

Faculty Center for Excellence in Teaching & Learning

Responses to "Forget Massy," by Steve Ayers, 3/1/97

OH MY GOD!! Steve, I was there! Not in the bar, of course, but at the hospital emergency room when Roy and his missing left testicle showed up. And I overheard Roy explaining to the ER doc that his fight with Buddy wasn't over any old presidential dude; it was over a play they had just seen at the University of Dallas. Roy believed with his entire beating heart that Theseus held the Truth of all human kind: fathers must arrange marriages for their daughters. Buddy, on the other hand, was a firm supporter of Hermia and her progressive right to choose her own beloved husband. Yes, Steve, I, like you, can't believe these two Texas Neanderthals whipped out their big guns in a city bar, but clearly the topic was worth fighting over. Hermia, symbolically speaking of course, represents the new generation, radical ideas, pure passion and energy, and the way to improve the world as we know it. For you see, I'm no Norwegian historian, but I do know that back in those days of Bill Shakespeare, women were considered the property of their fathers until they were given away to become the property of their husbands.

And was it technology that saved the day? No, indeed not! Or, at least, not quite then. It wasn't until the development of the birth control pill several centuries later that women were truly liberated from the property-owning men and the eternal bondage of the female reproductive system. So, is this truly a debate between the traditional and the new? Adminis-

trators and faculty? Zen and fishing? The old and the young? Japan and America? Rhythm and the pill? Puck and the tree? Industry and education? No, all of those are simple dichotomies. You and I, Steve, have evolved well beyond those cowboy thespians. You and I know that life is much more complex, much richer and encompassing. You and I know that life is not stagnant, that we are not permanently cast in the roles of Theseus, Roy, or even Reverend Starbuck. You and I know that a few modern four-letter words can give playwright Bill a lot more laughs. And, lastly, I hope we both know that we must move beyond TQM to find something that works for us.

No, technology is not a panacea. And, no, cleverly couched committees will not solve all educational problems. But the lives of billions of women--and men--have been enhanced thanks to the invention of condoms, coffee warmers, cellular phones, birth control pills, portable pagers, penicillin, and compact disks. And I don't buy into that Freudian stuff; when Reverend Starbuck explained, "technology helped to flatten the faculty," he simply meant to say factory." We all know that industry has always been a couple decades ahead of education, anyway. Oh, and by the by, Steve, my son let me in on a secret: "COOL"--that term your daughter says to you all the time--is teen lingo for "Chill Out, Old Loser." No, no revolution is coming. That would be way too cool.

*Chris Gunn,
Counseling & Psychological Services*

Bill Massy's discussion was controversial, and Steve's opinion is an interesting perspective. I don't see us going to a TQM approach with all the bells and whistles, but while I don't agree with everything Bill said, much of what he is suggesting is already happening to higher education nationally. Massy's visit got us talking and thinking. That's useful on a campus regardless of what he actually said or how it was interpreted. My only real concern is the misinterpretation by many regarding the role of technology. I think his actual point, that got missed, was that technology provides options. Some people, especially those who are place-bound or credential oriented, will choose to use distance providers. But traditional universities provide a learning environment not supported by distance education alone. Massy is calling for all of us to think about how we can effectively use technology to increase our ability to concentrate on higher level skills and to enhance the quality of the learning environment. He says our future is in that direction and in this regard, I think he is right. Unfortunately, his language made the message difficult to understand, at best.

John Bardo, Chancellor

Responses to "Forget Massy," by Steve Ayers, 3/1/97, continued

"Cool!"

*Richard Beam,
Comm. &
Theatre Arts
(and others)*

Steve, if your powerful Forum piece was intended to oppose the ideas in Massy's article or the content of his presentations, then I strongly disagree with you. In my opinion, Massy presented his message very poorly, but that should not cause us to overlook the importance of the message. The singer stank, but let's not throw out the song because of a bad performance.

It seemed clear to me that you were trying to tell us that it's a waste of time to consider the Massy message because the changes it advocates and requires will never happen in the environment in which we operate. You seemed to blame everyone above the faculty level for the stagnant condition of our academic swamp. But re-member the famous words of another swamp denizen, Pogo, who said "We have met the enemy and he is us."

The collective reluctance of faculty to contemplate new ideas, their unwillingness to fight for needed change, and the passive acceptance of the status quo make us part of the problem, not mere members of a theatre audience watching a tragedy unfold.

Perhaps I misunderstood your position, but it seemed to me that you were suggesting that trying to restructure the university along the lines of TQM with students as the focus in a client-driven process is a waste of time. I submit that it is absolutely imperative that such a restructuring be accomplished. Actually, we've quietly begun the process at WCU; we just need to continue.

The old academic system of internal decision making without the participation of our customers (yes, customers) is dead. People who furnish the money we spend rightly demand to have some say in how it's spent and rightly expect accountability from their employees. For those of us who put the interests of students and other buyers of our services first, these demands are not threatening. In fact, they are supportive.

I, for one, welcome the changes advocated by Massy. They would help me facilitate learning and measure my value as a teacher far better than the existing system, which still rewards us for teaching Saber-Toothed Tiger Hunting 101 the same way everyone else teaches it while ignoring that Saber-Toothed-Tigers disappeared long ago and that all our concerns about how well we teach young people to hunt them is academic (pun intended).

Without restructuring, I seriously doubt Western's ability to attract and retain quality faculty or quality students. WCU cannot hope to compete in the marketplace for scarce resources without both quality and accountability. Whatever the components of tomorrow's computers, Western must get them, must use them productively, and must tell others what we did with them.

John Moore, Communication and Theatre Arts

*Wow! They
don't call the
Director God
fur nuttin'!
Steve Eberly
English*

*For the last two
forums this
semester, I'd
like for Steve
to address
"raising the bar"
and post-tenure
review.*

Anonymous

*Yes, BUT if we weren't here forming committees we might
be in the streets causing real trouble. In the meantime,
I'm going to get me a bullet proof jock strap.
Chris Martin, Faculty Center*

Responses to "Forget Massy," by Steve Ayers, 3/1/97, continued

I, too, came away from Massy's presentation with negative feelings. I think my comment to a colleague was, "are you buying in to all of this?" However, the next day I was subjected to more Massyism via a campus leadership retreat and came away with an entirely different perception. After a near repeat of the previous day's rhetoric, Massy added some more pieces to the puzzle and some of what this guy was talking about started to make some sense. But it only made sense after Dr. Bardo asked us the right question. He said, "What is it that keeps you from doing quality work?"

There is a lot that is wrong with the current system of faculty governance and Dr. Bardo is trying to assist the faculty in changing that. However, it is the faculty who have to make their voices heard. We are looking at alternate forms of faculty governance, and Dr. Bardo's position on this is to give the faculty a stronger voice. Part of that is to remove administrators, or at least their vote, from many if not all of the Faculty Senate committees and councils. But let us first deal with the current system. I, too, have been on committees that have been a total waste of my time. However, it is one of the Faculty Senate councils that reviewed and presented the new + and - grading system and another one that was able to get the 40% rule deleted. Now, everyone can take sides with these issues as armchair quarterbacks, but I have not seen one faculty member other than senators attend the Senate meetings to discuss these issues this year. And both of the above issues were about teaching! At the next Faculty Senate meeting, we are discussing class scheduling. Want to come? It is March 19th at 3:00 in Killian 104. Faculty can ask to be recognized.

I applaud Dr. Bardo for being a transformational leader (one who sees what could be)! Heaven knows we have a lot of transactional leaders (those who are satisfied with status quo, don't want to rock the boat, and only communicate with underlings when they screw up)! Dr. Bardo is trying to empower us to take greater responsibility for addressing key issues on this campus. Answering his question about barriers to quality work is a good place to start.

But in order to get the right answers, all of the administrators must ask--and keep on asking--What keeps us from doing quality work? After asking the RIGHT QUESTION, then they must be willing to act and not ignore. If they get our answers to that \$64,000 question and are not willing to fix that which is impeding quality, then we are back at square one. Of course, we are not all going to get overnight what we want when we want it. But if some had been asking that question for the nine years I have been here, many more faculty would be a lot happier in their "teaching" roles and perhaps we would not all have to be asking the "quality" question all at the same time. We also must remember that the legislature may not be asking the right questions either, but perhaps that has come about because we and our administrators have failed for so long to ask the RIGHT QUESTION.

Things do not get changed by just doing our job. Things only get changed by speaking up and communicating with the administration. Yes, everyone has to be on the same page. That is not going to happen over night. Change is good, but we must be willing to embrace change. The faculty voice has to be an advocate for positive change that relates to teaching and there is a lot beyond the classroom that impacts teaching. We cannot just teach and expect positive change to be at our finger tips. Our administrators cannot read our minds. Unless those of us who administer the academic major and are in the classroom speak out, all of the things that impact teaching will be changed based on misperceptions by administrators rather than through communication. Our faculty governance system is far from perfect, but all those who serve willingly and positively on those "committees" are to be applauded. At least they are providing a voice if they speak up and are not afraid to speak their mind even if their boss does walk into the room. If we do not respect each other for our opinions and our right to voice them, then none of this works either.

I applaud Steve Ayers for one thing about his statements. He brought up the issue. Many administrators are not asking the RIGHT QUESTION perhaps because very few are listening. Dr. Bardo is trying to empower us. We do not have to accept everything as gospel truth, but EVERYONE does have to listen.

*Susan C. Brown
Sport Management*

Responses to "Forget Massy," by Steve Ayers, 3/1/97, continued

Hoo, boy! Why does the person with the gun get to "win" the discussion? (Although, in a way, Buddy had the right idea--removing some of the excess testosterone from the scene). Steve is right when he urges faculty to seize the power inherent in their teaching role. If the administration keeps telling us that teaching is the most important activity at WCU, why don't departments revise their TPR criteria to reflect that emphasis and keep "scholarly activity" and "service" within the framework of the teaching mission of the department? We keep moaning about what actually gets rewarded here, but the power to change criteria lies firmly in the departments, which is where faculty have their strongest voice.

Sharon Jacques, Nursing

AT LAST!! The whole, sordid truth of the real function of the Faculty Senate is exposed by Steve Ayers. Committees to decide when to go to the bathroom and other weighty discussion items--FOR THE ADMINISTRATION. The magic bullet, long sought for cancer, now found as a cure for education--THE COMPUTER!! Engineers have known for 50 years that the computer is a tool, not a SOLUTION. We can do things (simulations of reality) that were never possible before cheap computing power. But, as for all tools, if the user does not understand underlying principles then the tool is useless. Or, a simple tool can not use a complex tool.

*Kenneth Ayala,
Industrial & Engineering Technology*

The author of "Forget Massy" pulled out all stops to merely gain the attention of his colleagues (he got mine, but, then, he always had mine beginning with his 1991 article in the Faculty Forum, "It's Okay To Be Smart In College" to his current one on "Raising the Bar"). However, after gaining my attention he told me more about the messenger, than the message--about his emotional appeal to pubertal themes, secondary sex characteristics, scapegoating, and prejudices against minorities. It is a well-known and frequently discussed topic in psychoanalytic literature (psychology, too) that the verbal behavior of immature levels of moral development, particularly Kohlberg's Stage 2, is highly ego-centered and irrational. The ego, in a manner of speaking, slips away from the processes of rational thought and reality-testing and indulges in (preadolescent) fantasies. To narrow the scope, Ayers fails to distinguish between two rather basic notions in General Education objectives--referencing (a primary source of an idea) and regressing (to an early form of thinking). If he would have done his homework with regard to the utility of the refrain "stay cool" when confronted with a stressful event, he would have had a more productive precept: namely, the reliance on an earlier level of adolescent mentality. "Stay cool" is not the same as securing a strong emotional base for meeting stress. Indeed, Ayers would have discovered instead, "I (Steve) lost my cool" or as my friend Anita told me, "Nun--habich mich verstanden?" ("Now--have I understood myself?").

William Chovan, Psychology

Very witty and poignant piece. It's about time someone with at least one testicle said something against the Technomaniacs. Many Hurrahs to Steve. In this spirit, I did not use the latest technology for my "chat" on Celebration of Teaching Day. I asked for an old-fashioned blackboard and got a slightly more modern white board with felt-tip marker. I hope Steve's piece stirs up the sleeping dogs.

*Daryl Hale
Philosophy and Religion*

About Steve Ayers and what he writes. Mine is more a reaction than a response. I am pleased to see you publish material that does not suffer from understatement. Pleased to see humor and amusement, but I assure you I have taken the serious parts seriously. Pleased to see free speech freely exercised. Pleased to hear another voice speak for self-control as the only worthwhile control for scholars as scholars. Pleased to see the emperor's costume examined. Pleased Steve wrote. He seems to me not so much a Luddite as a Dilbertian.

Jack Wakeley, Psychology