

# *Faculty Center for Excellence in Teaching & Learning*

Responses to "Teaching Awards: A Modest Proposal," by Hal Herzog, 11/1/96

I found Hal's piece interesting, though I don't agree with all of it. Back in the '70's the Chancellor's Teaching Award monies were designated: a modest amount went directly to the "winner," some was earmarked for book purchases, some was specified for teaching supplies, and some went for a student scholarship in the awardee's name. These designated distributions wouldn't satisfy all of Hal's objections, but I thought this was neat. Oh yes, the stigma is real and persistent.

*Gary Pool, Chemistry*

I agree with Hal, mostly, but. . . . If the purpose of the teaching awards is to give money to good teachers, based on what I hear there is little argument about the selectees being "good" teachers. What I hear is: there is no way to pick a "best" teacher and /or the amount of money is too much and/or the present system is adequate although probably more time consuming than is necessary.

The current system of prizes does not teach us how to be good teachers. It teaches us, it seems to me, that striving to be a good teacher may not lead to money prizes; it teaches us that there is no certain link between good teaching and prizes. What is needed is a system that rewards us for striving to be good teachers because that striving is the job we have chosen. We need a system that gives us external rewards even though we value internal rewards more than external ones, not a system that tries to make the external more valuable to us. We need a system that understands that time spent consciously pursuing external prizes is time snatched from improving teaching. We need a basic annual salary adjustment system that is fair and perceived to be fair; then prizes can be appended. I think we have on the campus a generally fair salary adjustment system, but that's a statement we can debate. What I believe we cannot debate is that the time that goes into prizes and contests would be better spent on the basic salary system.

If we are to have prizes, let me make a semi-frivolous suggestion.

Each term each student is given 25 tokens for each class he/she is taking. At the end of the semester each student distributes the tokens to the teachers she/he has had that semester. The rule for distribution is this: give the most tokens to those from whom you learned the most and the fewest tokens to those from whom you learned the least. You may give a teacher zero tokens, you may give all your tokens to one teacher, or you may return any or all of your tokens to command central. Once each year, each faculty member would turn in her/his tokens, the tokens would be pro-rated against the teaching prize money available, and prizes would be distributed. Tokens could not be carried forward from year to year. Fine tuning of the concept could be worked out by a committee.

*Jack Wakeley, Psychology*

Hal Herzog's comments on teaching awards should definitely win the WCU award for Best-Tongue-In-Cheek-Article ever presented in the Faculty Forum; he is also in contention for the Valid Points Award as well.

*Joyce Baldwin, Human Environmental Sciences*

Oh, yeah, Herzog? Well, I'll put my "Geography of Prostitution" lecture up against your "Evolution of the Sexual Orgasm" lecture ANY day.

*Jeffrey Neff, Geosciences and Anthropology*

# ***Faculty Center for Excellence in Teaching & Learning***

**Responses to "A Modest Proposal," by Hal Herzog, 11/1/96, continued**

My friend Hal Herzog's clever attack on teaching awards probably hit a chord with the cynic in all of us. At the risk of being a spoil-sport, let me suggest that we should not be seduced completely by his cleverness. \$103,000 toward teaching? PEANUTS! In my 18 years at WCU, millions of dollars (tons of wine!) have been doled out to individuals in the form of "merit" pay. How many of those millions (not to mention the results of compounding) went to reward outstanding teaching? How many went for getting esoteric research published? How many for doing the bidding of a powerful administrator? Who knows? At least the money provided for rewarding teaching highlights the importance of our central business in a concrete way. Have we forgotten already what it was like before teaching started getting some attention in higher education? Are there problems in deciding which teachers should receive awards? Surely. Was the distribution of this summer's windfall handled poorly? Undoubtedly. Should we forget individual differences in teaching performance and stick to counting publications and brownie points? I hope not. My own immodest proposal: let's reject the assumption that good teaching can't be measured. Instead, let's work together to find better ways to identify and reward good teaching in its many forms. Let's not go back to the days when it was assumed anyone with a degree could teach (a "given" in the words of Chancellor Robinson) so that all the rewards go to those who do things other than teaching well.

***Bruce Henderson, Psychology***