

Baylor University Faculty Senate Newsletter

April 1999

Comments from Senate Chair Daniel B. McGee:

Creating and Sustaining Community in Academia

Recently we have been discussing the future size of the Baylor community. One of the issues raised in this discussion has been how size affects the nature and quality of community. While size is an important dimension, there are other features that dramatically impact the texture and quality of a community. The two features that I want to reflect on here are the diversity and shape of the relationships within the academic community.

One wag has said that the only thing uniting the modern university is its plumbing. The lament reflected in this observation is the lack of meaningful community because of the diversity and specialization of function that characterizes the university. One instinctive response to this dilemma is to reduce the diversity. We imagine that the only way to achieve unity is through homogeneity. I think that this is mistaken for two reasons.

First, homogeneity is incompatible with the nature and purpose of the university. The defining task of the university requires heterogeneity. We acknowledge this in our creation of multiple schools or colleges and within them multiple divisions and departments. Our very purpose of remembering, reflecting upon, and advancing all dimensions and enterprises of human culture requires diverse talents, perspectives, standards of excellence and models of understanding. The information explosion has required that we divide the labor in multiple and diverse ways. We cannot enjoy the comfortable luxury of homogeneity as the defining feature of a university community.

Not only is homogeneity incompatible with the nature of university, it is not the only, nor I think, the healthiest way to achieve community in any human community. We assume, incorrectly I think, that sameness creates unity. This became clear to me when years ago I first read Ferdinand Toennies classic study of community, *Gemeinschaft und Gessellschaft*. Here he described the *Gemeinschaft* community as characteristic of those in which there was minimum division of labor. These communities are held together by commonality. The *Gessellschaft* community is characterized by significant division of labor and is increasingly prevalent in the modern era. Here the glue that holds community together is not commonality but mutual dependence. Although Toennies does not reflect on all the implications of his observation, he opened the door to my seeing clearly how some of the strongest bonds within the communities of my life were the differences among us. Complementarity, not commonality, was the source of our affection and appreciation for each other. Upon reflection, I then remembered that a much more ancient description of the ideal human community had pointed to diversity as a necessary feature.

St. Paul in describing the Christian community, i.e. community as God intends it, compares it to the human body with its many and diverse parts. The admonition is to avoid the mistake of imagining that any one part is the whole body or that all of the parts should try to be alike. No part, i.e. person, even the most weakest part, should be disvalued but seen as necessary to the functioning of the whole body. (I Corinthians 12)

When I reflect on the value of looking for how our differences strengthen us rather than divide us, I am encouraged to become more sensitive to the ways we are inclined to value only those that look like us. Among the more obvious differences that pushes us into different worlds are our disciplines. We have become super specialists that range from engineering to art and naturally tend to see all of human experience from the perspective that makes sense out of what we focus upon. The human experience and the human task requires diverse models of understanding and we cheat ourselves when we disvalue other disciplines.

Another way of destroying community is to use ideological standards to draw tight lines of inclusion and exclusion. Many of us have strong feelings about certain schools of thought within our disciplines and in promoting our views we exclude those who differ. As faculty, respect for our disciplines should prompt us toward openness about the diversity within our disciplines. This is true in our relationships within departments but also our relationships with students. There are also religious, political, and social ideologies that can narrow our view of the world and prevent us and those we teach from seeing value in very different ideological perspectives.

A cluster of identities built around our differences in gender, race or ethnicity, social class, or nationality also threaten to diminish the quality of the academic community. At Baylor we have made some progress in enriching our faculty by adding more women and the obvious benefits to us should encourage further strides in this direction. The more challenging task, we have discovered, is to make the racial composition of both faculty and student body more representative of the mosaic of ethnicities that comprise the human community both nationally and internationally. In this regard, while we enjoy a discernible presence of students from around the world, there are many places where our faculty would be strengthened by a greater presence of professors from overseas.

I am struck how quickly we shun these diversities out of a fear that they will destroy the academic community. To be sure diversity alone does not create community. There is a need for a sharing of some common purposes, but spelling what those might be for academia must wait for another column. In the meantime, why not celebrate our differences?

Daniel B, McGee, Chair of Faculty Senate, April, 1999

Steve Moore, Vice President for Student Life

Developing An Integrated Educational Experience: A Student Life Imperative

It was a very unlikely prophet, a syphilitic and eventually insane German, who from the middle of his own century looked into the soul of ours. In *The Gay Science* Friedrich Nietzsche wrote,

"Have you not heard of the man who lit a lamp on a bright morning and went to the marketplace crying ceaselessly, 'I seek God. I seek God.' There were many among those standing there who didn't believe in God, so he made them laugh. 'Is God lost?' one of them said. 'Has he gone astray like a child?' said another. 'Or is he hiding? Has he gone on board a ship and emigrated?' So they laughed, and they shouted at one another. The man sprang into their midst and looked daggers at them. 'Where is God?' he cried, 'I will tell you. We have killed Him, you and I.' We are all His killers, but how can we have done that?"

When Nietzsche spoke of the "death of God", God's actual existence was beside the point. The point was that people would learn to live, to educate themselves, to build families, institutions and even societies in complete oblivion to God.

Ernie Boyer in his book *College: The Undergraduate Experience in America* reports, "We seem to have arrived at the point where it's intellectually indecent to make up your mind." In our concern to avoid the excesses and intrusions of the past, Christian educators have often tended to evacuate the field of values and ethics altogether. In our understandable honoring of the freedom of others we have allowed our students, undergraduate and graduate, to conclude that we don't much care. Students need more than information; they also need integration, implications, and applications. My experience in higher education has convinced me that a place like Baylor must not only attempt to involve students in inquiry and scholarship of the highest quality, but also facilitate the process of students finding a sense of lifelong personal and social direction, of developing an ability to communicate effectively, of learning to think clearly and make discriminating judgements. Such goals require a fertile campus life in which students encounter each other and the faculty/staff in formal and informal ways. These interactions combined with the events, traditions and activities of the university create a campus culture and ethos through which the educational goals are experienced as well as learned. Having served and attended seven colleges and universities – large and small, public and private, Christian and secular – I have both experienced and observed the importance of community in shaping the educational experience. In part because of the powerful impact of those communities of learning upon my life, I have chosen to serve in institutions committed to being purposeful learning communities.

As well I have benefited from an education which combined rigorous theological as well as philosophical training. This combined with a careful critique of culture has led me to believe that the church and her institutions need a cradle-to-grave recovery of the integral relationship between belief and behavior. Our students at Baylor need to be nurtured in

the teaching that knowledge necessarily implies responsibility: to know is to do, to hear is to act. Christian higher education must include a vision for character-forming faith, for thinking Christianly and acting Christianly. If students are not systematically challenged to develop a worldview informed by faith and values, it is unlikely that they will work one out on their own. Without such a perspective, many abandon or compartmentalize matters of faith and live disconnected lives. As James Laney of Emory University once said, "Without the education of the heart, expertise and ambition easily become demonic." To speak of "Christian education" does not necessarily entail being ideological or doctrinaire. Nor does it imply being moralistic. It does quite simply mean that we intentionally and unapologetically bring matters of faith into our conversations of learning and inquiry. It means that we seek to take seriously Christ's command to love God with all our heart, soul, strength and mind.

I resonate with the commitment to integration and excellence spelled out in Baylor's mission statement. I believe that an institution must intentionally create a distinctive ethos marked by a commitment to students as whole persons and by communicating high expectations to all members of the campus community. It is an all-too-common tendency in higher education today to deflate aspirations – both those held by faculty and staff for students as well as faculty and staff for themselves. Although high expectations cannot insure success, low expectations are almost always deleterious. I believe Baylor attains one of its most important purposes when it changes students' views of themselves and the world by raising their personal, educational and spiritual aspirations and establishing clear expectations for involvement in activities that will help students attain their goals.

My own research as well as that of George Kuh, Alexander Astin, Patricia Cross, et. al. has quite convincingly shown that much of the learning impact of higher education is determined by the extent and content of students' interactions, in and out of class, with the major agents of learning and socialization on campus: faculty members, educational staff, campus activities, and peers. We also know from research that students who regularly reflect on their learning experience a higher degree of learning and satisfaction with their educational experience. As well, reflection enhances learning practices and strategies of students.

Unfortunately, we live in a culture that discourages reflection. We all live very busy lives and our students have learned busyness very, very well. Unfortunately, educators who work in the student affairs dimension of higher education have sometimes encouraged or reinforced students' involvement in too many things. Fortunately, Baylor is blessed with a student life staff who is committed to partnering with faculty to build an increasingly educationally purposeful learning community. Through building such partnerships we can become a place where student learning in all of its dimensions is affirmed and the mission of Baylor can be achieved in the lives of our students. I look forward to working with you and welcome opportunities for dialog around our common task of educating students for the 21st century.

Steve Moore
Vice President for Student Life

FACULTY SENATE, 1999-2000

Senate elections have been completed. Your representatives for the 1999-2000 school year are listed below. Officers will be determined soon.

College of Arts and Sciences

Linda Adams -- 98-01
Robert "Bob" Baird -- 98-01
Rosalie Beck -- 98-01
Anne-Marie Bowery -- 97-00
William M. Jensen -- 97-00
Philip Johnson -- 97-00
David L. Longfellow -- 97-00
Jay B. Losey -- 99-02
Daniel B. McGee -- 97-00
Richard B. Riley -- 99-02
Sara Stone -- 98-01
Joan E. Supplee -- 97-00
Charles A. Weaver III -- 97-00
F. Ray Wilson II -- 98-01
Joe C. Yelderman, Jr. -- 99-02
David E. Young -- 98-01

Engineering and Computer Science

Donald Farris -- 99-02

Libraries

William B. Hair III -- 99-02

Nursing

Sandra J. Genrich -- 97-00

Hankamer School of Business

Gary R. Carini -- 97-00
Joe A. Cox -- 99-02
Charles E. Davis -- 97-00
Mark G. Dunn -- 98-01
Karen Johnson -- 98-01
Jane G. Williams -- 99-02

School of Education

K. Frederick Curtis -- 99-02
Norman L. Gilchrest -- 98-01
Deborah Johnston -- 97-00

Law School

Mitchell E. Counts -- 98-01

School of Music

Jane Abbott-Kirk -- 98-01
J. Christopher Buddo -- 97-00

Truett Seminary

Ruth Ann Foster -- 99-02

Dates of future Senate meetings for 1998-99:

Meetings begin promptly at 3:30 p.m. in room 303; Cashion Academic Center, Hankamer School of Business.

April 20, 1999

May 11, 1999

Important Dates:

President's State of the University Address: Wednesday, April 21, 1999; 3:30 p.m.;
Barfield Drawing Room, BDSC

Call for Historical Items Relating to the Faculty Senate

The Faculty Senate would like to develop a more complete record of past Senate activities, deliberations, and actions. It is probable that many of you have items in your files and archives that you will be able to share. Will you please check your electronic and paper files and send any records, minutes, newsletters, and any other items that will be useful.

For hard copy items, please send to: Buddy Gilchrest; P. O. Box 97313; campus mail.
For electronic items, please send to: buddy_gilchrest@Baylor.edu

In this way, you can lighten your file load as you enrich our ability to archive and access our history. Thank you for your help.

Faculty Senate Website

http://www3.baylor.edu/~Fac_Senate/senatehome.html

The Senate website has been updated. Please check it for minutes, meeting dates, membership, and other important information. Please send suggestions to: buddy_gilchrest@Baylor.edu.

Kathy Weber is doing an outstanding job with the technical work in maintaining the website. Thank you, Kathy.

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