

The Editor, *Sequoia* Magazine

Dear Sir:

One should not have to suffer adverse criticism before one is well-settled into a university, but Dean Philip Rhinelander's ideas on general education in the last issue of *Sequoia* were so well attuned to the common run of educational philosophy at Stanford University that he need not feel that he is being called out of ranks to hear these objections to them.

Dean Rhinelander's general thesis, if I read it right, holds general education to be that education which produces students who are competent specialists and who are at the same time aware of the interconnections of the various special fields. Such students are produced by teachers who have a "breadth of outlook rooted in a specialized discipline but not limited to it," and who have "a lively concern for their students as human beings"; these teachers also have in common a love of learning combined with understanding and imagination.

Contrasted to these "great teachers" stand those who are unconcerned with their students as human beings, who are too narrow in their range of interests, and who do not have a love of learning combined with understanding and imagination. The latter are the research scholars, who are interested in the advancement of knowledge. Since general education is postulated as being for the good of the student, and the advancement of knowledge is given as a secondary goal, then the "great teachers" as defined above should be preferred to the research scholars.

I find fault with several aspects of the thesis, but, for lack of space, can address myself to one major point only. Mr. Rhinelander creates two species, the teaching animal and the

research animal, who struggle in silent fury for control of the university and its students. But where are these animals to be found; what are their markings, their habitats, and their behaviors? What study has ever isolated and defined them? And if they are not species but statistical modes, what study has demonstrated the modes? None has, but if it did, then it is almost certain that such a study would have to abstract so strictly the two traits from a large number of associated variables that a much more sophisticated prescription would have to be offered for the solution of the problem of finding the "good teacher."

But some reason must exist for the persistence of the dichotomy between "teaching" and "research" in the minds of educators. I would suggest that most frequently it is, in the language of epistemology, a "practical fiction" for easing the task of administrators. When an indulgence has to be granted or denied in an economy of scarcity, a high premium is placed upon a foolproof and nonempirical concept for purposes of rationalization. A professor who wonders why he is not promoted may be told that he has not produced books or articles; his colleague who is favored for some reason or combination of reasons may be promoted because "he has produced something in print," or, if he too has not "produced," because "some attention has to be paid to encouraging good teaching." A large proportion of all the useful doubt and confusion that university administrators need to sow on problems of personnel and perquisites can be provided by the named fiction.

However, since some will continue to accept these fictions as true, and indeed, there may be the elements of a true *problem* here, I should like to

define them in my own terms, and to describe a more plausible set of contrasts in American university faculties today.

I would say, first of all, that a professor would love his students less, if he did not love the advancement of knowledge more. Love of the advancement of knowledge, like the love of another person (or of the students), should be an active and creative emotion in relation to its object; this emotion is expressed in typical ways—by writing, talking, experimenting, fighting, and contemplating. Much of the passion could be utterly dissipated and diverted into some of these or other channels if the prevailing test of love for the advancement of knowledge did not emphasize so strongly the “writing” channel.

Speak as one may of the other criteria of love for the advancement of knowledge, the fact remains that writing is the most reliable of such proofs today, and, by implication, the most reliable of proofs for the presence of good teaching. For learning is largely an imitative process; it is self-education from models, and teachers who are active and creative persons themselves in relation to the advancement of knowledge convey from their spirit, their posture, and their lives the essence of self-education. If the teachers are football fans, “great kids,” “easy graders,” semiprofessional gardeners, “committee bums,” scholarly dilettantes, social snobs, party fanatics, “mom figures,” or “daddy figures,” many students will nevertheless emulate them.

Are then all teachers who have written respected works good teachers? Yes, but some perhaps for only a few students; strong idiosyncrasies or a constant psychological rejection of students may be grounds for re-

fusing to grant them custody of an ordinary class. Are then all teachers who have not written respected works bad teachers? No; but deans and the like will have to devise criteria for assessing them without resorting to the absurd conclusion that if a man writes, he is probably a bad teacher, or, more commonly, if a man does not write but is on the faculty, he must be a good teacher.

Indeed, all of this talk about research versus teaching covers up a dozen different reasons why a faculty consists of a certain body of men: some are first-class writers; others write profusely but badly; some are friends of department heads or of key administrative officials; some are good teachers; some are popular among students; some have private incomes and are only a small charge against the budget; some bring in grants and may even earn money for the university; some serve endlessly and patiently on faculty or student committees; some have tenure and cannot be fired; some are still as church mice and ignored; some are employed because the university cannot choose or hire anyone better. Other reasons can be advanced, and it is unfortunate that some of the more covert and embarrassing of these reasons are concealed and, instead, certain false categories are conveyed to a respectful and naïve public. In any event it may be hoped that mechanistic proposals and distinctions will not govern forever our thoughts on the substance of a “liberal” or “general” education, and that an increasing proportion of the attention given it will delve into the fundamental laws of life, morality, and thought, where the best theory of a general education is to be formed.

Sincerely yours,

ALFRED DE GRAZIA

*Associate Professor of Political Science*