

Implementing a Teaching Incentive Program

By Ted Baker, Vassilios A. Tsihrintzis, Norman Munroe, and Laura Ruiz

After half a decade of effort by states to improve public school standards, the federal government responded by providing direct financial support in March 1994, when President Clinton signed into law the “Goals 2000 Educate America Act.” This law requires participating states to develop a program of educational reform to ensure that all students are exposed to significant qualitative and quantitative improvements—and to varied opportunities—in school. This dynamic legislation sets a national objective of significantly improved accomplishment in academic achievement by the year 2000.

Comparisons of the U.S. and Japan suggest that the Japanese enjoy a superior K-12 education system that produces better-educated “blue collar” workers, technicians, and entrants to Japanese universities. In the United States, open competition among institutions of higher education and their faculties, the relative informality of the postsecondary education system, and greater student access to faculty appear to compensate for deficiencies in the secondary school system.¹

However, an increasing number of American universities now emphasize research as their primary objective. Considered the source of national and international academic recognition, research has frequently been viewed as the academic “pace setter.”

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Universities have sought, through research grants obtained by faculty members, to expand facilities and purchase equipment. Many educators think that this research orientation has led to a growing neglect of the “art of teaching.” One compelling statement of this perspective is found in a December 1992 report of the House Select Committee on Children, Youth, and Families chaired by Representative Patricia Schroeder.²

Among the conclusions of this report:

- The cost of higher education has significantly increased over the past decade, far more than the cost of medical care, housing, food, and automobiles.
- The salary compensation paid to faculty members is inversely related to the number of hours taught.

The multi-faceted expectations for faculty traditionally mandated by universities—teaching, research, and service—are recognized by most faculty as an awesome task. On the other hand, those outside academia often fail to understand the complexities and demands of faculty appointments. The “teaching versus research” debate within universities reflects these different internal and external perspectives. It is incumbent upon universities and their faculties to appropriately respond to these divergent views of faculty and their roles.

Making an effective, well-received response is difficult, given the realities of contemporary universities. A glaring example of this—and there surely are many more—is the comment of a popular University of Illinois economics professor, who notes that “I have thirteen teaching assistants. . . and some of them don’t speak English.” This comment and similar anecdotes, reported in a popular critique of academe by Anderson, form the basis for an argument that the rewards and riches of academe—salary increases, promotions, prestige—come not from brilliant, compassionate teaching but from the number of articles researched, written, published, and then largely forgotten.³

This view is in many respects shared by Ernest Boyer, presi-

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dent of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. A former chancellor of the State University of New York, Boyer encourages faculty to rediscover the dignity of teaching. In *Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professoriate*, he asserts that universities seem to have lost an understanding of their primary mission. By defining research and publication as the primary measures of faculty value and academic achievement, they have failed to maintain adequate focus on undergraduate teaching.⁴

In his article “New Pressures on the University,” Honan notes accurately that, “The question is no longer whether to retract, consolidate, restructure and adapt in order to bear down on the basic mission of higher education—preparing students to take part in their civilization—but whether these reforms can be accomplished from within or must be imposed from without. The answer will be determined in large part by the outcome of a struggle—some call it a shootout—now in progress around the country between administrations and faculties.”⁵

Honan addresses the impacts of reallocation of tax dollars that have reduced university budgets, including:

- Faculty terminations.
- Decreases or delays in new faculty hirings.
- School and department consolidations.
- The streamlining of course offerings.

These responses to reduced funding are disturbing to the very students these universities have been established to serve.

We need to embrace open dialogue among students, faculties, and administrators to effectively and fairly address these related issues. This dialogue is essential to institutional integrity.

In this paper we describe an effort at Florida International University in the College of Engineering and Design to accomplish this objective, as part of the implementation of a state-mandated “Teaching Incentive Program.”

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versity, with a diverse student population. It offers both undergraduate and graduate degree programs, including more than 25 at the doctoral level. Established in 1965, it has grown to an enrollment of more than 25,000, primarily at the University Park campus in Miami and a North Campus in North Miami.

The University and College Teaching Incentive Program (TIP)

Growing concern about undergraduate teaching quality has been highly publicized in Florida in recent years.⁶ Parallel concern is reflected in the first two goals established in the 1993-94 Florida State University System Master Plan:⁷

1. Improvement in the quality of undergraduate teaching.
2. Adequate access to undergraduate education.

Similarly, a major goal defined by the Office of Academic Affairs at Florida International University for 1993-94 addresses the desire to provide excellent educational experiences to undergraduate and graduate students, insuring that faculty—in their various roles as teachers—impart knowledge and skills to students.

One response to these concerns was the funding of a Teaching Incentive Program (TIP) by the state legislature in the spring of 1993. The TIP provided \$5 million for \$5,000 base salary increases—effective for the 1994-95 academic year—to encourage and reward undergraduate teaching by full-time ranked faculty.

Because the legislation specified that the program was not subject to the state's collective bargaining law, United Faculty of Florida, as the collective bargaining representative for all state university faculty, filed a legal challenge to the program, seeking to bring it to the bargaining table. The suit was dropped when key legislators and the Board of Regents agreed to negotiations on the program for future years.

Funds for the program provided by the 1994 and 1995 appropriations bills were subject to collective bargaining, and some changes—including the addition of graduate faculty and instruc-

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tors—were made. This paper describes only the initial year.

Broad criteria and requirements were established by the legislature and the State University System of Florida. Within those guidelines, each university crafted its own process to allocate TIP funds and established standards to measure teaching productivity.

The guidelines required that eligible faculty have recent undergraduate teaching productivity greater than the average for their college or department. At FIU, productivity criteria were initially established by the university administration. These criteria included indicators of the number of students taught, the number of classes taught, new courses established, and new course preparations designed. The average productivity of all faculty within a department was then calculated.

Only faculty members whose productivity was above average were eligible to compete for a TIP award. Thus, the productivity model *did not* consider the quality of teaching, but rather teaching-related *activities*. The guidelines also made many faculty teaching smaller classes or graduate courses ineligible.

Once a pool of TIP candidates was identified, the College of Engineering and Design established a procedure for preparation of a faculty portfolio that would be used by the TIP committee to evaluate candidates. Portfolio requirements included:

- A list of all courses taught in the last three years, their enrollments and grade distributions, using data provided by the provost's office.
- A syllabus for each undergraduate course taught.
- A statistical summary of student teaching evaluations, with students' written comments or summaries of them, for each course. This was accompanied by a statement from the department chair explaining how student teaching evaluations are administered and interpreted and showing comparative data for all faculty in the department. Peer evaluations, if done between 1990-1993, were provided by the department chair or dean.
- Annual evaluations by the department chair.

Based on the productivity calculations, 20 faculty members qualified to compete.

- A concise self-assessment, including a statement of teaching philosophy and any creative, special approaches to teaching methods.
- A concise statement of future plans for undergraduate teaching, including any plans to improve the applicant's teaching effectiveness.
- Any other information supporting undergraduate teaching that the applicant wished to include.

These procedures were recommended by the college's Faculty Council, and ultimately adopted by the dean. The College of Engineering and Design TIP Committee, composed of elected faculty members not applying for a TIP award and at least two students or recent graduates, reviewed candidates and made recommendations. To make the process fair for the five college departments and the School of Design and its three programs, the committee was composed of 12 members: one faculty and one student or recent graduate representative from each Engineering College department and the School of Design. Faculty were selected to serve on the TIP Committee based on recommendation of the department chair, an excellent teaching record, and approval through voting by faculty of the department or school. Students selected were honor students, recent graduates, and students who held officer positions in student clubs (an officer of an honor society or student chapter of a professional society).

Based on the productivity calculations, some 20 faculty members within the College of Engineering and Design qualified to compete for a total of nine awards. These awards could be made to faculty from any of the five college departments, or the School of Design.

The 1994 TIP was the inaugural undertaking. As a result, the college's TIP committee wanted to carefully design a process that could serve as a reliable model for subsequent TIPs.

Review Process

The committee initially met to discuss possible methods for

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evaluating faculty, including elements/factors in addition to the University-required portfolio described above. The committee also discussed alternative scoring processes, rules that would apply to committee members in evaluating and scoring candidates, the appropriateness of anonymity, and methods of tabulating information and scoring candidates.

In subsequent meetings the committee determined that voting on candidates would be by secret ballot, that deliberations would be confidential, and that records would be maintained.

While the legislation emphasized productivity, the committee decided that it was, in fact, charged with evaluating teaching quality, creativity, and effectiveness. It sought to specifically evaluate such factors as teaching awards, student evaluations, use of “real world” examples and opportunities in teaching, teaching aids, guest speaker frequency, and development of new courses.

The committee also decided that each candidate would be asked to “teach the committee” an optional topic or subject in a 15- to 20-minute session, a requirement intended to demonstrate to the committee those teaching skills and presentation techniques utilized in the classroom or laboratory setting by the candidate. This observation of each candidate provided an opportunity for a rational evaluation of teaching knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs)—the psychometric categories expected for professional performance evaluation.

Definition of a “Good Teacher”

Good teaching—as defined by the legislation creating the TIP—is a function of teaching quality, effectiveness, and creativity.

During the review process, the committee awarded points for *quality* to faculty based on teaching excellence awards, minimal reliance upon teaching assistants, positive comments from students on semester-end evaluation forms, timely commencement of classes, and availability beyond the minimum posted office hours.

Points for *effectiveness* were awarded based primarily on comments on the student evaluation forms. Typical queries sought to determine if the professor:

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- demonstrated a superior level of preparation.
- offered field trips and “real-world” opportunities.
- maintained superior communication.
- effectively utilized teaching assistants in special problem-solving sessions.

The committee also examined student responses on an item assessing whether they would recommend the particular course, and the professor, to fellow students.

Points for *creativity* were awarded to a candidate based on:

- the use of guest speakers and “subject matter” experts to enhance class content.
- the development of new courses.
- the utilization of new and/or unusual teaching aids.

The committee realized that distinctions among quality, effectiveness, and creativity were “fuzzy.” Therefore, the committee considered the following overall teacher qualities in evaluating faculty performance:

1. Knowledge Within Discipline and Continuing Self-Improvement

Professors must maintain mastery of the subject(s) they teach in order to gain and maintain the respect of the student. Quality educators are always aware of the advances in their discipline, and they regularly attend conferences, workshops, short courses, symposia, seminars, and continuing education classes. They subscribe, read, and review discipline-related monographs, magazines, and journals. From these several sources, dedicated professors regularly update class materials.

2. “Real-World” Experience

Hands-on, real-world experience is often the “best teacher.” Professors with such experience generally perform better, since they know and teach from a “reality” perspective. Such faculty

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tend to couple fundamental theory with real world application, providing students real-world examples to be used during lecture and discussion, and in assignments. When applicable, professional licensure or registration may be an appropriate faculty requirement.

3. Research and Service Participation

Faculty excellence is grounded in the three interrelated activities expected of them: teaching, research, and service. These three components should be symbiotic. Research and service experiences improve teaching by broadening faculty knowledge and experience. Teaching not only disseminates new information, ideas, and concepts to students, but gives faculty opportunities to establish dialogue and to debate and investigate hypotheses not previously explored. While research activities can be brought to classrooms to enhance understanding of the fundamentals of a discipline, classes can also be brought to the field for demonstrations and explorations of these new ideas. In the technical disciplines, research funding can provide an opportunity for students to participate in and to present their research work to national forums, conferences, and journals.

4. Professionalism

Faculty should be models of professionalism. They should encourage excellence in technical foundations. But they should also be models of professionalism themselves. And they should emphasize the importance of ethical behavior, professional conduct, public service, and personal qualities of integrity and discipline.

5. Class Preparation

Thorough preparation is essential. Well-organized notes and the willingness to respond to questions build student confidence in professors. Preparation should include review of available references, research papers, and other material related to the subject and presentation. A concise summary of this data aids in its logical, comprehensible presentation. Reference books should be on

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reserve at the library, and the preparation of handouts should closely follow lecture/study topics. The syllabus should be sufficiently detailed to address all important issues.

The syllabus is the basis of a contract between students and faculty. Adherence to the syllabus is essential both to fairness and to the semester's study plan. Professors have the inherent right to make minor modifications to this contract, but only when changes are announced in class in advance of the effective date of change, and when they are equitable and do not establish unreasonable burdens on students. Similarly, the effective administration of class sessions requires that faculty and students adhere to stipulated start and finish times.

6. Adaptability, Individual Encouragement, Patience, and Availability for Personal Help

Professors should be adaptable and seek to find the most appropriate means for delivering information to students. In this process, recognizing the varied levels of previous knowledge among students is essential. Depending on the overall basic preparation of the students, courses should be modified if necessary to accommodate student needs and abilities. Effort should be made to encourage and promote the development of the individual student's knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs). Further, professors must demonstrate a genuine concern for disadvantaged, struggling, or otherwise limited students, seeking to discover or uncover special KSAs. Therefore, teachers must be patient with passive students, and with those whose learning curve may require additional time and repetitive explanation. The willingness to encourage and the time to help struggling students will normally lead to higher levels of student success in courses. Ready access to faculty for personal help is essential. While office hours are required, they should be posted and be convenient for students. If professors find minimal student use of office hours, they should either establish additional hours beyond those posted, or modify established office hours to better accommodate student needs.

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7. Ability to Present Complex Subjects with Clarity

Many faculty have had experiences with professors who were great thinkers or outstanding researchers, but who lacked teaching skills. Some people suggest that the ability to teach is the result of an inherent, mysterious gift. While such a view may have some validity, teaching skills can be learned, cultivated, and enhanced most effectively if educators seek improvement and acknowledge deficiencies. Perhaps one of the best assessments of one's teaching ability comes from peers, or from an institution such as FIU's Academy for the Art of Teaching. Attendance at classes in the education field and short courses on teaching skill improvement also provide valuable insight into teaching techniques. And, of course, without excellent verbal and written skills, proficient teaching is unachievable.

8. Pleasant Personality and Classroom Atmosphere, and Class Participation

Successful professors must maintain a pleasant personality and treat students with respect. Learning all students' names and addressing them by their names is important. Maintaining a cheerful and comfortable atmosphere in the classroom stimulates and encourages student participation and comment. To enhance participation, teaching aids should be used. The animated use of chalk boards, audio-visual equipment, videos, and other lecture/discussion tools is essential to an interactive course. Professors should also be "alive"; talk loudly to be heard everywhere in the classroom; change the tone of voice, raising it to emphasize subjects; move around and be animated; seek and encourage eye contact; and maintain a dialogue where students are asked questions, and are expected to offer their opinions.

9. Teaching Methods that Stimulate Interest and Develop Understanding

Using instructional design methods to present information in the classroom setting enhances both its delivery and subsequent levels of retention by students. Such methods should include

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strategies using tools and techniques that enhance visual and oral observation of the information and concepts presented, and may include the use of developing technologies such as computers, multimedia presentations, virtual reality, animation, video, and sound techniques. All have repeatedly been demonstrated to heighten the learning experience, aid in improving delivery skills of faculty and students, aid in completion of homework and laboratory exercises, and assist faculty in monitoring the performance of students. Other instructional strategies of value in achieving educational objectives include the use of field trips; lectures by and discussion with experts in the discipline; interaction with practitioners and representatives of government, regulatory agencies, and industry; design of multi-disciplinary class projects that involve work in student groups and subsequent team presentations in class; interaction with graduate students in the discipline; and involvement in research and design experiences.

Successful experiences in the development of innovative teaching methods from other universities should be monitored through direct communication, campus visits, and review of current literature within the discipline. Findings from in-house experiences and external research should be disseminated through conferences and professional papers. Finally, the pursuit by faculty of improved curriculum development and the modification and development of new courses in the discipline provide broad opportunities for all faculty to strengthen their individual skills and their perception and understanding of the teaching commitment.

10. Expectations and Fairness

Former university students can surely remember the professor they considered “the tough one.”

Usually this was the faculty member from whom the student learned the most and who they most respected and admired. In retrospect, there would be agreement that this professor was not particularly “tough,” but merely expected the level of work necessary for academic—and future professional—success. While the common view may be that “tough” professors are not fair, this per-

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ception is often flawed. It is more likely that a reasonable level of expectation and fairness go hand-in-hand. In emphasizing the need for hard work, professors concurrently address the “sense of excellence” that is essential to academic and professional success.

While maintaining fairness in the judgment of overall student performance, professors have the additional responsibility to measure excellence in academic performance; intellectual maturity and responsibility; creativity and innovative thinking; compliance with guidelines and deadlines; time management and organizational skills; appropriate judgment; technical knowledge; enthusiasm and seriousness-of-purpose; and integrity. While assessment of student performance may accommodate compromise, professors must be keenly aware that compromise on such expectations may result—at some point in the student’s academic career—in an inability of the student to meet reasonable intellectual objectives.

11. Testing

Beyond the compelling ethical questions, academic dishonesty is discouraging to those students who uphold appropriate ethical academic standards. Dishonesty promotes an inequitable and unstable student environment. Both in and out of the classroom, it is clearly the responsibility of professors to assure that academic dishonesty is not a factor in grades. The use of “defensive” test administration techniques to reduce academic dishonesty during exams should be instituted to address this issue. In addition, a thorough and careful analysis of demonstrated student abilities must be measured against student performance in assignments, projects, quizzes, and exams. Some techniques that assist in accomplishing this objective include the following: for quizzes and exams, avoid recycling old tests; use more than one version of the test, rearranging the questions; use student proctors to monitor; and enforce spacing among students. For papers and assignments, establish specific standards (Modern Language Association, Chicago Manual of Style, APA) and require specific appropriate citations and sources for submitted papers.

Professors should always question the general quality of their courses, through evaluations.

12. The “Love of Teaching”

In general, successful professors must “love to teach.” Most professors assume teaching responsibilities immediately upon completion of an advanced program of study leading to a terminal degree. Such advanced study seldom offers exposure to didactics and pedagogy: the field of education is an exception. Most graduate study traditionally has its focus in research, and professors from such programs do not have formal teaching education. They frequently have difficulty developing successful teaching techniques. Departmental, college, and university-based opportunities and activities that enhance basic teaching skills, and expose faculty to new methods, include:

- Mentoring programs in which experienced professors offer frequent assessment and guidance to new faculty.
- The use of a university’s Academy for the Art of Teaching in the development and review of syllabi, examination methods, and other teaching-related skills.
- Faculty participation in such programs as the “Master Student” course that may be offered within a core curriculum.

13. Qualities Specific to the Class

Professors should always question the general quality of their courses, through formative and summative evaluations. They should periodically add to such offerings those knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) that are dictated by the constant change found in the discipline, and that are considered essential to student academic and professional success. Adequacy and effectiveness of prerequisites should be regularly reviewed. Periodic peer review—at the department level—should be instituted to provide feedback on course content and delivery. Professors must be vigilant in ascertaining student capabilities and must select the most suitable texts that effectively “marry” those student abilities with the essential knowledge required by the course. Similarly, professors must carefully determine the reasonableness of assignments, homework, and projects. All such undertakings should be directed

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toward creative problem solutions and the development of critical analytical skills, rather than merely rote memorization. The promotion of curiosity, creativity, and innovative and critical thinking must always be the objective of higher education.

14. Considerations for Improvement

Professors should be receptive to student comments and should consider such observations as effective aids in enhancing teaching skills. By encouraging feedback from students, professors demonstrate not only a respect for student opinion, but also foster an openness conducive to the academic success of students. Tactfulness and sensitivity in dealing with the students' academic weaknesses encourages improved performance. Involvement with student activities such as student clubs, honor societies, and student-generated community projects all serve to "build bridges" to improved student academic performance.

Recommendations for Teaching Improvement

Based on the 14 characteristics of a good teacher identified above, and anticipating the continuation of the Teaching Incentive Program by the State University System, the TIP committee explored methods of improving teaching and made the following recommendations to the administration of Florida International University and to future TIP applicants:

- A common Student Evaluation Form assessing the performance of a professor should be utilized for objective comparison of faculty. The utilization of such a standardized form would assist in such programs as TIP.
- Assessment of teaching ability should be conducted in the classroom or laboratory setting, and for the full duration of the class, more than once in a semester. One possibility is a mid-term evaluation of the professor by fellow faculty, or in the same manner that the student is evaluated.

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In addition, faculty should be rated on the degree to which they:

- seek to be “adaptable,” particularly in dealing with a student audience with ethnic, gender, and age diversity.
- modify courses both through formative and summative evaluations from semester to semester, depending on the overall basic preparation of the students and historical levels of student achievement. This includes new texts, new quizzes, embedded testing, new discipline-specific information and knowledge, and new delivery methods.
- keep classes interesting, implementing the use of teaching aids as appropriate, including videos, overhead transparencies, role playing, simple games related to learning, outdoor classroom lectures, field trips, and guest speakers.
- repeatedly emphasize the importance of learning, by using real examples.
- continually update courses, to offer the latest technological advances.
- maintain the view that a service—an education—is being provided to the student, and that the service should be the best available.
- maintain fairness by giving reasonable homework, assignments, projects, quizzes, and exams; paying special attention to those students who are falling behind and providing additional help as necessary.

Assessment of the Process

The greatest flaw in the initial TIP process was its reliance on teaching productivity as an appropriate measure of “good teaching.” Candidates were initially selected for evaluation by the committee based on a productivity model that counted solely numbers of students taught, without consideration of the quality of that teaching. During such an initial selection process, “good teachers” can be excluded by failing to teach popular, well-enrolled classes, or by teaching mostly graduate-level courses that traditionally have lower enrollments.

Political trends and personal preferences may have entered into faculty deliberations.

Following the application of the productivity model, selection criteria were based on quality, and, in this subsequent analysis, a responsible committee was essential to the process. The vast majority of the 1994 TIP recipients in the College of Engineering and Design were certainly recognized as excellent teachers both by their students and their colleagues, but it is obvious that the process was not perfect.

The role of student participants was of great value. They brought to the discussions of the TIP committee a perspective that was not readily available to faculty members of the committee. Students were strict and fair in their assessments, and dedicated the time necessary to review of faculty portfolios and subsequent deliberations. Faculty may not have been as equitable: Political trends and personal preferences may have entered into deliberations.

The elements that the committee adopted to define the parameters of a “good teacher” were generated through lengthy but seldom heated discussion. There was clearly a consensus on those elements that constituted excellence in teaching.

The “teaching the committee” element was a valuable and interesting experience. There were initially a variety of opinions on adopting this format, and there were also suggestions that the committee visit candidate classrooms. Time constraints did not allow for such classroom visits. The former option proved to be a valuable tool and a worthwhile experience. Some candidates—though informed in detail as to the purpose of the “teaching the committee” component—were either unprepared, or unable to adequately focus their 20-minute presentation. Other candidates clearly demonstrated a lack of appropriate teaching skills, with an absence of verbal interaction and, in a few instances, even a lack of eye contact.

At this point, there are no data on the impact on faculty recipients. Subsequent followup on the second and third years of the Teaching Incentive Program should provide valuable data on the relationship between cash awards for teaching and improved teaching skills.

Conclusion

The issue is clear. Faculty must focus on teaching. This is the imperative of the day, and for the foreseeable future. The primary purpose of our role as professors is to teach—to share knowledge and wisdom with others. We must be ever vigilant that we do not stray far from that course. It is of great importance how those outside of our colleges and universities see us. It is equally important that we convey by our actions an awareness of these external concerns, not so they dictate our daily actions but rather that they remain a part of the equation which drives us in these daily activities. Teaching must respond not only to the pursuit of knowledge, but to the demands and needs of the marketplace. Though academicians might prefer the idyllic setting in which they sup on roast duckling, sip sweet wine, and undertake discourse on Descartes or Thoreau, if we produce graduates who are uninformed and unemployable, then of what value are educators and education?

We who profess are surely faced with extraordinary demands. We are asked to excel not in one area as are so many in the private sector, but in three areas: teaching, research, and service. Surely many of us do better in one area than in the others. But we must understand that growing numbers outside academia believe teaching has not held its appropriate role as the preeminent objective of the university.

That this reality has reached to the highest levels of our society is acknowledged by the actions and comments of congressional committees, the Carnegie Foundation, and state legislatures. Academia cannot ignore the message. It is for the purpose of education—teaching—that universities exist, and it must be teaching that is the measure by which both university success and faculty contributions are uniformly and substantively recognized, awarded, and rewarded. ■

Endnotes

- 1 Szekely, 1993
- 2 House Select Committee on Children, 1992
- 3 Anderson, 1992
- 4 Boyer, 1990
- 5 Honan, 1994
- 6 *The Miami Herald*, 1993
- 7 Florida State University System, 1993

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