

DEAR EDITOR:

I always read *Thought and Action* with a (to tell the truth) surprising amount of pleasure. As a college teacher since 1973, I find the articles often hit home! As a philosophy professor, I particularly enjoyed Kathleen Hull's article on eros and education (Fall 2002). I think she is essentially right, and she put it so well! (This is coming from someone who has taught *The Symposium* many times.) I like her "teaching model in which the object is to nurture the construction of a desiring self, a seeker of goals and goods and ends."

I also found interesting Evelyn Beck's article on distance learning in the same issue. I often feel that such articles end up talking about how to make distant learning more like a live classroom and wonder why people don't just stick with the live classroom. Beck's article makes it evident that distant learning can be successful, and can even have advantages over the live classroom. But, although I continue to experiment with online bulletin boards, I am still not eager to teach a distant learning class: I still think that this denies our existence as embodied beings. Nonetheless, one can learn from such articles: having students tell stories about their lives might open them up in the classroom too. Recently I have returned to the old-fashioned method of calling on students to answer questions, even the ones hiding in the back. If I give them encouraging and respectful responses I increase class participation and involvement throughout.

I wish, however, that you would, sometime, have an article or two in praise of the great lecturer. Lecturing is so often given such bad press in publications on higher education. When I think back to the teachers who inspired me, they were great lecturers one and all. Many of those teachers also encouraged and brilliantly managed classroom discussion. By contrast, I cannot remember one teacher who focused entirely on "active learning" influencing me in any strong way.

Although I think that Mark Benvenuto has many good ideas in his article on educational reform in the same issue, he fails to see that one of the main reasons teachers do not jump on this bandwagon is that they often remember the most dynamic teaching they received or witnessed as involving much lecture as well as directed discussion.

Could it be that attacks on the classic lecture/class discussion format usually compare the worst practitioners of that form with the best of the "student centered" form? Great lecturing is great story-telling. It involves drama and passion. And listening to the great lecturer is far from passive—and far less passive than some small group discussions! The great lecturer captures the imagination of the students and holds them in spell, inspiring them to engage in their own explorations. Although I teach in the humanities, I know that this is also true for the sciences: my father still speaks with admiration for the lectures of Nobel prize-winners in science who taught him at Berkeley in the 1940s.

I also want to praise Jeff Lustig for his well-argued and well-documented

discussion of the conflict over academic workload in the California State University system. As a member of the CSU faculty I heartily concur with his analysis. For example, it is widely recognized here that “outcomes assessment” increases our workload with unnecessary paperwork as well as heightening our levels of anxiety through the frequent threat of decertifying our general education courses. I have yet to attend a meeting in which faculty—all committed, by the way, to excellence in teaching—have praised outcomes assessment. Has outcomes assessment itself ever been honestly assessed?

But the original impetus of my writing was to compliment you and the journal on the new format. As I was reading this issue, I noted to my wife, who was sitting across from me in a Borders Cafe, “I really like this type-face, and the little drawings too.” It was only after that that I read your “Overview.” It is funny how a change in type-face can make such a positive difference. 

Thomas Leddy
San Jose State University
San Jose, California

DEAR EDITOR:

The article “Has Tenure Kept up with Growth?” (*Statue of the Profession*, Special Issue *NEA Higher Education Advocate*) notes that: “tenured faculty members were more likely to have published recently and serve on more committees than were those without tenure.” In the university where I teach, the reason for this is that tenured faculty are paid to do committee work and they are hired for more than a quarter or a year—so they can do research. Therefore the research results you mention in the article may be somewhat skewed.

For example, at the university where I teach, a full time load is 15 Weighted Teaching Units (WTU’s). A tenured faculty member teaches 12



WTU's and then has 3 WTU's for committee work at the department, college or/and university level. The nontenured faculty is hired to teach 15 WTU's with no WTU's allotted for committee work. A part-time nontenured faculty member teaches a percentage of the 15 WTU. Also, nontenured faculty have not been encouraged to participate on committees except at the department level. As for research, the university where I teach is not as interested in promoting research as are some institutions, for they consider themselves primarily a teaching institution. However, tenured faculty can receive some release time to do research and there are some financial programs for the research projects they might like to do. Until recently, nontenured faculty were hired quarter by quarter—so the opportunity to do research was not present under this unstable type of system. As it is now, if the nontenured faculty member has been with the University for up to 3 years, they will receive a year contract—still not long enough time to plan, execute, evaluate and write up the research.

Therefore, I believe the university hasn't thought through their use of nontenured faculty and how best to utilize their talents and skills. Since there is no commitment on the part of the university, to the nontenured faculty, they cannot invest too heavily in committees and they are not encouraged to do—where I reside. I do hope this letter will shed some light on your article regarding—has tenure kept up with growth?—and why tenured faculty probably have sat on more committees—they are paid to do such. 

Venesa W. Strong, RD, MNS, MBA
Cal Poly
San Luis Obispo, California

DEAR EDITOR:

I just finished reading Mark Benvenuto's article "Educational Reform: Why the Academy Doesn't Change" [*Thought & Action*, Fall 2002] and I agree with him and welcome his suggestions. I realize his goal was to "explore [the] impediments to reform," so I don't fault him for not going beyond to where I really need to be guided: specific ideas, comments, suggestions, exercises, assignments.

I am curious as to why many articles expounding the virtues of active learning strategies do not get down to the specifics. Is it because they are meant for general audiences so that Benvenuto's example of the "vague" lab assignment would not be easily translated into other, non-science disciplines? I clearly understand what doesn't work; I'm more unclear about what else might work.

Overall, I want to thank him for identifying obstacles and for offering four clear strategies to reforming the academy. 

Liliana Castaneda Rossmann, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor of communication
San Marcos, California

DEAR EDITOR:

Several years back, you published *Distinguishing a University from a Shopping Mall*, an essay I wrote based on my experiences as a graduate student at the University of Rochester. In an attempt to get as far away from what I described in that essay as possible, in August of 2000 I accepted a position as a Civic Education Project Visiting Lecturer and moved to Yerevan, Armenia. I stayed for two years, finished my Ph.D., taught a range of classes on American history, helped to start an American Studies program at one of the branches of Yerevan State University, and had a wonderful time. Since September 2002, I've been a lecturer on social studies at Harvard.

Meanwhile, I happily discovered through a friend that you had republished my essay in your Fall 2000 retrospective edition. I'm writing now to let you know that I appreciate the replication of this essay, and that it keeps striking a chord. From an article in the University of Rochester student newspaper, I learned that—thanks to you—somebody found my essay online and distributed it across the campus. ... The student journalists confronted the president of the university with the points I make in my essay. Friends in Rochester tell me that a whole new generation of undergraduates is reading my essay. Many wrote to the student newspaper in response to the article I mentioned. According to my advisor, all but one of these letters expressed discontent with American higher education similar to my own.

In my opinion, this small chain of events is a hopeful sign. At the very least, it shows that undergraduates in Rochester are reading *Thought & Action* and that we are provoking a useful discussion. 

Daniel N. Moses

*Harvard University committee on Degrees in Social Studies
Hilles Library*

DEAR EDITOR:

The latest *Thought and Action* had two articles that were very timely. Lansing Community College, like several other Michigan community colleges and universities around the country, is taking part in the organizational "training" of Price Pritchett; the articles, "The Best of Times, the Worst of Times" and "Treadmill to Oblivion," address this kind of training that openly advocates, among other things, the elimination of tenure. It is a frontal attack on the very existence of academia.

This is a national problem. According to Mr. Pritchett, he has presented his training to the Universities of California (San Deigo and Davis), Colorado, Dallas, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Hawaii, Illinois, Iowa, Minnesota, North Carolina, Notre Dame, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Texas Austin, Virginia, Wisconsin, and Michigan, as well as at many community colleges. I do not know if the training in these other institutions was mandated for all

full-time faculty and full- and part-time staff as it has been here at Lansing Community College. The information he presents makes it very clear that resistance (including discussion of changes and examining the consequences of proposed actions) is not only futile but by definition harmful. He advises that if you cannot commit immediately to changes, you should quit, and not waste precious time. I sent out a memo to LCC employees, telling them of the two articles that may help put some of this training into perspective, and even doing that much leaves me feeling my job may be in jeopardy.

The *Thought & Action* articles I mentioned did not go far enough. It is hard ball time. It is essential that people realize the depth and speed of the attack on academia. [nea](#)

Mary Held
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DEAR EDITOR:

I am a female, conservative, evangelical Christian professor on a public college campus in California. I know what you are going to say, that I think: "Too many radical left liberals on campus."

You are wrong. On my campus, I am frightened by an alarming tendency by administration to make us all homogenized, agreeable, party-line non-activists. One example of this was the invitation to a nationally known speaker to campus that appeared to us racist. None of the faculty was willing to deal with this until one of our students pointed out that the "Emperor wore no clothes". Once the floodgates were opened, a lively debate engaged the campus for a month.

What is it about American higher education that seems to dictate today that all faculty members must be "the same?" I enjoy, personally, a good debate with my colleagues and friends who are different. What must our students conclude from watching us all agree to not disagree on any current topic? Why must we all be the same in our grade-giving abilities (no tough graders allowed on campus)? Why must we all be good, obedient, and agree at all times with administration and each others (no hot heads need apply)?

It seems to me the founding fathers of our Country were conservative, Christian, male, hotheads who did not agree with much of the status quo. There! I have thrown the gauntlet down, colleagues. I dare you to disagree and start a debate about not agreeing. Happy arguing! [nea](#)

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