

# *Faculty Center for Teaching Excellence*

## Responses to Nory Prochaska

I support most enthusiastically the views expressed by Nory Prochaska. We are here at WCU to TEACH. In some circles, teaching is looked down upon by those whose calling is research or other non-classroom academic activities, but good teaching requires exactly the kind of dedication that Nory describes.

We are blessed at WCU precisely because we are needed to teach the less-than-perfect student. Teaching the "average" student is a challenge, and we should welcome that challenge. As a recent arrival from a large research-oriented university, I have noted a defensive tone that suggests we are not as "good" as the brand name schools in the state. Thank God! Let us not aspire to add our names to the list of mediocre research-oriented schools. There are, however, very few schools in this state oriented toward good undergraduate education and fewer that cater to the "average" student. Let us strive to be the best at what we do--taking "average" people and equipping them for productive and meaningful lives.

Finally, I recommend that anyone dismayed by the decline of teaching read ProfScam by C. J. Sykes (available at the FCTE). The examples in the book are extreme, but the message is clear: at many universities, teaching undergraduates is not rewarded or respected. The faculty at WCU can demonstrate that teaching undergraduates is the most important function of any university.

*Kenneth Ayala, Engineering Tech*

Although I agree with Nory Prochaska on most points, her opinion piece makes me uncomfortable because she challenges me to teach my subject **with** students rather than **to** them. It is just plain difficult to teach to, with, and for all the different levels of intelligence, motivation, prior preparation, and physical and mental health that we encounter in our classes. Furthermore, finding or developing that balance between covering certain material and responding to and molding the whole student is a constant challenge and concern. Students who do not care and do not work are not my major interest, (though some little voice somewhere keeps repeating that "real" teachers do care

and do get through to them). My bigger struggle is with the ones who really seem to give it their all but never quite get to where both they and I think they should be. Anyway, my thanks to Nory for the nudge written so clearly and positively.

*Alice Weldon Perry, Spanish*

I thank Nory Prochaska for pointing out that our ideas about academic standards must include the concept of student improvement; we have a responsibility to set reasonable standards; we have a responsibility to support student efforts, regardless of the level of student performance; and helping student achievement requires commitment and unique abilities.

In our faculty-student dialogue last October, one student pointed out that we ought to make it easier to get into WCU but harder to get out. According to Grant Wiggins, an educational consultant, institutions with high academic standards are those where the gap between high achieving and low achieving students is narrow. Perhaps this gives us something to think about as we struggle to build and maintain high academic standards.

*Casey Hurley, Admin., Curric., & Instr.*

Nory Prochaska's opinion piece concerning academic standards is **RIGHT ON TARGET**. We need to "meet our students where they are intellectually." Although this is difficult when class size numbers 50+, I wonder if a diagnostic form given to our students during the first week of each course would help us evaluate how much our students already know about our subject. Then instruction could be geared to the majority (ability-wise), making for less student/teacher frustration or boredom. After 30 years of teaching, I have found that classes "settle in" to a particular intellectual pattern or style, with extremes at either end of the spectrum. Such a diagnostic tool might eliminate wasted time and give us a "leg up" in doing a better job of teaching.

*Judy King, Human Environ. Sciences*