

Introductory Courses, Student Ethos, and Living the Life of the Mind

Marshall Gregory

The term *introductory courses* is perhaps unfortunate, for *introductory* is an adjective that often carries a slight. Insofar as *introductory courses* implies that they are less substantial than advanced courses, it masks the truth that students often find their introductory courses harder to master—because they are novices—than upper-level courses they take later on. Students are always more vulnerable to failure, either perceived or real, in the initial stages of learning than they are after having been seasoned by experience.

What Do Introductory Courses Teach?

Moreover, the deprecatory view of introductory courses also masks the truth that introductions both to disciplines in particular and to education in general, like introductions to people, often create indelible impressions of delight or disgust, attraction or repulsion. The tone of an introduction can have everything to do with the way a relationship subsequently develops, whether between two persons, between students and a particular discipline, and, even more significantly, between students and their overall education.

The great importance of introductory courses, then, is that they set up a stu-

dent's relationship to his or her entire college experience. Freshmen and sophomores learn not only about English, history, or economics, but about college as a whole. They learn to read the ethos of their academic community the same way they earlier learned to read the ethos of their own families, congregations, or neighborhoods. They sense the assumptions, even if they cannot articulate them, that their teachers and older peers hold about education in general. Within this essay, I propose to analyze a few of the most important contextual pressures on introductory courses, after I have tried to determine if there is anything distinctively characteristic—and valuable—about introductory courses in themselves.

The two most typical statements about introductory courses are well-meant and often right. Introductory courses, it is said, teach two things: first, they teach the foundations of disciplines, and, second, they teach the foundations of cognitive skills. As for content, such introductory courses as 100-level classes in languages, biology, psychology, sociology, and philosophy introduce students to the kinds of interests, issues, and modes of inquiry that identify each discipline's distinctiveness. As for skills, introductory courses teach students the basic foundations and forms of thinking: analysis, synthesis, evaluation, basic logic, practical reasoning, the rudiments of disciplinary discourse, basic research skills, strategies of rhetoric and argument in speaking and

writing, and the basic skills of arranging evidence.

However right this conventional, two-pronged definition of the content and function of beginning courses may be, I am always nagged with a sense that it begins too far down the road. It seems to me that introductory courses cannot teach either disciplinary content or cognitive skills as effectively as most teachers would like them to do without first improving their general intellectuality. By *intellectuality* I mean something more than and different from cognitive skills.

Intellectuality here means more than just the ability to analyze or synthesize; it refers to something more like an overall stance. It is what we call living the life of the mind. *Intellectuality* includes, for example, judiciousness, an avoidance of cant, a realization that first impressions are seldom authoritative, a sense that the easy answers may indeed be too easy, a pleasure in the processes of learning for their own sake, a hatred of dogmatism, and a sensitive nose for the smell of rotten evidence. And it means most, perhaps, the generosity to admit that, sometimes, the very arguments and positions that we dislike the most either hold at least half of the truth that *we* would like to claim exclusively, or, worse, that the objectionable positions hold half of the truth that our own position is somehow too feeble to contain. When any of us, students and teachers alike, can begin to live according to these principles, we may

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say that we have begun to live the life of the mind.

We seldom inquire into the intellectuality of introductory courses. I suspect that most teachers stick to what they often call “nuts and bolts” because they think that beginning students just aren’t ready for genuine intellectuality. If this is indeed the reason, I beg to differ. I don’t think students in introductory courses enter them with much capacity for intellectuality; they have received precious little training in it. But I think six-year-olds are capable of intellectuality if the opportunity is presented to them in the right way, and I think it is the job of introductory courses to make sure that when students leave them, they not only recognize the stance of intellectuality but have developed some ambition for taking that stance on their own.

Content and skills are crucial elements of all courses, but it seems to me that before students can make intellectual use of disciplinary content—that is, before they can begin to think like sociologists or philosophers, rather than memorize a list of things that sociologists and philosophers think about—and even before they can begin using cognitive skills such as analysis and synthesis, students need to be introduced to two other domains. I am referring to two sets of attitudes that are both antecedent to, and that condition, learning: first, a set of attitudes that many students hold about intellectuality itself, and, second, a set of general attitudes they also hold about learning. The generality of these two sets of attitudes is a function of their pervasiveness, not of their vagueness; they are both immensely determinative of what students learn, how they learn it, what they do with it, and the personal value they attach to it. Neither set of attitudes is synonymous with either the foundations of academic disciplines or with cognitive skills. I will discuss what I mean under the headings of intellectual presumptions and student ethos.

Intellectual Presumptions

One of the first introductions that I think important is to recognize the value of ignorance. Students’ minds as they come to us in their first year of college study have been formed by a society and reinforced by an educational scheme that

scorns ignorance. Of course, many kinds of ignorance deserve contempt such as ignorance that is willful, prejudiced, defensive, complacent, chauvinistic, and based on fear, to mention only a few. But in our haste to teach students the value of knowledge and the cost of ignorance we have, quite inadvertently I think, helped create two liabilities for our students.

Value of Ignorance vs. Value of Knowledge

First, as the words *value* and *cost* imply, we too often suggest that the value of knowledge and the cost of ignorance are measured almost entirely in financial terms. Although none of us objects to being paid for being knowledgeable, and we all hope that our students will be well paid for retaining the knowledge we teach them, if we emphasize repeatedly that our students are pursuing knowledge in order to gain financial rewards, they may infer—as, indeed, I am sure most of them do infer—that making money is the only good reason for higher learning. In that case, we teachers may wind up short-changing our students on the deeper rewards of acquiring an education.

If we were to be asked whether making money is the primary reason we would choose to offer students for becoming knowledgeable, almost all of us would say “no.” But I think none of us is aware of how often and how unthinkingly we reinforce it. It is so easy to promote the acquisition of knowledge to students in financial terms, and so difficult to promote the life of the mind in terms of pleasure, ethical development, emotional fulfillment, intellectual growth, or basic human development. Much of the time we all opt for the easier argument about money.

The second liability of our ignorance-bashing is the depreciation of curiosity. Curiosity is an essential foundation both for prolonged deliberation, whether performed in our own heads or in company with others, and for the delayed gratification of answers that can only be earned by incremental degrees and long commitments. We and our students both tend to think of curiosity as a function of wanting to know, and it is, but I think we too seldom make, and even more seldom feel, the distinction between thirsting for knowledge and having an answer.

Wanting to know grows out of a sense of ignorance to which all of us should be more finely attuned. We need to listen to the messages from our ignorance the way radio astronomers listen for messages from unseen planets, for such messages may carry vital information about the kind of a creature we are and how we may, by acting on such messages, gradually transform ourselves into some other, or at least improved, kind of creature. Curiosity is certainly more a function of wanting to know than of having an answer.

Too often our students’ inquisitiveness is of the stunted kind that admits no tolerance for a prolonged state of inquiry. Having an answer to some question is knowledge already gained and in the pocket. But taking time to be playfully curious, to shape ignorance into the desire for knowledge is another matter. Human existence is defined, as Diotima long ago told Socrates, by *need*. Living always in the space between Plenty and Poverty, human beings spend their lives trying to move away from various forms of deprivation and move toward various forms of fulfillment. Just as a wise physician respects a fever as a symptom of the body’s need for attention to health, wise teachers and students should respect ignorance as a symptom of the mind’s and soul’s need for knowledge.

The search for knowledge begins with a sensation of deprivation rooted in ignorance. As teachers we need to teach our students how to follow that sensation of intellectual deprivation back to the ignorance that is the symptom of the fundamental *need to know*. Then we must teach them what an adventure—and what a pleasure—it is actually to fulfill that need. Cardinal Newman says somewhere in *The Idea of a University* that “such is the constitution of the human mind, that any kind of knowledge, if it be really such, is its own reward.” Our students need to learn about this constitution of their own minds, and they need it as early as possible, right inside the entryway of our introductory courses. They also must learn about the intrinsic rewards of having such a mind. (They can learn about how much money it’s worth later, on their own.)

Generally speaking, however, students do not come to us expressing a funda-



mental sense of the need to know. Rather, they come to us hell-bent for answers. If they have the answer, they are proud; if they are ignorant of the answer, they are ashamed, and they bull their way through the territory of useful ignorance with all the avoidance-urgency of those who wish to escape shame. Instead of reinforcing this sense of urgency, teachers might help students more by teaching them to value *in the right way* their own ignorance. Students tend to think they have measured what they know when they have counted up their stockpile of A+ answers. Delaying the gratification of an A-plussed answer in favor of dwelling longer in a state of nonplussed ignorance where a range of answers may be considered before marrying one of them is usually not seen as an option.

By the way, faculty members who think they have measured what they know when they have counted up their stockpile of A+ publications, instead of letting their ideas mature and season, do the same thing. However that may be, a young man or woman in the pursuit of knowledge, as in the pursuit of a mate, should be willing to play the field for a while in a state of indecision and ignorance before getting engaged to either a single person or answer. Is “terminally engaged” too grim a way to put it?

Students’ predatory pursuit of answers works against prolonged deliberation. It seems like a waste of time. Students want to get to the bottom line—secure the answer, provide “what the teacher wants,” or merely get a good test grade—and lingering in ignorance seems like an admission of defeat. “This teacher’s just beating around the bush because he doesn’t really know the answer” typifies some students’ responses to a teacher who attempts to lead a class toward the deliberative exploration of ignorance. Yet it is precisely that exploration that will help students move closer to the intellectual stance.

Questions vs. Answers

It is a corollary of the former point, but one that deserves consideration, to say that students in introductory courses need to learn to ask questions more than to give answers, and to devote more time to learning how to ask questions than how to deliver answers. For all of their lives as students, which in the case of most first-year students is contemporaneous with most of their years as persons, answers have been the only stable currency for purchasing academic progress, prestige, and self-esteem. Because answers are what students give in response to teachers questions, most stu-

dents’ think that questions belong to teachers. They tend to think that answers belong to teachers also, only they know that paying their tuition gives them the right to make their own mental photocopies. Few students have teachers who reinforce the (perhaps) strange idea that questions belong to students.

Yet all of us teachers know, as disciplinarians, that the most productive scholars in our own fields are the people with the best questions. So why don’t we infer that one of our jobs is to teach students to come up with good questions? Because all answers in all fields really are “merely adequate and provisional,” and because all disciplines do maintain their vitality by formulating better questions, then why shouldn’t it follow that the pursuit of questions might be the best way for our students to learn?

Teachers could test for questions as easily as for answers. We could conduct discussions organized around student questions rather than teacher questions. And we could gradually help students believe that questions are better academic currency than answers. After all, questions tend to appreciate in value over time; answers to depreciate.

Concepts vs. Experience

The way our students emphasize the educational value of experience, the ease with which they talk about hands-on learning, collaborative education, peer-review, peer-tutoring, and, in general, the way they view education as *experience* rather than ideas opens a window onto an intellectual presumption that is ordinarily masked from view because it is so widely shared that its significance is difficult to see, like the difficulty of finding a blue-tinted contact lens on a blue carpet. There’s just not enough background contrast to get a good view of the hidden presumption. But let us try.

The most common epistemology I hear spoken by students seems to come right from the center of the British empirical tradition of psychology, beginning, I suppose, with Locke. Most of our students have been capitivated by Locke’s image of the mind as a blank tablet—I remember being entranced with this view myself at age nineteen. It is a view that holds sway as an intellectual presumption that

is determinative but unarticulated and almost never supported. According to this view, as we know, all knowledge arises from experience. The mind at birth is like a blank tablet on which, first, physical sensations, and then the educational scribbles of our teachers, churches, friends, family, and society write the messages that create not only a self but that create knowledge. Although there are many problems with this view psychologically and philosophically, I will not consider them here. There are also major pedagogical problems, which I never hear acknowledged by either students or teachers.

Plato seems to be the first thinker to have argued that knowledge is always knowledge of concepts, not of experience, but, interestingly, Plato's elevation of concepts over experience has received powerful reformulation and reinforcement from science. Modern philosophers of science, have been arguing for at least the last thirty years that facts, as in "facts of nature," are created by theories, not the other way round. That is, if we separate Plato's emphasis on concepts from his theory of Forms—*pace* Plato!—the modern scientific notion of knowledge as a construction of theories rather than of experience (thus the emphasis on "theory laden" facts) strikingly resembles Plato's construction of concepts laid out as dialectical argument. Neither Plato nor modern philosophers of science believe that there are a huge number of self-announcing facts running around in the world, which it is the purpose of education to enclose inside their self-evident corrals.

But this is exactly what many of our students, who are mostly romantics or existentialists rather than Platonists or philosophers of science, do believe. As the unconscious heirs of romanticism and existentialism they believe first in authenticity of experience and second in individuality of experience. Their faith in authenticity and individuality receives powerful reinforcement from therapeutic notions that have deeply infiltrated our culture and that reveal themselves in such phrases as "owning one's own experience," "feeling one's own feelings," and "finding the healing power within." From this point of view, concepts matter little

because they are the product of intellectual traditions, not of individual insight and genius. And the intellectual presumptions of romanticism and existentialism place much less value on the products of intellectual tradition than they do on the interior insights of the individual, preferably the individual of genius.

As (unselfconscious) romantics and existentialists, our students do not recognize the importance of concepts, and they don't like to linger long within their fuzzy precincts. Students are generally much more comfortable with facts instead. Moreover, they often object to being tested on concepts rather than facts, unless the concepts are actually being treated *as* facts, of course, in which case they are happy to memorize a list of the main features of the concept, such as memorizing that the concept of The Great Chain of Being is formed of the three subsidiary concepts of the Doctrine of Plenitude, the Doctrine of Hierarchy, and the Doctrine of Contiguity, and then listing these on a test as if they were the factual equivalent of asserting that water freezes at 32°.

In my view, students in introductory courses need to learn the importance of concepts and theories as the basic organizers of knowledge, and, in some senses, as the basic shapers of knowledge. But I am certainly not recommending a pedagogy of fact-bashing. I have seen enough of this to make me depressed. Rather, I advocate balancing students' naive confidence in the ontology of facts with a suitable recognition that the way facts become facts in the first place, and then the way they get organized into meaningful structures of knowledge, is not according to self-selection, or to self-announcement, or to a transcendent pattern that only teachers can see.

Students should learn, as Plato would like to teach them, that they can comprehend some things they have never experienced, such as perfect triangularity, the speed of light, and absolute zero. They also should learn, as modern science would like to teach them, they can have much experience of things that don't necessarily yield knowledge or truth just because they are actually experienced, such as the empirical "fact" of the sun's arc across the sky every day being taken as "knowledge" of a geocentric universe.

I think, furthermore, that the place students need to learn this distinction, and to think about its significance, is in introductory courses where it will help them acquire the intellectual subtlety and patience to deal with ideas as ideas, not just as substitutes for facts.

Student Ethos: Humility vs. Self-Centeredness

The following discussion is not meant as student-bashing. I make this disclaimer because discussions of ethos, which means character, always tread onto sensitive ground. I will be talking here about students as a group, not as individual students, and about the ethos of students *as* students, not as persons in the broadest sense. When students are assessed only as students, I find that many of them exhibit an ethos that cuts across the grain of real learning and the intellectual stance in ways that they are mostly unaware of, and also in ways that we as teachers frequently, if inadvertently, reinforce. The features of student ethos I will discuss are not faults of moral character or intelligence; they are not attitudes that students have developed in order to devil their teachers or sabotage their own learning. Instead, they are attitudes that students have learned from their very own schools and teachers. Insofar as I am critical of these attitudes, it is clear that I think students are more innocent in the dynamic that produces them than are the teachers and schools that reinforce them.

The leading principle of contemporary student ethos that introductory courses could help students address is, for lack of a better term, *self-centeredness*. I am not talking about arrogance. Although a few students are arrogant, it is not a problem that I think teachers do much to create or reinforce. The kind of student self-centeredness I am referring is a more insidious, yet mostly innocent, usually unacknowledged assumption that everything in the classroom not only does—but should—revolve around the students' feelings: whether they feel deprived, satisfied, frustrated, fulfilled, pleased, bored, entertained, or rewarded.

The bad old days when what happened in a classroom was determined by teachers consulting only their own inclinations and feelings have been so turned

around that now teachers consult mostly the inclinations and anticipated feelings of their students. This has become so much the norm that students expect it. When students today, for example, think that a given teacher is requiring too much work or grades too hard or assigns boring readings, they take it as a student right to make these judgments about the teacher. Furthermore, students—with an unconscious assumption of their status as the court of final authority—believe that they can judge categorically and unequivocally.

Whether trading scuttlebutt among themselves or filling out course evaluation forms, it's difficult to picture more than an occasional student, a rare student, saying anything like, "Well, I don't like the way Professor Gregory does X, but, before I criticize, let me try to look at the issue from his point of view." The subtext of a course evaluation form, at least as students are invited to read it, is that the customer is always right: if the coat, or the teacher, does not fit, the customer doesn't have to equivocate in criticizing its cut, style, or function. Although most students would concede, if asked, that the lion's voice in determining both the amount of content to be covered or the standards of their own performance should rightly belong to the requirements of the discipline and to those who have proven themselves in that discipline—in short, their teachers—most students still unconsciously assume that the teacher's lion's voice carries genuine authority only as long as it accords with their own judgments. Students mostly reserve the benefit of the doubt for their own judgments, not for the teacher's.

In many ways this reversal in classroom focus has been good for both teachers and students, and there are important senses, of course, in which students are quite justified in making evaluative judgments. Teachers should never let the impulses of ego or the enthusiasms of scholarship eclipse the needs of students. When this happens students usually see it and have a right to call it. The days when students had to take whatever teachers dished out, are gone, and for the better.

But without calling for a return of the bad old days, I believe that the emphasis on student satisfaction may carry an

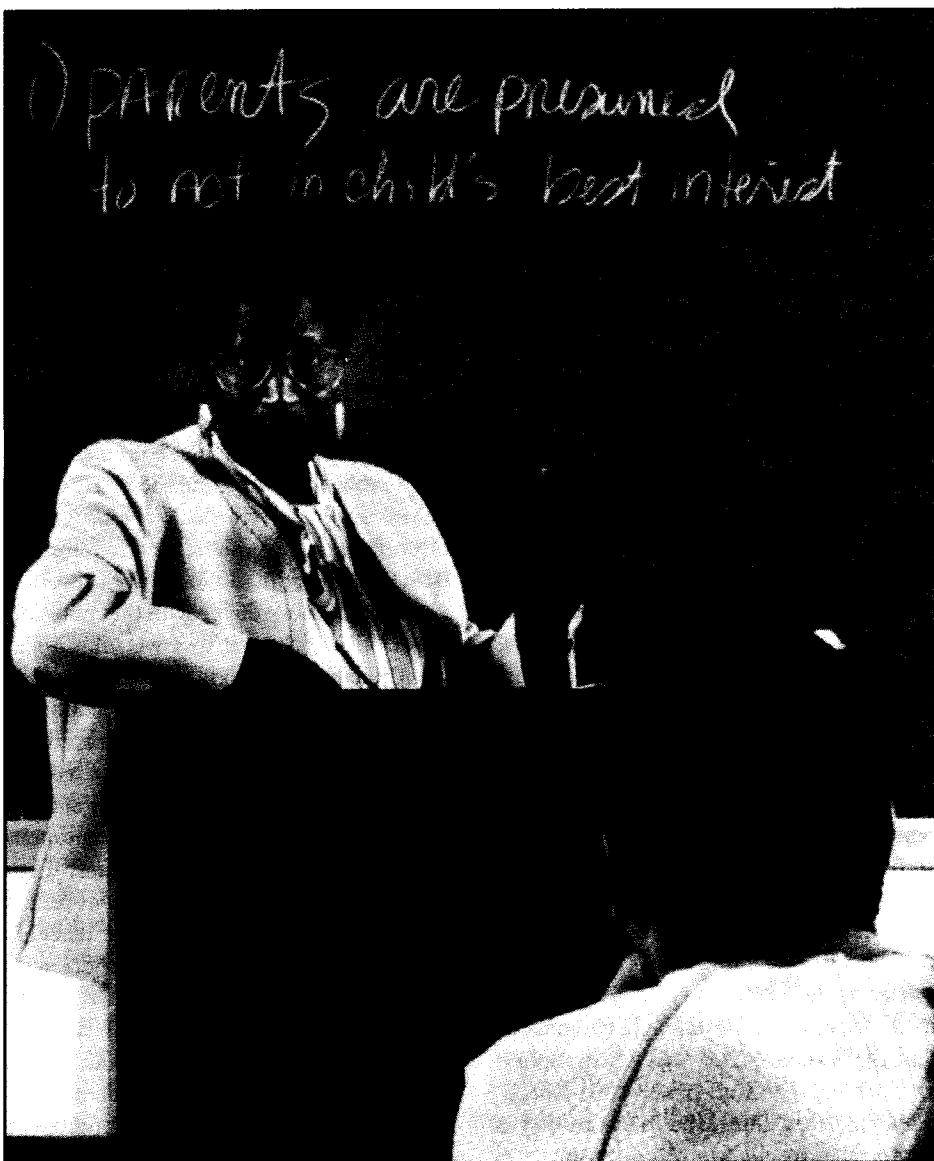
unfortunate tendency to cement students in the kind of unconscious self-centeredness that I am analyzing. The best antidote for it, I think, is for teachers and students alike to agree that learning is not necessarily cutting and trimming what is to be learned to fit either the inclinations of teachers alone, or the interests, abilities, or available time of the students alone.

Teachers and students alike would do better to agree that learning is, on the student's part, a willingness to participate in being called outside of the ego or the self in order to capture a glimpse of something that exists *out there*, and to relate it somehow to what he or she has, or is, *in here*. The theory of relativity; the biological classification of organisms; the principles of plant genetics; the literature of

Shakespeare, Ralph Ellison, and Jane Austen; the philosophy of Plato, Descartes, and Martha Nussbaum; and, indeed, all the knowledge in all of the disciplines, exist outside the student. A fundamental question that follows from this truism is, then, what does it mean to learn about these things?

Are Students' Comfort Zones Important?

The worrisome self-centeredness I see today, which I do not think is a self-conscious ideology of student empowerment, leads students to assume that something we might call a "comfort zone of effort and success"—not anything external such as the standards of a teacher—should set the limits on what is required both in content and in the standards of performance.



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I am aware that some of you are asking, "So what's new? Haven't students always been immature and resistant to challenge? Aren't some students just lazy? Doesn't immaturity simply come with the territory?"

The point is worth belaboring, I believe, because it is *not* about immaturity and laziness any more than it is about arrogance. I do not believe that most students are inappropriately immature or genuinely lazy. But students' own notions of a comfort zone of effort and success should not dominate the learning process as much as they do. However, I am not saying that what gives the comfort zone its authority for students is their immaturity and laziness. Too often both students and teachers alike fail to operate from a belief that the best version of a student's ethos *as* a student is taking that big risk of going outside of the self, accepting grades lower than A's while trying to earn them, being humble enough to concede that the standards for success exist outside of the comfort zone, and, finally, believing that this kind of humility is appropriate for getting an education.

Education is too limited, by trying to fit notions of comfort as if discomfort meant that something is going wrong. I know that when I encounter criticisms or compelling versions of ideas I disagree with I feel uncomfortable, but I also know that in that discomfort lie the seeds of my own learning. Why do we teachers so often teach as if our students were too frail to endure this kind of discomfort—and to then enjoy the growth that may follow from it? Or is it that we think them insufficiently deserving of the challenge?

Students' failure to view education as outside of themselves is mirrored by teachers' failure as well. I am not assuming that teachers with the lowest student grade averages are the ones who automatically hold the most appropriately high standards—the issue of student ethos cannot be improved simply by teachers "getting tough"—nor have teachers with the highest grade averages all caved in to student pressure. Teachers and students alike have been pressured by four forces in society and in academe that obscure the vision of work and the attitude of humility I am talking about.

Four Stressful Forces

One pressure we all feel, students and teachers alike, comes from living in a society that values instant gratification in all things. It doesn't matter that our current computers are thousands of times faster than our old typewriters; they are never fast enough. No matter that the food we eat is incredibly more exotic and varied than the diet available to our grandparents; if we haven't tried the new imported mushrooms from Poland and that new kind of salsa made out of sun-dried tomatoes, we feel positively behind the times. It is no problem that we haven't the cash for that new coat or lamp; a credit card will get it delivered this afternoon.

The academic version of the mania for being up-to-date has pushed into the background the scholarly model of setting sight on a distant learning objective, pursuing it for years in relative obscurity, and finally publishing the seasoned results of thorough research and long thought. Although this model of scholarship may not be entirely forgotten, who can deny that it seems very old-fashioned to most new Ph.D.'s? A scholar's stock on

the academic DOW may rise in value more as a consequence of fifteen minutes of fame at a national conference than from spending a lifetime getting something right that may never find fame. Graduate students have to publish these days in order to get job interviews. At some schools assistant professors have to publish two books in order to get tenure. Everyone must do everything, and they must do it in superlative degrees, and, above all, they must do it now. If not done now, the chance will be lost; the job will go to another; the contract will forfeit; the promotion will be denied; the person will fail.

Is it little wonder that students raised in this climate both in society and in school turn out to be innocently self-centered? They don't feel they have the leisure to go outside of themselves. Is it any wonder that students want answers, grades, and rewards *now*? These are the amulets that ward off failure. Students believe this because of the general climate of society, and because we often reinforce this amulet view of answers, grades, and rewards. *We* live by amulets designed to ward off failure so we sometimes lack the generosity of imagination to think that our students could live any differently. Mostly they don't. Students don't feel that they can take time to become seasoned; they must be in the job market tomorrow. They need to know the fact, the process, the information now; and they don't need teachers blocking their way with C+'s because they don't have the fact or the process quite right yet. Our culture of instant gratification and achievement turns school and learning into a brown-and-serve activity: "Five minutes in the oven gives you perfect results every time." *We wish*.

A second pressure we all feel is the infiltration into academe of the retail model of education in which the university acts as a retail outlet for the kinds of information and credentialing necessary for jobs, students are the customers, and teachers are the clerks who sell the merchandise on the floor and who have to deal with complaints and alterations. As the competition for students at many schools gets fiercer, as administrations and faculties get more intent on increasing student retention, and as university

survival in many tuition-driven institutions depends on keeping enrollments up, faculty members are more pressured to make sure that students stay happy.

In part this pressure is self-applied—faculty know the stakes—and in part it comes from administrators who emphasize the necessity of keeping the paying customers coming. Without imputing base motives or a sell-out mentality to anyone, we can see that pressure on faculty members will be picked up as messages by students, who today take it for granted that faculty members will be accommodating; be willing to negotiate about late papers, sloppy assignments, and attendance; and will go a second or even a third mile in order to keep a student enrolled in a course or in the university.

Although teachers' supportiveness is good when done for the right reasons, the pressure to please students so they will stay enrolled pushes up against the better motive of pleasing them in order to improve their learning. Students could exploit a situation in which their raw, tuition-paying presence is so much an object in itself. That few, if any, of them seem inclined to take advantage is to their credit. I don't think students' motives are generally base or manipulative any more than I think that of faculty or administrators' motives.

But I do think the whole atmosphere in which students receive a constant stream of messages about how valuable and valued they are just for *being in school*, *not necessarily for doing anything remarkable in school*, serves to intensify a kind of innocent and unconscious self-centeredness. Students are not necessarily rotters just because they pick up on the message from the university that their presence at the institution is cherished, but many of them will infer from this message that their feelings and their satisfactions—rather than the requirements of disciplines or external standards of performance—occupy the center of institutional focus.

A third variable reinforcing student self-centeredness is the emphasis since the late Seventies on student-centered classrooms. This pedagogy has had a positive and widespread influence on teaching in almost every discipline that I know of. I should not like to be under-

stood as advocating a return to straight lectures or authoritarian teaching. Peer-tutoring, collaborative learning, peer-review, and teachers who are willing to share classroom authority with students are immensely effective in helping students find the courage to learn, find their own voice, and discover their own ways of knowing. However, it seems clear to me that unless teachers carefully modulate their messages to students about student-centeredness, and that unless students are persuaded that we also need to center on, for example, content and learning—then they are left free to conflate student-centeredness with self-centeredness without ever seeing their own psychic sleight of hand.

Although I am not denying the value of student-centered classrooms, I am not certain that the implications of this pedagogy have been fully considered, even by the people most committed to it. How can we expect students to become true learners moving closer to an intellectual stance if they are allowed to think that all true learning must "relate" to the self, rather than leading them to think that learning is about getting *outside* the self?

I advocate, then, an ethos of student (and faculty) humility because all true learning begins with the recognition of other forces, other objects, other processes, and the Other itself—that person or group different from us. All of these have lives that are as legitimate, as real, and as valuable as our own. Until we can break through the crust of ego and ethnocentrism sufficiently to acknowledge uncountable domains of *not-us* in the world, then I question what or how much we can ever learn. All learning tethered solely to the self is on a rope too short to meet a wide range of Others. To see how small a piece of the world each of us comprises is to develop an ethos of humility not to be confused with hang-dog abasement or with the suppression of self-respect. In understanding that we are not the center of the universe lies the beginning of an adventure in learning that will take our students, and us, out of the self in that paradoxical way that fulfills the self at the same time that fulfillment ceases to be the main objective, and that completes the self as it accepts most readily its need for the Other.

Such an ethos of humility will free students' minds to range into the domains of the unknown, the adventure of which compares to self-centeredness as listening to Musak in an elevator by yourself compares to playing music in a chamber group. Listening to Musak is lonely, and the lonely poverty of the activity, if prolonged, would surely diminish the self. One plays chamber music in a group, but the playing expands the self through the control we exert over our impulses for gratification or attention in the interests of a creation more interesting than the impulses of self, namely the music and the sharing of the making of the music. In all true learning, students need to feel, if not see, preferably both, the usefulness of this distinction between self-gratification and self-fulfillment. They tend to think that self-gratification *is* self-fulfillment, but it is not, as we know. Self-gratification may be indulgent and even at times anti-social, while self-fulfillment is controlled and is usually social.

A fourth reinforcement of student self-centeredness is the postmodern elevation of subjectivity as very nearly a final authority for everything. The view of many postmodernists is that old-fashioned rationality has been merely a fiction, perhaps invented by men, and is a rhetorical ploy on the part of self-interested power groups who use the fiction of reason to retain their power over others that they then marginalize and oppress. Language, moreover, tends to be an independent force in the postmodern view, tripping readers and writers alike with its open-endedness and unexpected contradictions and deconstructions, slipping past intentionality and aesthetic control like an eel in water, and in general proving how impossible communication is rather than being the medium that makes communication work.

An additional part of the postmodern perspective is that human selfhood, or, rather, human "subjectivity," is so deeply embodied in various forms of constraint—gender, for example, as well as cultural, historical, linguistic, ethnic, racial, and class—that no overarching kind of authority (such as rationality) and no general concept (such as universal definitions of truth, goodness, and justice) hold any sway.

All persons must decide for themselves, from the perspective permitted to them by

the various forms of their enscripting embodiments, what identity, what truth, what justice, or what goodness makes sense to them or serves their own interests. If some men and women assert, for example, that they are so deeply scripted by gender that they can never really hope to understand each other, then postmodernism protects the authority of their subjectivity by providing supportive arguments for why men and women are more different than they are similar as human beings. They may as well have come from different planets, as in "men are from Mars, women are from Venus."

Without stopping to quarrel with these views, all of which I do have profound quarrels with, the point for us is that granting subjectivity such vast power—authority over truth, justice, and goodness, not to mention aesthetics and rationality—cannot help but deepen a student ethos of self-centeredness.

In a world of independent subjectivities, of partial perspectives only, of nothing but rhetoric, where all embodied forms of power are self-serving and duplicitous, what happens to the authority of the teacher, the course content, and the standards for performance? They melt. They lose traction. They lose credibility. Postmodern views, if acted on fully, would destroy education by erasing the difference between ignorance and knowledge. When subjectivity is all, ignorance disappears, and if ignorance disappears, knowledge also disappears. And if ignorance and knowledge disappear, so does education.

No one I know, either students or teachers, actually pushes these views to their absolute limit, and this is what allows us all to continue and to conduct real education anyway. But can anyone doubt that such an artificial elevation of the significance of subjectivity—unless carefully developed in the context of a dialogue with competing views—justifies a kind of student self-centeredness that relieves students of the need to get outside of themselves in order to become educated?

University Ethos: The Life of the Mind

Not only do introductory courses need to help students cultivate an appropriate

ethos, but they need an appropriate university ethos as well. What, after all, is an, or *the*, appropriate ethos of the university? Students have four years to observe us. What do they see? What ethos do we present? They see a university that is direly fragmented. Depending on the student's angle of vision, he or she will see the university looking like a corporation, a research institute, a technical school, or a liberal arts survivor straight out of the Italian Renaissance or the British public school system. I cannot say here how all these disunified components actually fit together—I suspect they do not—I can only say what I think the dominant ethos of the university should be. Solely in the context of some hypothesis about institutional ethos can we as teachers ever get a really clear idea about the appropriate ethos of our introductory courses.

I propose that the function of the university is to cultivate the life of the mind and to make the advantages of that cultivation available to both individuals and to society. What does this mean for introductory courses? I believe that teachers should take as one important aim, perhaps the most important, not merely the traditional aim of teaching content and skills, but the teaching of general principles of intellectuality. The intellectual stance I described earlier is defined as living the life of the mind. In addition, introductory courses should teach students how to talk about and how to analyze the processes, aims, and value of their own educations.

They have to be taught how to learn. Having an intuitive sense of ignorance and a need to know is not enough. The very considerations discussed in this essay—intellectual presumptions, student ethos, and various rationales for learning—are topics that students need to know how to think about on their own and with others. Introductory courses are the only places in the curriculum where this kind of education can occur for most students. If taking time for this goal means that we cover less disciplinary material than we wanted to, or teach fewer skills, it may be a worthwhile trade-off in the long run.

The ultimate objective is to help students see that human existence is

inescapably rooted in both individuality and community. Although we are each individuals, we are also part of a vast swell of humanity that courses through time and history and meaning with a range more vast than any of us alone can ever fully understand or control, but to which we each contribute by the sheer mass and force of our individual lives. If students can see this, then they may better understand that becoming educated can shape the quality of an individual destiny. Education has this power because it not only can enlarge an individual's contribution, but it

connects the mass and force of an individual life with the lives of other people in many periods of history, in other cultures, and in different social circumstances.

The life of the mind begins with the ability to see the relevance of that which does not immediately address the senses: to see ideas, the imagined reconstructions of history, the processes of nature as theorized by science, the fictions of literature, and the connected propositions and accounts of causes in philosophy. Once this vantage is achieved, the person who knows how to

live the life of the mind can progress to making good use of disciplinary content and cognitive skills. But this vision of a life that is at once individual and communal, separate and connected, must come first, I think, and the proper place to make this vision seem real, and eventually compelling, is in introductory courses. To grasp this vision is for students a huge challenge. To teach it is for teachers demanding, as well. But the vision carries rewards that will sustain a lifetime of effort, thought, and creative investment in the classroom.