

# *Faculty Center for Teaching Excellence*

Responses to "Lead, Follow, or Get Out of the Way"

by Richard Beam, 9/1/93

*We received seven pages of exciting responses to Richard Beam's opinion piece, more than the copying budget allows us to print. We hope that the excerpts below give an accurate flavor of the writers' responses. If you would like to read whole responses, please request a copy from the FCTE.*

Dr. Beam suggests that computer spelling and grammar checks "should be assisting our students to spend less time considering the mechanics of writing and to concentrate more on the content." But our students understand very little of the mechanics of writing and the computer, that Totally Obedient Moron, cannot really help. These programs will undoubtedly improve, but can they ever replace the human eye and brain?

Dr. Beam is dead right on one thing: we'd better grab hold of this technology--to the degree that we can--before it grabs hold of us. But let us remember that it is a tool, like the obsidian handaxe or the atomic bomb. It can change our lives, but it is not going to make us--or our students--better people. And here, at last, the human teachers have an edge that can never be overcome. (excerpt)

**Gael Graham, History**

I feel that technology is the only thing that is going to save us in this age of declining budgets. We must find ways of providing better educational services to our students yet at the same time reducing the cost of these services. An example would be the use of a campus wide video system for delivery of instructional videos to students. The Media Center is now checking out these videos to students on a one to one basis. With the same amount of time and energy we could be providing our entire student population with these same videos delivered across a campus video system.

As computer workstations become increasingly powerful and cheaper, exciting new possibilities will be opened for alternative teaching methods. If properly used, technology

can not only enhance the educational experience but also make our job as educators easier and more exciting.

**Robert L. Orr, Univ. Media Center**

It doesn't work to have state of the art equipment on our desks if our students don't have access to similar equipment. We would like computer literacy to be taught as a skill to be used throughout the curriculum and across the campus, but this is a fruitless exercise unless there is communication and cooperation between all of us, talking about what our needs are and helping each other to fill those needs for all of our students. We need to know what people would like us to be teaching in CS 101, and we need support from all levels to make sure that students have access to a sufficient quantity of suitably modern, readily available, and somewhat uniform equipment and software. (excerpt)

**Nory Prochaska, Mathematics and Computer Science**

It's pretty clear to me that it's too late for Western to lead in the area of providing an education in telecomputing access for our students. Other schools are years ahead of us. But it is of special concern to me that there are institutional barriers at Western to our even catching up, let alone taking a lead in this area. These barriers could vanish, but it will not happen until some of our strategically placed personnel either undergo a conversion on the road to Damascus, (paul@damascus.edu.sy), step aside, or retire. (excerpt)

**Allen Moore, Biology**

# Responses to Richard Beam

continued

I get frustrated teaching on archaic machines with outdated software with no money available to upgrade. This is a disservice to the student as it adds to his frustration in an already frustrating new environment.

But, Richard is right when he says we need to take the initiative--but we can't do it alone. I submit that the student has to carry some of the burden for his own enlightenment. We have to somehow convince him that this new window to the world is available (soon almost everywhere) to anyone, and that it gives him access to knowledge now, from anywhere the network reaches. Not to convince him leaves him behind. The magic is out there on the wires. We gotta hook em up to it. (excerpt)

**Richard Wohlman, Math & Computer Science**

"Lead, Follow, or Get Out of the Way"? I think maybe I'll just get out of the way. The thought of my students' papers being "electronically" submitted (rather than "personally") makes me sad. In obvious defiance of current practice, I decided to submit this response non-electronically in handwriting, on lined tablet paper.

**J. W. Neff, Geosciences & Anthropology**

Education does not consist of mere information retrieval and data processing but relies on the interaction of various interpretive processes that have been developed only in the human brain. These processes affect not only how we see information, but how we present it, and our manner of presentation makes important statements about our understanding of the material. The idea that we should (or even can) separate "actual content" from "the mechanics" of human expression is seriously flawed.

It is clear that higher education fails some, perhaps even much of the time. It is not at all clear that the expensive technologies today being proposed as the salvation of higher education will be able to help. Indeed, "if one can predict

anything about the future," it is that we will continue to make the same mistakes we have in the past. Foremost among these continues to be the attractive but barren belief that new tools and methodologies will necessarily improve the educational process. (excerpt)

**Will Peebles, Music**

Dr. Beam's Faculty Forum piece lends support to the growing number of faculty and students who are wondering when computer-aided instruction (CAI) is coming to Western. Inquiries in my freshman composition classes over the last few years reveal that the majority of students are leaving my class, going back to their dorms (or to one of the few public computer labs on campus), and recopying onto a computer what they have handwritten in class. I cannot help but wonder what their writing would be like if they could do their initial prewriting, drafting, and revising on computers right in the classroom. The fact is these students know that composing on a computer is much easier and more time efficient than the traditional "write, copy, write" method. Likewise, they are aware that being computer literate is a prerequisite for their future career success. Dr. Beam is right; we are teaching a new generation, many of whom have been exposed to computers since kindergarten. Clearly, the development of CAI, especially in our writing courses, needs to be made available to Western students as soon as possible.

**Linda Kinnear, English**

Despite many reasons NOT to be amazed at what people get hot over, somehow I still DO get surprised. Fortunately, I no longer get particularly hot in response--just more persistent. (read, "stubborn"). Of course I think Beam is right on target.

**Marilyn Jody, English**