

Faculty Center for Teaching Excellence

Responses to Bill Hyatt

I will confine my remarks to Bill's suggestion that faculty should be good role models for students with respect to moral conduct. Plato considered this idea and even used the same analogy Bill did, comparing a moral teacher to a sports coach in the Meno. In the course of the dialogue between Socrates and Meno, the following sort of problem arises. A student encounters both good role models and bad ones and must be able to distinguish among them in order to be properly influenced. The student must also have the strength of will to emulate the good person once he or she has been identified. But a student who is able to make such distinctions and who has such strength of will is already morally good and has no need for role models. And a student who is unable to make these distinctions and too weak to emulate a good person is unable to benefit from good role models. The dilemma might be dismissed as choplogic were it not for the fact that Socrates was executed for morally corrupting the youth of Athens, for being a bad role model. At his trial (the Apology) Socrates denied being a teacher of morality since he did not know how people became morally good or bad. He said perhaps the Athenians had him confused with the sophists, men who, in return for a fee, promised to make their students both morally better and skillful in acquiring wealth and honor.

Mike Jones, Philosophy

From a reference librarian's point of view, Bill Hyatt is absolutely on target about students taking cues from professors. At Hunter Library we give many tours and instructional sessions, and invariably, students in classes without a professor present are indifferent and passive. By their absence, professors send the message that the information is inconsequential. When professors are present, students are more attentive and especially so when the professors participate by reinforcing and supplementing the information given by librarians. By the act of arranging to take class time for bibliographic instruction, faculty express the importance of library research. But when professors tell their students to "listen to the librarian" and then drop them off, the message intended is not the message received.

Betsy Swarthout, Hunter Library

If you have opinion pieces or teaching tips, even if they are in a rough draft form, send them in and we'll help prepare them for publication.

Terry Nienhuis, Editor