

AAUP Report

Autumn 1991

American Association of University Professors
Bloomington Chapter

FACULTY FORUM ON THE IU PRESIDENCY PLANNED FOR FALL

All IU Faculty are invited to attend the Bloomington chapter's next major activity: "AAUP Faculty Forum on the IU Presidency." Because President Ehrlich will be reviewed for the first time this year, the AAUP wants to provide an opportunity for faculty members to hear informed addresses from thoughtful speakers and speak out on issues concerning the IU Presidency in the coming years. Too often formal reviews reach only a few people, and individual voices become lost in composite documents. This public forum provides the opportunity for you to share your views. You will receive a flyer listing the speakers and some issues for discussion.

WHY JOIN AAUP?

1. We are your national representatives.
2. We work on your behalf locally.

Faculty sometimes forget that in addition to a particular discipline, we are members of the **professoriate**. College professors have joint interests and needs that span our specific academic fields. The AAUP is the organization that articulated in the 1940 Red Book the essential freedoms and responsibilities that faculty and administrators know as **academic freedom** and **faculty governance**, and the AAUP adds your weight to the professoriate's collective presence before Congress, TIAA/CREF, and other institutions, and gives you a voice on issues of national educational and scholarly importance in the media.

On the local level, the Bloomington Chapter actively participates in faculty governance and setting the agenda for scholarly debate on policies and practices affecting governance, remuneration, and teaching and research. The AAUP is able to respond quickly and flexibly to emerging issues because it is free of the constraints that bind the institutions within the University. The questions immediately before us include:

- * What functions does the faculty want the **president** to play?
- * What is the proper balance at IU between **athletics and academics**?
- * Are **multiculturalism** and **academic freedom** compatible in Bloomington?
- * To what degree is **political correctness** a Bloomington problem?
- * Are **fighting words** damaging the campus intellectual climate?
- * Is the University a **federation of campuses and schools** or a single university?

The Bloomington AAUP comments on such matters as proposed changes in **retirement benefits, family leave plans, and pay policies and practices**--issues that affect us all. Join AAUP to become part of one of the strongest voices in Bloomington--the AAUP.

We urge you to join the AAUP, and if you already belong, to pay your local dues. (Call Dick Carr at 5-1134 if you aren't sure how to do this.)

--Susan Tyler Eastman
1991-92 President, Bloomington AAUP

FORUM ON TEACHING AND RESEARCH: A REPORT

About 100 members of the Bloomington faculty participated in the AAUP forum on Teaching and Research in early February. The program began with Paul Strohm's analysis of the way we've been using the word "excellence" actually sponsors a narrowing of our notion of research. (An abridged version of Paul's keynote address appears elsewhere in the newsletter.) As George Kuh's run-down on national ranking schemes showed, any simple effort to judge our own excellence by national rankings (21 among Graduate Schools in 1982, according to one measure) is bound to be misleading. Rankings have remained relatively stable, and the only way to work our way up is: 1. to emulate other programs, 2. to acquire more resources, and 3. to hope that someone else will slip. Significantly, IU's rankings based upon student perceptions of how well we're teaching have slid downward in the past year or so.

The two panel discussions that followed these presentations turned to more concrete issues. Jim Craig suggested that we do a bad job of letting students know why faculty do research, what its results are, and how it affects their own learning. Kathy Krendl countered with the notion that we need a breadth of approach to teach in the large, service classes that may lie far from our own more narrow research field. And George Jurgens made an impassioned declaration that we are in a crisis in which research threatens to take over teaching on this campus.

The second panel addressed some of the issues of the impact of teaching on research, and Susan Gubar suggested that the interchange was not always, and at every stage of a career, beneficial. She raised issues of keeping lines clear between faculty and student research in graduate teaching, keeping a fresh view of undergraduate potentiality in the face of even greater gaps in their knowledge and motivation, balancing the jobs of telling what we already know with the possibility of learning from our students in particular classes. Mike Metzger and Ben Brabson also

spoke about appealing to the best in students in business and in science, by engaging them in the growth of the research process.

The session ended with a rousing talk by Frank Newman, President of the Education Commission of the States, which left no doubt that if the academy does not attend to issues of teaching, and teaching well, state legislators will begin to take those issues on themselves. We are at a crossroads in undergraduate teaching, in short, and we all must find some proper direction. The final suggestions in Paul Strohm's address give us at least a start in thinking about how to reform ourselves.

--Mary Burgan

THE IDEOLOGY OF "EXCELLENCE"

We here at Indiana University have heard a lot about "excellence" in the last few years. Many recent policy innovations have been administratively justified in its name. In fact, many of our incumbent administrators wield the concept talismanically, as a kind of charm to dispell doubt and indicate preferred alternatives. Part of its force is the implied commitment of its user to high ideals: no one would dare grasp this sword if he or she were not worthy to wield it, and the person who grasps it seems committed to a solitary crusade, a kind of noble unrest not to be placated until a hard goal is achieved. And a powerful talisman it is; no cause is so unpropitious that it can't be rescued, no argumentative position so weak that it can't be revived, by its invocation and use.

Varied in its uses, this powerful concept is most often employed not to praise but to blame: to identify and stigmatize those less-than-excellent groups and strategies and persons who possess no real desire to better themselves. Much of the activity that goes on under its name is a winnowing-process, a separation of those who possess excellence from those who lack it, the relative few who desire it from the torpid many who refuse its call.

Excellence has always been an object of aspiration at Indiana University, but it used to be thought of as something hard to define, nebulous, diffusely distributed through our ranks. Many of us have sought this quality for our institution and ourselves, in a plurality of highly individualistic ways and under a variety of definitions. Recently, however, it has come into much more precise and confident use--and especially administrative use--to describe a limited set of highly specialized attributes and behaviors (especially, behaviors resulting in the high-volume publication of specialized research). I mean, that is, to suggest that the concept of excellence is currently functioning in an ideological way.

As a demonstration of the potential fluidity of the concept of "excellence," let me offer two rival definitions, each with its own set of implied prescriptions for university policy. I draw both from an essay by Arturo Madrid, that appeared in the last issue of *ACADEME*. One definition, according to Madrid, holds excellence to be the province of the few rather than the many, the traditional rather than the insurgent, the prosperous or well-funded rather than the marginal or indigent. But an alternative definition, he argues, may be based on diversity, not on exclusion but on inclusion: "Quality in our society proceeds in large measure out of the stimulus of diverse modes of thinking and acting; out of the creativity made possible by the different ways in which we approach things; out of diversion from paths or modes hallowed by tradition."

Here at Indiana University, the former of these definitions (excellence as something precious, rare, and sanctioned by tradition) is certainly now prevalent over the latter (something diverse, innovative, erratically distributed). Our increasingly restricted sense of the term is illustrated above all by our sense of its "proper place," or the domains we have established for it. General university policy has been to establish small and carefully guarded and well funded "enclaves of excellence" at each level of university operations. We

have had "distinguished professors" for a long time, but only in the seventies were they constituted (with administrative encouragement) as a political pressure group. And of course now we have "outstanding junior faculty"--chosen, as nearly as I can tell, by the criterion of having met the standards for tenure in advance, so that the university can safely throw money at them, not so much for development as in the confidence that it is betting on a winning horse. And, of course, we now have special recruitment programs for research professors and college professors--with, as far as I can tell, the primary requirement that they come from elsewhere (out of, apparently, a deep anxiety that, seek it as we might, "real" excellence is still to be found somewhere beyond our own precincts).

By mimetic replication, we also, of course, have programs to reward "distinguished" service and "outstanding" teaching--though at lower levels of compensation, since these accomplishments are apparently more widely distributed and hence less valuable than achievement in research endeavors. We have come to a point where, as one faculty member (who happens to be a respected researcher) recently commented,

This campus now seems to have more special awards . . . for faculty and students than a dictator's army has ribbons. They are no substitutes for broader-based initiatives. As we keep congratulating ourselves and seeking "excellence," we look more and more foolish.

So here we are like Charlie Chaplin in *THE GREAT DICTATOR*, strutting around with our locally-manufactured medals on and fooling nobody. But why isn't this funny? In part because, as I said earlier, enstatement of one definition of excellence means rejection of another. And I believe that, between the two possible definitions, we have accepted the less interesting: the less dynamic, the less plural.

Consider the consequence of applying the prevailing definition of excellence to that category to which it is supposed to have a

special affinity: the category of research. I accept the proposition that this is a research university" and that research should be the crown of our endeavors. At the same time, I would argue that, in an institution as complexly defined and situated as our own, research must be broadly and flexibly defined. Yet we have increasingly associated "excellence" with a definition of "research" that is curiously narrow and inert, that is measured quantitatively rather than qualitatively, that (for this reason) favors diligent elaborative activity within established paradigms, that nervously looks outward (to ratings and rankings) rather than inward for validation. "Excellence" has, in other words, increasingly been connected to a curiously hypostatized version of research. Such a version of research, preferring high-volume publication in established places, can pose a paradoxical threat to the quality of research itself--a threat to work from emergent fields that crosses boundaries and addresses constituencies not yet fully formed, to work that treats fringe phenomena and aberrant exceptions and the non-canonical.

Viewed more generally, an essentially conservative and one-dimensional definition of the sort I am describing is naturally favored by the already-privileged: by the "arrived," those who have previously achieved a level of recognition and reward, those who have something to protect. Less likely to enjoy the spoils are those more recently arrived, those outside waiting to get in, those committed to means too marginal or new to win the full sanction of tradition.

Thus far, I've emphasized the threat posed by a narrow--in fact vulgar--definition of excellence to research itself. More troubling still is the threat posed by this definition to those faculty members seeking to conduct what once used to be called a "balanced" career--to commit some portion of their intellectual energy to such ephemeral and relatively non-quantifiable pursuits as curricular innovation or classroom teaching. And, of

course, the collateral threat posed to those who depend on such activities, our students. This problem has been noted and frequently decried--most recently in Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professoriate, published in early 1991 by the Carnegie Foundation. This study observes of American higher education in recent years that "at the very time America's higher education institutions are becoming more open and inclusive, the culture of the professoriate is becoming more hierarchical and restrictive"; that "young professors seeking security and status find it more rewarding--in a quite literal sense--to deliver a paper at a national convention . . . than teach undergraduates back home."

This is a problem we all recognize, but seldom do anything about. In order to explain the strange state of mind in which we approach it, I would like to return to my earlier comment about ideology. Ideology is imaginary in nature, and distortion is a possible aspect of any imaginative act. Local ideas of excellence have concealed some very deep contradictions indeed. The most egregious of these contradictions is certainly the sequestration and application of "excellence" to a certain kind of highly specialized research endeavor and its issue in publication, to the virtually complete neglect of other aspects of professional performance.

Our ideology of excellence serves us well in the maintenance of this glaring contradiction, enabling us to surmount it with brazen yet seldom-challenged evasions. It "solves" the problem of apparent conflict between research and teaching by denying its existence: by embracing what my colleague Lew Miller has recently called in CHANGE magazine the "specious" claim that "the institution's most productive researchers are necessarily its most effective undergraduate teachers."

Ideology permits us to say, and even think, one thing, as we do another. One remarkable example is that of those Bloomington Campus administrators,--vocal sponsors of the contention that the best

researchers are the best teachers--who have proposed hiring of "docents" and other non-tenure-eligible instructors. The only responsibility of these docents would be to teach, and teach, and teach, without the time or incentive to enrich their intellectual lives by research practice. My own view is that creation of a two-tier faculty of privileged researchers and overworking instructors would not only weaken teaching, but would--in the long run--weaken research.

We cannot finally live beyond, or escape--ideology. But how much better would we serve ourselves and our students if we cast off our present "ideology of excellence," with its dubious preference for the most mundane research accomplishment over the most innovative classroom performance, in favor of a more supple alternative within which the relations of research and teaching might be rigorously reconceived!

Notice, by the way, that I have said "rigorously" reconceived, because I am not just talking about some flabby standard of "everybody does something well." I am regarding intellectually-responsive teaching as an act that fuses confident mastery of the latest methods and theories of the discipline with imaginative instances and applications that render them comprehensible to previously inexperienced undergraduate and graduate students. I am, in short, thinking of excellent teaching, not as an indifferent by-product of published research and not as occurring in estrangement from it, but as itself possessed of important aspects of research.

Bad teaching and bad research are listless, repetitive, dull. Excellent teaching and excellent research are imaginative, groundbreaking, stimulating. In other words: they participate in, and reveal, similar habits of mind. These are essential scholarly habits, related to the acquisition and dissemination of knowledge. The recent Carnegie Report argues eloquently that we must re-think our definition of scholarship and the

scholarly, moving toward an understanding that we are talking about complexly interrelated skills. The Report urges us to understand our activities within the more supple categories of "the scholarship of discovery," "the scholarship of integration," "the scholarship of application," and "the scholarship of teaching." As it concludes, "What we urgently need today is a more inclusive view of what it means to be a scholar--a recognition that knowledge is acquired through research, through synthesis, through practice, and through teaching."

Knowledge is acquired in various ways, and "excellence" is exhibited in various ways: in mainstream research, and in oppositional and boundary-breaking research, and in the acts of creative assimilation and application that introduce the products of both kinds of research into the classroom. My talk today would be severely misunderstood, if I were thought to be pressing a slack claim that "everybody's excellent." But I do believe excellence to be more widely and productively distributed among us, and more variously manifested, than current ideology would allow. I am suggesting that we reach for--that we insist upon--a definition of "excellence" that includes as well as than excludes, that thrives on diversity rather than spurns it, that unites and integrates different areas of our activity rather than divides and hypostatizes them, that concerns itself less with the creation of islands of privilege and more with the nurture of a stimulating totality--the totality of a dynamic and egalitarian learning community.

--Paul Strohm

For AAMP Membership Information

Please call Dick Carr (855-1134)

or write

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1991-92 CHAPTER CALENDAR

AAUP New Faculty Reception
Friday, September 27, 1991
Burgans' house, 604 Ballantine Road, 5-7 pm

AAUP Faculty Forum on the IU Presidency
Friday, October 25, 1991
University Faculty Club, IMU, 3-5 pm

Annual Spring Meeting
April 1992
Lunch, Coronation Room, IMU

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