and not what I do" environment.

Assessment, done well, serves many purposes (some of which can be positive). Assessment can be used to diagnose (and then treat) student needs, to monitor student progress, to give students grades, to judge the effectiveness of teaching and thereby determine raises and promotions. Assessment can evaluate curricula choices and programs, and shed light on the proper allocation of scarce resources. Parents and students alike, deserve information about a college's programs, faculty, facilities, and everything else that goes in to making an informed decision. Taxpayers deserve to know that their money is being spent wisely on both public and private institutions that accept federal and state funds. In essence, assessment, done well, can do many good and decent things, and the pursuit of meaningful assessment should be a goal for all of us; it is the pursuit of assessment for assessment's sake that may do as much or more harm than all of the best of intentions might otherwise overcome.

An underlying theme of this work must surely be that of the ironic detachment of a U.S. President from many matters for which one might think he'd be held accountable, and an accompanying disdain for those who might try to hold him or his administration accountable, while he pursues an agenda of greater accountability for others. If we question Iraq policy, we are traitors; if we question human rights and/or Guantanamo Bay, we are "jeopardizing our national security"; if we question the scandals surrounding Alberto Gonzalez and within the justice system, we are "playing politics." Within this "see no evil, hear no evil, and report no evil" environment, we are told to question nearly everything our teachers do, and to challenge the

“fairness and accountability” of educators from pre-school through college.

Perhaps it is not new, and perhaps it is even human nature, for many of us to want others to be held to higher standards than we might expect of ourselves. After all, we certainly would like police to catch speeders, but we ourselves feel nothing but resentment when we are ticketed, so perhaps it should not surprise us that our President wants others to be held accountable, while he simultaneously scorns those who might seek answers from him. Nevertheless, it is with great irony, I think, that the Bush Administration seeks greater accountability of others, at least in its rhetoric. Raider-Roth (2005) spoke of the irony behind the educational discourse in which “trust” is frequently at center-stage within the larger context of the political climate which is deeply distrusting of administrators, teachers, and even children. We no longer trust teachers to make classroom curricula decisions, and that philosophy seems to be moving (somewhat more gradually thank goodness) toward higher education.

President Bush, you may remember, promised to restore honor and integrity to the Oval Office. A report, however, by the House Government Reform Committee, based on three years of e-mails and billing records from disgraced lobbyist Jack Abramoff’s former law firm, detailed how Mr. Abramoff billed clients for *hundreds* of contacts with White House officials. One would think that Mr. Bush, ever interested in the accountability of others would be interested in rooting out any abuses within the White House, but instead, as The Washington Post has editorialized “this White House, which has been resolutely incurious about Mr. Abramoff’s activities and equally unwilling to provide information about it” (2006, p. B06). White House spokeswoman Dana Perino has told reporters “nothing more will come from the report, no further fallout from the report” (2006, p. B06).

The conviction in early 2007 of "Scooter" Libby, chief of staff for Vice-President Cheney, continues a pattern in the Bush administration of contempt for "assessment" of the administration's own workings and dealings, and lying to Congress may simply be one more symptom of a disease in which there is no oversight and no accountability. As this is written, Libby's sentence has been commuted by President Bush, which would seem to be a natural result of an administration bent on accountability for "others" and freedom for themselves. Having assailed the President and those who he has surrounded himself with, it's now time for me to cease the Bush bashing (some targets have become too easy and therefore less worthy of my readers' time). Indeed, the purpose of this book is not to join a litany of voices bashing the Bush administration (however worthy such a goal might be). The point is much larger than what may or may not be going on in the inner workings of the Bush White House, for the point is that it is the height of hypocrisy (perhaps bordering on the truly absurd) for an administration so little concerned about genuine accountability within its ranks--a White House that has actually rewarded persons responsible for what can only be considered the abject failure of Iraq war policy—to attempt to credibly preach to those of us in higher education about the need for accountability. Anna Quindlen expressed her suspicions in a *Newsweek* column in which she suggests that one reason for the Bush administration's interest in more and more testing schemes might at least be related to the fact that the presidential commission considering more standardized testing, and specifically standardized testing for college students, has one member who runs a test-prep company. "Through their No Child Left Untested initiative, they'd managed to metastasize school testing so that it was everywhere, from the early grades through high school. Why stop there? Why stop at all?" (Quindlen, 2006, p. 78). Perhaps ultimately greater

accountability is needed, perhaps there are schemes for genuine assessment that might truly make our colleges and universities better places. But getting guidance on this issue from the Bush White House should have no more credibility than a lecture on how to be faithful to one's spouse coming from Bill Clinton or Newt Gingrich.

The timeliness of this work might be illustrated by the work that is being done (right now) by a higher education commission named by the Bush administration in examining whether standardized testing should be expanded into colleges and universities to "prove" that students are learning and, perhaps most frighteningly, to "allow easier comparisons on quality." Not surprisingly, the chair of this commission is Texas businessman Charles Miller, who was head of the Regents of the University of Texas when they directed the university's nine campuses to use standardized tests to establish what students were learning. The Bush administration has never been a "friend" of higher education, from much of their rather overtly negative "ivory tower" references to those they view as "out of touch," to their more subtle efforts to "shape" information that emanates from higher education, such as concerns over global warming or freedom of information. Certainly some other administrations have viewed "academia" with varying levels of disdain, but perhaps not with this level of outright suspicion. This is a President who has been accused of not being an academically curious man, and the contrasts that have been made between his unwillingness to even consider details, with his predecessor's seemingly unquenchable thirst to know even the smallest details could not be more stark. This is a contrast that would serve this book as a means of questioning the motives behind the imposition of "standards" upon those interested in the "pursuit of truth."

> "The people at the top of a society almost always feel themselves to be genuinely superior to the rest, not just luckily born, and to have

earned their places" (Lemann, 1999, p. 343).

I recently read another disturbing aspect of our sense of "superiority," that perhaps illustrates another issue within higher education, at least so far as the perception of "place" is concerned. In Shipler's work *The Working Poor*, he cites David Brooks, a senior editor at the *Weekly Standard*, who reported that in the 2000 election, when Al Gore proposed revising a tax scheme in which only the top 1% of wage earners were favored, one would think about 99% of the population would be for his plan. Instead, *Time* magazine discovered through their polling, that 19% of Americans actually thought that they were in the top 1% of wage-earners, and perhaps even more significantly, another 20 percent expected to be in the top 1% in the future. So, fully 39% of Americans thought that an "attack" on the top 1% was an attack aimed directly at them. Hmmmm….if our rather inflated self images, and financial worths are indicative of anything, perhaps they represent our culture in which becoming a member of the very rich, is very much in the mindsets of almost 2 out of 5 Americans. Such an environment may not be overly conducive to great concerns over education at any level. It may also be relevant that there is a perception, usually borne out by reality that "regulation and accountability" tend to hamper the efforts of business in a quest for profits. If nearly 40% of Americans believe they are in the top 1% of now and future wage earners, it may be no small wonder why they might be reluctant to hold business accountable in the same way they seem quite willing to examine the education system.

Higher education is not exempt from the criticism so clearly warranted in an examination of business and politics. While perhaps the magnitude of "scandals" that can be found on college and university campuses may pale when compared to those within the White House, the Halls of

Congress, and the Boardrooms across Corporate America, we do have our ways in which we establish a pecking order which seemingly favors some at the expense of others. Fairness is elusive in almost every context.

Within the society that is higher education, we have our own social order, in which some have enhanced credibility, and others diminished credibility. Teaching in a "marginalized" discipline, as I do, I am tired of being told to do something merely because that's the way it's always been done. More to the point, I've grown tired of being told explicitly and implicitly that I, and others like me, should recognize our place within the academy. Don't we need something more than that? Shouldn't where we belong be based on reason, rather than history? Shouldn't the lessons taught by the late Rosa Parks, among others, let us know that conformity is not always appropriate, and one's "place" as determined by others, is not always where one belongs? The answer to these questions seemingly begs for more thoughtfulness when it comes to examining why things are done the way in which they are done, and why certain proposals seem to carry weight whether or not they've been studied, or even whether or not their long-term consequences are considered. Indeed, it would seem to be imperative that we slow down, before we simply conform to powerful influences, and accept, without question, proposals that will impact a generation or more of students and professors alike.

> "A thick line runs through the country, with people who have been to college on one side of it and people who haven't on the other. The line gets brighter all the time…as people plan their lives and their children's lives, higher education is the main focus of their aspirations" (Lemann, 1999, p. 6).

Lemann's quote seems to ably identify what we all know: that higher education is critical to our future, if only as the accepted means of advancing our children's individual futures. While

not everyone may know what actually goes on in college, everyone is painfully aware of the future that awaits the high school student who chooses to forego college, and it's a future that very few parents want for their children. Given then, that higher education is the goal of nearly each parent, it is no small wonder that more and more parents (and those who advocate on their behalf) are becoming increasingly interested in what actually goes on within the hallowed halls of academia. Raising the level of scrutiny that higher education receives is probably not a bad thing, as certainly, in higher education, as in all human related services, a significant amount of waste, fraud, incompetence, and other sordid absurdities could be found…if one only looked. At the same time, who may be doing the looking is every bit as important as that for which they might be looking. One doesn't have to be Gary Hart, Newt Gingrich, or Bill Clinton to recognize that close scrutiny sometimes leads to less than desirable outcomes for those being scrutinized. In some instances, overly zealous scrutiny might actually lead to "wrongdoing," as anyone who has been followed by a police car might have come to realize, if they had been followed for very long. Did the police actually cause the traffic violation? No. Did their presence intensify what would typically have been a harmless act? Indeed it almost certainly did.

Being scrutinized more closely is not the dream of anyone, whether that anyone is a factory worker, a trash collector, a doctor, a lawyer, or, as relevant to the gist of this book: a college administrator or a college professor. Still, as reluctant as we "academics" are to "suffer" the outrageous fortune of stricter scrutiny, it is an ever greater reality for us, and we are seemingly embroiled in a series of disputes concerning the quality and quantity of that scrutiny. Sometimes we have even invited these challenges when we treat our universities and our students as our sanctified preserves rather than as gifts to the public trust (even private universities are

really gifts to the public trust, as without serving the students and the community via the educational process, there simply is no point to any university, public or private). "Americans dissatisfied with higher education typically have one of two gripes. Either the problem is the curriculum, which might be too liberal or too conservative, too changeful or too stodgy, too current or too retrograde, too utilitarian or too useless; or the problem is the university's structure, which often is deemed too businesslike and soulless" (Oppenheimer, 2004, p. B7). Oppenheimer wrote of the need for disagreement in the classroom as "disagreement is a prime engine for advancing human knowledge" (p. B8). Standardization and assessment to the degree that it requires a rote method of doing things, will forestall the type of disagreement within classrooms that Oppenheimer applauds.

Whether we are outraged by the increased marketing of everything, including academic research (see Calhoun, 2006), or by the increasing infiltration of "low brow popular culture" into our academic lives, our reality is best served by confronting these realities, rather than idly wishing that these trends would simply go away. If we accept the premise of more standardization and more quantifiable data concerning assessment of our teaching and students' learning, are we not limiting the amount of disagreement within our classrooms, as well as any real opportunity to explore the realities that confront our own and our students' lives? When does too much focus become too little exploration?

"Consumer demand is a big part of this…we will need to open up the ivory towers and put data at students' fingertips." This quote is from Margaret Spellings, Education Secretary in the George W. Bush Administration (Kantrowitz, 2006). Like her colleagues in the Administration, Spellings consistently calls for more accountability in higher education, but

perhaps reflective of an administration in which the major players have backgrounds in business, that accountability seems to be equated with "consumer demand." It has been argued here and elsewhere, that higher education is not one's standard consumer product, and treating it as such might be more harmful than any short term gains achieved from the increased competition that might result from colleges more directly "competing" with one another for students. Should students continue to seek the best fit for them, or should our consumer driven society allow for better brochures and more "tangible data" to make students' and their parents' decisions easier. Perhaps, ultimately, the choice of which college one should attend, should truly be a difficult and somewhat agonizing choice. Not everything is as easy as "if you're not with us, you're against us."

Vaughn (2006) wrote of his plight in producing syllabi for his students that adhered to state standards. He wrote that certain words must be contained in his syllabi, whether or not, his cynical colleagues assured him, the concepts behind the words ever were actually translated into the class. Vaughn, like others, and like myself pondered whether such intrusions into his teaching style and requirements imposed upon his teaching "productivity" were alarming or merely bothersome. Whether or not such intrusions into our classrooms and the obvious questioning of our professionalism and our competencies that follows such questions, is alarming or merely bothersome, the nature of the intrusions surely must make us pause and wonder exactly who has entered our classroom and for what purpose. I've often opened my classroom up to prospective students, to my peers, to my Dean, all of whom have scrutinized me to differing degrees, and for different purposes, but who else should take a chair in my classroom? Who should be scrutinizing us? The parents? The students? The administration? Our peers? Each and every one

of them? What weight should their comments about our worth carry? What should they be entitled to see, and how do they know what it is that they're seeing? Will higher levels of scrutiny change our "behavior" in and out of the classroom and make us better at what we do, or will it lessen our willingness to take risks and make us worse? Finally, and perhaps ultimately, most importantly of all, don't you just hate a book that poses a series of questions, many of which may, in the end, be unanswerable? For my sake, I hope not, and I am indeed of the belief that by the end of these few chapters, we might all begin to better address these vexing questions, and begin to focus on our respective college and university mission statements by at least being "on the same page." While these questions and many more are at the center of an on-going storm concerning relationships on campus between administrators and those for whom they administer, there is sun behind these storm clouds. When this storm passes, we might all be better for the cleansing rain that the storm has wrought, and while there may be some clean-up and there may be some significant short-term damage to individuals and collectives alike, we might still be ultimately better able to serve our respective missions.

Chapter Two

This Isn't High School

> "When the man on the street talks about accountability in education these days, he usually means blame. To most of our political and business leaders, 'standing accountable' does not mean taking responsibility in a collaborative enterprise aimed at achieving high quality. Rather, it means designating a person to take the blame if the enterprise falls short of its goals" (Frase & Streshly, 2000, p. 16).

The social contract entered into between faculty and university administrations has been undergoing some significant revision. What is expected of university administrators perhaps hasn't undergone complete transformation, but what is expected of faculty members has been seriously altered. Most of that alteration centers upon the greater need for "external validation," or the need to make certain the students (consumers) have measurable value added during their stay at the university. External validation changes the very nature of the social contract, by requiring faculty members to subject themselves to increasingly stringent review of their work, often by those entirely unfamiliar with how they might review that very work. External validation is not a new concept, as periodically, various government agencies have sought greater oversight into the workings of a variety of professionals from stockbrokers to realtors to physicians and even butchers and possibly candlestick makers. Teachers, at the secondary and elementary levels have certainly been subjected to ever more scrutiny, whether or not there is any evidence that this scrutiny has bettered the educational experiences of students. The concept of "teaching to the test" has been the bane of educators at all levels, and soon, perhaps, it will become the bane of college professors who must eventually deal with the practicality of it all, rather than merely debate from afar the wisdom or folly of standardized testing.

But college is different from high school. While the argument can certainly be made that little choice really exists for parents of high school age children who want to send their kids to schools other than the local public school, the same argument carries little weight with regard to higher education. Consumer choice, in a free society such as ours, would seem to offer ultimate accountability: If enough students choose not to attend a given college or university, the institution would ultimately fail. While it remains a relatively rare occurrence, colleges do, now and then, close their doors and stop doing business. That type of accountability seems to be the calling card of most business executives when they measure the successes or failures of business ventures, yet it seems to elude them as a fair comparison when business-minded people (like our current President) look to evaluate higher education.

Critics of higher education, increasingly marked by a political slant to the right, tend to believe that colleges and universities are far too loosely controlled, that they are disorganized, out of control, and lacking in measurable standards. A lack of accountability, these critics contend, tends to create environments rife with poor and lazy teachers, students, and administrators alike. The obvious cure for the ills as perceived by these critics is to tighten the ship, and to strive for greater accountability. Of course, there should be no missing of the irony inherent in business people who seek greater freedom from governmental intrusion into their own businesses so as to prosper unencumbered, while they believe that higher education would only prosper under strict and standardized guidelines. While many public figures have been deeply troubled by what they perceive is happening in academia, they are seemingly less troubled by their own spread of misinformation, disinformation, and a seeming lack of concern for simple or complex truths. Did the Bush administration, in the form of the President, Vice-President, Secretary of Defense,

Secretary of State and others, lie to us, or did they merely "misstate" facts? Did they misrepresent and/or "cherry-pick" the intelligence made available to them, or did they merely do the best they could with what they had? Your answer to these questions may very well lie less with the "facts" than with your past and present-sense impressions of the truth and veracity of these players, and with your own individual politics. A concern to those of us in higher education is that similar "cherry-picking" and similar reports of our inadequacies may be misrepresented to the public, by those with a political agenda seemingly bent on altering the structure of higher education. Are they truly concerned about higher education, or are they more concerned with spreading their own political agendas? Are they truly concerned about higher education, or are they more concerned with what they "perceive" to be bias against their political views emanating from the highly educated classes? I don't know…but it worries me. Is cooperation with persons bent on altering the shape of higher education, by acceding to more and more scrutiny and more and more assessment really in the best interests of professors, administrators, and others involved in the higher educational process…like students, for example?

Shouldn't higher education be progressive education as envisioned by John Dewey? Shouldn't colleges and universities promote the individual's ability to blossom and become the creative thinker that they can become? Shouldn't these thinkers then create a more liberal-minded, freethinking, tolerant class of leaders, who would build a fairer society? (Lemann, 1999, p. 22). Perhaps we've answered our own question: "liberal-minded" in a time when "liberal" has become a dirty word in much of society; a "fairer" society, more "tolerant" leaders; not exactly the type of concepts that would play well to a Bill O'Reilly audience, or even a George W. Bush audience.

So what would be a "fair" way to assess teaching within this society? Assuming, for the moment, that assessment or appraisal of teaching is a necessary function of a higher education enterprise, then how do we do it fairly, so as not to unfairly burden the educator, and how do we do it effectively, so that the data we collect is actually meaningful and can improve and inform practice? How do we make certain that we recognize the nature of assessment or appraisal involves certain value judgments and personal tastes that may or may not be accurately reflections of worth to others? "Appraisals are value judgments that require criteria for establishing good practice…Even the most credible research in education brings us to a conundrum…What works, while sometimes generalizable, is often context specific and inexorably tied to appraisals and moral and ethical considerations" (Andrew, 2005, pp. 53-54). A difficult reality may also involve the labor intensive nature of good assessment. Idealistic educators may recognize that any overreliance upon the textbook and/or standardized tests goes against the grain of good teaching. Will we allow good teachers and good professors the time necessary to establish rapport, create an environment conducive to the teaching/learning enterprise, and generally add value to students, or will we pressure those teachers and those professors into giving their superiors data showing short-term gains and largely superficial progress, before they can establish any of those more important things? Short term gain and "measurable progress" nearly always trumps long term vision in a variety of contexts, and education is becoming no different, despite the very nature of the enterprise in which long-term and "life-long" learning is more generally recognized as more important than short-term and often temporary improvements in performance.

Issues of the governance of higher education are not new. How much control professors

should have over curriculum and other workplace issues are consistently debated on campuses across the country. College Trustees and Presidents as well as Faculty Senates continually wrestle with each other and among themselves over how much control can and must be asserted by faculty, and how much must be maintained by administrations. Does top-down control make for an inefficient or an efficient bureaucratic machine? Does efficiency stifle creativity, or does creativity encourage undisciplined responses and a far too undisciplined workplace?

Measuring the effectiveness of professors and the "value" that should be put upon their work product is going to be a difficult task. Some might argue that to measure this effectiveness with any sense of fairness and/or accuracy will prove to be largely impossible. This chapter concerns itself less with how that measurement will take place (particularly since any form of measurement will necessarily be so inherently flawed as to hardly be worthy of examination), but will instead focus upon how that measurement is likely to modify the behavior of those being measured.

> "Teachers face a complex choice about whether they will attempt, in addition to classroom teaching, to influence the entire school. Teachers who choose to confine their work as educators to the classroom win. They have more time and energy to devote to their teaching, to each of their students, and to their responsibilities outside of school. They are less susceptible to interpersonal conflicts with other teachers and with the administration. They enjoy a measure of sanity, and this is the path that the majority of teachers follow. Other teachers, a smaller number to be sure, take a different path. In addition to their work as classroom teachers, they choose to expand their contribution to the school by assuming responsibility, some of the time, for some of the issues integral to the health and character of the entire school. By participating in the larger arena, these teachers lose what the larger group wins: time, energy, freedom from interpersonal hassle, and immunity from public criticism for efforts that might fail. But the teachers who choose this path win more than they lose. These teachers become owners and investors in the school, rather than mere tenants" (Barth, 2001, pp. 116-117).

As I write this, I am, like most of my collegiate colleagues across the country I suppose, conflicted by my need to retain my sanity and do my job of teaching and writing in the best way that I can, while I simultaneously fulfill my obligations, moral and otherwise, to my employer, the University. There can be no doubt whatsoever that part of my obligations include service on university committees. The obligation is not in dispute, the issue is not the nature of university service, but rather the nature of the obligation. Do we give of ourselves to committee work until it hurts? Do we give of ourselves to committee work at the expense of our writing, teaching, and other community service? As the lengthy quote from Barth illustrates, all of us in education, professors in higher education included, face a similar and no less complicated choice: whether we will attempt, in addition to our classroom teaching, to influence the greater university. Choosing to influence students beyond the classroom, and university policies outside of their immediate department comes with risk. At my university, faculty members younger than myself, now face differing standards of review for tenure and promotion in which external validation and research for publication seem to vastly outweigh teaching and service. In such a changing environment, one must now openly question the wisdom of participating on university committees which seem to assure the participant of a steady workload and plenty of aggravation, but not tenure or promotion.

The risk that comes with involvement is not exactly life and death (although untenured faculty members may risk academic death should they involve themselves either too controversially or so much that they cannot fulfill their publishing requirements). The risk of involvement connects to the on-going culture that ever more lauds the necessity of assessment in

real terms, despite the inability to assess actual learning in any way that resembles reality. Professors face much the same paradox that Alsup (2006) suggested that secondary school teachers face: “the successful teacher must be selfless and selfish at the same time, a seemingly impossible seesaw to balance” (p. 25). We must be selfish enough to think of ourselves first in terms of how we are going to be “assessed” while we must be selfless in order to actually be the best teacher that we can be.

We can measure outcomes, and we can most certainly teach to the test, but it is much more difficult to measure genuine learning, and more difficult still to empirically measure successful versus unsuccessful teaching/learning interactions occurring in the classroom.

> Standardized tests provide a crude approximation at best of what college students should be learning (Bok, 2003, p. 31).

> Welcome to the world of education where the corporate definition of quality determines what quality means, where business values are replacing educational values at an unprecedented rate (Edler, 2004, p. 91).

The above quotes, which lament corporatization and standardization, do not have to reflect (at least fully reflect) university life. Despite the well-intentioned efforts of administrators who feel compelled by accrediting agencies to improve the ways in which we measure our quality, there remain some of us who remain convinced that assessment (at least in terms of what is being presented to us) will, in and of itself, actually diminish the quality of education that we deliver to our students. The issue, a very real issue, is how faculty members might address these concerns in an environment in which assessment as a positive is neither debated nor, dare I say it, assessed, but rather an environment in which the value of assessment is assumed. As administrators in academia surely must lament from time to time, very little in academia is

assumed. We have all been taught by our graduate professors to assume very little, and to examine with as much detail as we may muster, almost everything that confronts us. Those lessons that we were taught, are not necessarily being effectively passed on to future generations of college students. Complacency and acceptance have seemingly surpassed questioning as our fundamental mode of intellectual discourse.

> "One of the most salient features of our culture is that
> There is so much bullshit" (Frankfurt, 2005, p. 1).

Chapter Three

Assessment and Social Justice: Whining and Dining

Mastering the obvious has become a popular feature within the culture of a society in which we spend a great deal of time asserting that Paris Hilton is "spoiled" and that Lindsay Lohan is "troubled." "We are using too much energy and have become overly dependent upon foreign oil," news that must come as a real revelation to Jimmy Carter who gave speeches on the subject 30 years ago. Why do we spend so much time talking about stuff that we already intuitively know? Keizer (2007) put it tersely, succinctly, and I think, best:

> "The brief hubbub over Al Gore's lavish energy consumption was similar in its disingenuousness to the outcry over conditions at Walter Reed. Imagine: Rats! Roaches! Moldy walls! To think that these poor wounded soldiers might actually be sequestered in places as those in which many of them came of age and went to school—it boggled the mind. And this Gore, this patrician prophet of global catastrophe, this millionaire former candidate for President of a nation in which the phrase 'millionaire candidate for president" amounts to a circumlocution—he actually lives in a big house. And he uses a lot of electricity too! This pretense of not knowing what every idiot knows has increasingly come to define our national discourse" (p. 9).

The reality is that Al Gore is well to do, and that the political commentators who condemned his energy usage are also well to do, as are the candidates running for president, as are the other political leaders influencing public policy. The reality is that many of the soldiers fighting in Iraq are not in a similar situation, that they and their families would not be described as well to do. The reality for us, however, is that we know that, or we are simply deluding ourselves if we deny it. Our collective concepts of social justice should be on our radar screens as

a matter of course, not simply when we "learn" that Al Gore probably lives in a big house, or that hospitals and schools that serve low-income persons are probably not free of mold, insects, and other nastiness that afflicts the living conditions of millions of Americans. But, rather than accepting the "obvious," we deny it, and express our shock when we "learn" of it. I fear that we are traveling down a similar path when it comes to higher education assessment, that when it is found not to have a positive impact upon learning outcomes, we will express our "shock," when we should've seen it coming all along.

I wonder who might do poorly on standardized assessment? Might there be gate-keeping effects of various testing programs, and might low-income and culturally diverse test-takers fare most poorly of all? Might we be able to attach labels to those who perform poorly on tests that are created by those with the power to keep people out? Will we have to express our shock once again, when the advantaged classes with access to test prep courses as well as the best living conditions, healthcare, travel opportunities, and the like, perform the best on "standardized tests?" If we must teach to the test, we simply won't have time to focus on the many alternative assessment programs that might better serve our variety of populations. We could actually reach a wide range of students in our classrooms, and we could…I think…even "educate" these students and build in them, or at least many of them, a genuine love of learning and a curiosity that might serve them in society. Or…we could test them, and let them go, informing them symbolically and realistically, that only the "stuff" that is on the test is the stuff that "matters," and that there is no real reason to engage in thinking beyond the practical. One would assume that the arts would suffer: why bother going to a museum or an art gallery? What possible practical purpose could be gleaned from exploring the distant past, or the beauty of art? Better,

we keep our eyes on the prize, a focused attention to the test that everyone will take. Freedom and exploration were for the settlers and our distant ancestors, better we conform to the standards as set from above.

In teaching the course, "social justice and ethics," I have had ample opportunity to confront in student dialogue, student writing, and the academic literature, a seemingly precipitous decline in both our collective interest in "social justice," and any consequent need to fight for such justice. "Ethics" as both a course and a concept is equally "academic" in the sense that it bears little relationship to my students' consciousness and/or their "real world" focus. A pre-occupation with the "practical," at the expense of the theoretical may be understandable in youth who fear for their futures and who worry about their "place" in the world after they leave their campuses. I've had the occasional student who has complained of me in their evaluations that I didn't have enough "real world experience." As a former practicing attorney, and magistrate prior to attaining my Ph.D. and becoming a professor, I always failed to understand that particular criticism. What did they want from me? Was I being compared to some of my "old war horse" colleagues, gentlemen in their 60s who spent entire careers in law enforcement prior to becoming part-time professors? Did their dependency upon "war stories" actually appeal to the students more than what I perceived to be a more critical analysis of course material, use of texts, and only an occasional interweaving of "real-life" experience? While whether I am good at what I do or not is surely a factor in how students evaluate the class, I am left to ponder whether they've also been socialized (even as teenagers) to view what I do (teach) as something less valuable than what they are planning on doing (making a lot of money). If the larger culture continually berates the teaching and by extension the professing professions then it should be no small wonder that

many students are looking for "practical and real life" experiences in the classroom rather than what apparently must be the artificial and fake life theories and constructs that sometimes make up the foundation for many of our courses. "Is this going to be on the test?" "What possible use could there be in this for my real life?" Thinking becomes unfashionable, while doing becomes everything. To revisit George W. Bush, if only for a moment, his victories have been, in no small part, a result of his and (Karl Rove's) ability to portray his opponents as egg-headed intellectuals out of touch with the "real world." He's the "decider-in-chief," and the quicker and more decisive those decisions come forth, the more "leadership" he seems to be exerting. If education is about increasing doubt and questioning assumptions, what kind of strong leadership can emanate from the academy? In contrast, we've looked to business where decisive leadership absent of doubt has become richly compensated, both monetarily, and conceptually. Perhaps nobody (at least in a democracy) has exhibited the complete absence of doubt better than George W. Bush and Dick Cheney. It is certainly no mere coincidence that calls for assessment in education have become louder and suspicions about those who engage in the practice of education have grown stronger. Certainty, decisive leadership, and consistency have trumped the wisdom that comes from questioning the status quo. Even contemplating a change of mind, should events or information gained require a thinking person to make such a change, is often now seen as a sign of weakness, or in politics, "waffling." So we find ourselves within that environment in which a course of action has been charted, where greater and more quantitative assessment has been shouted from the hilltops, and in which all doubters be damned, and condemned to the dark recesses of that unmentionable place where temperance, reasoned dialogue, and caution rule. In other words, those of us who raise questions in the face of

overwhelming momentum are best left where we already are: academia, where we can question, examine, and then be chastised for our unwillingness to get on the bandwagon, and our consequent inability to understand the value of the practical.

It is not as if all of my colleagues are reluctant to jump on the moving bandwagon that is greater assessment. What about the focus upon the practical rather than the theoretical among professors, themselves? As "practical" assessment becomes a more central focus of administrators, politicians, and even parents and students, professors may naturally feel an obligation to focus themselves upon publication and other aspects of their work that can be more easily a subject of "external" review and validation. Such an "external" focus on the part of professors might naturally lessen their focus on more "internal" campus community activities such as committee work and even, to some degree, the teaching of students. Fewer faculty members may pursue research that isn't pre-determined to achieve a successful outcome. Why would one take risks in an environment in which your critics are constantly peering over your shoulder? Wouldn't it be much safer just to do what we are told?

Most institutions spend months, actually years, preparing their "self studies." These studies are documents reflecting all that the university has been doing (often embellished no doubt) and all that the university hopes to accomplish. Grand mission statements and value laden entries are included and the finished product is the culmination of hundreds of hours spent compiling, and sometimes creating, data for the accreditation body to examine. While I am not against the concept of accreditation and/or licensing more generally, as the maintenance of and adherence to standards are critical to the functioning of any "quality" endeavor: it still seems as though the expenditure of quite literally hundreds of person hours on assessment preparation

could be better spent actually doing what a university is supposed to be doing: teaching, researching, and serving. Similarly, faculty members faced with tenure and promotion decisions must also devote many, many hours to the compilation of documents and the creation of grandiose teaching statements and value statements that justify their own worth. Again, hours that might better be spent improving their teaching, writing, and/or service, rather than figuring out new and creative ways to tout one's own virtues. Mediocre teaching is tolerated, even rewarded. Mediocre research records seemingly are intolerable. Until provosts and deans begin to recognize high quality scholarship on teaching and learning as comparable in importance to traditional disciplinary scholarship, we will not see substantive change. But…just as touting our own virtues becomes more important than actually creating a more genuine work product, it remains a zero-sum game

when it comes down to improving one's teaching or writing a journal article...why take a chance on that teaching thing? It is clear that a focus upon teaching puts one's status at risk...regardless of the rhetoric of the institution.

While not all of us are so valuable that our individual merits speak entirely for themselves, there still must be a better way of illustrating our value than spending countless hours on "philosophies of teaching," and the compilation of several years worth of syllabi and tests and assignments. At my university, not so different from most, I am led to believe, there continues to be an increase placed in the value of "external validation." Validation from outside sources is fine, and no doubt appropriate for peer reviewed books, articles, research projects, conference presentations, and the like, but are we really going toward a time in which we need letters from those outside the university in which are advising, teaching, and general interactions

with students are somehow "judged," from the outside. How is that even practically possible?

What happens in the university is based upon professor/student interaction, and the fact that students are uninvolved is perhaps merely a reflection of similar behavior on the part of faculty members who like it or not, and for good or ill, are students' primary role models during their time on campus. If fighting for social justice is barely, if at all, upon our students' radar screens, perhaps it shouldn't surprise anyone that faculty members are equally consumed with their own "real world" lives that leave less and less time for such worthy but often futile pursuits as social justice.

> "A moral community is not possible without anger and the moral indignation that accompanies it" (Berns, 1979, p. 156).

All of which brings me, not a moment too soon, to assessment. First, I nor my colleagues I presume, are against assessment. Like motherhood and apple pie, the concept of assessment is sound. Finding a way to assess what learning is occurring and how our students are doing is innocuous at worst, and perhaps even valuable. It is not that assessment is somehow wrong it is more that assessment of the teaching/learning model on college campuses is not possible in the same way that it is proving elusive in secondary and primary schools. For assessment to have any value it must be done well, and it must be done comprehensively. Most assessment plans, however, are neither done well, nor comprehensively. Barrington (2003) identified two reasons why assessment typically fails to improve teaching: (1) it duplicates existing efforts while taking time away from activities more advantageous to student learning, and (2) it leaves professors with the unfortunate choice of either fabricating assessment data or teaching things that are easily assessed.

Popham (2004) defined assessment as "the measurement activities in which educators attempt to derive valid inferences about students' unseen knowledge, skills, or affect" (p. 419). Assessment can be an important tool in determining what curricular aims should be pursued, or whether course sequencing has been appropriate, and it may even help us determine how best to correlate our abilities to teach with our students' abilities and desires to learn. In other words, assessing how we deliver our program to our students can be useful. Jensen (2006), among others, provided a number of alternative assessment vehicles, including such options as student content journals, learning contracts, and portfolios. Making certain that a variety of learning styles are accounted for, and that a variety of learners are responded to is a primary function of quality teaching. Making assessment more standardized and "routine" will almost surely impact the outcome of any assessments made, as the racial, cultural, and social biases of the assessors may overshadow any information received. If assessment is mostly a positive concept (after all we do need to evaluate our past performances if we are going perform better in the future), then both students and professors can gain from appropriate and varied assessment methods. Both of these groups are almost certain to suffer, as victims in a diminished teaching/learning process, if professors are required to standardize their teaching methods and focus upon "teaching to the test."

Assessment represents an emerging trend in education, and assessment imposed upon us by the federal government, accreditation agencies, and university administrators is purportedly done for the students and for the betterment of these (our) programs. Despite this emerging trend and its widespread acceptance (perhaps largely from resignation); there is little to nothing about these new methods of assessment that is either natural or logical.

Edmundson (2004) ably critiques the assessment of professors in which students frequently assessed a given professor's ability based on whether or not the class was "enjoyable." Professors are frequently lauded for being "interesting," or for being "relaxed" or even "tolerant." Are these adjectives appropriate for assessing whether a professor is doing a good job? What about intolerant professors? Or dare I say it, what about boring professors? How do we distinguish between a student's level of "enjoyment" and their actual learning? How do we distinguish between a student's actual learning because of their own initiative or "interest," from the level of learning or interest that is brought forth in them, because of the influence of a professor?

The assessment issue confronts us, confounds us, and, at times even, it paralyzes us from taking genuine and positive steps toward a program that might better measure our successes and more appropriately limit our failures. How can we take seriously an atmosphere of assessment of students, when there is no meaningful assessment of faculty and administrators? Are we again asked to assume that all is well with our teaching, research, and service, despite any (or at least much) evidence that indicates good health? Are our teaching evaluations as prepared by students taken seriously? Is there any mechanism in place whereby we might evaluate our administrators? Our peers? Is the acquisition of tenure meaningful, or merely a process of putting in one's time? If we perhaps do not have entirely satisfactory answers to these and other vexing questions of assessment, how in the world might we begin to properly assess the success of our program? Are we truly adding value to all students' lives? Perhaps we should be satisfied if we are truly adding value to most students' lives. What if students are largely adding value to their own lives simply by being members of the campus community? Do we get credit for that? Should we take credit

for that?

What about the atmosphere present in many college classrooms in which the confrontation of students by professor is often seen by students as threatening and uncomfortable? In essence, much of what good professors often do: challenge students, make them uncomfortable with their preconceived ideas, and even threaten notions that they may have held dear, may be seen by students as incompatible with their "consumer" experience.

Edmundson (2004) wrote of students classroom desires with the following description:

> "The classroom atmosphere they most treasured was relaxed, laid-back, cool. The teacher should never get exercised about anything, on pain of being written off as a buffoon. Nor should she create an atmosphere of vital contention, where students lost their composure, spoke out, became passionate, expressed their deeper thoughts and fears, or did anything that might cause embarrassment. Embarrassment was the worst thing that could befall one; it must be avoided at whatever cost" (p. 11).

What becomes of assessment, if professors who challenge and/or even embarrass the occasional student, who has not done the reading, or who fails to comprehend a certain point, can then savage the professor at assessment time. What if a professor is a genuinely good educator who makes students uncomfortable? If thinking about significant issues in a classroom can be uncomfortable, it is surely even more uncomfortable ultimately not to think about them at all (Edmundson, 2004). "The result of never brooding over major issues is likely to be that one follows the crowd" (Edmundson, 2004, p. 101). Do we really want our professors to not engage their students for fear of being lambasted at assessment time? Should only tenured professors have the right to question students and make them uncomfortable in following conventional wisdom. Doesn't a true liberal arts education require that students be challenged in their

thoughts, and that they challenge themselves? If the answer is yes, then how do we make certain that student evaluations of professors focus more upon how challenging the professor was and less upon how "interesting" the professor was.

"How many professors does it take to change a lightbulb?" Some administrators might disgustedly assume the answer is "many." As a professor, myself, I submit the answer is probably only one...but we would first want to examine why the lightbulb failed, and whether simple replacement is the appropriate course of action. How many professors does it take to change a student? The answer again is one, but the opportunity to change a student and open his/her mind to endless possibilities is an opportunity that presents itself in nearly every college classroom. If a student performs well on a standardized test is that a measure of success? I submit that it is but one measure and at that, not a particularly valuable measure of success. If a student opens him/herself up to other possibilities, and if that student begins to address issues in a more reasoned and critical manner, that is another, and I believe, more important measure of success. If I were, for example, to lead a class on something as important as assessment, I would begin by asking my students to consider the value of assessment and how it might best be accomplished. I certainly wouldn't provide for them a means of assessment and expect them not to question it. Yet, it seems, faculty members are expected to simply accept a given means of assessment as appropriate for this program, and administrators should not be surprised when our level of acceptance is minimal.

The first and perhaps most important "fact" that we must address is the flawed premise upon which much assessment is built: that education is somehow "delivered" and therefore, the success or failure of that delivery can be measured. If FedEx or UPS fails to deliver a package on

time, its failure can easily be assessed. If we, in higher education, fail to deliver an education to an adult student, that failure is significantly less certain, and who should bear responsibility is less certain still.

When corporate quality improvement measures are employed across an educational institution as a whole, the process of teaching and learning is forced to conform to the corporate model (Edler, 2004, p. 93). Thus teaching and learning is turned into the "production of education" for business and is driven by considerations of marketability, delivery, technology, availability, and efficiency (Edler, 2004, p. 93). We are in danger of allowing corporate values and processes to shift from the periphery of an educational institution to its defining center, making educational values and processes peripheral and even expendable (Edler, 2004, p. 96).

The bottom line (important for those engaged in the "corporatization" of university life and for those seeking to make simple, what is unduly complicated) is that assessment systems have not been shown to improve teaching and/or learning. Assessment systems can and often are very reductive and more than a bit unreflective. Popham (2004) referred to "blatent instances of curricular reductionism, excessive test preparation, and modeled dishonesty" (p. 423). Curricular reductionism takes place when professors begin to pay little to no attention to topics that won't be covered on an assessment test. Is such an occurrence possible? How, can any of us even begin to argue that human nature would be overcome and good professors would not feel compelled to "teach to the test?" Excessive test preparation, in order to make certain our students perform well, will not only lessen our ability to teach them to "think," it will also suck out any remaining joy that formal education still retains for both student and professor. Finally, modeled dishonesty as Popham refers to it, would consist of the "need" for professors to engage in unethical practices

in order to succeed in the classroom. Professors may supply students with answers ahead of time, or focus upon questions on the test exclusively during class time. Cheating in order to succeed...what a message to send to our students, many of whom already feel pressure from home, peers, and other sources that sometimes makes their need for good grades supercede any process that might be required in order to honestly achieve those grades. Do the ends justify the means?

While assessment is ostensibly done as a form of "quality control," one of the major effects of assessment is that professors find themselves compelled, as do other teachers, to "teach to the test." Concern over learning is lessened, and concern over compliance is heightened. Teaching to the test will surely happen, given the incentives present in such an atmosphere of assessment. If my students will be judged against your students and they will both be taking the same exam...it would be less than realistic to expect me not to focus their efforts on doing well on that exam, and thereby establishing their worth as students and my worth as teacher. Professors will begin the process (long established by some of our older and established peers) of imparting to our students a bunch of "facts" that will be remembered only as long as the time between the "teaching" and the taking of the exam. Has learning then been demonstrated? Barrington (2003) cautioned us that the very nature of the liberal arts in which students are encouraged to develop their abilities to recognize, evaluate, synthesize, and understand observations and arguments they encounter runs counter to an educational process whereby students are encouraged to memorize facts or master vocational skills.

Universities must observe good business practices in the relevant areas (purchasing, service contracts, maintenance, construction), but colleges are not businesses. They do not drop

product lines that have lost market share. They do not dismiss employees who cease to be productive or who run into personal problems. They do not monitor every moment of every day. My experience suggests that it might be worth a try to stand up for ourselves unapologetically, and to comport ourselves as if we were formidable adversaries, rather than easy marks.

Sometimes people suggesting change are simply too nice. We are diplomatic, respectful, conciliatory, reasonable, sometimes apologetic, and always defensive, when we maybe should be blunt, aggressive, mildly confrontational, and just a bit arrogant (Fish, 2004, p. C1). Sometimes causing people pain and making them uncomfortable is the best way to initiate real change. I find myself torn between playing "nice" and accepting assessment as a means of making my administrator's lives easier with our accrediting agencies; and doing what I believe is the correct thing to do...resist and desist until there have been persuasive arguments made explaining why assessment will be good for the learning process at this university and for this discipline.

There is a place for assessment. "Very few universities make a serious, systematic effort to study their own teaching, let alone try to assess how much their students learn or to experiment with new methods of instruction" (Bok, 2003, p. 26). We should begin to make a serious, systematic effort to study such things, but that discussion is just beginning, it is far from over and far from resolved.

"The assumption by assessment advocates that a single set of 'learning objectives' exists regardless of teaching style or discipline is curious" (Barrington, 2003). Curiosity seldom kills the professor, however. What may kill us is the idea that standardization of assessment criteria should take precedence over faculty judgment about how to teach a course. If assessment were really about teaching and learning, faculty members wouldn't be encouraged to spend time

making their courses easier to assess.

Yet another irony of the corporate model of education and assessment lies in the fact that in our discipline, we are having no problem attracting students. If the market is any indicator, students are coming to our discipline because they perceive it will assist them. If we were losing students, perhaps I could see the need for more and different assessment mechanisms that could help us explain our failures. Given our successes, in contrast, do we not trust our students? It seems that assessment will allow administrators a means whereby they can insulate themselves from doing their jobs. Assess our performances, truly assess our performances, make the acquisition of tenure meaningful, take the comments of our students seriously...then...and only then...will I jump on the bandwagon of assessment.

I cannot oppose any program that might lessen our students' contact with bad teaching. Surely, none of us can oppose any program of assessment that might actually address poor teaching, and promote areas in which positive changes could be made. Assessment programs, as presently constituted (and certainly in the form of standardized tests) seem unlikely to force or even suggest any positive changes.

> "I have found little defense against...pathetically bad teaching of the Liberal arts that can be found at all levels of education... in external institutional accreditation, state program approval of academic or professional programs, etc..." (Delattre, 2002, p. 91).

Until we find an appropriate defense against bad teaching, whether that teaching is in the liberal arts or the "pre-professional" programs, there is little that assessment can do, other than waste our classtime, lower our morale, and lessen our contributions to service and research in and for the institution. Perhaps most importantly, the focus upon assessment comes dangerously close

to becoming its own educational philosophy. De Zengotita (2005) warned of the unholy alliance between education and politics: "Scratch an educational philosophy and you'll uncover a political scheme. Every time." (p. 46). It would seem at least plausible that those most interested in greater and ever more assessment within higher education are hell-bent upon finding reasons to diminish the standing of higher education in our society. Our tolerance of and compliance with what may very well be political schemes rather than serious attempts to improve higher education speaks very poorly of us all. Still, acknowledgment of the many limitations of assessment schemes, is not the same as translating new and better ideas into action. I don't want to leave the reader with the unfair impression that raising questions and complaining about the status quo occupies all of my time, when the reality is that it merely occupies most of my time, at least professionally. In that spirit, I must save some of this book, for suggestions for a new and better way, in which we might actually translate ideas and ideals into reality, so that both students and professors, alike, might benefit rather than suffer from assessment.

Not too long ago, I prepared a portfolio for my own assessment, as post-tenure review, and promotion to full professor loomed on the horizon. Inevitably, my portfolio was largely my version of a common template…a representation of all that flattered me, my visions, my hopes, my dreams, my accomplishments, my world view….me, me, me….de Zengotita referred to "meWorld" in which we come to understand that we, ourselves are at the center of our world…and others at the center of their worlds. "The idea that everyone has their own reality, constituted by their own experiences and perceptions, comes almost automatically. It feels like common sense" (de Zengotita, 2005, p. 77).

I cannot remember if the following line is my own, or if I've stolen it from somewhere,

but I fear in either case that it applies to higher education in all too real a way. We've become players on a stage rather than players in the world. "I've been playing myself now for so long, I've almost forgotten that it's an act." This chapter began pondering why we spend so much time pretending not to know what everybody already knows. I will close it, by pondering why we spend so little time challenging what is less obvious. Should Paris Hilton spend 4 days in jail, 23 days, 45 days…the rest of her "not so natural" life? Maybe indeed the world is but a stage, and we are merely players, but I fear that important players, like teachers and professors, are ever more shoved into the wings, while less critically prepared people with considerably less wisdom, are allowed to take center stage. Of course, Al Gore is wealthy. Of course, Paris Hilton is "spoiled." Of course, some kids are privileged and gain admission to elite colleges based on status rather than merit. Of course, a meritocracy is much more an ideal than a reality. How much time do we need to spend on these "questions" to which we already all know the answers? Why not devote some time and resources to questions that actually are worthy of answering, and/or to solutions to genuine problems, like inequities that exist in society, or like our dependence upon foreign oil, or like how to avoid more war in places where even "winning" is losing. For my purposes, the question of how we better assess college teaching and the work that goes on in colleges and universities is a question worthy pursuing, because we don't already know the answer. To presume that the answer lies in more standardized tests for our students is to abdicate any responsibility for really assessing the nature of the question, and merely jumping ahead to an "easy and almost certainly inappropriate fix."

Chapter Four

"The Practice of Assessment: Assessment for Assessment's Sake"

It was the beginning of the end for one of my former Deans. He had come to the faculty meeting armed with an assessment "chart" that the college of engineering had been using. He suggested to us that we needed to begin a full-scale assessment program for our own program. Just plug some numbers into the "matrix" and all would be well. We could measure student satisfaction with the program, and everyone above the Dean would be happy and presumably I suppose, congratulate him on his assessment program validating the worth of his program. While this story began several years and several Deans ago, the reaction at the time is important for us to "assess" today. The faculty reaction was either to ignore the request, or to actually engage the conversation about the nature of and the need for assessment, but there was little action directed towards implementation of any actual assessment vehicle. After all, how could we just go forth without questioning, that's not what we do, that's not what we ever do. So…we questioned, we tinkered, we abandoned all hope. But that was then, what about assessment in today's world of higher education? Today there is less room for deliberate consideration…we must assess and we must assess quickly…or else.

There is little doubt that most of us are able to access more information than ever before. There is doubt, however, as to whether or not accessing that information has made us any smarter. Thornton (1999), an author with whom I don't share a political philosophy, and with whom I'd probably disagree with every bit as much as I might agree (as easily interpreted as my problem, as it may be his) makes what I believe is an extremely valid point regarding the spread

of knowledge without an accompanying depth with which we might try to actually absorb and use that information. He describes "the 'horizontal' spread of knowledge, its dissemination through widespread -literacy, universal education, and high-tech media of transmission, has *not* banished ignorance, false knowledge, interested error, or institutionalized lies" (p. xvi). Without context and understanding, information becomes little more than trivia. If we "assess" based upon how well our students can retain information, without understanding how well they actually understand that information and/or how well they can actually use that information, then we are assessing little more than trivia retention.

If the retention of trivia is our goal, then standardized assessment vehicles may be our means to achieve that goal. If, however, we are looking for a contextualized understanding of knowledge and an ability to critically think, reason, and better absorb what is presented to us in the world around us, we may actually make a case that standardized assessment is not, at its worst, a harmless waste of time for educators, but actually an extremely harmful process that diverts us from goals that we should be seeking. In essence, assessment programs absorb valuable resources that better be used to actually provide our students with enriched experiences. Miltich (2001-02) wrote of assessment as a "distraction diverting our attention" (p. 87). "Measurement is no substitute for nourishment. The assessment movement's spokespeople like to talk about nurturance and about learning communities, but they end by focusing on measurement, data gathering, and quantification, rather than what nurturance requires of us: provision" (p. 87).

How do colleges actually approach assessment? If we can agree that the concept seems to be pervasive and has ventured well beyond the accreditation process with which all credible

colleges and universities have historically complied, then in what form has that focus on assessment taken? If there is an increased focus upon assessment, largely for assessment's sake, then how is it that such assessment actually takes place? Are assessment schemes logical? Are they truly a method of determining whether value is added to students? Are they truly a method of determining whether value is added to the educational process? Or are they more about assessments for the sake of assessment: more numbers, more quantitative data, less actual information that can be useful. This chapter is intended to be a warning concerning what sometimes happens when a seemingly benign concept like assessment becomes a much more malignant concept like "judgment." Having said this, certainly not all is relative. Some programs, some professors, some entire colleges lack merit and have only a minimal amount to actually offer students, parents, and other potential "consumers." Still, most colleges and universities continue to survive in these perilous "consumer driven" times, and many even thrive. How do some thrive and others perish? Why do some thrive and others perish? How important are such "subjective" ratings systems like *U.S. News & World Report* rankings? Do "hot" or "up and coming" schools really warrant such reviews? Are the biggest "party" schools really the biggest party schools, and who makes the claim that a school is a "party" school? Is it a frat boy? Is it a student more concerned with his/her Friday night social schedule than his Monday through Friday class schedule? If it is, why would we take such a person's word, and if it isn't, how would another actually know of the best parties? It's a dilemma to be sure.

Moving beyond parties, which schools have superior academic programs and professors? How are these programs and these people judged? Are publications the most significant criteria? Which publications in which journals and from which publications are more worthy than others?

What of teaching evaluations? What about self-identification as brilliant scholars? How about reputations? It all reminds me of the old Groucho Marx line in which he laments the dilemma that he wouldn't want to be a member of a club that would have him. If one teaches at Harvard or Yale or Princeton or Columbia is one automatically in? How about if one merely attends one of these institutions? (There has been an increasing recent discussion of the interest in some Ivy League schools in admitting the sons and daughters of celebrities and, in some cases, the celebrities themselves…with more an eye on their celebrity status, than their SAT scores).

Is it possible to avoid bias in these situations? Aren't some people necessarily going to be favored while others disfavored? Perhaps it is important to Yale that Jody Foster attended or to Princeton to count Brooke Shields as an alum? Is NYU a better place because of the Olson twins? I'm not suggesting that any of these folks either didn't deserve their place in the class or that they didn't add value to the campus. It is merely food for thought about yet another important way in which colleges make headlines unrelated to the academic happenings on campus. Do celebrities contribute to campus "cool?" Is the climate for learning enhanced by their admission and through the admission of legacies of the rich and famous alum of generations past?

I don't know the answers to any of these questions, as is my modus operandi, yet they all make me wonder about how colleges and universities are "assessed" in the public's eye. Did the Duke Lacrosse scandal (whether real or inflated) diminish the greater university? Does the success of Duke basketball inflate the quality of the greater university? My belief is that the answer to both of these questions is no, or perhaps only a very minimal, almost imperceptible yes. Yet there can be no doubt that athletic success and the lack of athletic department scandal

are both important to the way in which an entire university is assessed? A recent football brawl at the University of Miami, only heightened an already prevalent perception that focus upon big-time college athletics has consumed a more primary focus upon academics at some institutions. Bok (2006) suggests that even with the heightened scrutiny that has begun to examine what happens on college campuses, we "do not even have an informed guess" whether or not the quality of teaching has improved over the past several decades. Bok suggests that colleges and universities are not alone in this limited ability to accurately assess their worth: "no clear consensus exists on whether the quality of architecture, poetry, or painting has improved since 1950, or whether lawyers are practicing their craft more skillfully or philosophers writing with greater insight" (p. 30).

> "Is it fair to judge the current state of undergraduate education as one might evaluate a consumer product, and ask for demonstrable improvements in quality? Or is the experience of college more like the writing of poetry and the practice of architecture, activities that normally defy such judgments, as least over periods of 50 or 100 years?" (Bok, 2006, p. 30).

Chapter Five

"Corporate Dominance in Thought, Word, and Sometimes, Deed"

> "While all of us believe in having accountability in schools, the argument is over which type of accountability" (Jensen, 2006, p. 236).

"Scratch an educational philosophy and you'll uncover a political scheme. Every time." De Zengotita (2005), p. 46. It is certainly political to continually equate education with business, but to do so distorts educational policy in a variety of unproductive ways. To largely rest the case for improving higher education upon economic grounds (and to continually refer to students as consumers as if they were shopping for toothbrushes at Target or Wal-Mart significantly misstates and radically understates the goals of higher education).

> "The country will continue to need cadres of highly trained specialists in an array of technical fields. In many cases, of course, the best place to learn the necessary skills will be a university. For many and perhaps most of us, however, university education is not mainly for acquiring directly marketable skills that raise the nation's productivity. It is for securing a higher ranking in the labor market, and for cultural and intellectual enrichment. Summed across society, the first of those purposes cancels out. The second does not. That is why enlightenment, not productivity, is the chief social justification for fours years at college" (Crook, 2006, p. 28).

Among the duties I have performed in my role as a professor, is the duty of serving as a search committee chair for new faculty hires. These duties required me to sort through voluminous vitae, attempting to initially determine and distinguish human "wheat" from human "chaff." After the initial sorting phases, phone interviews were conducted and then on-campus visits in which candidates would nervously present themselves and (to a lesser degree) their research interests in front of a class of students and professors. Many obligatory lunches and dinners would be attended with varying amounts of heady "professor-type" talk interspersed with

small talk and questions that always headed towards the inappropriate and personal, but which stopped just short of being either inappropriate or personal and as a natural consequence, the questions usually begged answers that stopped just short of being meaningful or helpful to the search committee. But alas, that is the measure of a search committee, trying to figure how who might best fit in with an existing group, who might best satisfy the needs of the department, and who might best contribute to bettering the overall program. But all of this, however grand in design, usually becomes an exercise in sorting out the differences between the genuine and the helpful on the one hand and the disingenuous and the "bullshit" on the other.

One of these experiences perhaps sums up the futility of this particular assignment (that of search committee chair) better than any other: it involved all of the above…the sorting out of vitae, the phone interview, the campus visit, the small and large talk with the candidate, the lunches, the dinners, the behind the candidates' back talks with present colleagues about whether or not she'd fit well. All of that was to be expected, but the outcome was perhaps less anticipated…even by someone who is becoming an ever more wily veteran of the academic life and vagaries of academic politics. Our candidate was deemed worthy and our Dean was asked to make an offer. Then, it all deteriorated, when our Provost determined that the offer should be for significantly less than going professor rates, and that the position (advertised as tenure-track and assistant professor) should be offered as non tenure-track and with visiting status. Not so shockingly, our candidate declined the less than reasonable and less than "polite" offer. So…many weeks of work, and literally many hours of time, were washed away in less time than it takes to say the words "disingenuous offer." I was personally aggrieved, offended, but mostly irritated. This story brings me to the closing chapter of this work, in which I will expand upon

Frankfurt's (2005) work involving "bullshit" with a chapter of my own in which I will come right out with it: it being that academic disingenuousness and "misrepresentation" has become a part of academic culture, now more than ever, and that assessment vehicles play well into that type of culture in which disingenuousness, misrepresentation, and even, dare I say, outright lying have become more than a part of the campus culture.

> "However studiously and conscientiously the bullshitter proceeds, it remains true that he is also trying to get away with something. There is surely in his work, as in the work of the slovenly craftsman, some kind of laxity that resists or eludes the demands of a disinterested and austere discipline" (Frankfurt, 2005, p. 23).

You can get so much done when you are not in any way constrained by truth or ethics. Unfortunately, that which you get done is then in no way related to either truth or ethics. I fear this is where we are with the rhetoric surrounding higher education "accountability." While Dick Cheney may be all for accountability in others, for example, including those "leftists" in higher education, he seems peculiarly against accountability for his own actions, his own policy decisions, and even any accountability over his own government or his past and future business engagements. Comedy Central's *The Daily Show* (March 23, 2006) acquired Cheney's requests when he travels, and while he didn't ask for certain colored M&Ms to be removed, as some rock bands have done, he did have his own unique requests. Most significant for my purposes in this work on accountability and assessment, Vice President Cheney asks that all televisions be tuned to Fox News prior to his arrival. Jon Stewart seized upon that request to focus on the humor of the situation, but perhaps it's not really that funny, that Vice President Cheney, so free to criticize others, would be reluctant to watch anything other than the "news" channel that is essentially guaranteed to support each and every policy and initiative that his Republican administration

might pursue.

Are we unpatriotic to question this administration? Why are they so free to question others as they operate in near total secrecy? Academia is not like that, for as we may not exactly welcome criticism (does anyone really?), we certainly conduct our business in the open. Academia is remarkably open in fact…everyday I subject myself to dozens of students who are always free to report on my biases, my limitations, and to hold me accountable in ways ranging from their course evaluations to "ratemyprofessor.com." It is the very nature of the beast, what I do is very "public," and criticisms can be made publicly as well. Whether criticisms have validity depends, to a large extent, upon the quality and quantity of the critics and the nature of the claims. That is the cross that those of us who do our work in public must bear, I have no problem with it, as I believe my work is high quality and others are free to judge it. Were it secret, I suspect I would be more open to a greater need for assessment. What a physician does, for example, in the privacy of his/her own office with only a patient and possibly a nurse present, is certainly not ripe for public criticism, and so another avenue of accountability is critical for all of our safety. My teaching, however, is not done in the privacy of my own office (at least most of the time) and as such there are many witnesses daily to the effectiveness or the ineffectiveness of my teaching. Truly, how much more accountable than that can I possibly be? Very few people do their work in front of an audience; certainly actors and athletes do, but so too, do teachers and professors. If only those in the comfort of their offices were subject to doing their work in front of an audience. Would they be even more conscientious than they otherwise would be? It's difficult to imagine that they would be less focused, less hard-working, and less driven to succeed if people were watching how they did their jobs. Remember the old adage that has

annoyed teachers of all stripes for generations: Those who can do, and those who can't, teach? Well…those who teach are seen, and those who don't get to do most of their work in total privacy and sometimes, even, total secrecy. Shouldn't we worry about greater accountability in those professions before we begin to focus on greater accountability on one of the most public of professions? I don't know…just a question. But it's much more than a question of "mere" hypocracy, it's much more than "mere" fairness and equity, our push toward standardization is actually harming the educational process more than it may be helping it. Raider-Roth (1995) wrote of the need to foster "relationships" between teacher and student so that trust could play a role in the teaching/learning enterprise. Individuality needs to be allowed to take root, and reaching different students through different means seems inherent in the process of truly educating a student and preparing a life-long learner.

> "The standardized culture of education today suggests that 'objective measures,' such as high-stakes testing, and standardized curriculum will help students learn more effectively. Yet the very measures espoused by politicians, policymakers, and researchers as the silver bullet to save education are systematically undermining the foundational relationships in the classroom, thereby eroding the most central pillar in the knowledge-building enterprise" (Raider-Roth, 2005, p. 167).

If teachers (and ultimately professors) are led to teach certain bits of information on certain days, they will not be able to make curricular decisions based on what they think their students need…but then, of course, why would we trust teachers in classrooms to have any idea of what their students need? Wouldn't we be better served if those in corporate boardrooms, political offices, and those who lead interest groups dictate what students need? Obviously, of course, the last question is a sardonic one, but if patriotism is the last refuge of a scoundrel,

sarcasm may become the last refuge of a college professor. Perhaps those of us concerned about the direction in which assessment is headed, simply need to wait it out. It was only a few short years ago, that business was held up as a model which we education types might emulate. Through the years, the scandals of Enron, Tyco, Adelphia, the outrage (muted in my view) over outrageous CEO compensation (even when the CEO is directing failing companies) has knocked business from its perch as a general paragon of virtue. Greater accountability for business seems necessary to this outside observer, given the significant problems mentioned above; greater accountability for higher education seems more interested in curing ills that may or may not actually exist. If corruption and scandal were rampant across campuses then surely more accountability would be necessary, but shouldn't those interested in holding higher education accountable for the ills in society be at least as concerned about accountability in places seemingly ripe with already existing scandals and outrages?

Chapter Six

Assessment Through Self-Study (Promotion Through Self-Promotion)

> "What do we mean when we call something 'scholarship'? Certainly all acts of intelligence are not scholarship. An act of intelligence or of artistic creation becomes scholarship when it possesses at least three attributes: it becomes public; it becomes an object of critical review and evaluation by members of one's own community; and members of one's community begin to use, build upon, and develop those acts of mind and creation" Shulman

Shulman's words, like Boyer's words used at the beginning of this book, should offer some enlightenment for all of us working in academia regarding what is or is not scholarship, and hence what is or is not worthy of consideration for promotion. Perhaps it is easily understood why, at least in terms of basic educational philosophy, if not perspective, Shulman succeeded Boyer as President of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. What is less understood, however, is the debate about assessing the "quality" of scholarship and of teaching. Too often, players in higher education become bogged down over the assessment debate framing the work that professors do, with an administration that questions the "scholarly nature" of some work, and a professoriate that insists in its inherent scholarly value. Hatch (2006) describes a variety of different connotations to which both scholarship and teaching have been subjected. Scholarship can be seen as a "noble enterprise" or an "arcane pursuit" and teaching can be viewed as a "vigorous intellectual endeavor or a routine engagement" (p. xvii).

> "Success as a teacher is attached to a sense of professional identity that integrates the intellectual, the emotional, and the physical aspects of the teacher's life as well as taking on the subjectivities of 'teacher.' It means being able to combine what I call the core identity or personal beliefs and sense of self with a professional identity that in our culture is often very narrowly and

rigidly defined" (Alsup, 2006, p. 36).

My university's administration and faculty like many other university administrations and faculties I am sure, struggle with the proper role of scholarship within a setting in which teaching has traditionally been viewed as the primary function of the enterprise. A reality that is usually unspoken, but always on the minds of those of us within academia, is that teaching carries very little of the prestige associated with scholarship. Fuller (2003) wrote much about the "abuse of rank" and how important rank has become in society. Teachers, it is thought, rank low upon the ladder of prestige that accompanies professional participation in our society. Others, Fuller included, have written of the "feminization" of the profession, as well as other reasons for the status of teaching in our society, but the reasons are less important than the result of that rankism. Fuller, cited the example of a 7th grade science teacher who lamented his reality in which his friends seem to believe they know everything there is to know about being a teacher, and thus they assume teaching is rather commonplace. In contrast, law, high finance, medicine, and other professions seem to have acquired a "hyper-important" place in our society, while those who educate are often seen as beneath such important people. It is easy for me to see why there is fertile ground for educational accountability movements, given the importance of rankism in our society. In essence, why shouldn't "important" people supervise, and approve of the work that less important people do? Why shouldn't "important" people judge the work of those less critical in our society? Why wouldn't people like Dick Cheney and George W. Bush, millionaire former CEO's entrenched in what they view as the virtues of capitalistic society suppose that lowly, and significantly less well paid educators were less worthy, and more in need of oversight?

Have you ever been bothered by what the person using food stamps might buy in the

grocery store? If you have, or if you have been made aware of those who are upset by such seemingly mundane things, you are aware of the importance of rank and place in our society. I suspect most people, even those seeking greater accountability in others would be horrified if people judged them based on what they might buy at the grocery store, and, after all, what business is it of mine, what those above me in the "natural order" of things might buy. Still, it seems to be a preoccupation of many to be keenly interested in what might be purchased by those below them in the pecking order established by society. Freudenburg & Alario (2007) spoke of "political misdirection," in which some of our leaders seek to focus our attention upon things that are less harmful to themselves. It's not unlike those moments in the movies, or in situation comedies…or in our real lives, in which, when confronted with a difficult question, the subject moves to something less personally intrusive, like sports or the weather. George W. Bush told us to go shopping rather than make individual sacrifices after September 11th, to live our lives and "not let the terrorists win." In essence, he told us not to think about it, and let him worry about it. We've now seen where not thinking about proper responses to terrorism has led us; when faced with difficult questions, we chose to go shopping and ask questions no more probing than "How about those Red Sox?"

All of this brings me back to the "place" of teaching, in which those "above" us feel compelled to scrutinize our work product…even if our work product (the education of persons) is actually rather difficult to properly scrutinize. Part of the appeal of "No Child Left Behind," as well as the assessment movement more generally, has been to focus our attention on a blameworthy target, in this case, teachers and schools, and thereby distract us from some of the other ills in society. Do oil companies and their record profits require scrutiny? Absolutely not,

we are told, that is simply the free market at work. Should we examine a healthcare system that seems to be in need of a long-term and expensive fix? How about social security? Too complicated are the answers, too painful might be the self-reflection, so “How about those Red Sox?

Chapter Seven

"Dead Weight Walking: The Professor Privilege"

> "We also have our occasional cranks, our poseurs, our bloviators, our pedants, and a couple of those people who are just impossible to work with, but in this respect we're very much like any other workplace—except for the pedants, who are relatively more numerous on campus than off"(Berube, 2006, p. 98).

This was an extremely difficult chapter for me to include in this book, as the subject matter and the tone pained me. To shine an unfavorable light on my colleagues, and a profession that I believe does not take a back seat to any other in terms of integrity, compassion, competence, and worth to society, is not something I've taken lightly. Still, since I've spent much of this work criticizing administrative desires to "assess" without studying the long-term implications of that assessment, it seems only fair to take a hard and long look at ourselves. The profession of college teaching is not all sweetness and light. We have our problems, and this chapter is written to acknowledge some of those problems and perhaps explain, in part, why efforts to impose greater accountability upon our profession have become more commonplace.

Many researchers and policy analysts (e.g. Mingle, 1996; Layzell, Lovell, and Gill, 1996) have argued that the ongoing public concerns regarding faculty productivity are related in part to the fact that existing faculty reward structures and not in sync with the public's main goals for higher education (i.e., undergraduate education and service). Instead, faculty reward structures appear to be heavily geared toward research and scholarship. This disjuncture has led to several initiatives to "fix the problem," including legislation, accountability reporting, mandated workload policies, and post-tenure review (Layzell, 1999, p. 3). There are many other aspects of higher education in which the public and the professoriate are seemingly out of sync. One aspect

involves the ever increasing use and dependence upon adjunct faculty. While each of us is armed with anecdotal evidence which both recognizes competent and incompetent adjunct instructors: if ever there was an accountability gap…there it is. How many students have complained about adjuncts and their inaccessibility, their inability to teach, and their seeming inability to even express human emotion….only to find themselves without redress, when adjuncts come and go, and often leave no forwarding addresses. How can we continually be told by administrators and the public that we should be more accountable, as they continually support greater use of professional "temps." We in the academic profession are often labeled by those with whom we are lumped together, and frankly, I'm concerned about being lumped together with adjuncts who are now teaching close to half of undergraduate courses on some campuses. Administrators (like business people fond of temporary help) like the "flexibility" that comes with treating people as expendable "seasonal" help. Unfortunately, the "season" of teaching is year round and the environment and campus culture that is created when "temps" play such a significant role in classroom life has tremendously negative effect upon less temporary professionals who see themselves as part of something bigger than workers at a "jobsite." Contributing to the campus culture is bigger than working at a jobsite, and much of those contributions are lost on administrators focused on short-term balance sheets at the cost of collegiate culture. We cannot complain about campus culture, however, nor can we credibly complain about increasing dependence upon adjuncts, if we turn a blind eye to our own dead weight. If too many among us act as if we were adjuncts, when we are actually full-time employees of the university, what difference would more adjuncts really make?

Recently, I wrote about the rift between J.D.'s and Ph.D.'s within the rather undisciplined

"discipline" of criminal justice (ACJS Today, February 2007). While I'm not the most perceptive person I know (although I am perceptive enough to recognize that), I was able to determine that I struck a fairly raw nerve with a number of people, given the number of unsolicited e-mails received concerning that piece. It seems as though many people sometimes think the same "unthinkable" things, but those who think these things, are reluctant to actually say them. Verbalizing those things which so many of us are thinking is the way in which we get the debate rolling. My belief that this short essay had provoked strong emotions was later confirmed when I was invited to serve on a panel discussing the concepts presented within the article at my discipline's annual meeting. One member of the panel spent the brunt of his time attacking the position taken in that article and, at least it seemed to me, attacking me personally. I had been accustomed to dealing with pompous professor-types at this and other annual meetings, and I have little doubt that many conversations that occur in private (in and outside of academia) focus largely if not entirely on bashing colleagues. I had not, however, ever been bashed so "publicly," and the sting was less than the shock. It's not as if I had never received poor reviews before, presumably because (a) I'm not that gifted a writer, and (b) reviews are, after all, entirely subjective in nature, and different individuals will necessarily view things differently (sometimes my brilliance and clarity of both thought and purpose is apparent only to me). Still, negative reviews had always come in the impersonal nature of a form letter or some other "virtual rejection" rather than a face-to-face diminishment.

Should I defend myself, should I attack the attacker, should I rise above it all? All of these possibilities were being considered as I listened to the speaker make his points. (Thankfully, at least, academic conferences haven't deteriorated, yet anyway, into talk radio and

talk TV in which interrupting the speaker becomes sport, and dominating the discourse replaces actually contributing to intellectual discourse). After his points were made, I responded as I am wont to do, by using self-deprecation and what I perceive to be humor to diffuse a tense situation. My sardonic and negative responses were reserved for more "private" venues with friends and colleagues….until now. I actually have hopes of beginning an elaborate friendship with my tormentor, one in which we exchange vitriolic opinions of one another…preferably in front of others. Perhaps…I muse…at next year's annual conference we can begin the jousting. But, as is so often the case…I digress.

My experience that morning led me to consider the "professor privilege" which I deem to be the ability to say whatever one thinks without the benefit of self-censorship. If others were to say some of the things we've been known to say at meetings, there would be considerable contemplation of a civil commitment, lawsuit, fisticuffs, or some other unpleasant outcome. But, because of our "status" we seem able to say whatever, whenever. Perhaps it's simply my lack of understanding of the broader implications of academic freedom, or perhaps I'm just not comfortable with being a jerk (at least in public) but whether it's my personality or my academic deficiencies, it's stunning to be a party to some of what I've been a party to over the last decade in academia. Prior to my time at the university, I'd thought that a total disregard for the conventions of polite society was the exclusive province of cretins and frat boys (however redundant that might be), but now I've seen firsthand the ability of highly educated people to exercise the "professor privilege" and simply be complete jerks in public. The privilege might also be linked to why some feel that there is a genuine need for greater accountability and a need to reign in some freedoms that those of us entrenched in academia have long taken for granted.

Ward Churchill has become well known for his speech, if not his scholarship, and has become something of a poster boy for the movement that seeks to limit academic freedom. While Churchill is not the best poster child for academic freedom, and in fact, he may indeed serve more effectively as a poster child for why the professor privilege sometimes may extend too far, he is newsworthy precisely because he is so "different." Why shouldn't we be able to always simply say what we think, whenever we want? Is it simply because in a civil society people simply do not do that! I've wanted to insult a student here and there for his/her choice of clothing or inability to grasp what seemed like a simple concept, but I've chosen to censor myself. Sometimes exercising self-censorship could go a very long way toward improving our human relationships, and our inability as a profession to engage in some appropriate self-censorship may have been a contributing factor in any loss of esteem we've suffered.

One thing that surprises many people entering the world of academia is the highly competitive nature of the enterprise. Many people (myself included) gravitate toward academia because of their perceptions (misperceptions really) that it would be a joy to be surrounded by intellectual discourse and collegial interchange, without the highly competitive atmosphere we left behind in the law, business, or other endeavors. We soon learn, however, that everything about the professoriate is competitive, from the journal review process, to peer review and evaluations, promotion and tenure, and even the allocation of office space and other resources. Little did many of us realize that the competition for relatively scarce resources would follow us into the "sheltered" world of academia. Why were so many articles published by the same people over and over? Were these people truly the most gifted among us? In many cases, the answer was indeed yes, but in other cases, the importance of social networking and currying favor among

friends became equally important. Why should the lessons we've learned early in life about the importance of connections and networking be different within academia? We would never tell our students that we live in a genuine meritocracy where all who achieve are richly rewarded and those who are lazy and fail are accordingly left penniless, so why would we think that academic life would be a true meritocracy? Life is simply too complicated for us to achieve a genuine meritocracy, at least given our present social systems. Far from our recognition of this concept leading us down a path to despair, it should free us to understand the need in our profession to heed the words written in *Teacher Stories: Teaching archetypes revealed by analysis*, by Marguerite Hansen Nelson (1993), in which she, among other things, spoke of good teaching as requiring the recurring characteristics of optimism and perseverance. These characteristics are intertwined and, in fact, one inspires the other. Without optimism, it is difficult to persevere and remain confident that the day-to-day workings of a teacher, which can often be frustrating and can temporarily seem undervalued, will ultimately lead to a rewarding existence. Likewise, without perseverance, optimism can be supplanted by the temporary day-to-day frustrations that accompany teaching and other people-oriented professions. Among the most significant frustrations occurs when we must deal with and occasionally even defer to people who have compiled amazing records of non-achievement, sometimes compiled during long careers in academia.

It pleases me to contribute to a debate which I view as a worthy one, and so I'd like to try it again, and this time I'm feeling empowered enough to actually attack an even bigger dilemma within all disciplines within the academy: the dilemma of "dead weight faculty." Lest the reader accuse me of sympathizing with the William Bennett's and Bill O'Reilly's of the world, who

relish any opportunity to attack "elitist intellectuals," I can only assure you their numerous individual hypocrisies and general tendencies to shout over their critics, is every bit as distasteful to me, as I suspect it is to most readers of this book. Thus, I can only ask that you read this chapter for what it is, a criticism for sure, but one that is borne out of love for higher education and for my university, and not out of the apparent abject hatred for academia, a place from which so many critics (particularly those on the right) tend to write. Yet another caveat should be mentioned: that there simply is no profession in which all of the members are good at what they do. It would be wonderful, of course, if all teachers, all police officers, doctors, lawyers, nurses, etc…were outstanding at what they do, but the reality is that not everyone is actually particularly good at what they do, nor is everyone hard working, diligent, and focused on every necessary detail. Some folks have simply allowed the passage of time to erode their skills and interests and devotion to their respective crafts. Others simply never worked that hard at it and have largely "coasted" through their workplace lives. Both of these types of persons exist within academia, as they do in all professions, but sadly and for the sake of this article, my profession is the only one I really know anything about, and thus, it will bear the brunt of my criticism.

Suffering the slings and arrows of criticism does not need to evoke defensiveness as much as I hope it evokes some positive self-reflection within those of us charged with the important responsibility of educating those who will serve our society and contribute to our well-being, both financially and spiritually. Sometimes, for the good of the organization, somebody on the "inside" needs to engage in some reflection that, hopefully, might benefit all of us. (It should be noted, that while this article addresses faculty members in higher education, there can be little doubt that "dead weight" can be found in EVERY social organization, from Congress to

Corporate America, and everywhere in between). NBC news used to have a feature entitled "the fleecing of America" in which wastes of taxpayer dollars were examined, and I presume that almost any organization, public or private, could use some degree of similar scrutiny.

Now, having disclaimed most of what I might say, let's get back to the subject at hand: Dead Weight faculty. You know who you are (and if you're reading this "outside" reading, and typically read about new developments within your profession, you're likely not dead weight). Anyway, so I'm not talking about you, but I am talking about some of your colleagues, and you know who "they" are. You cannot help but know who they are, because they bring you down every day in almost every way, and if you don't recognize it, it's only because you haven't allowed yourself to think about it. This article suggests that it's time to start thinking about it in a reflective and hopefully helpful fashion. As university administrations (and sometimes public commentary) continue to threaten academic traditions such as tenure and academic freedom, it may be appropriate for us to take a hard look at ourselves, so that these worthwhile aspects of academia can actually be protected for the vast majority of those of us engaging in this enterprise. Fighting for something valuable (like tenure and academic freedom) is made much easier if the fight is truly a worthy one and those colleagues with whom you'd share a "foxhole" are actually valuable to the organization.

Dead weight comes in a variety of shapes, sizes, genders, races, ethnicities, but it has one thing in common: it contributes very little to the well being of the organization. Dead weight, as the phrase suggests, tends to drag down those who find themselves attached to it. I've taken the liberty of identifying and describing the traits of dead weight faculty, and I've chosen to break down these folks into two separate and distinguishable categories, with one being merely harmful

and the other being insidious at best, if not downright poisonous to the culture of higher education: (1) those whose time within the academy has come and gone. These folks, usually personable and quite charming, used to be productive members of the profession, but for whatever reasons, have now decided to "phone it in." You may recognize them by the yellowed nature of the notes they use from which to teach class, or you may recognize them from the comments students make about them, in which how "out of step" they are tend to be a common theme; (2) those who aren't that old, so cannot be lumped in description number one above, but who simply have no desire (again for whatever reasons) to do any appreciable work. They teach their classes, probably using old notes, or old powerpoint presentations, and do the minimum that their teaching contracts demand…careful not to do one thing more. They do not participate in extra-curricular activities, wouldn't be caught dead on campus at any time other than teaching or office hours, and generally make themselves scarce at any sign that heavy-lifting might be required. Sometimes they delegate obligations to others, particularly others whom they outrank in the academic pecking order, and sometimes they simply skip obligations altogether. They serve on committees, but seldom attend meetings, so their "service" is usually only service as listed on their curriculum vitas. Remarkably, they are continually "so busy" that scheduling a meeting with them even weeks in advance is, I presume, not unlike scheduling an audience with the Pope. Unlike those in group number one, members of group number two actually hold power over others. Those of us who do the heavy lifting of committee work, new student open houses, student advising, etc., essentially must do group number two's share as well…and sadly, they know it, and seemingly have little to no remorse about it. Are the rest of us simply, suckers? Is it naïve and self-hating to actually attempt to give the university as much as one can?

Beyond the difference in power that members of each group possesses, there is one even more appreciable difference between the two groups: the first group usually consists of older folks who actually feel positively about the university, but have simply grown too tired, too weary, and/or too disengaged to actively engage in scholarly endeavors; the second group usually consists of people who are disenchanted with their lives at the university. Sometimes it's easy to understand the former, but the latter are more difficult to assess, as they usually feel some sort of perceived persecution, as they collect relatively handsome paychecks for doing remarkably little and through the devotion of stunningly little time to the university. Rather than thanking God every morning for having such a job with good pay, and for which good performance is barely required, they instead insist on telling others about how terrible their lives are, and how woefully they are treated by (insert group here….students, colleagues, administrators….everyone at the university).

So…while tenure and other worthwhile academic protections carry with them vastly more positive traits than negative ones, we should probably stop denying the reality that "dead weight faculty" represent. Like some of our students who seem less than fully engaged in the academic enterprise, and cause us to wonder (sometimes aloud) why they've come to college in the first place, we should also focus our bewilderment, and hopefully, our intellectual resources, in an effort to combat disengagement on the part of some of our colleagues on the faculty. While it would truly be an altruistic effort, at least in the sense that it would greatly benefit our students, it would be an equally selfish act, as the heavy lifting that most of do would be shared and would truly make all of our lives in academia the study in social justice that they could actually be.

Those who have found themselves members in the elite group of people who populate

tenured and tenure-track university faculty positions, probably engage in a far more diverse series of job related activities than many laypeople would realize. Among those activities are a series of seemingly endless university community meetings on such topics as curriculum, strategic planning, enrollment management, and a wide variety of other possible and pertinent (some more than others) university issues. While much of what happens at these meetings is valuable and shows the level of engagement with the university that active faculty members should pursue, many other aspects of these meetings are simply studies in pretentiousness. Recently, at one of our "community" forums when our university was engaged in the process of hiring a new provost, one of our elder statesman faculty, long tenured, and long since past his prime, did that which he and many of his ilk are wont to do: he vastly overstated his own intellectual status and worth to the university as he understated the worth of those with differing viewpoints (this usually happens in the form of a long-winded "question" in an open forum that seeks no real answer and is a "question" only in the mind of the one making the clearly rhetorical statement…but yet again…I digress). In this particular case, my colleague on the faculty had come to the university more than thirty years ago, when the university was a fledgling place having just become a four year college. He had attained tenure when there really weren't any standards for achievement of tenure beyond years of service. He had never written a published article or book, nor had he taken any sort of active role in presenting at conferences or any of the myriad of other activities that tend to consume the non teaching hours of "typical" faculty members. Still, feeling no shame, and bursting with the sort of pride that seems to come so naturally to so many who've achieved so little, but who enjoy diminishing the work of others (Ann Coulter and Bill O'Reilly come immediately to mind), my colleague proceeded to extol the

virtue of teaching at the low undergraduate level, that form of teaching that not coincidentally he himself found himself consumed by. In and of itself touting the virtues of teaching freshman has its place, and I too agree that full-time faculty members should be engaged in such an important process. Sadly, however, he only built himself up by doing that which those without much to offer the rest of us tend to do, he tore others down (Kind of like I'm doing here, but differently, I think). He insulted those who teach in graduate programs, and informed the provost candidate and others victimized by their very presence at this open forum, that those faculty members unlike him simply weren't as valuable to the university. It's no wonder we struggle to create faculty wide policies, when we suffer such tremendous divides between us. I'm tired of being on the same side as these fools, and as I age, I am less willing to suffer these fools gladly.

Suffering fools is made even more difficult in my present environment, as I am a member (victim?) of a faculty union. Typically, my union doesn't hold the administration's feet to the fire about the things most unions would, our leadership generally operates by responding to crises as they arise. I've attended union forums in which our union leadership didn't actually know whether administrative contract obligations were being complied with, but we were told to assume (I guess absent being told otherwise) that the administration was doing the best they could. We are often told that we need to simply acquiesce to "reasonable management perspectives." In other words, my union carries with it the power of a battery-less battery operated toothbrush…it can only be moved if we move it ourselves. So, I get all the negative aspects of union membership…an administration that distrusts me and my status as a faculty member and cynically engages in "extra-contractual" events to test our mettle, while I get only the support of a fractured and powerless group of people who are only too comfortable fighting

among ourselves as we protect our individual turf (see above). The union doesn't really have to be adversarial…at least entirely…it truly should communicate with the administration and represent the needs, desires, and beliefs of the union membership, but it does need to fight for input into decisions that impacts the membership, rather than merely respond after the fact.

The union is a formidable obstacle in attempting to rid the "dead weight." Unions can be great things, and are genuinely necessary in what can be a truly oppressive corporate world in which workers are sometimes treated as fungible goods interchangeable, completely "manageable," and expendable. But what about our colleagues who truly need to be changed, managed, or even, sad to say, expended? What about our colleagues who have, either in reality or in their perceptions, suffered so greatly at the hands of administrative fiat, that their bitterness toward the common enterprise of the university is palpable? How can we work together if some of us seemingly absolutely despise our employer? Perhaps we need not be inviting our bosses over for dinner, but if our contempt for them overcomes our common purpose in the enterprise, isn't it time to go?

The difficulty of this chapter, and the formation of it (if only in my mind) has filled me with large doses of irony, for I've served on numerous faculty committees in which "civility" and "respect" have been the key words and key focal points of our consideration. So, it's not without some shame that I've written this vitriolic attack on my colleagues with whom I try to practice civil discourse and who, like all persons, are entitled to respect in our society. It's been difficult for me to respect them in the workplace, but I console myself as I have no doubt that I could respect them outside of it. Everything is contextual, after all, and it's only human nature to apportion your notions of respect in differing doses depending upon context. My colleagues are

all lovely people, but some of them are better at their jobs than others, and those who aren't particularly adept at what they do, are nevertheless adept at making my job more difficult and the lives of all of our students (both those with whom they directly relate in the classroom and those whose relationships with them are merely ancillary) less than what they could be. This is, after all, an academic enterprise in which we continually "judge" our students and the "worth" they bring to their assignments, tests, and even their course discussion. Perhaps it's time for us to take a harder look at ourselves.

Those of my generation remember the NBA player, Charles Barkley, who was castigated many years ago, when he informed a reporter (after a bout of bad behavior) that he, Charles Barkley, was not a role model for children, that role models should be parents and teachers, not basketball players. I don't know that I'd agree with much of what Mr. Barkley might say, but I am with him on that. Despite our tendency in society to worship our athletes and movie stars, and even those who achieve celebrity in the most dubious of ways (e.g., Anna Nicole Smith, Paris Hilton), those who really should be role models are parents and teachers. College professors and administrators, I believe, need to be those role models for the educational enterprise: we must work together to do the best that we can to educate, inform, and get our students to think for themselves and become reflective individuals participating in a reflective society. But…the happy talk about all working together presupposes that we are all truly capable of working together, that we will not undercut each other, we will not impugn the motives of our colleagues in other disciplines, and that we will truly bring something to the classroom other than "war stories" and "experience."

Chapter Eight

Merit Pay as an Assessment Tool

It ain't Over, 'til it's Over, But I think it's over: The sure and swift demise of my university's faculty union

> "I was getting back at my enemies, killing them with every word that came out of my mouth, and it was satisfying work" (Tompkins, 1996, p. 115).

> "Bullshit is unavoidable whenever circumstances require someone to talk without knowing what he is talking about. Thus the production of bullshit is stimulated whenever a person's obligations or opportunities to speak about some topic exceed his knowledge of the facts that are relevant to that topic" (Frankfurt, 2005, p. 63).

That the pen is mightier than the sword is seldom in doubt any longer. The damage that can be inflicted via the written word can be swift, certain, and severe. That reality, however, is coupled with another one: that a lot of what is said is simply uninformed, and therefore more suitable for talk radio and television than it is for academic circles. In that regard, much has been written about how we might assess "shared governance" and much of that written word has been mostly devoid of any real value. All that perhaps can be agreed upon is that the concept of shared governance is a worthy one, but the practice has been less than successful at most places in which it has been sincerely attempted. Condemning the actors within the institutions in which shared governance has been attempted has often been satisfying for those doing the condemning, but it has seldom, if ever, resulted in anything more satisfying for the greater institution. As we return to my overarching theme which questions the value of assessment as we currently consider it and conceptualize it, it is time to consider assessment of the actors "inside" academia: professors and administrators who spend significant time assessing the work that the other does. Such

assessment is often done despite the fact that the knowledge of what the other is and should be doing is often merely anecdotally and casual observation based. As a result, it is often assessment based more on bullshit as Frankfurt has identified it, and less the result of fact based observation and data collection. That it may be bullshit, however, does not always lessen its influence.

Today many postsecondary institutions have the remnants of a "shared governance" structure that virtually everyone agrees is not working very well. Administrators decry the inability to get decisions made, and faculty members are equally unhappy with the power and authority that has been assumed by boards of trustees, presidents, and senior administrators (Tierney, 1999, p. xiv). The point is neither to say that there should be greater or less faculty voice, nor that a specific organizational structure should be reshaped, just that structures always change…we should probably think about the needs of the future more than the standards of the past. The previous chapter of this work considered the assessment of faculty, some of whom unfortunately, have become dead weight dragging the academic enterprise down. This chapter considers the demise of faculty unionization in a change context. While most union principles are necessary in our society, some union protections do more harm than good and, if we are going to engage in a frank discussion of assessment in higher education: it is only fair that we continue to turn the magnifying glass inward and acknowledge our own blemishes as we point out the flaws in others.

I had hoped it wouldn't end this way for my faculty union. I'm actually a believer in the concept of unionization, and I'm certainly aware of a tendency on the part of the employer to exploit the worker. I've written published articles in my past that have viewed unions and the concept of unionization as positive societal phenomena. Surely they are necessary, both

practically and conceptually, in a world in which concentrated greed and power at the top of organizations is becoming nearly universal. Unionization has been critical in developing a viable middle class in this country and without them it would be easy to imagine even more disparity in power and income than is present now. Having said that, and holding that genuine belief, the union that presently represents my colleagues and me at my university is doing more harm than good for its membership and for the organization itself. So here it is, the chapter I thought I'd never write: an ode to my union as a dinosaur on the verge of extinction. The dinosaurs probably didn't deserve it (although I wasn't there), but my union, I'm afraid deserves much of the wrath it has brought upon itself.

As all disagreeable people probably do, I largely chalk up my ability to make enemies to what I perceive to be noticeable shortcomings in others and intellectual and/or moral deficiencies that make others deserving of the enemies they possess. I've concluded, no doubt as yet another rationalization more than an actual fact based conclusion that sometimes people need to know they have enemies, if for no other reason, than to assure them that their conduct isn't above monitoring. In sum, I didn't set out to become holier than thou…it just sort of happened along the way. But it happened not because of anything I did (no doubt another common rationalization among disagreeable people) but rather because of the unexplainable actions of others. I find myself frequently asking "why?" "Why would someone do that?" "What could they have been thinking, what was their motivation?"

We've all heard about the "evils" of unions. Evils usually associated with the code that conservatives use in which freedom for corporations and freedom from government regulation trumps freedom for workers. Private university "professional" unions, like public school

teacher's unions, are chided for restricting innovation, protecting lazy and incompetent workers, and contributing to layers of unnecessary bureaucracy. Whether some of these criticisms are valid, tends to ignore the flipside of the argument: unions are absolutely necessary to protect workers from capriciousness and arbitrary management decisions. Like with most arguments in which two sides are diametrically opposed, the truth likely lies somewhere between the two fairly divergent perspectives. So surmises this chapter in which the truth probably lies somewhere between a management perspective in which unions are all bad (possibly Satanic) and a union perspective in which management goals are centered upon hurting workers even at the expense of the organization (possibly Napoleonic). Essentially all that is both good and bad about Socialism versus all that is good and bad about Sadism.

Merit pay, like many other "assessment" programs, seems to have garnered widespread support and acceptance despite any real evidence that it has any positive impact…or even that any positive impact it does have outweighs the negative consequences that it engenders. Many of us "inside" academia have known that the concept of merit pay within the university faculty was a spectacularly bad idea since it was first broached…but apparently, nobody was listening…so here we go again. Actually, some ideas seem so remarkably bad, that it's difficult to understand how they are not dismissed as quickly as they come forth, but apparently one must not underestimate the ability of faculty members to become bewildered, perplexed and absolutely flummoxed by administrative proposals couched in the language of "collegiality," and "shared governance."

> "The great American meritocracy machine has run amok. There is little doubt that the prevailing paradigm about merit has consistently reproduced social and economic advantages for the

> ‘dukes of the system,’ the relatively few who conform to widely held views of merit.” (Sacks, 1999, p. 264).

Assessment as a means of creating conformity has been a recurrent theme of these chapters, and perhaps nowhere is that “ode to conformity” clearer than in the concept of merit pay for workers. The issue of merit pay seemed shockingly simple to me: it was clearly introduced to divide faculty from one another and the amount of discretion that would play into who applied, who reviewed, who allowed, who rejected, etc…would be so great that surely our general perceptions of fairness and discretion would require that our union “leadership” would immediately and powerfully reject such a divisive endeavor. But…no…indeed through a troubling combination of naïve beliefs, and heartfelt and sincere desires to get along well with everyone, our leadership effectively sold us out. They meant no harm they just weren’t strong or perceptive enough to see the dangers that lied ahead. And there are dangers that lie ahead, as perhaps belied by recent advertisements I’ve seen in the *Chronicle* seeking “collateral faculty.” I’ve heard of collateral damage, of course, but “collateral faculty?” Is this merely a new way of referring to adjunct faculty, or is it a disturbing shift toward viewing a significant number of faculty members as “collateral” to the institution. As we know from collateral damage assessments, we have been told repeatedly not to worry about “collateral damage,” even when it comes in human form. Some of us have worried about such damage despite the suggestions of the pentagon and the administration that we not. Damage that is done to people, even if it is unintended, is difficult to brush off as simply “collateral.” It may be time to worry about collateral damage in a less serious context as well. Collateral damage on college campuses doesn’t result in death and dismemberment, but it does result in loss of job, loss of esteem, and

loss of professional status. [At this point, it is probably necessary in the interests of full disclosure, to announce that I've recently received "merit pay" after not participating in the process the first three years of the program. Selfish or not, unilateral disarmament, or sitting idly by "in protest" while my colleagues received merit pay became less and less appealing. While I still believe the concept of merit pay is a bad and divisive one, I have now become part of the divisiveness myself, as it was clear that only a few persons would refuse to participate in it, while most would simply accept whatever extra money might come their way. Seemingly, there is a fine line between principle and stupidity.]

It wasn't one thing really, I trust it never is. My union beat up on me personally when I talked with union leadership, but that abuse wasn't enough. My union leadership embarrassed me periodically, when union leaders and activists would write polemic diatribes and then send them to "all university" e-mail addresses, when they were clearly personal attacks on individuals within the administration, but that wasn't enough. My union dues were far too expensive, given our need to re-negotiate only periodically, and given our lack of competent outside representation during those periods, but cost isn't everything, and the cost of my membership certainly wasn't enough to make me abandon the union. The union neglected my pleas for affection, my sincere comments directed at improvement of our collective endeavors, and ultimately they neglected to show me why I would be a better person for being a member of this particular union. It's over, it's beyond repair. The views of my union's leadership and my own views are irreconcilably different.

Not too long ago I spent a couple of hours reading *Talk to the Hand*, a best-seller about the increasing onset of rudeness in our society. Thinking, as I often do, I tried to imagine whether

my reading of that work would actually decrease or increase my rudeness or just give me a greater appreciation for rudeness when I see it. One sentence within the book stood out: "all the important rules surely boil down to one: remember you are with other people; show some consideration" (Truss, 2005, p. 12). I think that that one rule perhaps speaks to how we might attempt to handle the difficult time bomb that is merit pay. We all must remember that we are with other people…we are not just in this for ourselves.

Merit is defined (at least by my Webster's Collegiate Dictionary) as follows: "the quality or fact of deserving praise, reward, etc….worth, value, or excellence. This brings me to a reality that I fear will be painful to swallow: that we are actually being paid (every two weeks in my case) to perform our duties at our respective universities. To give a person merit pay implies (perhaps only to me) that the person receiving that pay has gone "above and beyond" the normal course of their employment contract. In other words, should one get paid "merit pay" for doing something that if they failed to do, they'd be subject to some sort of reprimand for delinquency of duty? We are supposed to provide our universities with teaching, research, and service, and in return we receive a paycheck. We can argue all day and all night about how good our teaching is, how impressive our research, and how worthy our service. I have no dispute with any of you about the quality of your work, and frankly, I am willing to assume it's better than mine. But…you don't deserve "merit pay" for your excellent teaching, research, or service that is expected of you and for which you already receive a paycheck every other Friday. How often do you do something for your university that goes unpaid? I realize that we all advise too many students, we all teach too many students, we all serve on too many committees, and perhaps we should all complain about our general wages, hours, and working conditions…or not…but how

often does anyone do something for which they are not compensated? I read comprehensive exams…I get paid. I teach an extra class…I get paid. Those who serve as directors of programs get paid. Do those seeking "merit" serve more than the others at openhouses and the other ancillaries that few of us enjoy, but almost all of us do?

The next time any one of us brings a huge event to campus that otherwise couldn't occur…they should seek merit pay. The next time any one of us writes a book that brings acclaim to the university…they should seek merit pay. The next time one of us begins a campus initiative that takes off and improves the campus community…they should seek merit pay. But…and I truly am not trying to diminish any of us…the fact that you are an excellent teacher, researcher, and servant to your university, is…without more, not worthy of merit pay. It may be worthy of a salary increase (and I presume that would be worth talking about with the administration)…but not merit pay.

Merit pay is one of the most contested issues in the academy. Administrators seem to like the "flexibility" of the concept, as it not only allows them to reward "excellence," but it also increases their discretion over awarding money generally. Most people with power tend to want even more power. Allowing more discretion to those who already have a great deal may not necessarily be in the best interests of a faculty who is subject to that ever increasing discretion, but perhaps that's just me.

> "Merit pay underwrites the whole system of disciplinary pay disparities and makes it easier to reward administrators and punish dissidents when salary decisions are made" (Nelson & Watt, 1999, p. 166).

Surely merit pay has about it, the air of a vendetta. The university administration could

find no better way of getting at its enemies and rewarding its friends. I don't actually share the level of paranoia that many of my faculty colleagues possess when it comes to gauging the actions of our administration. Most of the time, I actually agree with presidential fiats and other administrative acts that seem to center upon bettering the organization. I don't even blame the administration for pushing merit pay upon the faculty and convincing the faculty negotiators that it would be a good idea. A group of educated people shouldn't really play the victim when it comes to accepting merit pay in a union contract (all one has to do is google "merit pay" and one will find "union busting" in many of the listed sites, which one would think would have been enough to have hardened the faculty against the concept, but alas our reality was somewhat different). Seemingly reasonable faculty members supported the concept of merit pay as a means in which to reward those going above and beyond…whatever that means. As somebody who sincerely believes I give everything I have to the university, the concept remained elusive to me…would I work "harder and better" if I got merit pay…should I slack off if I did not? I am aware that those of us who publish (a minority on my particular teaching campus) felt somewhat slighted when it comes to the rewards of the university, but was merit pay actually the answer in a union environment?

This chapter wasn't really written out of anger, despite the opening quote in which Tompkins expresses the satisfaction that does indeed follow writing what one really believes even if it's difficult to say and painful for others to hear. My anger is less significant, however, than is my bewilderment. Why would people "on my side" allow this to happen? Perhaps our union has truly made a compact with the devil, at least insofar as our universal knowledge that while only a few truly work hard here, all are rewarded. Who loses when a faculty member

coasts? The cheated student? The wasted professional teacher? The university? The greater society? If the purpose of merit pay was to encourage people to stop coasting and get to work for the betterment of the university thereby earning "merit" and recognition, I fear the purpose was misguided. If the purpose was to divide us from each other, I think the purpose has been achieved. Competition with each other for a limited pool of funds, will surely suppress fundamental principles of genuine collegiality among peers. Psychological divides among peers based on envy, jealousy, and other all too human emotions will surely depress opportunities to work together for the common good. Of course, much of my position could be based on sour grapes, after all, I have previously played the role of our department's chair of the merit pay committee (one of several "chairmanships" to which I've been assigned), and in this role I've been able to review several "merit" applications. Most of these applications are nothing more than a request for free money based on work that all of us do. "Merit pay" for quality advising…does that mean others' advising is less quality?" "Merit pay" for serving on committees…doesn't everyone serve on committees?

Given the differences in status that merit pay necessarily builds in to faculty salary scales, it will be difficult, if not impossible, to view our colleagues as anything other than competition for limited resources. Such competition may become nothing less than "Academic" Darwinism? Or will we be able to somehow appeal to our kinder and gentler instincts and avoid dissention? Time will tell.

Every union is against the concept of merit pay (except, apparently mine) as it places the union in an untenable position. For every professor awarded merit pay, ten others should probably file a grievance alleging that they deserved merit pay more than one to which it was

awarded. Merit pay is far too subjective, it is used to reward bootlickers (and thereby give others, like myself for example, incentives to do such bootlicking themselves) and to intimidate critics of the administration. Nelson & Watt (1999) put it quite simply: "salary increases based on merit, presumably…is a way to divide the faculty and undermine union solidarity."

My own thoughts concerning merit pay have been sharpened over time by my service for several years as chair of our division's merit pay committee. My chairmanship was not in itself meritoriously earned, but rather was a by-product of my own desire not to apply for merit pay which therefore gave me the appropriate status as an "uninterested" and neutral player in all of this. I am uninterested as far as bias for or against given individuals goes, but I am certainly interested in this ridiculous exercise in which hours are spent filling out paperwork in which individuals make their case for merit pay, and then committees, like the one I chaired, must sort through that paperwork and make recommendations. Talk about untenable…we recommend pay raises for people doing good work (shouldn't we all be doing that without merit pay?) or we withhold pay raises for our colleagues, none of whom tend to be in positions in which some extra money wouldn't be helpful to themselves and their families. All in all, not a good day's work for an individual trying to retain friends, and do the best he can to advance the mission of the university; A mission that seems entirely counter to all concepts of merit pay. I wonder, now aloud, if I should be awarding my time not to all students who ask for it, but rather only to those who "merit" it.

Assessing the merits of merit pay, of course, should not be left solely in my hands. In *The Public Interest*, two researchers concluded with apparent disappointment in 1985 (shortly after the concept began to make inroads into educational contracts) that no evidence supported the

idea that merit pay "had an appreciable or consistent positive effect on teachers' classroom work." To this day, enthusiasm for pay for performance runs far ahead of any data supporting its effectiveness—even as measured by standardized test scores, much less by meaningful indicators of learning (Kohn, 2004, p. 168).

"Merit pay works fine if you're making widgets, but kids aren't widgets, and good teaching isn't an assembly line" (Quindlen, 2005, p. 100). Quindlen was speaking of teaching in an elementary school, so the "kids" she's talking about really are kids, as opposed to the young adults (mostly) with whom we deal at the university, but the concept is the same: "good teaching isn't an assembly line." It's hard to figure out a useful way to measure the merit of what a really good teacher does.

Why pay for performance? If merit pay feels manipulative and patronizing, that's probably because it is (Kohn, 2004, p. 169). In its most destructive form, merit pay is set up as a competition, where the point is to best one's colleagues. A recent study of a merit pay plan that covered all employees at a northeastern college found that intrinsic motivation declined as a result direct of the plan's adoption, particularly for some of the school's "most valued employees—those who were highly motivated intrinsically before the program was implemented" (Kohn, 2004, p. 171). Bok (1993) wrote similarly of the perils of merit pay (admittedly in the context of secondary education):

> "we do not need a competition for merit bonuses that turns teachers into rivals and engenders suspicion toward the very principals whose job is to lead their staffs to higher levels of performance. The challenge in education is to find incentives that do not divide but bring about a collaborative search for better ways of coping with an extremely difficult set of problems" (p. 192).

Bok's words could easily be translated into a higher education setting where collaboration is equally valued, but is made increasingly difficult when competition between and among colleagues becomes the merit pay way. Ours is a remarkable profession, and if being given the privilege of teaching young people in their maturing years, isn't responsibility enough, and isn't challenge enough to get those with the ability to do it, to always give it their best, then surely the thought of "merit pay" cannot possibly change behavior that is rooted in laziness, complacency, and the fear of trying new things. Relatively high salaries and peaceful working conditions alone cannot keep good people happy and working at a high level. Good people need stimulation, but in the university, I was of the mind that stimulation was to come from motivated students, a will to learn more (life-long learning we call it); rather than the ability to out-earn my colleagues and to get something monetarily that they may not.

"Merit bonuses reduce employees to chickens pecking at lighted buttons for pellets." "The more frequently you reinforce 'good' behavior with cash, the more you disconnect employees from their own experience of the work itself. The focus shifts away from the task and onto the reward" (Rushkoff, 2005). I'm trying to understand what makes individuals comply with authority, even when the consequences of that compliance are so obviously detrimental to their fellow human beings, their colleagues. When union leaders so clearly forget about those following in their footsteps while they protect only the older members in similar positions…haven't we truly lost sight of the purposes of a union? Are our union leaders truly interested in protecting the interests of the union, or are they hell-bent on maintaining their own power, status, and "personal" relationships with bargaining adversaries? It would seem at my

university, that the answer is less than crystal clear.

> "Competing for pennies does not ennoble the faculty or increase its dignity" (Nelson & Watt, 1999, p. 166).

It must also be acknowledged that not everyone deserves merit. Some fail to meet the daily responsibilities of their jobs, and some simply aren't that good at what they do. A failure to punish faculty who are derelict in their duties or who violate basic standards of behavior does not reinforce solidarity; it cheapens the meaning of the work everyone does and whatever rewards they receive (Nelson & Watt, 1999). These are not the words of a union buster or an anti-faculty position espoused by a non-academic. Cary Nelson is an academic through and through and presently serves as President of the American Association of University Professors (AAUP). The reality is that not punishing those who are derelict in their duties increases the workload of those who are not.

We have such a problem facing us now, as a fairly long-term faculty member is suffering the indignity of the denial of tenure, which would bother me, were it not for my perception that he's a bigoted, sexist, unprofessional lout, whose absence will actually strengthen the credibility of all professors here. Talking loudly and mocking both colleague and student alike may seem attractive to some…and may qualify him to be a talk show host, but he certainly diminishes my status as a faculty member when he is able to represent himself publicly as holding such a position at this university. I guess I should miss him when he is gone, but I will not. If we are only as strong as our weakest link, then surely it is time to address some of those weak links and addressing them after the award of tenure is far too late. In essence, I'm with the administration on this one, and our union's defense of this man (though given the ineffectiveness of our union,

such a defense is tepid at best) once again lessens the credibility of the union when it will truly need to defend people worthy of our collective defense.

All sorts of absurdities creep into the salary reward systems. Awarding percentage-based salary increases simply makes the rich richer. Not surprisingly, well-paid senior faculty, and those who work in the business school or other relatively well-paid disciplines are comfortable with the concept of percentage based salary increases. (Don't get me started on why business school members love merit pay, but suffice it to say that they are union members at my university only in the protected sense, as their salaries and teaching loads are not even negotiated by the union….good for them, idiocy for the rest of us, but I digress). But regardless of popularity, such a system is inherently unfair…is merit in one department actually more valuable than merit in another? Is merit achieved by a full professor worth more than that achieved by an assistant professor? It is with this system in which merit pay is tied to salary, so that "step" raises are given to those "high performers" among us.

Could it be that bemoaning the evils of merit pay is little more than the natural result of those of us steeped in mediocrity jealously guarding what little control over our lives that we retain? I suppose it could be. Or could it be that sometimes those who don't publish decry merit systems as unfair to those who teach and teach well. While there is no doubt some truth there, it may also be the case that most often there is a correlation between those who are the most productive scholars and those who are most highly rated by their students. In essence some of the best researchers and publishers are actually some of the best teachers as well. That such logic might threaten those who neither research nor publish and who consistently laud their own "focus" upon the classroom cannot be doubted. In other words, if you're good at what you do,

you'll not only produce good things, but your students probably won't hate you and may even think highly of your classroom presence and teaching as well.

Returning to the point of any correlation between being liked by students and being a "good" professor: I find myself apologizing for my high "rate my professor.com" ratings. I understand the ratings are flawed (and that they are subject to change without notice) I understand even that they may be so flawed as not to be of any value, but I don't understand why I should apologize for good ratings. I'm willing to forgive those who have bad ratings for the reasons stated above, but I'm not sure I need to apologize for my good ratings. Perhaps there could even be a kernel of truth in some of them…perhaps. Perhaps some professors forget or simply ignore the simple fact that we teach people…not subjects…and therefore, whether we like it or not, we must truly prepare and present material that is relevant and relative to their abilities and their knowledge (Markie, 1994). If our students do not like us, and do not like how we teach the class, is it completely their fault? Can they not be trusted, after all, to recognize good teaching when they see it? What we should expect of students is work that is demanding, but within their grasp. Perhaps merit pay should be awarded based on favorable student reviews? Such a system would undoubtedly lead to widespread grade inflation and other less flagrant attempts to buy the affection of students, but buying the affection of others seems quite in line with the concept of merit pay. Surely as a means of assessment, we should be working to halt the practice, or at least greatly refine its implementation. I fear that we simply do what we have so often done with regard to all assessment programs: accept, muddle on, and uncritically comply.

Within a book about accountability and "assessment" our union needed to be held accountable for its actions and my assessment of it was largely unfavorable. Was it advancing the

interests of the larger university or was it truly all that some in the administration said it was "a collection of greedy, lazy, and unconcerned self-interested individuals seeking to get as much as they could for as little work as they could get away with?"

Our union needed (and for years has needed) to hold the administration accountable for what role teaching, research, and service play at the university. I trust that we are no different from many universities in that regard, our difference is that we never seem to require those in charge of evaluations to be held to standards within those evaluations. Are we a teaching institution? How important is research? How important is service? What constitutes service? Obviously we talk about the importance of teaching in our mission statements and when we speak to prospective students, but is there any genuine connection between good teaching and the expectations of the university administrators? If good teaching doesn't get rewarded, does good service, or is research really the only aspect of our professional lives that gets rewarded? If research is king, and we tout ourselves as a teaching institution…is that disconnect acceptable to union leadership?

Chapter Nine

No College or University Left Untouched: Where Do We Go From Here?

> **"**No critic from outside the walls of academe can describe its stupidities with the bitterness of which very few academics are incapable" (Cottom, 2003, p. 204).

We indeed are our own worst critics…as we should be, as it should be. But we are also in the business of creating our own critics. Indeed rather than creating "satisfaction" in our consumers, we should be seeking to promote "dissatisfaction" with their present situations, in an attempt to bring out of them all that might be. I'm not suggesting that the place of the professoriate is to create an army of suicidal wanderers, but rather an army of questioning, seeking, and informed citizens searching for answers. Those of us on the inside of academia are thus more than capable of questioning that which surrounds us. If we seem bitter and cynical at times, it surely must be because we won't allow ourselves to be content and/or complacent. Things can always be better. Methods can always be improved. The status quo, while comfortable, does not allow for the improvements that could be considered if we allow ourselves to look beyond the present state of things. Such words don't suggest that we cannot find happiness or even contentment…at times, and for periods of our lives, but we cannot simply accept that which many might see as being unchangeable. "That's just the way it is, or that's just the way it's always been," we've been told over and over and in a variety of contexts, when we've confronted the status quo and suggested that improvements could be made. Shouldn't those not engaged in the higher education profession, be comforted by the knowledge that those of us who are will challenge and "test" nearly everything we encounter. Blind acceptance is not

our way of life, and woe if it were? Shouldn't those of us in higher education who value the diversity of what we do and how we do it, at least challenge the rising tide of standardization and "accountability?" Ultimately, we may fail, as many of our experiments do, and eventually my hypothesis may be proven to be mistaken, but doesn't doing what we're told without questioning the wisdom of the directive diminish the true nature of the educational process? Perhaps it is the ultimate catch-22: If we accept standardization we may actually better our colleges, but if we accept standardization without question, and without challenging the credibility of those who seek these policy initiatives, we may lose whatever level of independence and credibility that we have, and that independence and credibility is the life-blood of what we do.

You've been warned, now how do you heed the warning? This book began with a quote from Ernest Boyer from 1990 in which he lamented the decline of "uniqueness." This chapter follows up on that beginning, and hopefully, concludes by coming to terms with ways in which we might foster our "uniqueness" in a "culture of assessment" that will do its best to stifle that uniqueness. What about the decline of uniqueness? How can we be unique and "standardized" at the same time? If we allow for greater standardization and a greater "respect/fear" of external assessment, how might we retain our qualities that make our own teaching and our own institutions different from every other teacher and every other institution? Why should a student attend our university, if every university is essentially the same? Should our location and the beauty of our campus be the only distinguishing features?

Perhaps we must begin addressing the warnings with the following steps: (1) we must assess why higher education is so often denigrated; and (2) work to lessen or even largely eliminate the popularity of such denigration. Is education really power? Most Americans have

long understood that the surest way to great wealth is inheritance, but short of that, the surest way to "success" and a quality American Dream lifestyle must surely be through educational advancement. After all, if you're not among those who will be left with tremendous financial resources, you are compelled to find a road to "success" in this world, and higher education is clearly that road. So, perhaps education really is power, those who have it are enabled to apply for and often receive positions of leadership and power. Even those of us happily entrenched in academia have the power of the written word and the power of rhetoric which enables most of us to sound as if we know what we're talking about, even when we sometimes do not. We write and we talk and we have audiences of millions of (mostly) young people. We do indeed have power. Yet, we are resented by those who refer to us as "elites," (however ironic that term when used by those born into great wealth). Hirsch (1996) wrote "it is never a healthy circumstance when people who are held in low esteem exercise dominant influence in an important sphere. The conjunction of power with resentment is deadly" (pp. 115-116). While Hirsch was writing of the place of the education faculty within the greater university, I believe his words can be used to explain some of the resentment that is centered upon higher education more generally. We have power and we are resented…it should be no small wonder that we might be subject to verbal attack. Another interesting approach was taken by Cottom (2003) in his thoroughly enjoyable book *Why Education is Useless*, in which he takes on critics (mostly from the right) who view education as a largely useless endeavor and "book learning" as something that makes one aloof, arrogant and absent-minded. In one of many delicious passages from his work, Cottom writes: "Of course, the most famous classical model for the uselessness of learning was Socrates. Generally speaking, being condemned to death would seem to indicate that something has gone

wrong in one's tenure review, and in Plato's *Apology* the notorious Athenian does indeed sound like the patron saint of academic deadwood. 'To none did I promise instruction, and none did I teach,' he avers, maintaining that his role had only been that of a questioner" (From Plato's *Apology,* as quoted by Cottom, 2003, pp. 166-167). "We live in an environment where performance indicators and benchmarking are commonplace. In the academy, professional accountability has always been shaped by a community of scholars sharing mastery of specialized knowledge and a culture regulated by ethics. This accountability is built on a tradition of peer review and the understanding that tenure is a reciprocal arrangement exchanging certain job guarantees for professional self-regulation, self-renewal, and high performance standards. This inwardly driven process often stands in contrast to managerial accountability, which, based on corporate traditions, promotes continued quality assurance using specific external benchmarks and indicators to measure achievement" (Licata, 2004, p. 1).

I've spoken of many of the ironies that surround the Bush administration and their approach to dealing with educational issues. There is no irony in the position taken by the administration concerning such diverse issues as the treatment of prisoners in Guantanomo Bay to the treatment of educators…and that is…trust us…not them. Trust us to do what is right, and to set appropriate standards. Apple (2001) spoke of a transition from "licensed autonomy" to "regulated autonomy," in which teachers work becomes more standardized. As we focus upon greater scrutiny in which teachers are regulated in terms of process and outcomes, and in which teachers are sometimes told exactly the content of what they should teach, as well as the teaching methods they should use, there is surely a lessening of any professional discretion that a professional teacher might bring with them. Perhaps the irony comes from pleas from those at the

top of government to trust in them, unfailingly and unquestioningly, while they view others with a deep suspicion and distrust. If teachers don't follow approved teaching methods and teach specified content they are subjected to administrative sanctions. If students don't perform on standardized tests, they are subject to sanctions. Trust us, they say…but we have no trust in you. Statewide and even national testing is proposed to make certain that students learn what the government says they must. Poorly performing teachers and students will be punished. A loss of autonomy and respect surely must follow as Apple and others have previously stated.

If we lose even more respect for high school teachers, surely there will be a subsequent loss of respect for college professors. Where, after all, do students learn about the process of learning? Where, after all, do students learn about the value that the greater society places in education? How hard can it be to teach to the test? Imagine being in a high school with such exciting course offerings as "Test Preparation English" and "Test Preparation Math." Might "Test Preparation Creative Writing" be far behind? What if everybody passed all state created exams? Should they made more difficult? Should testing officials (whoever they might be) aim to produce failures?

When these highly regulated and highly standardized high school students enter college what will they be expecting? Standardized teaching? Remember where we began: Boyer spoke of "uniqueness," and he also spoke of the scholarship of discovery, integration, application, and teaching. Maybe we won't have to worry about all of that stuff and we can merely focus on "teaching to the test."

"The mentality that the only realities are the ones that are countable and measurable is inadequate when the problems are more humanistically qualitative than scientifically

quantitative" (Bleedorn, 2005, p. xvi). The notion of scholarly teaching, not to mention the scholarship of teaching and learning, remains a mystery to many. Lee Shulman, president of the Carnegie Foundation, defines scholarly teaching as teaching that focuses on student learning and is well grounded in the sources and resources appropriate to the field. The scholarship of teaching and learning, according to Shulman, occurs when our work as teachers becomes public, peer-reviewed and critiqued, and exchanged with other members of our professional communities (Shapiro, 2006, p. 40).

Shapiro argues that a fundamental shift in promotion and tenure criteria is needed for colleges and universities--and research universities in particular--to become learner-centered and for both scholarly teaching and the scholarship of teaching and learning to become embedded and valued in the culture (Shapiro, 2006, p. 40). In general, it seems that colleges and universities are taking teaching more seriously than they have in the past. Teaching and learning centers abound, accreditors are promulgating outcomes-based standards, and on many campuses faculty are struggling to find ways to evaluate teaching and learning scholarship that aren't based on the sort of bean counting we have become accustomed to in evaluating disciplinary research.

The primary data used to evaluate teaching come from poorly designed student evaluation forms, and what passes for competent teaching on these campuses is still commonly defined by such measures as being adequately prepared, giving good lectures, and getting at least average student evaluations. Teaching is still not assessed in terms of student learning, student outcome assessment is seen as a necessary evil promulgated by a zeal for accountability (Shapiro, 2006, p. 42). Government offers to measure the outcomes of students and schools, especially on the basis of student test scores, and to provide explicit rewards and punishments based on these

measures...this is government based accountability.

Assessment must be a cyclic process of setting meaningful goals, selecting methods to meet those goals, drawing inferences, collecting evidence, and then continually reassessing the goals. Assessment is continuous and long-term and surely goes far beyond short-sighted dependence on "hard" data that only begs all instructors to "teach to the test." Assessment must be an open process in which all constituencies (particularly faculty and students) are heard. Remember the famous White House "energy commission" in which various energy company executives were invited to meetings led by Vice President Dick Cheney, and all that was discussed and all that was promoted…was done in total secrecy? Once again, this administration stands not as an example for assessment, but rather as a cautionary tale concerning the realities of avoiding self-assessment at any cost. Karl Rove would certainly characterize those against "No Child Left Behind" as those against the education of children…all is quite simple "you're either with us or you're against us," we either "stay the course" or "cut and run." Why on earth would we follow the suggestions of this kind of sloganized policy? Assessment may be a good thing…let's examine it, and not simply adhere to simplistic proposals made by people with a rather tenuous grasp on the realities facing students and instructors alike. Hitchens (2005) refers to "an intellectually impoverished education system"(p. xv), that students in his classes had to overcome prior, of course, to their time spent with him. Let us hope that our attempts to overcome intellectual poverty may prove to be more successful than our attempts (sometimes serious, sometimes less so) to eradicate economic poverty in our highly privileged country. I'm not prone to overestimating our collective intelligence, however, looking to higher education as a place to begin holding professionals accountable, is a little like blaming school teachers when

business “leaders” lie, cheat, and steal their way to wealth, power and fame. Given what’s going on in Iraq, and what’s going on in corporate America, it would seem beyond reason to “begin” a discussion of greater accountability with a focus upon higher education.

Another possibility that we should not discount, is simply waiting through all of this, until college professors (and higher education) comes back in style. “Along with the rest of America, universities enjoyed a halcyon period in the 1950s and 60s. World War II had taught the country that science was important to a great nation; Washington now committed itself to building the finest research capability the world had ever seen” (Bok, 1993, p. 53). The Bush administration (as I write this in 2007) has just recently come to any sort of acknowledgment that scientific phenomenon such as global warming actually exists. The same administration has long disparaged the scientific use of stem cells for research purposes, suggesting, among other things, that the research is not clear enough to establish the value of such research. Obviously, this has not been an administration that has promoted in its budgeting reality or its important symbolic rhetoric, the advances that science makes possible. In contrast, their support of “faith based” initiatives, and other programs (up to and including the invasion of Iraq) has been based less on evidence of the value of the program or initiative, and more on “belief” in the worthiness of the cause. Essentially, we have been asked to trust the administration without challenge and without question. Those who questioned have been attacked, and clearly, professors are among those professionals who question the most. It is by virtue of what they do, the very nature of their profession to question everything and not accept one’s word, without validation. Bok (1993) wrote that during the 1950s and 60s professors “had become more prominent in American life and had more opportunities to do exciting things. Faculty members were prowling the corridors

of power—consulting in corporate boardrooms, advising international bodies, serving on government task forces" (p. 53). If these high times ended in the late 60s, and according to Bok that is when they ended, and while that was long before the administration of George W. Bush, it would seem that the administration of George W. Bush has greatly contributed to the erosion of the need for scientific inquiry, and also dealt some blows to the professoriate as an institution. But certainty requires no further examination, and that has been the ultimate danger of the present administration, their certainty, their decisiveness, their complete lack of doubt even in the face of overwhelming contrary evidence that might humble lesser people.

> "George W. Bush has gathered around him upper-crust C-students who know no history or geography, plus not-so-closeted white supremacists, aka Christians, and plus, most frighteningly, psychopathic personalities, or PPs, the medical term for smart, personable people who have no consciences. (Vonnegut, 2005, p. 99)."
>
> "They might have felt that taking our country into an endless war was simply something decisive to do. What has allowed so many PPs to rise so high in corporations, and now in government, is that they are so decisive. They are going to do something every fuckin' day and they are not afraid. Unlike normal people, they are never filled with doubts (Vonnegut, 2005, p. 101).

It has taken more than one President to assist in the decline of the status of the professoriate, it is a profession that has taken a series of shots from right wing radio and television hosts, from politicians and others in positions of authority, and from, quite honestly, an American society which in its love of popular culture from "Survivor" to "American Idol" has begun to truly celebrate mediocrity, at the expense of achievement. We live in a culture in which "successful" and handsomely rewarded CEO's hire "life coaches" and others not to harvest any value that might come with doubt, but to eradicate all semblance of doubt and bestow the type of

self-confidence in "leadership" that may be hugely valuable on the battlefield, but disturbingly short-sighted in the boardroom, and certainly, unacceptable in a classroom in which "examination" is the preferred way of doing business. Style over substance plays into a culture accepting of "reform" that is nothing more than "an illusion that masks an intrusion of testing into good teaching" (Hoffman, et al, 2001). I fear that greater "accountability" is an illusion, and a misdirection play which takes our focus away from improving education at all levels, and centers it upon merely "assessing" the present state. Our attention to standardization will prevent us from making schools and ultimately, colleges and universities better, more welcoming places in which a variety of individuals can better themselves.

Perhaps, however, I could be mistaken. Perhaps selfishness lies at the heart of my arguments, as I love my chosen vocation of teaching college students, and I'd hate for that profession, in its current form, to go away. I began, several chapters ago, with the premise that the death of higher education was vastly overstated, and that "fixing that which isn't broke" may do more harm than good, it is with that that I will leave you to contemplate higher education's place in the "accountability" movement. It would have been nice to end with my own words, but as is so often the case, others have already said it better. In this case, Pickering (2004) who said:

> "The other matter that helps teachers bounce into class is that the real effects of teaching remain mysterious, something that complicates attempts to define good teaching. Almost never do teachers know exactly how their words, or actions, affect students. Moreover, if we really believed that everything we said shaped students, we would be too terrified to speak" (p. 14).

The real effects of writing are often every bit as mysterious as are the real effects of teaching. It would be great if this work re-shaped the boundaries of the discipline and changed

the paradigm concerning how we view assessment within the academy. All authors hope that their work will be read and considered and even used as a source, and my hopes are no different. But for any of that to come true, the discussion surrounding higher education assessment would have to continue and become a genuine debate about how best it should be done, rather than what it seems to be now, which is merely a discussion centering upon how high we must jump when we are told to jump. So far our "buy-in" has centered upon that very leap of faith, that assessmentin higher education involves more testing of our students and more comparisons (standardization) across colleges and universities. There's nothing really wrong with taking a leap of faith every now and then…provided that we've looked before we've leapt.

Afterward

One of the many fears that authors face (some of which are actually rational) include the fear that by the time the manuscript becomes the book and the public is invited to take a look, the material will be dated and no longer as relevant and timely as it seemed during the writing process. Naturally, when dealing with a topic like the assessment of higher education, that fear is heightened because of the need to talk about the rhetoric surrounding the issue while the rhetoric remains in the forefront. On the positive side, and the side from which my many fears were allayed: assessment within higher education seems to be a never-ceasing topic, and thus as long as this book comes out while colleges and universities remain in business, the topic will remain timely. On the negative side, one would think that at some time the public's desire to read anything more about higher education generally, and assessment more specifically, would simply have to cease.

Another fear lies in choosing a title that conveys the nature of the work and yet appeals to a wider audience than blood relatives alone. To this end, I contemplated such phrases as "critical assessment," and "cynical assessment." It seemed as though some combination of the words assessment, critical, and cynical needed to be considered if the title were going to be truly reflective of the work. The avoidance of reality and the subsequent attention we pay to style rather than substance also needed to be somehow acknowledged.

Bob Woodward's *State of Denial*, addressed in great length the perception and apparent reality that George W. Bush and his immediate underlings avoided telling the truth about Iraq to the public, to Congress, and even, according to Woodward, to themselves. The avoidance of reality, even in the face of troubling facts that would seem contrary to much of the rhetoric,

seems to have crept into many areas of present governmental policy and even, perhaps most troubling of all, into our own lives. Rather than focusing upon what might be considered for lack of a better term, "important;" things like education, healthcare, energy policy, jobs, government spending, weapon proliferation, and so on…we find ourselves focused more upon "true crime" stories and the various rehabilitation status of celebrities. Our denial of reality allows us to somewhat comfortably approach the "assessment" of others, as we avoid turning a mirror upon ourselves. I am hopeful that this book assists our progress in understanding both that for assessment to be real, it must be comprehensive, rather than selective, and that means we need to assess our own job performance, as well as the job performance of others. The leadership of our country, as well as the leaders on our own campuses can provide significant progress toward genuine and progressive assessment, so long as they are willing to assess themselves. I have attempted to spare no feelings and begin a discussion of the proper assessment of those of us in education. Our dead weight needs to be removed, and our failures need to be exposed so that others might not repeat similar mistakes and so that students are not subjected to inadequate instruction. Likewise, those among us who are truly excellent need to be recognized and publicized so that others might learn how best to emulate them and improve their odds at achieving similar excellence. None of this can be done in an atmosphere of denial.

During the course of this writing such notable celebrities as Anna Nicole Smith, Don Imus, Paris Hilton, and Lindsay Lohan all completely dominated the news. Paris Hilton's on-again, off-again, and then on-again jail sentence featured the type of helicopter coverage of a motorcade not seen since O.J. Simpson's slow speed chase, unless, of course, we count the helicopter coverage of the motorcade to Anna Nicole Smith's funeral. How does one reconcile

this “celebrity culture” with a plea to recognize the value of higher education, and the need for autonomy in the college classroom? Does our fascination with celebrity and the attention we pay toward those who are famous largely for being famous and for little else, diminish the attention that we might otherwise have to focus upon more worthwhile pursuits? If our students are paying attention to this culture, how can they not question the validity of education as a means of improving themselves and the world in which they live? How can we have a rational conversation about assessment, when our means of assessing so much in society depends solely on how much money can be made and how corners might be cut to make that money? It will clearly take leadership that not only talks the talk of assessment and accountability, but also walks the walk. The hypocrisy so present in so many who seek greater accountability into the work lives of others, while they insist upon a free pass themselves, extends beyond the White House and has crept into the halls of academia. We must be ever vigilant to make certain that certain ideas aren’t implemented merely because they have gained momentum. If they are reasonable, and they truly improve the university, then we should not stand in their way, but let’s take some time to assess whether or not higher education assessment schemes will truly improve the university, or whether they are simply more work for the overworked, and more numbers for everyone to use, without any enhancement of the product. Sometimes it seems that if *U.S. News and World Report* ranked the way in which colleges and universities delivered the mail…we’d see a major initiative on many campuses to improve mail delivery. If there was ever a place in which the workers should question the methods used to evaluate the delivery of services, academia is that place. This has been an appeal not to abdicate our responsibility to question and seek the truth…but to actually and aggressively question and seek the truth, wherever that truth

leads us. “Because I said so” was barely an adequate reason when our parents used it on us as children, we must be careful not to simply accept the premise that more assessment makes for better education, merely because someone in power said so.

> “Once you have learned how to ask questions—relevant and appropriate and substantial questions—you have learned how to learn and no one can keep you from learning whatever you want or need to know” (Postman & Weingartner, 1969, p. 23).

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