

To the Faculty Council

Memorandum on Improvement of Teaching

The subject of improvement of teaching assumes an increasingly high priority in the university agenda, attested by exhortations from the deans, requests on the annual faculty reports for evidence of improved teaching, and campus-wide student evaluations of all courses. Having given due concern to this matter, I should like to share with the rest of the faculty my own discovery, after 25 years in the classroom, as to the most effective method of communicating knowledge to the young.

The method, in short, is total abstinence from spirituous beverages. This past spring semester, while serving as visiting professor at the University of California, Berkeley, I adopted this strategy, as a desperation measure to cope with 250 Berkeley students, who wander in and out of the classroom continuously as if it were a motion picture show, along with innumerable stray dogs, intermittently hissing, yawning, and on occasion pinning notes of stern criticism to the podium informing the instructor how to improve the content of his lectures. Under these conditions, the lecturer must indeed be in full mastery of all his powers. Consequently I resolved on a strict regime of body- and mind-building to be in tiptop condition for the eighty minute confrontation twice a week. After a decade on the Bloomington cocktail circuit, a steady inhalation of beer while watching TV football, and increasing reliance on such novelties as orange and lime vodka, the sudden shift to ginger ale and buttermilk comes as a shock to the system, which, I am happy to report, soon adjusts. Marching to the lectern with a springy step, facing the class with steely vision, one feels a new snap of the mental muscles and a sense of confidence as he delivers a clear, persuasive flow of ideas in a rippling stream to an entranced and admiring class. Gone are those fuzzy blackouts, sudden memory lapses ("now who the devil was the Father of our Country?"), and disturbing non sequiturs as one seeks to recall the beginning of his sentence.

May I respectfully suggest that henceforth our university officials set an example



for the faculty by serving at their genial receptions, soirées, salons, smokers and mixers nonalcoholic drinks, perhaps a tasteful assortment of Sprite, Fresca, and variously flavored Metrecal, as an example of their own commitment to good teaching.

There are of course other corollary possibilities: early morning exercises, joggings in the evening, healthful sporting activities in the gymnasium. Has the Committee on Improvement of Teaching obtained from the Bureau of Educational Research a graph on the correlation between successful classroom hours and hours spent in the gym? I notice that Henry Remak, a 5 point teacher, regularly jogs around the track. Recently I have abandoned the use of the elevator in Ballantine to walk the eight flights to my office. I look forward to the day when our entire faculty of steadily improving teachers marches confidently up the stairs, leaving the elevators to our inspired students.

*Richard M. Dorson*

Richard M. Dorson  
Professor of History  
and Folklore

