

A Point of View © 1996

Learning a luxury education

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Some colleges and universities are excellent, some good, others so-so and the rest no good at all. If you expect me to list the names in each category, don't sit down waiting for me, because you will never get out of your chair. Get up and run!

Many of you know that I was a full-time college educator for sixteen years. It was one of my most cherished and proud ambitions and I decided to retire the day I sensed a difference between what I was teaching and what the students wanted to hear. Education is a contract of excellence between the teacher and the student. Professors are supposed to give their students all we got, and students are supposed to receive what they get with respect and serious consideration. Failure of either side to behave that way is not called education, it is a ruse.

For me to be a teacher, I had to be at the mountaintop of my career, for my students it was climbing their mountain side year after year with dedication and a sense of adventure. Nothing inspires a young person more than a vision of a future as an accomplished adult in a chosen field.

The contract between professors and students requires faith in each other. We are supposed to bring a documented expertise in our field. When we walk into a class to face students who are waiting for our wisdom, they don't ask if we have the credentials required to provide it. They assume that such is the responsibility of the main office and was taken care of.

As for we, the professors, we never ask the students if they have paid their tuition or are behind in their payments. We don't need to know if they are studying on a scholarship or paying full tuition basis. And when the colleges issue a diploma to the graduates, there is nothing on the qualification that refers to financial arrangements. They get "Bachelor of Science degrees," not "Bachelor of Layaway Science Degrees."

The recent scandal surrounding the excessive payments made by parents of more than 750 students who faked athletic records of their children to earn an entrance or a scholarship based on sports they did not play, never mind excel, is a serious violation of that contract between teacher and student mentioned before. That in some cases the tests at which the students were required to sit were taken for them by someone else with full participation of the test administrators, makes the case worse. Did those students ever wonder why Charlie or Mary next door had to take them, but they didn't? What made them special? It makes me feel better to hear that the colleges affected were victims and not victimizers.

When I go to a car dealer to buy a new automobile, I am convinced that some folks are willing and financially able to buy a more expensive car than mine in that dealership or someplace else. I don't blame or envy them. Buying whatever "whatchamacallit" pleases them does not push me out of buying my own "whazzit". It is their "capitalistic" given right. But I have a problem when some parents want to buy their children's education rights at the expense of someone else's kids. It is not fair, and it is not right.

The smiles on the faces of the young victors in this game of "got cha", whether they are aware or not, are no comparison to the tears spilled by those who get pushed out of an opportunity to better themselves by some financial shenanigan. It is also unfair to us as professors, when we have to deal with damaged intellectual or moral goods who violate the essential teaching contract between student and teacher. That the world is deprived of a mind of excellence to open the road to one of mediocrity makes it worse.

And that is my Point of View today.