

Baylor University

Faculty Senate Newsletter

October, 1999

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(Arts and Sciences)

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(Arts and Sciences)

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(Arts and Sciences)

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Sandra Genrich

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Comments from Senate Chair Robert Baird:

Achieving Baylor

Philosopher Richard Rorty, in his recent work *Achieving Our Country*, describes our country as a poem and its citizens as poets constantly revising the poem. Stories about who we have been and who we ought to be are "our attempts to forge a [national] moral identity." I find appealing his claim that as a nation we should not take any truths about ourselves as the final word, for "our national character is still in the making." The title of his book captures the moral challenge continually confronting us as we struggle to define ourselves as a nation.

The phrase "achieving Baylor" might be used to describe our continual struggle to define who we are as an institution, a process that must be ongoing if we are to remain vital. Always an important dimension of this struggle is the tension between retaining elements of who we have been and embracing new possibilities. For the foreseeable future, the tension between emphasizing teaching and devoting time to students, on the one hand, and focusing on research and publication, on the other, will be significant. The issue is monumental for Baylor. It must be addressed intentionally lest we unwittingly "achieve" a Baylor we do not intend

Let me make two quick disclaimers. I am not resurrecting the old issue of the compatibility or incompatibility of teaching and research. Who today would deny that competent teaching requires attention to "cutting edge" developments in one's field, and how is that to occur apart from research? Nor would I for a moment denigrate the importance of publication. The public dissemination and criticism of ideas is the life-blood of the academic community, and it has been (for which I am grateful) an integral part of the culture of my department during the thirty-plus years of my life here.

Nevertheless, the new scholarly expectations document now in effect at Baylor is and will continue to create tensions that need to be addressed. A recent study of perceptions of Baylor by a variety of audiences provides an entrée to the issues I want to address here. All of the audiences responding to the survey named "caring" as one of the "best" characteristics of Baylor.

If the stories we tell about ourselves are efforts to identify who we are, it is noteworthy that the story we most often tell about Baylor is that our caring is reflected in the number of relatively small classes taught by full-time faculty who make themselves available to students. Indeed, this has been the Baylor story. If anyone doubts this, listen to the remarks made by Baylor administration, staff, and faculty to any gathering of high school students invited to the Baylor campus. This story played well when faculty were told repeatedly that high quality teaching and interaction with students was the *sine qua non* of a successful Baylor career and that publication was appreciated.

But this is a new day, and the question is, how well will the story continue to play? New faculty know that we now have a scholarly expectations document in place and that publication is required for tenure. Moreover, those of us on the faculty who pursued graduate studies at research institutions know that the publication demands on our professors was such that they spent little time teaching and even less in their offices interacting with students. Here, then, lies the tension. We have the Baylor story (the good old Baylor line): "relatively small classes taught by full-time faculty who make themselves available to students." We also have a new publication requirement that has the potential of dramatically redirecting faculty energies toward other goals. Some young tenure-track faculty are already being advised not to become involved in the honors program or the Baylor Interdisciplinary Core because those are not "tenure friendly" activities.

In thinking about this tension, a host of thoughts come to my mind. One possibility is that the Baylor story is simply being rewritten, that Baylor will become dramatically different, and that we should acknowledge that reality. It may well be that the transition to a research institution is underway in such a way that preservation of the old Baylor story is inconceivable. Baptists need, the argument might go, an institution playing the research game at the level of other major research centers. The game of "relatively small classes taught by full-time faculty who make themselves available to students" will have to be played at other Baptist colleges. I imagine that some of my colleagues across the campus endorse this direction for Baylor and would advance cogent arguments for doing so. This may even be the agenda of some administrators and/or trustees who are favorably situated to transform this possibility to actuality.

In fact, however, this is not the agenda I hear being proposed. The desire, rather, seems to be to preserve the depth of faculty-student interaction that has been the Baylor story and to develop a faculty committed to research and publication. If this is the vision, it can only be achieved with focused intentionality. If this is the vision, several issues need rigorous consideration.

Increased publication expectations, if they are to be fairly imposed, require reduced teaching time to meet the expectations. Moreover, reduced teaching responsibilities for faculty, particularly since the number of students is increasing, presents several dilemmas. The university can compensate for reduced teaching loads in a variety of ways. Class size could become larger. That, in fact, seems to be the case in some departments. Part-time lecturers or graduate assistants could do more of the teaching. That, in fact, seems to be the case in some departments. But notice, those two moves are incompatible with the traditional Baylor story ("relatively small classes taught by full-time faculty who make themselves available to students"). A third move would involve increasing the number of tenure-track positions at Baylor. This, in fact, is also being done. My department has benefited from this, and my colleagues and I could hardly be more grateful. But whether it is being done on a sufficient scale across the university to avoid having to increase class size or to avoid having to use part-time faculty is doubtful. To hire new faculty (and provide office space and support services for them) is costly. To

do so in sufficient quantity to undergird the traditional Baylor story will be unusually costly.

I understand that the dilemmas to which I point are obvious. It seems to me, however, that we need constantly to remind ourselves of the choices we are making because in the process we are "achieving Baylor." Whether we can "achieve Baylor" in a way that preserves the old story and embraces specified new possibilities depends on the answer to two questions. Do we have the will to do so? If we have the will, do we have the financial resources?

Comments from President Robert B. Sloan, Jr.:

A Challenge for Renewal

Recently I was invited to speak to the new Baylor Interdisciplinary Core (BIC) students, and I came away from that experience even more convinced that we are fortunate to have such outstanding young men and women at the University. They are bright, motivated and eager to challenge us as faculty and administrators.

BIC students, as you know, take a great deal of responsibility for their learning. The BIC experience, as its name implies, is interdisciplinary and interactive. As I was speaking to these students, extolling the virtues of the BIC program, and congratulating them for having the initiative to pursue such a vigorous and innovative course of study, a young man asked me a probing question: "If BIC is such a great program, why aren't all courses at Baylor taught this way?"

Well, of course, we have valid reasons for making this program highly selective. It is not for every student. BIC requires a tremendous commitment of time and energy from not only the students, but from the faculty who teach in the program as well. It is a costly program to administer.

His question, however, caused me to think about how we approach our work as faculty members. It made me reflect on what I call the scholarship of teaching. There are many dimensions to scholarship, and I have addressed these dimensions in previous Faculty Senate Newsletters, but I want to challenge us constantly to invest ourselves in making our teaching even better.

Baylor is well known for its caring, committed faculty. That is a reputation that has been developed through hard work over many years, and we must be vigilant in preserving that distinction. One of the ways we can do that is through professional renewal.

If you have lecture notes that have grown stale from years of use, spend some time updating your material. If you have not stayed up to date in the area of technology, take advantage of the many workshops and training opportunities offered by our Information Technology Center. Determine ways to enhance your pedagogy through the appropriate use of the many new tools at our disposal.

Finally, if you are still delivering lectures which require only note taking, note memorization, and the regurgitation of those notes back to you in a chosen test format, do consider adding more interactive elements to your classroom, such as those found in the BIC program and, indeed, as practiced by so many of our colleagues across the university. The day of the lecture is not gone, but neither is there ever room for out-of-date content or boring teaching techniques.

Students will always look upon faculty as authorities, and we have a responsibility to justify the trust they place in us. One of the ways we can do that is by engaging in professional renewal and by seeking innovative ways to stimulate learning. Ongoing professional renewal certainly is one of the most critical factors in producing what I am referring to as the scholarship of teaching. It is every bit as important as the other forms of scholarship.

I hope you are having a great semester. Thank you for all that you do to make Baylor such a special place.

Faculty Senate Website

http://www3.baylor.edu/~Fac_Senate/senatehome.html

The Senate website has minutes, meeting dates, membership, and other important information. Please send suggestions to: buddy_gilchrest@Baylor.edu.

Faculty Senate Meeting Dates

All meetings scheduled for Cashion 303 at 3:30 p.m.

October 19, 1999 February 15, 2000

November 16, 1999 March 21, 2000

December 14, 1999 April 18, 2000

January 18, 2000 May 9, 2000

President's Faculty Forum Meetings

Scheduled for 3:30 p.m. in Kayser Auditorium

Thursday, October 21, 1999

Thursday, March 2, 2000

President's State of the University Address

Wednesday, April 19, 2000, 3:30 p.m., location TBA