

Speech by: Robert Morgan
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ON A FACULTY MEMBER OR A TEACHER

Though it is a pleasure to be with you and to address this group, I find that I do so at a time when once again activities on our nation's college and university campuses are foremost in the news. It is always difficult to make a speech during such times for there is a temptation to comment merely on the news of the day--to overemphasize recent events and imply importance which usually in retrospect the events commented upon did not deserve.

I cautioned myself to avoid that pitfall in my remarks tonight. I hope I shall be able to do so.

You know, I think it is important for us as we observe the protest movements centered on our campuses today to remember that the student activism we now see concerning the war in Southeast Asia and social issues here at home began as a reaction to a situation unique to our campuses. If I remember correctly, the present wave of student activism began more than a decade ago as a reaction to the non-teaching activities of the academic community.

It was during the late 1950's and the early 1960's that students began to stir against the academic community itself. At that time, it dawned on students throughout the nation that they had been caught up in an impersonalized society and were about to be impersonalized themselves.

They felt lost among the thousands of other students in the larger universities and abandoned by faculty members who more and more appeared too interested in their professional reputations based upon research and publication to take teaching and the individual student very seriously. Students felt isolated from college and university administrators who appeared more concerned for the academic reputations of their institutions and efficient administrative bureaucracy than student problems and concerns.

It was during these years that students in many institutions ceased to be individuals but became ID numbers, that personalities were reduced to codes and placed on IBM data cards---it was during these years when students first began to react and, quite frankly, I can appreciate the concern which prompted them to do so.

Not long ago I was subjected to what I believe was the same sort of "teaching" (and I have put the word "teaching" in quotes) that these students were rebelling against. Let me share with you my experience.

I was invited to take a course related to my duties as a public administrator. The topic was one in which I had a great deal of interest and needed as much instruction as possible. Furthermore, I was told that the instructor was a PhD. in this area, had had a great deal of practical experience, and was one of the best qualified persons in the country to teach the course.

I could hardly wait for the course to start, and after it started I could hardly wait for it to get over. Infact, I didn't---I quit.

This man who supposedly had so much to share with us came in each morning at 8:00 and read to us---literally read to us---from a dissertation he had prepared on the subject. This PhD., this "teacher" not only could not teach, he could not read.

Though initially my interest was high, I ended up being bored to death. In an attempt to salvage something, I asked one of my assistants to go for me and tape the lecture. He went one or two times and then he began to find ways to be somewhere else when the class was going on. I sent a second assistant and the same thing happened. Finally I just gave up.

I had a similar experience just a few weeks ago. A national expert on personnel relations was to hold a one-day seminar for high-ranking state government administrators. He showed up totally unprepared without notes or, seeming, previous thought. He rambled and rambled until one-by-one the participants found excuses to leave. I protested by leaving before lunch because my time was being wasted.

I can imagine how distressed the students on our campuses must become when they run into this same problem in the classroom. It is easy for me to understand how they become alienated by the system when this occurs.

But you know the cause of this alienation of students

within the academic community has nevertheless always puzzled me for a number of reasons:

First of all, although most people associated with our colleges and universities realize that research and publication are important academic activities, most faculty members would be quick to complain if a policy of "publish or perish" were to be adopted throughout this country's institutions of higher learning. I am sure those faculty members who would rebel against a policy of publish or perish would state emphatically that research and publication are not their primary responsibilities.

Yet in my opinion, faculty members themselves tend to over emphasize these activities whenever they set their own standards of excellence and sit in judgment upon each other. I have noted that when asked whether a professor is good, his colleagues will almost invariably answer by talking about whether or not he publishes and will almost never answer by talking of his teaching ability, his actual effectiveness with his students.

East Carolina's own regulations for faculty retention and promotion--which were written by faculty members themselves, I am told--might well be pointed to as an example of such overemphasis.

Second of all, professors guard jealously their prerogative to judge students, and this is reflected in our traditional grading system which seems to have as a part of it the notion that a certain percentage of every class should fail, that most of a class should get C's, and that very few should receive A's, and which clearly implies that the class as a whole and not individual students are being judged.

Yet professors almost never criticize each other's teaching, almost always view with apprehension student evaluations of teaching, quite often resent such judgments when done by college administrators and are reluctant to adopt a new grading structure.

Recently, I had an opportunity to have lunch with the Chancellor of one of the branches of the Consolidated University. He is concerned about this same problem, because

it is a concern of the students on his campus. He related an experience he had which I think illustrates what we must guard against.

(Chancellor's Story)

Third, in an effort to clarify policy and make things easier on students, colleges and universities often adopt strict procedures. Yet seldom do college and university officials re-evaluate these procedures after they have been in existence awhile to determine whether they are as effective as they were intended to be, and whether they really make things easier for the students involved. Instead, rules and procedures are quite often defended as though they existed for their own sake.

There is a legal maxim that when the reason for a law no longer exists that the law should also cease to exist. Perhaps we should continuously look at some of the rules and regulations we have handed down to make sure that we do not allow them to remain as restraints on student activity long after the reason for their being has disappeared.

Perhaps those of us concerned with the education of our youth should continually remind ourselves of Emerson's

statement that "A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds adored by little statesmen and philosophers and divines." This is not to say that we should compromise on principle. Principles are not subject to change but certainly policy should be.

Now I did not come here tonight to be a critic of the university community. I do not intend these remarks as criticisms, for I realize there is right on both sides of the questions I have raised. As a matter of fact, I was pleased when I turned to the dictionary for a definition of "professor" and found it defined as a "faculty member of the highest academic rank at an institution of higher learning, usually dividing his time between scholarship and lecturing and teaching." I personally think that this is the most perfect blend, for research and scholarship are important. They are requisites to good and effective teaching, and certainly no student would want a professor to stand before him who was not also constantly learning.

But I also believe that publish or perish is not the answer, for this policy causes professors to tend to neglect

their students. I realize that student performance must be judged, and I also realize that not everyone is qualified to judge a professor's teaching ability, but someone in the academic community should be concerned about it. It is an indictment of our system when students have to come to administrators to complain of inadequate teaching in the classroom.

College and University administrators should know what is going on in the classrooms. They must insist that students be taught--that old and obsolete teaching methods be discarded and replaced by that which is new and fresh and intellectually exciting. There is no reason for administrators to feel threatened when students come to them with reasonable complaints and suggestions about teachers and teaching methods. I believe quite strongly that our students can be the source of many good ideas and that it is a foolish man who spurns them.

I also realize the need for administrative rules and regulations. No one knows better than the members of my profession the importance of order and correct procedure. But I know also that reason sometimes dictates that rules and regulations be changed to meet the needs of a new day.

We all know that nothing distresses a young person more than rigidity springing from worship of that which is old and familiar and established. Perhaps the key is common sense for I believe that "Nothing astonishes men (and students) so much as common sense and plain dealing." Emerson.

Those of you who are connected with East Carolina are to be commended for the remarkable way in which you have handled the problems which have arisen here and responded to student needs and suggestions. I do not think that any college or university in this country can equal our record.

You might ask then why I raised these questions here tonight. The answer is this:

The problems I have touched upon so briefly tonight must be solved by you in the academic community. They cannot be solved by the Board of Trustees or anyone else. And we must remember that when the war in Southeast Asia is over, and when this nation turns to the solution of our social problems, in my opinion students are apt to once again aim their criticism at these issues which

originally gave rise to student interest. If the academic community hopes to avoid this future criticism,--and we must admit that much of it was valid--it must respond now and begin to get its house in order.

You must find ways of balancing research and teaching, you must find ways of judging and rewarding good teaching as effectively as you judge and reward good scholarship, and you must find ways of establishing procedures which will result in the periodic re-evaluation of the university's rules and regulations to see whether or not they are working as well as intended.

You too must find ways of involving students in this enterprise, for the expansion and change in university communities can only be justified as response to student needs. Two old proverbs come to my mind: one says that if you wish to teach, you must stop to think the scholar's thoughts and the other that the teacher who has forgotten his own boyhood will have little success.

So I as a concerned citizen and trustee would hope and urge that you, as those members of the university faculty

who seek to be most active in university affairs, would devote your trained minds to solving these problems, for the future of our colleges and universities depends on their solutions. If these problems are not solved by you, I fear colleges and universities themselves will again be the target of student unrest.

Neither you nor I nor the other trustees would like to see this happen. Although trustees everywhere must show a concern for the performance of the faculties in their institutions, you, the faculty, must take the responsibility for your own and your colleagues performances. I urge you to accept this responsibility now.