

# THE IMPROVEMENT OF TEACHING

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ACLS OCCASIONAL PAPER, No. 16

ISSN 1041-536X



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*This Occasional Paper originated in the main program session of the ACLS Annual Meeting on April 26, 1991. That session was devoted to the general question of the improvement of teaching in higher education. This question was one to which the ACLS staff had devoted considerable attention, and the Executive Committee of the Delegates of the ACLS constituent societies suggested that Derek Bok, the outgoing President of Harvard University, be invited to deliver a major address on the subject. President Bok graciously accepted the invitation, and his remarks are the main contents of this publication.*

*In addition, the Delegates Executive Committee also suggested that a distinguished group of respondents, including one of the Delegates, be invited to comment upon President Bok's remarks. Presidents Johnnetta Cole of Spelman College, Francis Oakley of Williams College, and George Rupp of Rice University agreed to bring their particular institutional perspectives to bear upon President Bok's remarks, and Sylvia Grider, the Delegate of the American Folklore Society and a member of the faculty at Texas A&M University, was asked to join them on the podium. President Cole was unable to attend the meeting, but the remarks of the other respondents are reproduced here with only minor editing.*

*The ACLS is pleased to present the proceedings of that session in this format and believes that President Bok's talk and the remarks of the commentators provide a useful and constructive approach to a subject of great significance.*



## The Improvement of Teaching

*Derek Bok*  
*Harvard University*

A familiar complaint about the American university is its neglect of teaching. "At present," declares William Arrowsmith, "universities are as uncongenial to teaching as the Mojave Desert to a clutch of Druid priests."<sup>1</sup> In this arid environment, the results, according to Ernest Boyer, President of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, are "often uninspired."<sup>2</sup> As he describes the problem: "With few exceptions, when we visited classes, the teacher stood in front of rows of chairs and talked most of the forty-five or fifty minutes. Information was presented that often students passively received. There was little opportunity for positions to be clarified or ideas challenged."<sup>3</sup>

It is customary to link the neglect of teaching with the rise of the research university and to assume that there was an earlier time when great teachers packed the lecture halls and lavished attention on their students. As Charles Sykes observes, after assailing my own University for failing to promote several popular young instructors: "This [neglect of teaching] was, by no means, always the case at Harvard. At one time Harvard boasted such brilliant scholar-teachers as Henry James, Irving Babbitt (a teacher of T.S. Eliot), George Santayana, Joseph Schumpeter, and William Ernest Hocking. Two [later] generations of Harvard students thrilled to Professor Samuel Beer. . . . But he was a representative of a breed of teacher already obsolete in the academic culture."<sup>4</sup>

Notwithstanding Mr. Sykes and those who share his view, it is hard to locate a Golden Age of teaching at Harvard (or, I suspect, at other universities). As early as 1722, Benjamin Franklin declared that Harvard students "learn little more than how to carry themselves handsomely and enter a Room genteelly (which might as well be acquired at a Dancing school), . . ."<sup>5</sup> Those who taught in those early years distanced themselves more and more from their charges, with the result that "in the eighteenth century . . . the undergraduates began to look at them as their natural enemies."<sup>6</sup> After 1825, new grading and disciplinary procedures further "poisoned the already hostile relations between students and instructors and made social intercourse between them

impossible.”<sup>7</sup> According to Harvard’s chief chronicler, Samuel Eliot Morison, “the Faculty was not there to teach but to see that boys got their lessons. To explain difficulties or to explicate a text would have seemed improper.” In this environment, Morison added, “almost every graduate of the period 1825-1860 has left on record his detestation of the system of instruction at Harvard.”<sup>8</sup>

With the coming of President Eliot, Harvard changed to an elective system, and professors could lecture on subjects of their own choosing instead of merely taking recitations. William James, Josiah Royce, Alfred Bushnell Hart, George Lyman Kittredge, and a few others won reputations as excellent teachers. Still, as the Committee on Instruction reported in 1901, “Certain lecturers failed to interest, some were inaudible, and some wasted time dictating data or having it copied from the blackboard.”<sup>9</sup> Worse yet, the intellectual standards in many courses left much to be desired, and the amount of time students spent studying was often “discreditably small.”

One marked improvement of *fin de siècle* Harvard was the growth of social contact between professors and undergraduates after many generations of isolation and hostility. While Charles Copeland, or “Copey,” was specially admired for entertaining students in his quarters in the Yard, other faculty members did the same. Maps of Cambridge showing the addresses of faculty members testify to the fact that professors living near the campus welcomed undergraduates into their homes. Yet, in the midst of this hospitality, accounts of that era echo much of what is often criticized today. However much he may have been beloved by his students, “Copey was never properly appreciated by his colleagues,” writes Admiral Morison; “he was not even promoted [to] Assistant Professor until 1910” (when he was approaching 50 years of age).<sup>10</sup>

In 1939, a student committee undertook a comprehensive review of undergraduate education. The committee itself was distinguished by having among its members a future Nobel laureate in Economics, a dean of the Chicago Law School, and the first director of the Harvard-MIT Joint Program in Health Science and Technology. Thoughtful in its observations and temperate in tone, the report includes many passages that suggest that all was not well with the quality of instruction. According to the committee, the tutorial system was “disintegrating,” “irregular and haphazard,” and subject to “half-heartedness and discouragement.”<sup>11</sup> Although the lecture system “is an effective and economical

educational method,” “there is a great temptation for the lecturer to repeat every year the same lectures. . . .”<sup>12</sup> In the end, the report concluded, “the difficulty with Harvard teaching is that the personnel is not selected or advanced with teaching ability as a major consideration; and since it is not believed by instructors to be a major criterion, they do not devote sufficient time and thought to teaching.”<sup>13</sup>

So much for romantic allusions to an earlier “Golden Age.” We must also be on guard against the companion tendency to paint the current situation as worse than it really is. To read most popular critics, one would suppose that the quality of instruction must have sunk to a very low ebb indeed. Yet I doubt that this is the case. Years of glancing at student course evaluations have convinced me that every one of our faculties boasts many members who are regarded as fine teachers. The overall quality of instruction is also high. For example, our latest survey of undergraduate opinion reveals that over 80 percent of the students regard their electives, courses in concentrations, tutorials, and language instruction as either good, excellent, or superb while over 70 percent give such ratings to courses in the core curriculum. In short, if Harvard’s experience is any guide, the fairest summary of teaching today is not that it has slipped in quality, but that now, as in the past, there is ample room for improvement.

While universities have always had their share of good and bad teaching, the nature of the problem has changed in recent decades because of the emphasis on scientific discovery and research that emerged after World War II. With the growth of huge federal grants and scores of academic journals, research has come to dominate all other factors in choosing, recognizing, and rewarding faculty members. High salaries and promotions tend to go primarily to accomplished scholars, since it is published work, far more than teaching, that builds the reputation of a university. Even offers from other institutions come most often to well-known scholars, if only because it is easy for faculties elsewhere to read and evaluate professors’ books but difficult to find out much about the quality of their teaching.

With such powerful incentives stacked in favor of research, the prospects for good teaching seem distinctly bleak. Yet the relationship between teaching and research is not as simple as critics like to claim. After innumerable studies, it appears that more time spent on research does not necessarily mean less time spent on teaching, nor do those

who publish more fare any worse as teachers in the eyes of their students. If anything, the reverse is more likely to be true, although the correlations are too slight to have much meaning.<sup>14</sup>

Fortunately, professors also seem to respond to more than the lure of fame and higher salaries in allocating their time and talent. Many find it challenging, even exhilarating, to teach students, especially if they are bright and eager to learn. Thus, when almost all experienced junior faculty at Harvard affirmed in a poll that they would accept appointments here if they had to choose again, their primary reason was “the chance to teach your students.” Conversely, poor teaching carries its own special penalties: low enrollments, bored faces, a dearth of the little clues and heartening encounters that show appreciation for a job well done. These incentives — to help others learn, to inspire respect, to perform one’s professional responsibilities well — provide foundations on which the university can build a strong commitment to good teaching.

There are few clear guides to developing this commitment. Critics have worked much harder at conjuring up declamatory rhetoric than they have at prescribing remedies. Those writers who do offer suggestions usually concentrate on the need to stress teaching more in deciding whom to appoint to the faculty. Thus, a recent Carnegie Foundation report urges that appointments committees define scholarship more broadly and consider not only books and articles in refereed journals but indicia of teaching as well, such as textbooks, computer software, and even student evaluations of courses.<sup>15</sup>

Few would quarrel with proposals to pay serious attention to a candidate’s teaching in appointing and promoting faculty. But such suggestions fall far short of giving us adequate means to improve instruction. Assessing the ability to teach is not a simple matter, especially when candidates come from other institutions. Besides, concentrating on the appointments process assumes that teaching well is a skill that instructors can readily acquire on their own if they will only choose to do so. The fact is that many faculty members need help, and efforts to give such help must play an important part in any comprehensive program to improve the quality of instruction. Furthermore, even if professors teach well at the moment they are tenured, there is no guarantee that they will continue to do so during their decades of

service thereafter. Something more must be done to encourage and reward good instruction throughout the whole career cycle.

In the pages that follow, I will try to fill these gaps by offering 16 practical steps to lift the level of teaching in universities. No one of them by itself will make a great impact. Together, however, they provide a network of incentives that can alter the campus environment and overcome the impression that teaching does not really matter. Most of these steps are already in place, at least in some of Harvard's faculties. Doubtless, similar reforms are widely used elsewhere. Describing them, therefore, may not only lend some much-needed concreteness to the current debate over teaching. It may also help to show that more has been done to improve the quality of instruction than is commonly recognized.

### **Appointments and Preparation for Teaching**

#### **Teaching Fellows**

While efforts to improve teaching can be helpful at all levels of the faculty, any administration concerned about the problem would do well to begin with its youngest instructors, the graduate student-teaching fellows, for it is here that efforts to help are most appropriate and most likely to be welcomed. By leading discussions in the sections of large lecture courses, teaching fellows perform one of the hardest forms of pedagogy even though they are the least experienced of all the university's instructors. At its worst, this practice can lead to dull, uninspired teaching. At its best, it offers undergraduates an active, personalized instruction that would be impossibly expensive if universities had to depend entirely on professors.

1. *Requiring Proficiency in English.* It is impossible to choose new teaching fellows on the basis of their skill in the classroom, since they rarely will have had prior experience. But there is one threshold requirement that all universities can and should insist upon. Now that more than one quarter of our graduate students come from abroad, there are invariably some who cannot speak English with enough facility to teach undergraduates effectively. Nevertheless, they are often pressed into service by departments in urgent need of teaching fellows. The results are often deeply frustrating for students and instructor alike.

Although this problem seems glaring enough to demand a solution, it persists in many institutions. Only this year at Harvard have rules

come into force prohibiting foreign graduate students from teaching without first taking a test to demonstrate their proficiency in English. Since written exams do not necessarily prove an ability to speak and be understood, the screening test is oral. Those who do not pass are not permanently barred from teaching. They must simply take instruction in English as a Second Language until they have demonstrated enough proficiency to take up their classroom duties.

2. *Giving Preparatory Training.* If a university wishes to use graduate students to teach in important, demanding ways, it should do its best to prepare them for the task. Such an effort carries a double reward. Not only will it help to improve the quality of instruction; it will also prepare graduate students for a task they will perform throughout their academic careers.

Ideally, graduate students should receive such preparation before they meet their first class. At least four types of assistance are possible. The simplest method is to distribute written material describing recurring problems in teaching and ways of coping with them effectively. Although such documents can convey much useful information, they are often too inert, too passive to make much of an impression. More stimulating are discussions based on case studies of dilemmas that instructors often face in the classroom. Under the guidance of a gifted teacher, such discussions can help participants not only to learn to recognize important classroom issues when they arise but also to discover different ways of dealing with them, each with its peculiar advantages and limitations. A third method is to allow new teaching fellows to observe a demonstration class taught by an able, experienced instructor and then to talk about the experience with a skilled mentor. The last, and exceptionally valuable, technique is to videotape instructors in the act of teaching and discuss the tape with them. This can either be done by taping an actual class or by having graduate students teach for a few minutes in front of their fellows, watch a tape of the teaching segment, discuss the results, and then repeat the process.

A good training course can make use of all four of these methods. In its own fashion, each can help instructors realize that teaching is not merely an intuitive, highly personal form of communication but a process filled with recurring issues that one can analyze and address in a variety of ways. How to begin and end a class, how to cope with racial tensions that can arise in a discussion, how to teach controversial

material without indoctrinating students, how to critique student work — the list is endless. Although no two instructors may choose to resolve these problems in exactly the same way, all can enrich their teaching by learning to perceive more of these issues and more interesting ways of responding. With this end in mind, under the leadership of our Danforth Center for the Improvement of Teaching, Harvard is moving steadily, department by department, toward giving a training course to all new teaching fellows.

3. *Providing Faculty Supervision.* Preparatory courses and videotaping can do a lot to help prospective teachers learn *how* to communicate ideas and information effectively. But they will not help a graduate student to understand just *what* it is that is worth communicating. Such understanding can come only from those who have mastered the field of knowledge being taught. As a result, no preparation for teaching would be complete without periodic meetings between professors and their teaching fellows to discuss the aims of the course, the complexities of the subject, and the ways in which sections can most fruitfully address issues raised in the lectures.

Many Harvard professors already follow this practice, although many others, alas, do not. In some courses, great traditions have grown up around the meetings that gifted teachers have held with their teaching fellows over many years. For graduate students, these discussions are often among the most memorable experiences of their Harvard training; for professors, the conversations undoubtedly lead them to think more deeply about their teaching.

Because of these benefits, regular meetings with teaching fellows should be a part of every large sectioned course. Since the meetings take time and effort, they could legitimately be regarded as graduate seminars and counted as part of a professor's normal teaching load. Or perhaps they should be treated as a duty rendered in return for the time spared from having to grade student examinations. In either case, institutionalizing these discussions could do much to improve the quality of instruction and to enrich graduate education.

4. *Preventing Inadequate Instruction.* Despite efforts to screen for language proficiency and to prepare graduate students for the classroom, a few teaching fellows are bound to perform badly. For the sake of its undergraduates, a university should intervene at the earliest

feasible moment and prevent such instructors from continuing until they have acquired an adequate level of proficiency. At Harvard we rely on student evaluations to identify teaching fellows who are in need of remedial help. Those with especially negative evaluations are asked to stop teaching until they have had extensive tutoring with the aid of videotaping and have improved enough to return to the classroom.

5. *Assembling Teaching Portfolios.* Next year, we will try to place further emphasis on teaching by preparing portfolios for all graduate student instructors. Each portfolio will include a list of the classes the student has taught, results of all student evaluations, a record of any completed courses or other forms of preparation for teaching, an evaluation by one or more knowledgeable faculty members, and a videotape of the student instructing an actual class. All prospective employers will be informed that this information exists and can be requested from a graduate student seeking a job. The ultimate decision whether to make the portfolio available will be left to the graduate student.

Portfolios should serve several purposes. They will help our graduate students to convey the clearest possible indication of their teaching ability so that they can present themselves in the strongest possible light. Other institutions should be happy to receive this material, since our surveys suggest that most colleges and universities would like to emphasize teaching more but lack the information to do so. The use of portfolios will also benefit Harvard faculty in choosing teaching fellows for their courses. Not least, knowing that evidence of teaching is regularly assembled for prospective employers should give a strong incentive to graduate students to work hard to improve their classroom skills.

### **Junior Faculty**

Since universities recruit most of their junior faculty from other institutions, they will usually have to evaluate prospective young colleagues whose teaching skills are unknown. It is generally possible to obtain a letter evaluating the teaching of such candidates from senior faculty in their home institutions, but these assessments are often skimpy and based on hearsay of uncertain reliability. Hence, almost all departments invite the leading candidates to come to the campus and deliver a lecture or teach a class. Such visits are clearly a help. Still, a single appearance is a thin reed on which to base an evaluation, since

candidates are often nervous and do not always give a valid impression of their worth.

6. *Collecting Better Evidence of Teaching.* These difficulties underscore the need for all universities to prepare teaching portfolios for their graduate students that can be given to prospective employers. The benefits of assembling such information seem great enough to warrant doing the same for junior faculty. Just as in the case of graduate students, portfolios will offer much better evidence of teaching, both for candidates being evaluated for promotion to tenure within their own universities and for those seeking appointments at some other institution. Similarly, the practice should also encourage junior faculty to work at their teaching as well as their research. So long as young scholars believe that their chances for promotion will depend overwhelmingly on their publications, they will be less inclined to try to improve their teaching. The best way to overcome this problem is to develop a record of teaching that others can analyze and weigh just as they assess a candidate's publications.

7. *Offering Suitable Preparation for Teaching.* Few universities offer training to their graduate students to help them learn to teach effectively. As a result, many new junior faculty will come to their first full-time academic post without adequate preparation for the classroom. Most of them will not wish to fill this gap by simply joining programs designed for graduate students. Nor should they, for the problems they face are quite different. Unlike graduate students, junior faculty have the challenge of designing an entire course with appropriate readings. Much of their teaching will involve lecturing rather than leading a discussion. They may well have to assemble, motivate, and supervise a team of teaching fellows or laboratory assistants. For these reasons, they need a program of preparation designed specially for them.

The Business School has long had such a seminar with apparently good results. Academic deans in our other schools have responded positively to the idea, and a group of junior faculty from Arts and Sciences with whom I discussed the matter were likewise enthusiastic. As a result, the Danforth Center has decided to offer such a seminar on a voluntary basis commencing next fall.

## Senior Faculty

A featured item in the litany of complaints about teaching is the failure of universities to give tenure to exceptionally popular instructors. Nothing seems to demonstrate a disdain for teaching so vividly as letting go a young professor who has just won an award as best instructor of the year. On reflection, however, it is not so clear that universities should promote successful teachers who are not proficient in research. After all, research is a vital part of the university's mission. The ability to do it well is also an important part of attracting and training talented graduate students. Hence, promoting excellent undergraduate teachers who have not produced first-rate research may make no more sense than it would for a baseball team to hire good hitters who are unable to catch or throw the ball.

What *is* hard to excuse is the willingness to tenure productive scholars without paying more than cursory attention to the quality of their teaching. Unfortunately, this practice is commonplace even in the best universities. Granted, every institution asks for *some* evidence of a candidate's teaching before making a tenure decision. But the information submitted is often skimpy, and reviewing authorities typically spend far less time examining this aspect of the case than they devote to evaluating a candidate's published work.

8. *Obtaining Adequate Evidence of Teaching.* Most candidates for tenure have had ample time to demonstrate their abilities as teachers. But how should one evaluate these abilities and what evidence might one wish to consider? Much of the needed data is similar to what will be included in the teaching portfolios already described: a record of courses and seminars taught, a complete set of student evaluations, a listing of any teaching awards received, and letters from several senior faculty members who have actually watched the candidate teach a class. Beyond this basic information, however, one might also ask for evaluations of the syllabi of any new courses that candidates have developed and for descriptions of any innovations in teaching that they have introduced. It would likewise be helpful to hear from the department chairperson on such other matters as the candidate's efforts to work with teaching fellows and advise students. Finally, if the prospective colleague has had graduate students, one might benefit not only from the chairperson's evaluation of these efforts but from confidential letters by former students whom the candidate has mentored.

It is harder, of course, to gather evidence about the teaching of professors recruited from other universities. Yet many departments are not as resourceful as they should be in seeking information. As a result, there is often little more in the dossier than a list of courses taught and the impressions of a few faculty members gleaned from a single visit to give a talk to the department.

With a little ingenuity, the department could do much better. Many universities provide for regular student evaluations of their courses; by asking the candidate or inquiring of friends, the chairperson could obtain them and make them available. If it seems indelicate to ask members of the candidate's home department to add their personal appraisal, one can usually find former colleagues who can offer an assessment. Since candidates are usually willing to supply their *curriculum vitae*, they will presumably agree to submit the syllabus of any new courses they have created or a description of any teaching innovations they have introduced or even the student evaluations of their courses. In short, although evidence of teaching from other universities may be hard to obtain, much can be done if the administration makes clear its desire for such material and requires the department to submit it along with an account of its efforts to obtain as much relevant information as possible.

9. *Curbing the Fixation on the Quantity of Publications.* A startling result of recent surveys on faculty appointments procedures is the emphasis placed on the sheer number of books and articles that candidates have published. The most recent Carnegie study reveals that over half of all university professors believe that tenure is based primarily on the quantity of a candidate's publications.<sup>16</sup> A more elaborate, earlier survey found that even in the most selective research universities, the leading criterion for tenure was the number of articles published in refereed journals.<sup>17</sup>

This practice is patently indefensible. One can appreciate why it is important to know whether a candidate has produced enough published work to demonstrate a sustained commitment to research. But surely the *quality* of work, rather than the *quantity*, must be the overriding concern in considering the appointment of a scholar. The fixation on quantity has caused a vast accumulation of mediocre research. It also helps to explain why a large majority of professors in the United States believe that the pressure to produce more research is interfering

with instruction.\* To avoid these results, every faculty should make clear in its published appointments procedures that quality, not quantity, must be the principal factor in evaluating a candidate's research. It would even be wise to consider following the lead of our Medical School by placing a limit on the number of publications that appointments committees can evaluate in making their decisions.

10. *Refusing to Lower Teaching Loads.* Another useful step that every university can take to uphold the quality of instruction is to commit itself not to initiate offers to reduce the teaching loads of professors it is seeking to attract or retain. In the relentless competition to recruit outstanding scholars, such arrangements are all too common. As one university spokesperson put it, "Unfortunately, the blue chip we play in the poker game these days is to offer our best scholars less time with students."<sup>18</sup> With the prospect of large shortages of Ph.D.'s, the competition is likely to grow keener, and offers to lower teaching loads will multiply if something is not done to discourage the practice.

It would be asking too much to insist that a university never agree to reduce a teaching schedule. No dean or provost can refuse to meet the competition by matching offers made by other institutions. But it is not unreasonable to urge that universities refrain from *initiating* offers of reduced teaching as a means of attracting candidates. Unless such offers come to be recognized as irresponsible, it will be hard to avoid a steady erosion in the amount of teaching expected of senior faculty at leading universities.

### **Building Incentives to Sustain Good Teaching**

As I pointed out earlier, it is not enough merely to emphasize good teaching in the appointments process. Something must be done to encourage it during the years that follow an appointment. Many universities establish teaching prizes for this purpose. No one can quarrel with

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\*Studies on the relation between teaching and research, as I have already indicated, do not show that those who publish more are less successful in their teaching. Indeed, those who work harder on their research seem to take the time from family and recreation rather than from their preparation for classes. Still, these studies have not proved that professors *seeking promotion* may not slight their teaching in order to build their publication record. Lacking more definitive studies, the widespread impression on the part of large majorities of faculty members that overemphasis on the quantity of research *does* interfere with teaching should presumably be accorded weight.

these awards, of course. But the slim chance of winning such recognition may not motivate a large number of faculty members. And if the university does not do much more than this to demonstrate its sincere desire to encourage good teaching, prizes can easily become an object of cynicism rather than a symbol of institutional commitment. Hence, a number of steps must be taken to create an environment that constantly affirms the value of teaching and offers a variety of incentives to induce faculty members to take it seriously.

11. *Requiring Student Evaluation.* Student evaluations can help in several ways to improve the quality of instruction. They will motivate professors to work harder at their courses, since few instructors like to be identified publicly as poor teachers. Evaluations can also give valuable feedback to instructors, provided they are drafted with care. Evaluation forms should not merely ask students to state how much they enjoyed the course; they should inquire about the clarity and organization of lectures and class discussions, the usefulness of assigned readings, the relationship of sections to the lectures, and the helpfulness of the instructor in seeing students, commenting on their papers, and returning them promptly. Well-chosen questions can also help to achieve specific educational goals. For example, our Business School includes a question on its form that asks students to assess how well the instructor dealt with ethical issues, since the dean wants to encourage professors to take this aspect of their teaching seriously. In order to encourage professors to consider whether they rely too much on passive lectures, the Faculty of Arts and Sciences plans to ask students to assess how much each course has helped them learn to think more clearly and logically.

One often hears faculty colleagues dismiss student evaluations as mere popularity contests. But the evidence does not bear this out. Several studies confirm that student assessments are reliable and consistent over time and provide information that correlates positively to more expert assessments of teaching.<sup>19</sup> Surveys of alumni suggest that student assessments do not change appreciably with greater age and reflection.<sup>20</sup> Other investigations show a significant correlation between how well students rate an instructor and how much they actually learn.<sup>21</sup> At Harvard, students actually tend to give higher ratings to courses they consider more difficult.

It would be hard to argue, therefore, that student assessments are worthless or trivial. On the contrary, a strong case can be made for making evaluation compulsory for all courses above a certain size, as it already is in almost all Harvard faculties. The harder question is whether to publish the results. Doing so not only helps students to choose their courses; it also motivates professors to try harder. Yet one can object to this practice on the grounds that some faculty members have problems with their teaching that are incurable; for them, publishing poor student reviews will be a humiliation with few compensating benefits. Resolving this dilemma is difficult but not impossible. One alternative is to publish the tabulations but not the accompanying student comments. Another is to evaluate all courses but to honor a specific request by any professor not to publish the results.

12. *Providing Opportunities to Improve Teaching.* Student evaluation and feedback will not have maximum effect unless a dean or chairperson discusses the results with instructors who get poor ratings and encourages them to seek help. Various forms of assistance are possible. At Harvard, one promising opportunity has come from the work of Roland Christensen, a professor from the Business School who has thought more than anyone else in the University about the process of teaching. Many years ago, Dr. Christensen developed a seminar for all new faculty at the Business School to acquaint them with the problems of using the case and discussion method. For the best part of a decade, the seminar has been open to professors elsewhere in the University, and many instructors, young and old, have profited by taking it. In addition, faculty members can also benefit from having their classes videotaped and watching the results with an experienced critic. Even the ablest instructors have improved their teaching in this way. To date, videotaping has been used most extensively by teaching fellows; over 250 volunteer each year. But tenured professors have used this device as well, notably in the Law School, the Kennedy School, and, most recently, the Physics Department. The Kennedy School actually employs a trained critic to videotape faculty members and assist them in interpreting the results.

Beyond efforts to help individual instructors lie further opportunities to improve education through fostering a process of continuous innovation and improvement. Four steps are essential for this to occur.

13. *Offering Grants for Educational Innovation.* It is sometimes easier for a professor to win a six-figure grant for research than to scratch up \$1,500 to revise a course or experiment with a new instructional technique. In such an environment, many faculty members are bound to be discouraged from trying to improve their teaching. To avoid this result, it is important to invest in innovation by budgeting an annual sum that can be disbursed without delay or red tape to professors with plausible ideas for improving their courses.

14. *Evaluating New Initiatives.* Each grant for improving teaching should carry a stipulation that the project be evaluated carefully. Such a requirement forces everyone who seeks a grant to think carefully about the purposes of the innovation. More important, it provides a way to determine whether the innovation deserves to be retained and possibly used by other instructors or whether it should be revised or even discarded. Through a series of grants and evaluations, a university can foster a process of trial and error in which innovations produce research which gradually expands our knowledge of how to improve teaching and learning.

15. *Mounting a Continuous Program of Educational Research.* Ideally the process of evaluating innovations should grow to include an active program of research to learn more about how to enhance the quality of education. Without such an effort, education will remain as one of the few fields of human endeavor that fails to improve demonstrably from one generation to the next. Of course, there are aspects of teaching and learning too subtle to be proper subjects for rigorous research and evaluation. But progress in many fields, such as expository writing, logical reasoning, foreign languages, science and mathematics, can be measured reasonably well. As a result, it is possible for a faculty to launch its own series of studies using technology, new pedagogical methods, innovative teaching materials, and other experimental methods to find out how to do a better job of helping students to master these skills. By planning and assessing these initiatives carefully, faculties could greatly accelerate efforts to improve the effectiveness of instruction throughout the University.

To stimulate interest in this sort of research, I launched an Assessment Seminar three years ago under the leadership of Professor Richard Light. The Seminar attracted over 60 participants and produced a variety of studies on subjects ranging from underachieving students to the use

of personal logs as a means of improving study habits. Stimulated by these efforts, more than a dozen research projects are currently under way involving such topics as estimating the impact of computers on improving language instruction, assessing the effectiveness of small study groups in promoting learning, evaluating an experimental course to help underachieving students, and determining whether programs to prepare graduate students for teaching actually produce better instruction and improve student learning.

Despite these initiatives, I have found that it is far from easy to develop a vigorous program of research on teaching and learning. Deans have more immediate tasks to perform. However much they may deny it, many instructors resist having their work assessed. Researchers often turn to intriguing topics that have no prospect of yielding information that can guide real educational reform. In the face of these obstacles, the outlook for research remains precarious, even though such work seems invaluable in speeding the process of educational reform.

16. *Publicizing New Ideas.* Universities are notoriously haphazard in publicizing successful innovations, not just from one institution to another but even within a single campus. Lacking publicity, many good ideas take a long time to spread, and some do not spread at all. To solve this problem and to foster a sense of venturesomeness and experimentation, universities should find a way of regularly reporting on new experiments in pedagogy or curricula and describing the results of studies investigating important educational problems.

There is more interest in work of this kind than one might think. Last year, Professor Light produced his first report of studies completed under our Assessment Seminar.<sup>22</sup> Not only did a story about the report appear on the front page of *The New York Times*; within six months, 8,000 copies had been requested, 500 of them from within Harvard itself. A lively account of new findings, new innovations, and new pedagogic ideas, both internally and elsewhere, could easily find a wide readership on campus and arouse much interest in educational reform.

In combination, then, these last four steps could do much to foster a continuous process of experimentation and reform. With the help of well-prepared publicity, faculty members could learn of interesting new ideas to improve their teaching. Aided by modest grants, interested instructors could put these ideas into practice. Through continuous

evaluation, the entire University could discover which new initiatives actually achieved their objectives so that successful innovations could survive and spread while less effective efforts were discarded.

### Conclusion

In describing these 16 steps to improve the quality of instruction, I grant that what I have proposed has little to do with truly exceptional teaching. Great teachers emerge not so much by mastering a standard technique as through the special quality of their minds, and that is an ingredient that cannot be readily transmitted to new faculty members or replicated by conscious effort.

Because many of the greatest teachers seem to succeed spontaneously, using methods that are often peculiar to themselves, it is tempting to conclude that teaching is simply too private and personal to be improved by purposeful, organized means. But that is clearly not the case. Much teaching is ineffective or uninspired either because instructors spend too little time preparing, or because they do not know what they are doing wrong, or because they are not aware of other ways to motivate, to illuminate, and ultimately to move their students to master a body of knowledge. These are all deficiencies that universities can help to remedy, either by challenging those who give too little time to their teaching, or by aiding instructors who need help in finding how to teach more effectively, or by experimenting more systematically to discover new ways of helping students learn.

We should not underestimate the benefits that can result from these efforts. Universities such as Harvard already do as much as they possibly can to attract the most powerful, creative minds throughout the world. The greatest opportunities to improve the quality of education lie in helping to insure that such a talented faculty accomplishes more to stimulate and enlighten its students.

At Harvard and elsewhere, much is now being done to move in this direction. I hope that we can sustain this momentum in the future. The quality of our students obliges us to do our best to help them develop their knowledge and their capacities to the fullest. As we seek to fulfill this obligation, we may increasingly discover that finding better ways to help students learn can be as challenging and rewarding as conveying new insights and creating new knowledge in our chosen field of research. Once we arrive at this point, we may look forward to

a time when we can confidently assert that the quality of teaching is demonstrably better than it was in earlier generations.

## Notes

1. "The Future of Teaching," *Improving College Teaching*, American Council on Education (1967), pp. 58-59.
2. Ernest Boyer, *College: The Undergraduate Experience in America* (1987), p. 151.
3. *Ibid.*, pp. 149-50.
4. *Profscam* (1989), p. 53.
5. Quoted in Bernard Bailyn, Donald Fleming, Oscar Handlin, and Stephan Thernstrom, *Glimpses of the Harvard Past* (1986), p. 52.
6. Samuel Eliot Morison, *Three Centuries of Harvard* (1936), p. 260.
7. *Ibid.*
8. *Ibid.*
9. Quoted in Hugh Hawkins, *Between Harvard and America* (1972), p. 274.
10. Morison, *op. cit.*, p. 403.
11. *Report of Student Council Committee on Education*, June 12, 1939 (mimeo), p. 19.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 27.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 28.
14. The most authoritative survey of all the research on these topics is contained in Kenneth Feldman, "Research Productivity and Scholarly Accomplishment of College Teachers as Related to Their Instructional Effectiveness: A Review and Exploration," *Research in Higher Education*, vol. 26 (1987), p. 227.
15. The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, *Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professoriate* (1990).
16. *Ibid.*, p. 33.
17. John A. Centra, *Determining Faculty Effectiveness* (1980), p. 15.
18. Lee Knefelkamp, as quoted in Lynne Cheney, *Tyrannical Machines: A Report on Educational Practices Gone Wrong and Our Best Hopes of Setting Them Right*, National Endowment for the Humanities (1990), p. 28.
19. Centra, *op. cit.*, n. 16, *supra* at pp. 26-28; Peter Cohen, "Student Ratings of Instruction and Student Achievement: A Meta-analysis of Multisection Validity Studies," *Review of Educational Research*, Vol. 51 (Fall 1981), p. 281; Frank Costina, William Greenough, and Robert Menges, "Student Ratings of College Teaching: Reliability, Validity, and Usefulness," *Review of Educational Research*, vol. 41 (Dec. 1971), pp. 511, 516-17.
20. Centra, *op. cit.*, pp. 41-42.
21. *Ibid.*, pp. 36-38.
22. *First Report of the Harvard Assessment Seminars: Explorations with Faculty and Students About Teaching, Learning and Student Life* (1990).

## Respondent

*Sylvia Grider*  
*American Folklore Society and*  
*Texas A&M University*

First of all let me say that I am honored to be part of this distinguished panel confronting the issue of improving teaching in American higher education. To share this podium with Presidents Bok and Oakley and Rupp is an extraordinary experience. Although I am not a university president, I am President-elect of the American Folklore Society. The annual mid-year meeting of the Board of the American Folklore Society coincides with this ACLS meeting, and so my friends and colleagues on the AFS Board are here today as my guests.

Administrators often remark that one of the problems with faculty is that they are more loyal to their disciplines than to the institutions in which they teach. As a faculty member, my response to that is “yes, of course,” because it is our disciplines that provide the emotional camaraderie and the emotional support which undergird our serious lifetime research interests. The various annual meetings, conferences, and symposia of our respective disciplines provide the primary fora for discussing and presenting our research problems and results. Of course that is why our universities provide travel funds for us to attend these meetings. Ironically, however, our disciplines do not require us to publish or perish; our institutions do. Our disciplines provide solace and escape from the arbitrary and bureaucratic pressures and constraints of the university. Because of my own disciplinary loyalty, I want to speak today on behalf of and informed by my fellow folklorists in the academy.

Although well known and respected in Europe, folklore is a much misunderstood discipline in the United States. The American Folklore Society, founded in 1888, is one of the oldest constituent members of the American Council of Learned Societies. Nevertheless, those of us folklorists who teach in colleges and universities, unlike philosophers or historians or literary critics, constantly have to explain to our colleagues and to the general public what we do. The main thing that we do is study and interpret tradition in all of its manifestations throughout

human culture. The oral tradition is at the very heart of the discipline of folklore. Since so much of teaching is oral as well as traditional, whether lectures or Socratic dialogue, folklorists pay a great deal of attention to the teaching process.

Because most of our colleagues in the academy do not understand what folklorists do, the classes that we teach are usually not understood very well either. Because folklore has the popular connotation of “old timey” or “untrue,” a folklore course sounds like it is going to be easy. As a result, counselors and advisors often pack our undergraduate classes with students in general studies or with athletes or with students on academic probation. However, for most people the word *folklore* also conjures up nostalgic images which are inherently interesting, so we also get an inordinate number of students who are simply curious and looking for a relevant elective. And, of course, folklorists in some universities also teach a wide range of graduate seminars in the discipline. As a result, folklorists must be master teachers who can cope with a whole range of student ability, maturity, and interest.

The lack of separate departments in our discipline is another professional obstacle for academic folklorists to overcome. Folklorists can be found in departments of English, anthropology, history, and sociology, just to name a few. Most folklorists teach only one or two undergraduate survey courses in folklore and therefore rarely get the opportunity to teach their personal research specialties. Yet curiously, the current mandate of the university system is that professors must constantly engage in the publication of original research in order to keep abreast of the latest developments in their fields in order that they can teach better.

I think we can all agree that the simplistic, competitive either/or conflict between teaching and the publication of research results is disastrous to the overall educational process. None of us question the necessity of ongoing research to stay abreast of developments in our respective disciplines or the need to contribute to those developments. But how much cutting-edge information do undergraduates in introductory survey courses need? And how much can they absorb? And how long can the narrowly specialized research scholar stay interested in teaching if that scholar is assigned the same introductory courses semester after semester? Can it be that the talents of productive scholars are wasted in the undergraduate classroom? If so, it would appear that the

paradigm of the relationship between teaching and research needs re-examining.

The research mandate of large universities impacts especially hard on folklorists in non-folklore departments. For example, does the publish or perish mandate mean that a folklorist in an English department, for example, should be publishing in literature, as do the other members of that department, or should the folklorist be publishing in folklore, which the bulk of the members of the department consider as peripheral? If all that the English Department in question counts toward tenure and promotion are refereed articles and books about literature, then the folklorist is unfairly burdened with having to publish and do research outside of his or her field, while at the same time teaching only one or two introductory courses semester after semester. Such are the double binds that unilateral standards create in our universities.

As we all know from experience, good teaching involves more than simply walking unprepared into a classroom, coffee cup in hand, and winging it for 50 minutes. In many respects, teaching a graduate seminar is much easier and takes considerably less preparation time than teaching an undergraduate class — which is why faculty with distinguished publication records usually teach most of the seminars. Good teaching requires extensive preparation, especially for introductory survey classes. That preparation can entail constantly reading in the professional literature, revising lectures, organizing slides, previewing tapes and films and videotapes, lettering overhead transparencies, and planning ahead for discussion opportunities. Furthermore, as we all know, effective learning does not stop at the end of the class period. Students, especially undergraduates, need to interact with us outside of the classroom too. They often need help with study skills, with goal-setting, with clarification of subject matter, and so on.

All of this, of course, takes the professor's time away from research and writing. You can't sit at the word processor and talk to a desperate student at the same time. Good teaching therefore can become personally too expensive for many faculty, because the more time that is spent on teaching preparation and interaction with students, oftentimes the fewer the refereed publications and the less likely that that faculty member will be tenured or promoted, which like it or not, translates into dollars lost.

The assumption that lack of publication automatically indicates a lack of research presents another problem that needs confronting. The current definition of acceptable research is that which is published in refereed journals or by university presses. Why must such publication be the only acceptable, rewardable outlet for research? What about research that is channeled into the classroom rather than publication? Why doesn't that research count in the current reward system? Can the answer be because publication is the only kind of research that can be archived and quantified and thus compared by deans and promotion committees?

As a folklorist, I know that people in high stress occupations have a tendency to bond into tight knit and esoteric folk groups. The shared oral traditions of these occupational folk groups deal primarily with the stresses and concerns of making a living in that particular occupation. For example, lumberjacks talk about the dangers of felling trees, oil field roughnecks talk about the perils of rotary drilling, taxi drivers talk about which parts of town and which fares to avoid. Most high-stress occupational folk groups often share a rather caustic sense of humor which is sometimes shocking to outsiders.

Although the ivory tower is stereotyped as the bastion of tranquility where beloved faculty sit around and have great ideas, this stereotype is really no longer true — if in fact it ever was true. Because of the pressure to publish and get grants, university faculty are as highly stressed as any occupational group in our society. It should come as no surprise therefore that the main traditional items that faculty pass along from one to the other deal with their occupational stresses as faculty — publishing, teaching, and alienation from the administration.

Anti-administration jokes and anecdotes are probably the most common oral tradition among faculty. For example, "Do you know what an assistant dean is? It's a mouse in training to become a rat." Furthermore, considering how many of today's faculty came of age during the turbulent sixties, it is no surprise that a number of derogatory anti-administration epithets have stayed in oral tradition — for example, "deans is pigs" is one that we constantly hear. Anti-teaching, publish or perish anecdotes and aphorisms are likewise common in oral tradition. These traditions, interestingly enough, and not surprisingly, express cynicism toward an educational system that is perceived as giving lip service to, but that does not really value or reward good

teaching. For example, who has not heard the venerable chestnut: "Those who can, do, and those who can't, teach." There is even a cynical addendum, justifiably despised by our colleagues on education faculties: "Those who can't teach, teach teachers." There is another that I have collected from my colleagues: "The rich get richer, but the poor get students." Or try this one: "Jesus Christ was a good teacher, but he didn't publish." Anti-teaching sentiment is not new. The Roman satirist, Lucian, described the punishment for kings who ended up in Hades: They were condemned to either sell fish or teach grammar.

Of more recent vintage are a couple of anecdotes which are currently being reported throughout the country. Let me point out, by the way, that one of the distinguishing characteristics of folklore is that folklore is always anonymous and people usually cite the friend of a friend as the source of the various anecdotes that we exchange. And so according to the oral tradition and "friends of friends," an anonymous dean allegedly said, "When Harvard comes headhunting for my best teachers, then I'll consider teaching when I make tenure, promotion, and pay raise decisions." In a similar widely-reported anecdote, another anonymous dean allegedly told a starry-eyed new assistant professor that there was a formula for success in the university: "Get a quarter of a million dollars worth of grants every year, publish like a son-of-a-gun, and as long as classes aren't rioting, forget about teaching." Those last two anecdotes are especially noteworthy to a folklorist because of their structural dependence on triple implementation, which indicates the processes of traditionality in action.

As all of these anecdotes demonstrate, many faculty decry the growing emphasis on research at the expense of teaching, but feel powerless to do anything about it. President Bok has clearly outlined the measures that he has instituted at Harvard in an attempt to enhance and encourage good teaching there. But most of us do not toil with him in the groves of academe. Instead, we struggle in the trenches of large public universities dependent on state funding. Faculty down in those trenches apparently believe that their administrators will not promote good teachers with uncompetitive publication records lest that action give a signal to other universities that research is no longer their primary goal. Furthermore, some administrators apparently believe that all faculty will immediately stop publishing if the threat of not doing so is removed. And we as faculty know that that is not the case. As a

further serious indication of the negativism toward teaching that is becoming increasingly prevalent in our universities, more and more faculty reportedly regard prizes and cash awards for teaching excellence as little more than token consolation prizes for not being competitive researchers. The feeling that there is no punishment or no sanctions for poor teaching only increases the sense of frustration on the part of the teaching yeomanry. Throughout the country, we see indifferent publication being rewarded and good teaching ignored. In addition, we have the paradox of released time from teaching being the standard reward for publication productivity, and the punishment for lack of publication is an increased teaching load. If the system were logical, just the opposite would be the standard practice — in other words, productive scholars would have increased teaching loads because they would have so much more to say to students.

So why bother with teaching at all, if there are so few real rewards for teaching well and no penalties for teaching poorly? Many of us teach because we love it and because of the deep personal satisfaction that interacting with students and the transmission of knowledge bring us. In fact, many faculty readily admit that teaching is the engine that drives them. A former master teacher who left college teaching to undertake a more lucrative career in another field describes teaching as “the passion to explain,” and goes on to lament that the loss of that passionate commitment is not compensated for by money or the prestige of being in another profession. It would be crass to intimate that any of us teach for the money, but by the same token, teachers have to make enough to live on. According to a recent front-page article in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (April 3, 1991), faculty salaries nationwide already fail to keep pace with the cost of living. Since our society measures an individual’s social worth by the size of the paycheck, good teachers are going to have to be paid more if we expect to attract talented new people into our profession. Furthermore, we somehow must communicate to the upcoming generation that teaching is as much a part of our scholars’ obligation as is publishing.

I recently overheard a graduate student announce that he had to publish six refereed journal articles before his orals if he hoped to have any chance of getting a job upon graduation. Why six? And what about their quality? What about their content? What about the joy, the commitment to enriching our culture with new knowledge? I could not help

wondering what these six fledgling articles contributed to his teaching apprenticeship, and whether his teaching record would help him get the job he so coveted. Such emphasis on publication to the exclusion of all else frequently produces an excessively narrow, sterile scholarly career instead of the broad “life of learning” celebrated by the American Council of Learned Societies.

Our current system which rewards publication but not teaching is requiring more and more caring, compassionate, and gifted teachers to compromise their personal integrity in the service of their paychecks. It is emotionally damaging and it is depressing to be forced to stand before a class and not give your best because you either did not have the time, or even worse, did not have the heart to prepare for that class. If the university demands publication above all else, then the pragmatic individual will publish at the expense of teaching preparation. The result is more often than not depression, cynicism, and burnout.

In conclusion, and with apologies to Lynne Cheney and the National Endowment for the Humanities, I firmly believe that the crisis in American higher education is not the curriculum. In the hands of a master teacher, almost any responsible curriculum can be effective. The real crisis is the systematic marginalization of teaching as a result of the pressure to publish at all costs. The best way to put a stop to this pernicious trend and therefore to begin improving teaching in American higher education is quite simply to recognize and reward faculty for teaching well.



## Respondent

*Francis Oakley*  
*Williams College*

I suppose all of us, ladies and gentlemen, have from our particular institutions testimonies to bad teaching in the distant past. We ourselves have a set of reminiscences published by Bliss Perry, a graduate of the College who went on to teach at Williams, then at Princeton and Harvard, and he also attests (as a sort of freebie for Derek Bok) to the inaudibility of lecturing at Harvard in the late 19th century — though, to be honorable about it, I should indicate that he was referring to a visiting lecturer, none other, in fact, than Matthew Arnold. He also spoke about the teaching of classics at Williams and indicated that it nearly turned him off Latin literature for life. He noted that the opening exercise in Latin instruction in his freshman year in 1877 was exactly the same as the one his father had had in 1848 and, to make it worse, exactly the same as his son had in 1916. Curricular stability with a vengeance! I hasten to add that he spoke affectionately, warmly, and admiringly of the teaching of Mark Hopkins and of G. Stanley Hall, the pioneering psychologist who went on to become the first president of Clark University. Let me take as my point of departure, ladies and gentlemen, the hinge as it were of Derek Bok's talk, that "the most balanced summary of teaching today . . . is not that it has slipped in quality, but that now, as in the past, there is ample room for improvement." I propose to begin with the latter issue of improvement to which he devoted much of his excellent talk, before going on to a former claim of stability in teaching quality to which I want to devote most of the brief time at my disposal.

On the matter of improving teaching, I think the battery of steps being proposed make very good sense. These steps are doable, eminently practicable, and some of them, I sense, are already quite widely adopted across the country. Taken together as a group they should send a very clear message and should make a very real impact. I have only a couple of comments to make on them. First, having been in receipt of quantitative student evaluations of practically every course I myself have taught for over 20 years, and having had as Dean of the Faculty at Williams to weigh that sort of evidence against the judgments conveyed

by formal interviews conducted with students about the performance of their teachers, against peer judgments of teaching by colleagues visiting a series of classes, and against judgments solicited from alumni, I would strongly endorse the view that such student evaluations are certainly not to be dismissed as mere popularity contests. They can be very helpful to the individual instructor in improving his or her teaching; they can be very helpful to those charged with the task of advising instructors on ways to improve their teaching; and I regard them as an almost essential part of the process of seriously and equitably evaluating teaching performance in the context of reappointment and promotion decisions. But I believe we should be very clear about their purpose. I would endorse the use of such evaluations for two purposes: the improvement of teaching itself and its evaluation by the institution. And I view those ends as other than and far more important than that of helping students to pick their courses on the basis of the teaching ability of the instructor. For that reason, I would very much oppose the publication by the institution itself of evaluative data it has collected. For the institution to do that strikes me as in some measure punitive and of sending an unfortunate message to undergraduates who are already prone to stressing teaching rather than learning. (I believe one of the committees looking at Harvard teaching right at the beginning of the century concluded that students were spending too much time in the classroom and not learning enough — not spending enough time studying outside it.) In small face-to-face institutions moreover, those located in small college towns in which professional and social life tend to overlap, the publication of course evaluation data can be quite demoralizing — especially for faculty just starting out or for those further along in their careers who, for one reason or another, hit a bad patch.

Second, in discussing practical steps not only to improve teaching effectiveness but also to sustain it across the course of a long career, I think we should not lose sight of the fact that good teaching is not simply a matter of technique but depends also on a sure command of the subject matter being taught and on a degree of passionate engagement in that subject matter. The fact is so obvious that it may seem redundant to emphasize it. But we should not forget that the Carnegie survey data collected at regular intervals since 1969 have revealed that a large percentage of faculty members nationally consistently report themselves to be currently engaged in no scholarly project, and a clear

majority report themselves as having published little or nothing. A clear majority. And yet after being involved for more than 20 years in the evaluation of faculty performance college-wide, I conclude that the continuing intellectual curiosity about and scholarly engagement in one's own subject is a truly critical factor, perhaps *the* most important factor, in the ability to sustain an effective teaching performance across a career that may last, after all, from 30 to 40 years. We should resist, I believe, the persistent pressure mentally to put asunder what the academy has long and properly joined together — namely, scholarship and teaching. And in our preoccupation with the environment prevailing at our research universities and leading colleges, we should not overlook the fact that one of the most important and practical steps that could be taken to sustain good teaching across faculty careers at the full and very broad range and variety of institutions that make up our higher educational system would be the continuing and more universal provision of institutional support for sustained scholarly engagement. Broadly and generously defined of course, though not *too* broadly and generously defined.

Mention of the Carnegie survey data leads me to turn now to Derek Bok's first point: that although it could always be improved, teaching has not slipped in quality. He is right, of course. And the point deserves very strong emphasis today. Of all institutions, the academy should be able to cope with criticism. Indeed it should be able to cope with it far better than it usually does. But on this issue of teaching and research, some of the recent spate of criticism has in my opinion been totally unmeasured, mounted in an historical void, and betraying a remarkable lack of interest in the statistical data available. Instead, proscription tends to preempt analysis, in place of evidence we get a sort of disheveled anecdotalism, and a free-fire zone is created for eye-catching and sensational claims of the type favored by Page Smith ("The American professoriate is in full flight from teaching") or the deplorable Charles Sykes ("The academic culture is not merely indifferent to teaching but . . . *actively* hostile to it"). Of course, that is utter rubbish, but if one can rely on the blurbs on the book jacket, that fact did not prevent its reviewers in *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*, struck down it seems by a veritable infection of hyperbole, from labeling Sykes's book as "an incisive and convincing indictment," or even as "stupendously provocative and important."

About faculty attitudes towards teaching and research, the amount of time spent on them and related activities, about research productivity as measured by publications and so on, we have at our disposal for the period from the late 1960s onwards quite rich sets of survey data. And those data have a good deal to tell us about the subject — some of it quite startling, some a little puzzling, but all of it tending to reshape the teaching-research issue along more complex lines rendering it less rewarding material for those energized by the joys of polemic. Time permits me to note just a couple of facts that stand out from those data and a couple of conclusions drawn by analysts like Martin Trow and Everett Ladd which strike me as warranted. The facts: First, that in response to the 1989 Carnegie survey no less than 70 percent of faculty overall indicated that their primary interest lay in teaching rather than research. And if you break that figure down by institutional sector, while it is hardly surprising that 93 percent of faculty at two-year colleges indicated that primary interest, it is more startlingly, I think (given the current spate of criticism), that 33 percent of those at the research universities said the same, and 55 percent of those at the doctorate-granting institutions. Second, that research productivity as measured by publication activity was broadly consonant with what faculty reported about the primary focus of their interests. Thirty-four percent overall reported they were not currently engaged in any scholarly project. Twenty-six percent appear to have published nothing. Fifty-six percent had never written or edited a book, either alone or in collaboration with anybody else, and about 60 percent have published no more than five articles in the professional journals; while, of course, a smallish group of compulsive recidivists were meanwhile publishing up a storm.

What about the conclusions to be drawn from these and a whole series of related findings over the past 20 years? So far as commitment to teaching goes, the first is reassuring — namely, that “the normative climate [in American higher education], as reflected in academics’ personal preferences, is far more favorable to teaching” than it is usually taken to be (Fulton and Trow). “Most college and university professors in the United States do not think of themselves as research people,” and their actual behavior reflects that fact (Ladd).

The second conclusion is less reassuring, and my two predecessors on this panel have touched upon it. It seems clear that, in aggregate at least, the structure of extrinsic incentives and rewards in the academy

is markedly tilted in the direction of research. And yet in 1989, over 60 percent of faculty overall indicated their belief that teaching effectiveness should be the primary criterion for promotion of faculty. One could argue with that, but that is what they indicated. And 34 percent *felt*, at least, that the pressure to publish was having the effect of reducing the quality of teaching at their university or college — one could argue about that, too, but that is what they said. Hence Ladd's conclusion that "an ascendant model in academe positing probably what faculty *should be doing*, is seriously out of touch with what they *actually do* and *want to do*." That conclusion, I think, calls for thoughtful scrutiny and, if correct, for an appropriate array of responses of the type recently suggested by Ernest Boyer in his Carnegie report, *Scholarship Reconsidered* — responses, I should add, that will have to be calibrated differentially for the extraordinarily wide array of institutions and institutional sectors here in the United States. But whatever the case, it is a far cry from alarmist talk about a flight from teaching or even a hostility to it, the existence of which the available evidence simply does not support.

Why belabor the point? Well, because recent critiques, punitive in tone and demoralizing to our faculty members (most of whom in my experience are really very serious about their teaching responsibilities) — because these critiques *are* being read, or at least they are being glanced at. To that fact I can attest from my flow of correspondence from alumni and from the sort of questions I am asked as I go around the country speaking with alumni. And I am afraid that they are beginning to shape in the minds of the public a rather damaging (damagingly inaccurate and unfair) picture of attitudes and conditions in higher education. In addressing ourselves, then, to the ongoing effort to improve teaching at our institutions, as we should properly be doing, we have, alas, to be alert to the possibility that this very effort may be taken, ironically, as some sort of implicit admission of the accuracy of that unfair picture. And that would be extremely irritating, especially for one who has spent most of his teaching career at a college where student expectations for teaching quality are enormously high, and where the institutional commitment to the central importance of good teaching is clear, consistent, unwavering, unambiguous. And proudly so. Thank you, ladies and gentlemen.



## Respondent

*George Rupp*  
*Rice University*

I gather from conversations over coffee that many of you have vigorous responses and questions you want to pursue with Derek. In view of that fact and the further fact that we are running out of time, I will confine my comments quite stringently to a response to Derek's paper. That way my remarks can serve as a transition to what I expect will be a lively discussion among all of us.

I begin with high praise. I think the paper is excellent. It is refreshingly concrete and therefore illuminating — all the more impressive because it sheds light on terrain that is too often lost in a fog of abstractions. It is especially important — here is an example where the medium is the message — that the president of one of those nefarious research universities that is culpably derelict in ignoring its responsibility for teaching himself so manifestly is concerned with the process of teaching and with ways of improving it. Those of us who have known Derek over the years and have listened to what he has been saying and writing are not surprised at his animated involvement with questions of teaching. But the fact of his involvement does help to correct, if I may put it this way, the stereotypes of administrators and deans that, as Sylvia reports, folklorists among others perpetuate, probably in unhelpful ways.

I note in particular two constellations of virtues that I see in the presentation that Derek gave us. First is the nuance and balance both in diagnosis and prescription — a respect for the complexity of issues, a resistance to the kinds of easy simplifications that make good folklorist anecdotes or that appear on dust jackets of books but are really not helpful if we are serious about improving teaching. Here are a couple of examples of this respect for complexity.

One example is the care with which Derek sets the context for his discussion of improvement in teaching, by making it clear on the one hand that there was not a golden age and on the other that the current situation is not a catastrophe. I think this establishing the context for the discussion is especially important to avoid the misunderstanding

that Frank alluded to, namely, that attention to the improvement of teaching is somehow an admission that the situation is a disaster. At the same time, having insisted that it is not a catastrophe and there was no golden age, it is important to register the clear recognition, as Derek does, that there is ample room for improvement and also that a special constellation of problems have developed with the emphasis on research in research universities following World War II. That is one example of the virtue of nuance and balance in Derek's presentation.

A second example, again one that Frank alluded to, is the question of how teaching relates to research. Derek in his presentation cites data that show that teaching is not correlated negatively with research productivity. If anything the reverse is the case, although probably in the noise level in terms of statistical significance. So it is not the case that greater research productivity correlates with less good teaching. Accordingly, Derek, I think rightly, and Frank clearly agrees as well, resists the pressures to promote successful teachers who are not proficient at research. Having rejected this sort of easy simplification that figures in popularized versions of this problem, Derek then focuses his criticism at two points. First, he focuses on our apparent willingness to tenure productive scholars with only the most cursory look at the quality of their teaching; and second, he focuses criticism on the propensity, especially in larger institutions, to measure scholarly productivity in terms of quantity rather than quality. So that is another example of a nuanced and balanced position: not allowing the divorce, the separation of teaching and research, but nonetheless calling attention to places where we can make improvements and ought to do so.

A third example where this kind of balanced position is advanced very effectively is on the issue of student evaluations. Derek at least tacitly acknowledges the criticism of relying too extensively on what could degenerate into student satisfaction measures alone. Having conceded that point, he then argues effectively, as Frank also just has, that carefully crafted student evaluations provide data that first of all correlate very closely with expert assessments of teaching and also if carefully constructed can help to focus both student and faculty attention on specific educational goals rather than just the popularity of courses. That is another example of where Derek's presentation exhibits this virtue of nuance, of balance, of resisting easy simplifications.

The second constellation of virtues is what I take to be the central insight of the presentation: that improving teaching requires systemic attention to interlocking processes within complex institutions and not simply *ad hoc* and unconnected measures. Indicative of this point are Derek's repeated references to developing a comprehensive strategy, forging a network of incentives, creating an environment, fostering a process, launching continuous programs of educational research, experimentation, reform, and so on. Derek delineates the ways in which concrete mechanisms or procedures mutually stimulate and reinforce each other and thereby overall institutional cultures, which is a very helpful focus in contrast to an approach that lays out just a series of disconnected steps. The development of expectations as to teaching portfolios is one illuminating instance that comes up all through Derek's thinking about these problems, but there are other examples as well.

To exhibit nuance and balance and to advocate systemic solutions to persistent problems are certainly virtues; but, as always is the case in the currency of virtues, there is another side of the coin. This other side of the coin may not be a vice but it is at least the shadow side of the virtue: places where there may be a need to be less nuanced and balanced and aware of complexities and more pointed in questioning established patterns and procedures. I will offer two examples of this other side of the coin in the interest of getting our discussion under way.

The first has to do with teaching fellows. All through the presentation, a system of using teaching fellows seems to me to be more or less taken for granted. In the written version of this presentation that you forwarded to us ahead of time, Derek, you observe in passing that it would be "impossibly expensive to offer the personalized instruction that teaching fellows provide if universities had to depend entirely on professors." Now in your skillful presentation to this assembled gathering, you elided that specific sentence. It may be a little unfair for me to quote it anyway, but I think it will get at some issues that we should discuss. You certainly have excellent proposals for improving the performance of teaching fellows, and you also call, I think quite rightly, for more careful supervision of teaching fellows by faculty members. But it seems to me you do not engage as trenchantly as I think you should the central responsibility of faculty for personalized instruction of undergraduates — and not just through teaching fellows or

graduate students. I have a specific illustration that is in fact about your institution. One of our deans has a son at Harvard. He has an enormously high regard for the education he is getting and certainly would go there again; so he is in no way an unhappy camper at Harvard. But in the second semester of his son's sophomore year, he called home just enormously excited because he had had a conversation with his professor as they were walking across campus — which was clearly the high point of that half of that semester. Now I know that it is the case that Harvard faculty are available to undergraduates. Dick Light's assessment seminar findings show that aggressive undergraduates, or undergraduates who avail themselves of this opportunity, can meet with faculty members and most of them are receptive. But I think we have to look more systematically at ways to make sure that in fact faculty members take that responsibility for personal contact with undergraduates seriously and do not take completely for granted a system that has teaching fellows as a layer between faculty members and students. So one place where I would welcome a more vigorous questioning of established practices is on this question of the use of teaching fellows and the responsibility of the faculty for personalized instruction.

A second example where it seems to me a more pointed and unqualified position would be welcome is on the matter of reduced teaching loads in our efforts to recruit faculty. Here again, in your presentation, you did not refer as directly or explicitly to this issue as you did in your written remarks. Both in your written remarks and in other contexts like the Association of American Universities, you have taken the position that a research university should commit itself not to initiate offers to reduce teaching loads of professors that it is seeking to recruit from other institutions or to retain when other institutions are interested. My question is, is that enough? You have said that it would be asking too much to insist that a dean or a provost never agree to reducing its teaching loads or teaching schedules when trying to counter offers from other institutions. But it seems to me that the practice of reducing teaching loads as an inducement to faculty, whether in recruiting them or in keeping them, is so fundamentally perverse and so directly undermines the kind of connection between teaching and research that we are talking about that it should be forsworn even as a response to the initiatives that come from other institutions — as difficult and uncharacteristic as that would be for deans and provosts and department chairs. If it is the case, as I think most of us if not all

of us are persuaded, that there is an impending shortage of Ph.D.s, then all forms of competition for faculty will be intensifying in the decade ahead. In this setting, leading institutions must exercise leadership and refuse even to counter offers to reduce teaching loads. Only then will such offers come to be recognized as irresponsible, as contravening fundamental values that universities have to endorse. That harder line, or more pointed position, is the one that is called for rather than simply a commitment not to initiate such offers of reduced teaching loads.

I do not want to end with an exaggerated emphasis on points where I would like to see you go further, Derek. I do think there are a few such points, but I want to reiterate my overall sense that this is an excellent presentation. I am delighted to hear from Stanley and others that it will be available in written form to people because it offers proposals that are concrete, practical, illuminating, and also, demonstrates that leaders of major universities in fact are very concerned about teaching in their institutions. Thank you.



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