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Academic Vantage Points: Reflections on the University in the 21st Century

William G. Tierney

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A publication of the Center for Higher Education Policy Analysis

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Introduction

Few would contest the fact that the beginning of the new century has brought significant changes in higher education. A period of stability is not likely to surface for quite some time. Social and economic innovations move more quickly than institutions can respond; technology is almost outdated even as it is being installed. For profit universities, distance learning, new diversities in student populations, fiscal downturns, and even current threats of terrorism have necessitated imaginative reactions from faculty, administrators, and policy makers. But not all responses help cultivate a commitment to institutional improvement and momentum.

The essays in this collection reflect and represent the many ways in which the academic world is in flux. Starting on the deck of the Titanic, Tierney's articles move forward into the 21st century while keeping an eye on the past. The collection suggests guidance for organizations and individual faculty, looks at decision-making structures, offers advice about empowering a faculty, and addresses the responsibilities of the academic in the current educational climate.

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Dr. Tierney's current research projects include a Department of Education supported study of college preparation programs for underrepresented youth, and a multi-year investigation of governance and decision-making in higher education. Some of his recent publications include Faculty Work in Schools of Education: Rethinking Roles and Rewards (2001), Building the Responsive Campus: Creating High Performing Colleges and Universities (1999), and The Responsive University: Restructuring for High Performance (1998). At USC, he teaches graduate courses on higher education policy, administration and governance, organizational behavior, and qualitative methodology.

Essays

I. A View From The Titanic: Strategic Responsiveness

In on-going research that I have done over the last decade, colleges and universities increasingly strike me as an armada of 21st century Titanics sailing peacefully across the ocean. Perhaps the ship's captain and the crew are intuitively aware of the dangers that exist in their oceanic voyages, but they are unable to change course. Or rather, they have some sense of the dangers, but their responses are more often than not self absorbed, rather than farsighted. Faculty complain about their lack of voice and call for greater participation in governance. Administrators bemoan their lack of power and demand greater authority. Unfortunately, these calls for change frequently do little more than rearrange the chairs on the deck of the Titanic: the faculty have a better view, and the captain's cabin has nicer chairs. The result is that the faculty may feel that they have a clearer vantage point and college presidents may feel more comfortable in the seclusion of their first class cabins, but we remain unaware of what is out there in the environment and how we might best respond.

The difference between the original Titanic and our latter day copies is that we actually are able to detect the dangers, but we do little about them. For-profit universities are the fastest growing sector in higher education. Distance learning, although not turning the wishfully huge profits that some predicted only a year ago, still has vast implications for how colleges and universities will be transformed. Depressed wages when compared with our peers in business and industry, combined with aging facilities and unrelenting demands on our time, make academe less attractive for new scholars than it did a generation ago. Colleges and universities as institutions have been structurally set up to serve a full-time traditionally aged residential population when that group is in decline and new constituencies have new needs, new demands. The competition for the "best and brightest" of a shrinking demographic group has heated up so that institutions might lay claim to excellence in a winner-take-all market; the result is an increase in merit aid for those who do well on standardized tests, and a decrease in financial aid for those who are most in need of fiscal support. And, of course, we have just completed an unprecedented era of fiscal opportunity for the

wealthiest in America that has enabled capital campaigns to succeed and thereby lessen the presumed need of public funding. Predictions about the current economic downturn present a dual fiscal dilemma: On the one hand, private support will be vastly reduced, and on the other, public support is now low on a list of reordered priorities in the aftermath of September 11th.

The response to the view on the horizon generally has been threefold. Some are in denial. I hear claims that distance learning, for example, will not impact one or another college, or that a person's institution has always served a particular clientele and the individual sees no reason why they can not do so in the future. The respondents overlook, of course, the ubiquitous presence of the Internet in everyday life and its relationship to teaching and learning, and how certain clienteles such as traditionally aged residential students are in decline. A second response is to quarrel over how to respond. Faculty and administrators will vaguely agree that some kind of danger exists, but in discussions akin to the negotiations about the shape of the table at the Vietnamese peace negotiations a generation ago, they somehow never get around to discussing the issues that confront them; instead they become consumed about how to discuss the issues. The third response is perhaps the most troubling, and that is to assume that nothing can be done. Instead of being on a boat where the individuals are unaware of the dangers, the crew is on an intellectual ship of fools that is hopelessly headed toward the shoals. The best that can be hoped for is that everyone bails out, or at least retires, before the boat hits the reef.

For those who want to respond we hear either the calls I referred to above for greater presidential leadership, a more powerful role for governing boards, or after a generation of lessened voice in decision-making, a reinvigoration of faculty power. Such responses miss the boat.

Organizations that are in need of reform ought to focus less on the structure of decision-making than on the decisions themselves. In a preliminary review, for example, of decisions by Academic Senates over the last three years, I found that most focused on labor issues rather than academic ones: retirement policies, salary and benefits scales, and leave policies. Although these are undoubtedly critical

issues to be dealt with, they are not the only ones, and a coordinated faculty voice on academic issues that are being impacted by the external environment is virtually absent. Similarly, on the administrative side of the house I have found senior administrators who are overwhelmed by how much needs to be done; they suffer from a form of institutional attention deficit disorder. They are unable to focus, they have mood swings that push them either toward making snap decisions based on little or no information, or a sense of organizational inertia where no decisions can be made.

What might be done? Although there are no bath salts to calm turbulent waters, we also know that calls for somnolent Captain Queegs to steer academe's ship, or demands that the faculty gain a better view from the upper decks, consume valuable energy, resources, and time when an institution's participants should be working strategically, together. Those institutions that do best are those with faculty and administrators who work with the environment and with one another, those who look not only on what is immediately in front of them, but also toward the horizon. By offering this point, I am neither suggesting that colleges and universities merely adapt to the demands of the external environment and sail whichever way the winds take them, nor am I painting a feel-good campus where everyone must get along.

Over a half century ago Jose Ortega y Gasset advised us to have a mission that directs our action, and yet, less than 25% of those institutions I have studied have a definable mission that the organization's participants could define. In studies of business companies that work, the same point has been made over and over: without some sense of identity companies won't last in a competitive market. The point is not to fit a "niche" or "brand" our institutions because that's what they do in business, but rather, institutional identity provides a sense of purpose to those within the academic organization. An institution's mission enables faculty to organize priorities and permits administrators to set agendas about how to deal with multiple publics.

Faculty and administrators will also have, at times, competing interests and definitions of reality. Just as I have found that it is a mistake for administrators to

try to ignore faculty interests and go around traditional bodies such as Academic Senates, faculties also fall short when they reflexively reject administrative calls for reform, as if the past were an academic Utopia. We ought to think of campuses as arenas for creative conflict, rather than cozy consensus. To some, shared governance means that nothing can be done until everyone agrees. Such a model in the 21st century is a recipe for disaster. While academic organizations will always be messy decisional environments in loosely coupled systems where lack of clarity confuses the process, we ought not fool ourselves into thinking that the only route to academic excellence is a definition of shared governance that demands consensus. Instead, we might develop a more protean and nuanced sense of what we mean by "shared" so that the delineation of responsibilities enables greater discussion within a more structured decisional framework.

Postsecondary institutions need to be more focused, inclusive, and agile. Such a claim suggests that academic agendas become paramount, that we improve the structure of decision-making so that faculty are more, rather than less, engaged, and that decisions are made more efficiently. Decisions need to be based on comparative data with one's peer institutions so that we have a sense of how others are responding to similar problems. All too often I have found institutions where the faculty and administrators think of themselves as a lone ship adrift at sea; if they recognized that there were many ships out there facing similar problems they might be better able to develop an informed response about how best to chart a course.

By calling for "strategic responsiveness" I am not suggesting yet another management fad to move academe out of its presumed crisis. For over a generation we have culled ideas from the corporate sector with little success. Insofar as we are an organization built around the intellect rather than hamburgers or widgets, we also have an obligation to frame our responses in much the same way that we frame the best of our research efforts. Regardless of whether one undertakes natural science or social science, we begin with an organized research agenda, we seek peer review, we work collaboratively, and we are competitive. Such an agenda outlines the scope of work, but we also

recognize that some finding or additional piece of information may cause us to adjust our basic research agenda. We also keep at it.

Responsiveness suggests that colleges and universities must be more aligned with the environment. When I place strategic in front of responsiveness I am suggesting that those of us involved in the enterprise have choices to make. Unfortunately, today, more often than not, we are buffeted by the winds, and react to forces that descend upon us or arise from below. Those institutions that will be best able to respond to future transformations are those that are strategically responsive. Those that do not are those likely to find icebergs enroute to their destinations.

A modified version of this essay appeared in *The Department Chair, 13*(2), (Fall, 2002).

II. Terrorism and Academic Freedom

One of the more interesting organizations that has sprung up over the last decade is the American Council of Trustees and Alumni (ACTA). Lynne Cheney founded the group in 1995 in order to develop an association that might encourage trustees and alumni to become more involved in the workings of their institutions. Former Governor Dick Lamm and Senator Joseph Lieberman are on their National Council. ACTA publishes a quarterly newsletter and occasional reports that are available on the website: http://www.goacta.org.

In February, 2002, ACTA published *Defending Civilization: How Our Universities Are Failing America And What Can Be Done About It.* I recommend this text and encourage readers to consider its implications. The report outlines how universities have responded to the events of September 11th. The authors condemn colleges and universities because the faculty, in the view of ACTA, has not been sufficiently vocal in support of the Bush administration. "Many invoked tolerance and diversity," the report states, "as antidotes to evil." The report goes on to point out that "most faculty presumably shared America's horror … some did not." It also alleges that the faculty's voice across all campuses has been mute in its condemnation of the terrorist attacks, and the authors document "more than a hundred statements" of perceived faculty moral equivocation. Indeed, in their appendix they list 115 comments from faculty and students. A professor of law at Harvard, for example, stated "We should build bridges and relationships, not simply bombs and walls"; a counterpart at Pomona said, "Break the cycle of violence," and a sign at the University of Maryland read "hate breeds hate."

How shall we interpret such comments and ACTA's response? I admit to a fair amount of concern. ACTA is not simply a fringe group; the former chair of the National Endowment for the Humanities and a former vice presidential candidate are involved. Numerous newspapers have endorsed ACTA's articles. At a time when different constituencies should work together, ACTA has chosen an adversarial stance to yet again attack the faculty. Although I will encourage my students to read this report even though I very much disagree with it, I am troubled by an association such as ACTA, which seeks to circumscribe basic academic freedoms on our campuses with

the admonition that one ought to be free to say things – just as long as we never say them.

There is a troubling ring to this article and other reports of ACTA that seeks to paint all of academe with one broad and misleading brushstroke. Step back for a moment and consider their documentation. They have pointed out 115 comments in a universe with over three thousand postsecondary institutions and over one million full and part-time faculty. One need not be an ethnographer to know that to generalize about a population of a million with five score worth of comments is foolish. One also need not be a literary deconstructionist to know the implication when an author pens, "most faculty presumably shared America's horror…"

More importantly, we may often disagree with comments from a colleague about the war or a multitude of other matters, yet it remains our obligation as academics to defend the rights of individuals on our campuses to speak up and to speak out. None of ACTA's 115 documented comments are calls for violence. True, I disagree with many of the comments, but academic freedom is about protecting unpopular speech. Who needs to protect popular speech? By its very nature, it doesn't need protecting – it's popular. Those comments and ideas that are unpopular, out of fashion, against the norm, are the ones that we need to ensure have the right to be aired on our campuses.

Rather than resort to a populist demagoguery – "my country right or shut up" – we instead need to respond to terror precisely in the manner that has made democracy the greatest living experiment. Our campuses need to foment dialogue and debate, surely not stifle it. In *Leaves of Grass* Walt Whitman wrote, "Wondrous the English language, … language of growth, faith, self-esteem, rudeness, justice, friendliness, amplitude, prudence, decision, exactitude, courage. Language for the modern, language for America." Whitman saw democracy for what it must be – a noisy conversation about what we want to become. Those who try to define for us what we can and cannot say in arenas that should be the noisiest of places – our campuses – lessen such a conversation.

What, then, are our responsibilities as faculty? Postsecondary education is going through as significant changes now as at any time in the past generation. We ought not let the ACTA's of the world define the parameters of those changes, or force ourselves merely to respond to one or another flawed report. I encourage more of us to get involved in these debates on a public basis, on our campuses, and within professional organizations. We bring to the discussion a depth of knowledge that is often lacking and is crucially needed. At the same time, we also learn more when we are able to broaden dialogue beyond the parochial confines of our disciplines. I fully recognize that not everyone will agree with what I have to say – and I welcome constructive dialogue.

A version of this article appeared in the Winter 2002 newsletter for the Association for the Study of Higher Education.

III. The Responsive Campus: Nine Ways To Weaken Faculty Commitment To The University

During periods of economic downturns organizations need individuals to pull together and work in an orchestrated manner toward improvement. The temptation is to hunker down and maintain the status quo – that response is precisely what should not happen in a dynamic environment. Colleges and universities need creative solutions where multiple groups get involved in organizational improvement. In research I have done over the last decade I have worked from the assumption that colleges and universities are cultural entities filled with symbolic meanings. Faculty constantly interpret the discourse and actions that occur on campus in a "real" and a cultural domain. If they receive a raise they have gotten a "real" sense of their import, but faculty also interpret meanings on a daily level in a myriad of symbolic ways that also effect one's engagement with the organization. If an institution's leaders want to cultivate faculty commitment, they need to begin by cultivating the kind of culture they want.

Unfortunately, often the organization sends messages to the faculty that impoverishes the organization's culture, rather than enriches it. Here are nine common ways that a college or university sends messages to the faculty that create a sense of organizational dissonance, if not disengagement.

Force the individual to get a job offer elsewhere in order to receive tenure, promotion, or a raise. An individual desires a raise or promotion and is told by the department chair, dean or provost that a queue exists, or a shortfall of funding precludes any raise. The individual then goes out and gets a job offer from another institution, returns home, and the administrator who had just said that the raise or promotion was impossible, now backtracks and matches the offer.

Forget for the moment the fiscal resources that are consumed and the time that is wasted by the candidate. What does such a message send to the individual? In effect, the institution where the individual works has told the person to go look elsewhere, and if another organization values the person, then the person's home

college or university will as well. The effect is one of disengagement; why value a culture that only values me when another culture does?

Ask in the evaluation letter for a candidate coming up for promotion or tenure whether the evaluator's institution would grant the candidate tenure and/or promotion. At a time when institutions increasingly speak of the importance of teaching and bemoan the lack of faculty involvement in service activities, a letter to an outsider that asks for judgment about whether the evaluator would grant tenure at his or her institution sends a clear signal: only research matters. How could one reasonably state whether the candidate would receive tenure if the evaluator has never seen the person teach and has no sense of the quality of the person's service? The only criteria on which an external reader is able to render judgment is on the candidate's research; in a culture that values teaching, research, and service such a judgment is but part of the evaluation, not its entirety. The individual receives another message about what the culture values.

Convene a committee, give it a charge, and state that the committee will be responsible for making the decision – and then don't implement the decision. Some might suggest that giving any committee a charge to make a decision without administrative oversight is foolhardy. However, all too often I have seen administrators call committees together and provide the explicit message that what the committee decides will have fundamental impact on a particular topic. Faculty participate on the committee, assume that their decision will be useful and discover that for one reason or another, their decision is not rejected, it is just overlooked or ignored.

The point here is not merely to provide clear guidance about what a committee will or will not do at the outset. More importantly, call committees together when the issue will have an impact and the collective judgment of the group will be used. If the group is simply information sharing, then they ought to know that, and such busy-ness ought to be done sparingly. If faculty committees never have any voice in decision-making, then the signal to the busiest faculty is that participation in such a committee is a waste of time and they ought to focus on their research.

Ask for an individual's input and then ignore it. To be sure, faculty are adults and no one expects that every suggestion that one offers will be accepted. However, when an administrator explicitly solicits input, the expectation is that an individual's suggestions will be acknowledged, and perhaps used. If one's advice is consistently ignored, the result will be twofold. On the one hand, a busy individual will stop proffering suggestions that simply end up lost in cyberspace. On the other hand, in a culture that is dependent upon involvement the opposite will have happened.

Force reaction. Some individuals believe that an "open door" policy is a sign of good administrative leadership. The presumed signal of an open door is that individuals may enter at will. An additional signal is that the individual must step through the door to register his or her concerns, complaints, or suggestions. In a responsive environment thoughtful administrators do not wait for individuals to come through the door; they develop ways to gauge the climate of the organization by continually seeking input from individuals in a proactive and ongoing manner, rather than a reactive one.

Makes rules and don't follow them. Anyone involved with faculty know that a concern for process is paramount. Although one might bemoan the relative lack of speed with which decisions are made, the surest way to bring an idea to a halt is to ignore the rules that were set up to implement the idea. Part of the problem is the necessity of everyone working from the same decision-making assumptions. If a committee is to report to the Academic Senate and then the Senate reports to the Provost, then that is the process that has been established. If the issue is delayed or stalled in the Senate, one may succeed on occasion by simply implementing the idea, but an additional outcome is faculty disengagement with the process. Why get in involved in any undertaking, many faculty will ask, when ultimately the administration will decide what they want to do anyway?

Consistently choose the same people for committees and discourage dissent. Administrations often are impatient with the need for faculty deliberation on an issue. The lethargic pace of decision-making is maddening to administrators who feel the need to implement an idea they have been working on, perhaps for over a year. One way to circumvent the process is to involve a task force made up of faculty who

are sympathizers with the proposed idea. The assumption is that if a faculty committee looks over the administrative idea and supports it, then the administration can honestly say that faculty participation exists. The message, of course, is that honest deliberation is discouraged and if one wants to get on the good side of the administration then one needs to agree with the administrative idea. Such a message is precisely the wrong one to send at a time when colleges and universities need the full participation of the faculty in the array of issues that confront academe. Even in a time of crisis such as during the Cuban Missile Crisis, one lesson from President Kennedy's decision-making group was that better decisions are made when everyone does not think alike. Encourage diverse viewpoints to be represented and more faculty will participate, rather than fewer.

Assume that leadership and administrative skills cannot be learned and provide no seminars or workshops for faculty in new leadership positions. Administrative leaders increasingly point out the importance of the department chair during a period of reform. However, faculty expertise lies with their intellectual backgrounds. When someone becomes a department chair, dean and the like, such a position ought not be looked on as a promotion, but as a new job. In any new job, the trainee ought to be able to receive training and support from the administration. In higher education the opposite occurs. The individual is thrown into the administrative waters and either learns to swim on his or her own, or drowns. More often than not, the person treads water for a few years and then returns to the faculty. The implicit message is that academe is what one critic has termed an "organized anarchy" where nothing of importance can be learned that will help improve the organization's effectiveness.

Assume that the institution is an island and discussion with one's colleagues in other institutions or in professional associations is a waste of time. One irony of academic life in the 21st century is that communicative processes have greatly increased while reflexive understanding of different positions has decreased. Faculty and administrators live in a world of emails, faxes, pagers, tele-conferences and listservs. One is inundated from messages from the outside world. But when I have interviewed individuals about the issues that confront them the overwhelming

response is that they know what exists on their campus and evince little interest about what happens elsewhere.

The message is that those in the institution have the answer; to look outwardly for answers is either a sign of weakness or a waste of time. One hears, "We're so different from institution x, that what they do is of little concern to us." The curiosity is that in academic life faculty search for comparative understandings all the time. Faculty send their work out for review, attend conferences where they might learn about new breakthroughs in their area, and read voraciously to understand every nuance of their work.

In academic life, attendance at conferences by faculty is confined to one's discipline. A sabbatical is intended to sharpen the focus of one's intellectual undertaking – as well it should. However, if the organization seeks to empower faculty to participate in an increasingly complex organizational environment, then ways need to be found to enable faculty leaders to understand alternative models of particular problems. The organization also needs to create sustained dialogues on issues that may be new for someone who may be a recognized scholar in a particular area, but is a neophyte when it comes to some of the myriad issues confronting the institution. The classics professor, for example, may well stand apart in his field when it comes to Pericles, but has little understanding of the intricacies of intellectual property.

One response is to say that the Pericles scholar should stick with Pericles, and the general counsel can develop adequate policies on intellectual property. Such a response is wrongheaded, however, in a culture that values principles based on intellectual dialogue, academic community, and genuine engagement during a time of change. Colleges and universities in the United States became second to none in the twentieth century based on such principles; we drop them at our own risk.

A modified version of this article appeared in *The Department Chair, 13*(3), (Winter, 2003).

IV. Academic Destinies and the Role of the Intellectual

In Jose Saramago's remarkable *Blindness* we discover a world that has been hit by an epidemic of "white blindness." A man in a car is suddenly blind, and in short order, six strangers who come into contact with him also lose their sight. With a grim obsession for thick description, Saramago describes the horrors that befall the strangers. They are quarantined, beaten, raped, and disparaged until we learn that the whole world has become sightless and the seven strangers, now friends, are left to wander back to their abandoned homes. The chronicler and heroine of Saramago's tale is an optometrist's wife. She alone sees and with her sight helps the strangers.

The Nobel prize-winning author is undoubtedly one of the world's greatest living writers, and *Blindness* only confirms his strength as a satirist, ironist, and chronicler of life's events. The book is a parable about the horrors of the 20th century, humanity's shortcomings, and our ultimate need to love and be loved. Saramago seems to be asking: How much pain and suffering must we go through before we are able to open our eyes and see our need for one another? Only when we need one another are we able to see.

Toward the end of *Blindness* Saramago writes, "Destiny has to make many turnings before arriving anywhere." The word "destiny" is a worrisome idea in my lexicon. The belief in "manifest destiny" assumed that white America's rapacious appetite was justified in taking lands from Native Americans; America's "destiny" was clear – all the way to the Pacific Ocean, regardless of who stood in the way. When one speaks of destiny we also run the risk of appearing overly melodramatic: Superman's destiny was to save Lois Lane. At the opposite extreme, however, we reject destiny and assume that we are little more than pinballs in a cosmic machine, bouncing hither and yon.

I subscribe to Saramago's view of the world. We are neither placed on this earth merely to go through the motions, nor should we have the hubris to assume that our world will exist as we desire. Academics have a particular responsibility, a particular destiny, if you will, but there are many "turnings" before we are to arrive anywhere.

With no intended insult to plumbers or electricians, academic life is more than a trade – it is a calling, a vocation. I am troubled that we seem to have gotten very good at delineating our rights, but we have not clearly articulated our responsibilities.

I surely will be out front to protest intrusive attacks on the academy or encroachments on academe's fundamental beliefs such as academic freedom. However, the price the academic pays to enjoy particular rights is the responsibility to ensure that the academy is healthy, vibrant, and intellectually honest. Just as many of us are unwilling to forego the protections that tenure provide, so too should we reject an ersatz governance system that has few measures of accountability or claims to excellence. What, then, might the responsibility of the academic entail?

In a preliminary review of faculty participation in governance, James Minor and I have found that Academic Senates spend more time on labor-related issues than on academic topics. Unquestionably, retirement policies, leave policies, and tenure clock issues are examples of topics that must be of profound concern to any faculty. However, a variety of other non-labor related issues exist as well, and it seems that the professorate more often than not have ceded the right to participate in dialogues and debates pertaining to topics such as curricular reform, academic program review, and admissions policies. We are often excellent at creating new programs; we are not so good at monitoring them, and we are even worse at determining their quality and then setting the parameters for reform.

At the dawn of the 20th century various faculties had a common interest in seeing the idea of the University move forward. If faculty in the sciences were to undertake research in science, then the university needed to be healthy for that was where one did scientific research. The professions, for the most part, - medicine, law, and the like - coalesced and advanced within the university, not outside of it. Social scientists created a home for themselves within a university so that they were able to conduct research. Thus, even as graduate students were being socialized into their disciplines, there was also an implicit awareness across faculties that the university was a special organization deserving of trust and service.

A century later a different world exists. Scientists do not need to look to the core of their institutions in order to do their work; instead, they look outward to business and industry, where expensive and up-to-date laboratories await them. The same point can be made of many professions – faculty in business schools, for example, presumably have a greater need for strong ties with their confreres in the business world than with their colleagues across campus in the humanities. The bonds and ties of affiliation are no longer what they once were, so that academics act within their units facing outward, rather than within.

One result is that governance does not appear to be working too well. Why spend time working for the good of the commons if its health is inconsequential to my own well-being? When such a question is asked, the implicit answer impacts not only those who are currently faculty, but also those who are graduate students and will one day become faculty. I am saying something more here than simply that we have an allegiance to the discipline. Scientists in the early 20th century also had an allegiance to the discipline and an interest in seeing the university improve; accordingly, their investment in service and governance was greater than today where many see little benefit to their involvement in academic life.

There are those who will say that self-interest is what always rules one's life. I disagree, and this is where we return to Saramago's seven blind strangers. What they found in their pain and suffering was the importance of each individual and the centrality of the collective to not merely survive, but to enable hope and meaning. I fully understand the pressures, constraints and possibilities that exist for faculty. Our responsibility, however, is to the collective and to one another. We need to be more vigilant in ensuring that quality exists in the academy not because we will be financially richer, but because the life of the academic is inevitably rooted in communal obligations. When we do not take teaching seriously, or merely use the university as a way station en route to greater riches, we shortchange one another and we blind ourselves to the core values of the academy.

What are the implications if we believe what I am saying? As researchers and educators, we ought to serve as useful conduits for change and renewal. The need for historical analyses of the university, for philosophical discussions about the nature

of knowledge production, for anthropological studies about how members create meaning, and for psychological investigations about the nature of group identity, are all examples of vital research areas that help those of us in the academy to see. In this light, we are the optometrist's wife. We have no grand answers, no heroic destiny of our own, but because we study the organization in which we exist, we hold our own particular responsibility to help provoke discussions across campuses, thereby helping all of us to see.

A modified version of this article appeared in the Summer 2002 newsletter of the Association for the Study of Higher Education

V. A Walk in the Olive Grove

The freedom which we enjoy in our democratic government extends also to our ordinary life. We throw open our city to the world, and never by alien acts exclude foreigners from an opportunity of learning or observing although the eyes of an enemy may occasionally profit by our liberality.

Pericles, The Funeral Oration

In 1975 I graduated from Tufts University, cut my shoulder-length hair, and headed to Morocco to begin a two-year stint in the Peace Corps. I had few preconceptions about what Morocco and Islam would be like, but in keeping with most twenty one year olds, I suppose, I thought I knew myself pretty well. One lesson I learned in Morocco was how little I knew and how much I had to learn.

After ten weeks of language training we left for our assignments. With a combination of hubris, idealism, romanticism, and foolishness, I had asked to be placed by myself in a mountain town that was a day's journey from the trappings of modernity. I arrived in Tahala after two train rides, a third class bus, and a final hike into town.

Tahala was a Berber village nestled in the Atlas Mountains in central Morocco. They had just started a high school and I was to be the first foreign teacher – a ninth grade English teacher. The Peace Corps administrators had advised us to find someone to tutor us in Arabic, and admittedly, I needed someone desperately. I have never been good at learning a foreign language, and after ten weeks I was able to mumble a few phrases using the present tense, but I stumbled whenever I had to speak in the past, and the future tense got conveyed by my motioning with my hands as I muttered phrases in the present tense hoping my listeners understood. "I am leaving my bags in Fez yesterday," was one of my first language forays with my principal, "I go to Fez tomorrow. I return in two nights. But I teach today."

Because I was the only foreigner in Tahala, and an American as well, I was an object of intense curiosity. Many of my fellow teachers had studied in the town up the road where there had been French teachers, but an American was something new.

Children, especially, were astonished by me. When I went to market to buy a kilo of potatoes for the luncheon soup a mob of children followed me waiting to hear me blurt out my Americanized Arabic.

Although by the end of my stay my Arabic had improved and I had learned how to function in a society where I was constantly watched with a mixture of amusement and astonishment, during those first months in Tahala I have never felt so alone or grown so much.

We encounter difference in different ways. The easiest response is often the reflexive one: I know what's right and those who are different from me are wrong. Men who love men in a heterosexual culture are immoral, objects to be condemned. People whose skin is not white in an Anglo society must have some flaw. Those who are disabled are freaks of nature; perhaps they deserve pity – because they are different from the abled. If I do not have to confront those who are different from me, then I might fall back on a comfortable relativism where the Other's culture is not right or wrong, just different. Such relativism is made more difficult on an individual level when I must live in the foreign culture, and it is more anguishing on a national level when those who are different from "us" employ terror to try and destroy us. We then revert to reflexive responses.

Those first months in Morocco I had a wealth of similarly reflexive judgments. Sexual relations between men and women were topsy-turvy, making a mockery of everything I had just learned was good and just in my college classes. The pacifism I had articulated so clearly in working against the Vietnam War, seemed out of place in a society where everyone seemed to shout at one another. Even my definition of what was "fair" was challenged in a society where one had to bargain for everything – even potatoes. Why did I have to pay 25 cents more for a pound of potatoes from the same merchant than the woman who preceded me? The merchants, I felt, cheated me because I was a foreigner.

I lived in a small apartment where there was electricity for a few hours a day. I had been told there was a shower but the landlord had neglected to tell me that it was a cold- water tap that was above the squatter toilet, and the water worked only for an

hour at dawn. He, too, had not been fair. I spent a great of time in that apartment puzzling out what was right and what was wrong and who was I.

Soon after I arrived there was a knock at the door and I swung it open to meet Nezmi. He wore what I came to see was his standard clothing: a light brown djelaba that was soiled at the edges and old black shoes with holes in the tops. He was a small, rotund man with a tightly clipped black beard and intense brown eyes. I remember most clearly his laugh and his smile.

When I opened the door he grabbed my hands and offered the standard greeting: "Salem Ali-kum. – the peace of Allah be with you." Even with my neophyte's language skills I was able to respond in turn: "Ali-kum Salem – and the peace of Allah be with you."

He kept holding my hands and laughed slightly as he told me that he had heard I wanted an Arabic teacher. "I will teach you," he said. "We will be friends. Let's take a walk."

Nezmi taught me Arabic by taking me on walks in the foothills of the Atlas Mountains above town. As was standard custom in Morocco, he often held my hand as we walked, and the initial curiosity of the villagers gave way to a sense of normalcy as they saw Nezmi walking with his American. Although Nezmi was only a few years older than me, I always treated him more like a respected elder. We do not have a good equivalent in English for what Nezmi was; his life centered on studying the Koran although he was neither our version of a minister or a monk.
He usually kept to himself, although when we walked children often ran to him and kissed his hand.

"We are very different, William," he began that first day so many years ago.
"Do you like us?"

I forget my response but I recall my many conversations with him revolving around his initial question. He spoke quietly and corrected my numerous grammatical mistakes, but he kept asking me what I liked and didn't like, and how Morocco was different from my version of America.

He always arrived unannounced, but he developed a habit of coming toward the end of the day, and we would walk to an olive grove above Tahala to watch the sun begin to set. The last time I saw Nezmi we took what had become our familiar path to the olive garden and we sat quietly against a tree watching the sun's demise.

"Allah has given us many blessings, William," he said. "This day. Our friendship."

"Praise Allah," I responded. My Arabic had improved in the year I had lived in Tahala so that I now was able to speak in the present, past and future tenses, and Nezmi was departing for a Koranic school in the south.

"I am sad you are leaving, my teacher," I said, and he laughed at my formality, that I called him my teacher.

"When you go home to your family, William, try to remember the teachings of Allah. You are a Christian, but remember Allah's truths: Evil occurs when we forget. Always try to learn. The suffering of the world is from those who neither remember nor learn."

Pericles oration, and the madness of a handful of men, shows the dangers that exist when we throw open our city to the world. Nezmi's orations showed me the joys that arise when I am able to avail my selves to opportunities of learning and observing that same world.

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