

Faculty Center for Excellence in Teaching & Learning

Responses to "In Defense Of Elitism," by Daryl L. Hale, 10/1/99

I think what Mary Jean was trying to do with her article was to find some reason for the continued downward spiral of the "average" WCU student in terms of basic literacy, effort, and civility. The SAT scores may be up (note that they are still about 850 on the old scale) but that does not mean that our students are better prepared. The difference in the current set of students and the students of 10 years ago is like night and day. I used to observe (translation: complain) that many of our students could not read or write at a reasonable level; now I observe that most of our students can barely read or write at any level.

Richard Stephens, Math

I couldn't stop smiling as I read Daryl's piece in the last Faculty Forum. He said everything I would like to say, in a much more eloquent way. While he quotes his favorite scholars, I would like to give one of mine some credit: "You have brains in your head and feet in your shoes; you can point them in any direction you choose." (Dr. Seuss). My question is simple: why shouldn't these students be recognized for their accomplishments? Haven't they EARNED anything and everything we can do to further enhance their educational experience? They have worked hard to get where they are and they are working hard to stay where they are. I think that they should be applauded, not questioned. Honors classes make US better teachers by challenging OUR responsibility to keep these students challenged. I have found my experiences teaching honors courses to be both rejuvenating and humbling. With all of this talk about diversity floating around, I have to stop and wonder about the lack of attention given to those students with "hidden diversities." We have Student Support Services to help those who have learning challenges. Perhaps we need a branch of that program for students who don't. They are just as often the recipients of faulty attributions. Two of my three children have learning challenges, while the third is two grades ahead of her classmates in what she can achieve. Yet, they are all labeled. They all also need and deserve special attention. We need to direct our attention toward students along the continuum and give credit and rewards where they are due. The Honors college is due. Kudos to all of those who have taken the time to meet the "special needs" of these students and to Brian Railsback for creating the opportunities. Thank you, Daryl, for pointing out the inherent contradiction in Mary Jean Herzog's piece. To call or label something or someone as "elite," IS a product of elitism. The only way to avoid this is to refer to ourselves as Western Carolina "Eclectic" Place of Study. Until then, I hope the collection of 4.0ers grows and grows. I shall do everything I can to water the masses.

Patti Cutspec, Communication and Theatre Arts

Why not allow all students, upon standard acceptance, to be eligible for the Honors College? Those who take fifteen or more hours and receive a 4.00 are automatically admitted. If, after being admitted, they fall below a 3.5, they are thrown out. You can add things on like you must have taken this or that in high school or you must take from this list of courses. I think if students culled themselves in or out, Mary Jean's concerns really wouldn't be an issue. It used to be called the Dean's List or something like that. I really wouldn't know.

Stephen Ayers, CTA

While we will not agree on the issues concerning "elitism," I hope we will agree that Daryl Hale's thoughtful essay raises the level of discourse in the Faculty Forum a few notches. I admire the intelligence, professionalism, and style that his essay displays. He has set a high standard for the rest of us.

Brian Railsback, Acting Dean, Honors College