

# Philosophy of a University Education

Dear Sir:

Mr. Stickel's article "How do you teach a prof to teach?" raises an equally important issue in the philosophy of university education. Certainly Mr. Stickel was correct in pointing out the inadequacy of some of our teaching staff. My own experience in the seven years I have spent at various universities would suggest that the vast majority of university professors are moderately good teachers: a small minority are excellent and some are plainly incompetent.

## The University's Role

The Thing that has amazed me is how those in this latter group (and who would deny that there are some?) have been able to maintain their jobs. If the purpose of a university is to gather, discover and disseminate knowledge, then those who fail as teachers fail the university in one of its vital roles.

## Academic or Research

Our philosophy of university education, however, seems to have overemphasized the role of the university as a research institution to the detriment of

its teaching function. Thus, the qualification for academic tenure is not teaching ability but research ability, as demonstrated by publication. While some attention is paid to seniority, little attention is paid either to the sociability of a professor or his teaching ability. As a result, people who patently lack concern for their fellow-beings, and those who are totally inept as teachers, manage to obtain permanent employment under the tenure system.

## Tenure

Tenure is not necessarily bad. As a guarantee of academic freedom and as a bulwark against arbitrary dismissal, it performs a vital function. My contention is that before tenure is granted, the prospective appointee should be fully qualified for each of the functions he is to perform.

If a professor is to carry the traditional three-pronged role of researcher, director of graduate students and teacher of undergraduates, should he not be deemed qualified in each of

these areas before receiving a permanent appointment?

The present system where tenure is granted on the basis of research ability and seniority has led to some blatant absurdities. With tenure secure, a professor may thus shield his disinterest in graduate students or his lack of teaching competence. Graduate students may find him impossible to work under; undergraduates are denied the invigorating experience of good instruction; and the public gets poor value for its tax dollar. Nothing, however, can be done to relieve him of his post.

## Determining Ability

The means of determining either a professor's ability to get along with others or the degree of his teaching competence prior to the granting of tenure do not appear to be major obstacles. An anonymous polling of graduate students and faculty members with whom he has associated would determine his general cooperativeness. A fair indication of his teaching abilities could be obtained by a

survey of his students.

Should he be found weak in either of these areas, he should not be granted tenure until he is able to remedy his inabilities or until his responsibilities could be limited to those areas in which he is competent. Presumably, an approach along these lines would greatly improve the quality of university teaching.

## Remedial Actions

If the roles of the professor as teacher of undergraduates and director of graduate students were given their proper emphasis, professors would be more conscious of their weaknesses in these areas. Similarly, departments might respond to the need for better teaching by including one or two seminars on teaching techniques in their graduate programs.

In the absence of substantial courses offered by the Faculty of Education in the area of university teaching, each department might draw on the talents of its best teachers to develop seminars related to teaching in its field.

Finally, some immediate abuses might be alleviated by phasing out the responsibilities of the worst offenders in those areas where they are weak. Within the resources of the department, poor teachers should not be allowed to teach undergraduate survey courses, and those who have no interest in graduate students should not be obliged to direct graduate programs.

## Accent Teaching Role

What is really needed then is an educational philosophy that puts proper emphasis on the university's teaching role. The least that society can expect from university educators is that they be competent in the function they are supposed to perform. With the present surplus of prospective appointees, it seems to me that departments could well afford to be a little firmer in their search for teaching competence.

Sincerely yours,  
Roy A. Prete

## Love, Pregnancy, Abortion and the Kid

Dear Gateway Editors,

This is in reply to Carol Brown's address, page nine, Nov. 18 issue of the Gateway, *The Price of Love*.

### Disappointed

I had this issue hanging around quite a while before I decided to read it before throwing it away, (sorry Gateway). Seeing the picture of the unwed (supposedly) mother and the title of the article I immediately read it. I was extremely disappointed. For you see - I'm pregnant and single and had thought that there might be something encouraging here. But not really.

Carol Brown is a crusader (by nature, I suspect) with a cause. I wish she had balanced her material with an over-all view of both sides of the story and a little bit less of emotional bias.

### Abortions

In July my gynecologist told me it would take but a week for me to get an abortion. Supposedly Miss Brown's figures of only 5 out of 13 applicants receiving legal permission for that month are correct. But I had to wait several paragraphs before she mentioned the possibility that a good number of these women were married.

The statistics coming out of Vancouver for abortions in '69 were 45% married. (For reasons of my own I chose not to abort, and so can not validate as to the difficulty of processing but I was assured it would be *easy and cheap*.)

### Encouragement

There were *some* encouraging comments that she made - e.g. "...efforts might better be directed at creating a healthier - society where the many anxieties and hardships of bearing children need not exist". Also the last half of the last paragraph - "To support the wretched when they are down - work towards a world where people may never have to have abortions due to perfect prevention methods and the existence of a society that does not make pregnancy, under any circumstances unhappy".

### Prospects - Tough

Well, here I am faced with the prospect of unwed motherhood in a society that is not quite friendly to such as me (supposedly unwed mothers are *bad* types).

You know - I love this child already and don't really want to give him/her up, but I'm not blind - not deaf - I have talked to several women who have had children out of wed-lock, some of whom have kept them - the consensus - *toougough!* tough! - *not easy, not happy*. And then how about my child - *no status* - easy mark for any vicious mouth around. The picture's: not pretty. Not much prettier than an actual abortion.



### Added difficulties

Now, Miss Brown, I wish you had tried to give an "over-view" i.e. tried to broaden the minds of your readers not only towards the concept of abortion, (and believe me, with that shrill attitude of yours, you're probably making it harder than needs be) but towards expanded birth control information, education on such within the high and elementary schools with all its implications of social, family and personal behavior. (P.S. To counter act this side-effect of the pill, may I suggest to any interested readers to see Adele Davis' *Eat Right to Keep Fit*, where she suggests certain improved nutrition with supplements to help in that area.)

Also something about the responsibility

of the fine men - those fine fuckers - in their sexual behavior and its consequences. And then how about working some on this general social change bit? Where does a girl like me who is not especially brave get the courage to keep her child? From Carol Brown?

### Married chicks

Finally on this abortion issue - I have almost no sympathy for the married chick who could hide her little contraceptive mistake in among her own existing brood - they also have husbands who could get a temporary sterilization. (oh, yes, brand new this year with a high percentage, well over 50% of success!)

### Unwed chicks

For unwed chicks, like me, yes, give us the option - but how about the double option of being able to freely and proudly keep our children, too? Down with the god-damn word, "bastard"!

That's all I have to say on the subject. Now here's further proof of the type of society we're in - I'm not signing my name - guess why? *Name withheld at the writer's request.*

### P.S. Dear Editors:

Could you indicate to those who might read this letter and be in the same situation here on campus (obviously those girls who chose not to abort) that if they wish to communicate with me to contact me through THE GATEWAY.

I know I'm no social worker, councillor, or psychiatrist-but if we can't cry on each other's shoulders effectively there's people around, people I know personally in the social worker and councillor category-friends of mine-fine people that I highly recommend on a personal basis who could possibly help anyone who contacts me. (I hope.)

### Ed. Note: Write:

SLM  
c/o THE GATEWAY  
Room 282 SUB  
University of Alberta

## Brains and Abortions

Editor, The Gateway:

A well known physiologist once remarked that when a person uses his brain to full capacity he is still using less biological energy than it takes to spit. With this in mind I would like to comment upon Darryl Grams' chin dribbling letter concerning abortion.

I suggest that to draw an analogy in the way Grams does between a fetus and a convicted multiple murderer is more fantastic than the "reports of groups" which he claims are "utterly ridiculous."

In reference to Grams' suggestion that abortion panels are desirable, I can only invite him over to the Law Center to peruse the humane decisions of other enlightened government panels.

To Grams query as to where we would be had our mothers decided to abort us, I can only reply that I doubt whether we would be worrying about it.

To Grams' query as to where the world would be if the mothers of Mozart, Bach and friends had decided to abort, I would suggest: probably in much the same state as now, regardless of the fact that the mothers of Goebbels, de Sade, and Allan Ellender decided not to abort.

Who knows? Perhaps in the future when Mr. Grams finally makes his first conquest and meets the abortion problem face to face, he will thank the abortion groups for their support.

Sincerely,  
R. Verstraten,  
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