

The Daily Tar Heel

94th year of editorial freedom

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Editorials

Learn from thy neighbor

Spawned by internal dissatisfaction with their own systems, U.S. and Japanese education officials took a peek at how each schools their young. While the two nations complimented each other, the report clearly stated that the United States could benefit from the Japanese example.

Although the studies were non-comparative, conflicting strengths and weaknesses made the investigation beneficial for both countries. The pride of American education is its universities, while the Japanese secondary schools are their pillars. Japanese education is more structured and offers fewer opportunities for students to explore than American education.

What the U.S. representatives found was a "learning society of formidable dimensions," as Education Secretary William Bennett described it. The report said those achievements stemmed from demanding curriculum, heavy parental participation, tremendous regard for teachers by society and a strong student commitment to learning. These traits are noticeably lacking in American schools, as many studies have shown in recent years.

But whereas the Japanese are superior in efficiency and productivity, the Americans stand out in nurturing creativity and individual expression, characteristics Japanese

businessmen claim are lacking in today's Japanese college graduates.

In his most recent book, *The Reckoning*, Pulitzer Prize-winning author David Halberstam compares the auto industries of the United States and Japan. Halberstam attributes the enormous discipline and communal energy as primary reasons for the ascendancy of Japanese industry and technology in the post-World War II era.

While Americans aren't selfish by nature, American society emphasizes the Look-Out-for-Number-One mentality. The communal spirit is secondary to individualism and the status of personal materialism. Americans have historically been able to afford this attitude because of luxuries such as a tremendous wealth of national resources. Lacking such luxuries, the Japanese were forced to band together. The result has been a thriving business community, bolstered by some of the world's brightest students who developed this team concept while in school.

Bennett tried to dispute the societal differences between the two nations. However, those differences cannot be overlooked, for they go to the soul of the two nations. But integrating the best of the Japanese discipline and rigor could be the best move for American secondary education.

Fairness in media

Maybe a lull in the furor over the Iranian arms scandal made the media resort to witch hunting. But respect lost to sensationalism.

On Dec. 22, the Miami Herald reported that Lt. Col. Oliver North — current scoundrel, victim or scapegoat depending upon the point of view — had been treated in 1972 for an emotional disorder. The next day, major television networks and newspapers across the country carried the story.

The stories said North returned from military duty in Okinawa suffering from emotional distress. (The tour of duty ranged from 29 days to a year, depending upon the story read.) His Marine officers recommended treatment, and North was hospitalized. (The hospitalization was for 10 days or three weeks, also depending upon the account.) After his release, North returned to active duty. According to military officials, there is no indication or record of other emotional episodes.

Why should emotional anguish from 12 years ago become an issue

in North's present controversial actions? The story would have been relevant had North suffered emotional distress while on staff with the National Security Council, or had the problem been recurrent.

Public service announcements, physicians and even media representatives constantly remind the public that mental and emotional illnesses, like physical afflictions, can strike anyone. Americans are told there is nothing abnormal or freakish about seeking treatment for the mind as well as the body. But for North, that treatment has become a curse, being dredged from the past to cast insinuation upon his current behavior.

Members of the media must continue to be aggressive during investigation of the arms sale scandal. But they also need sensitivity for the fine distinction between the words "aggressive" and "offensive."

Americans are already known to be cynical about media responsibility and performance. If they recognize blatant witch hunting, news gatherers may lose as much credit as those they attack.

The Daily Tar Heel

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Tar Heel Forum

Reflections on the mind and heart

Walter Spearman
 Professor Emeritus

Editor's note: Walter Spearman, editor of *The Daily Tar Heel* in 1928 and professor emeritus of journalism, gave this address at the 1978 Phi Beta Kappa induction ceremony. Spearman's message is still very relevant nine years later, and the DTH felt it would be appropriate to reprint it at the beginning of this new semester.

If I have a theme tonight, I'd like to call it "The Mind and the Heart." Obviously, you are the minds of the University. You have made Phi Beta Kappa. You have achieved academic distinction and you deserve to be proud. Your parents deserve to be proud of you — and what they have helped you accomplish.

But tonight I want to ask you one other question: Where are your hearts?

Back in the 1960s, student hearts were all hanging out. Students were concerned with the world about them: war and peace, racial justice, the rights of labor and the welfare of the underprivileged, the plight of the poor and the desperation of the doomed. I had students who lay down in the streets of Chapel Hill, obstructing traffic and leading demonstrations to open theaters and eating places and hotels to blacks. I had a student — an A student at that — who spent three months in a N.C. jail for seeking rights for those discriminated against.

Tom Wolfe, a brilliant writer and the founder of the so-called "New Journalism," calls the 1970s the "Me Decade." Encounter groups, meditation groups, therapy sessions, Zen and Yoga, primal therapy, sexual swinging, they all scream "Let's talk about ME! That's what is important. Never mind the other fellow. Let's talk about me and forget the rest of the world. What grade will I get? What graduate school will I be admitted to? What job can I get? What sex partner can I find? What kind of retirement benefits will my job bring me? Let's think about me!"

Where are we now? Last year I read an editorial in *The Daily Tar Heel*, my old alma mater, entitled "Students seek status quo." The editorial quoted the director of the London School Of Economics as saying self-confident students of the 1960s have been replaced by the fearful and defensive students of the 1970s who demand a defense of the status quo, of existing privileges. And the student/writer concluded: "The student of the '70s has his hands full simply worrying about his own future. The idealism of the student of the '60s, striking out for utopia, has fallen by the wayside only to be replaced by a world of the survival of the fittest."

Several years ago, *The New York Times* made a survey of college editors on eight campuses, from coast to coast, asking what students were most interested in. One editor reported, "This campus' 13,000 students want a place of security in an anxious world more than an opportunity to make the world secure." And the UNC editor wrote: "Two-fifths of the students are preoccupied with trivia, about two-fifths of us sway back from concern and unconcern and about one-fifth are involved in something significant, something larger than ourselves."

One advantage to teaching here more than 40 years is that one sees so many college generations come and go, usually in like freshman lambs and old like senior lions. What do they do while they are here? Is it a four-year rest period — or coffee break — or beer blast — between high school graduation and a lifetime job? Or is it a period of growth, of maturing, of new ideas and expanding horizons, of trying out intellectual wings, of dedication and service? Are they parasites who sap the University of its stored up strength? Or do they revitalize a University that may be growing tired and add their own new ideas to the University's accumulation of wisdom?

Students seem more concerned with grades today — and with getting into graduate school or medical school or law school — than with other people and the world outside. No one is willing to accept a C even if it is a well-deserved C for too little work or too sloppy work.

For the first time in my 43 years of teaching at Carolina, students call me up at home at night to explain why they may have to cut my class the next day or why they have not been able to finish a paper on time.

Don't mistake me. It is good to be concerned about grades. How else can you get an education? How else can you make Phi Beta Kappa? But let's not sacrifice the heart to the mind. Let's not forget concern and compassion from the 1960s. If the 1970s is really the "ME Decade," as writer Tom Wolfe says it is, let us try to temper the personal concerns for ourselves and for our future with great outreach to others. "ME! ME! ME!" can become a selfish scream if one constantly ignores the needs and aspirations of others. Let's not cry "Wolfe" — even Tom Wolfe — too often. We might keep the chiding Wolfe from our personal door by looking outside to see the world around us. Can we use our Phi Beta Kappa minds and our human hearts to make a better world?

In one or two college generations, the pendulum swings — from apathy to activism, from callousness to concern, from selfishness to unselfishness, from the scheming mind to the roving heart.

To illustrate that swinging pendulum, let me take you over to two of my classes in journalism. I teach a class in book, movie and play reviewing. We read Judith Crist's movie reviews and hear her call *The Sound of Music* the "sound of marshmallows." We recall the small boy who said: "This book tells me more about penguins than I want to know." We remember George Bernard Shaw's classic remark: "A critic is a man who leaves no stone unturned." We quote that infamous line: "An amateur played Brahms last night. Brahms lost."

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The student who comes to Chapel Hill and gets a new idea, a new commitment, may puzzle the family back home — or even frighten the state — but he may well be building a progressive, enlightened future for his state.

Then I teach a course in editorial writing, and my students write about very serious subjects: the purpose of education, registration, drop-add, students' rights to vote, the Honor System, abortions, freedom of the press, conditions in prison, capital punishment, Watergate, the nuclear bomb, ERA and discrimination against blacks and women.

One day I asked my students to list five topics they were sufficiently concerned about to try to persuade others to their own convictions. But one girl — a very pretty girl — looked bewilderedly out the window. After class she turned in a blank paper. "But Mr. Spearman," she said, "I'm just not concerned about anything. I think everything is just fine."

Remember the "new commandment": "Thou shalt not commit — thyself?" She didn't, and she hadn't.

But I see commitment on every hand. Sometimes I even see a student committed to an academic course, to a term paper that excites him all through the night before he has to turn it in, to a new subject that gives him ideas he never had before, to a particular professor who may open up challenging new areas of study that had never interested him before.

Not all commitments are to great public causes. They may be to a superior basketball team. They may be commitments to a girl, but commitments that belie the old Playboy philosophy that girls, like any good accessory, are detachable and disposable. They may be commitments to become the best doctor or lawyer or nuclear physicist you

are capable of being. They may be commitments to open your sorority or your fraternity to all individuals, regardless of race, creed or color.

Commitments come in various sizes. What is a small commitment to one person may be a large and meaningful one to another; the refusal to go along with popular stereotypes, the determination to think for yourself, the courage to be a nonconformist in the midst of conformity. The student who comes to Chapel Hill and gets a new idea, a new commitment, may puzzle the family back home — or even frighten the state — but he may well be building a progressive, enlightened future for his state.

The "hippies" used to say, "Do your thing," but would add: "Have a thing to do." "Build, baby, build" was always a better slogan than "Burn, baby, burn."

Oh, there was apathy back in the 60s — as well as dedicated commitment. And there is commitment today — as well as a tendency to "look out for No. 1." Our task as "thinking students," as men and women with Phi Beta Kappa minds, is to use our minds in conjunction with our hearts to create the full man, the complete woman, the felicitous combination of mind and heart.

If this were to be a "Last Lecture", I'd like to wrap it all in a box, and, like the boxes we used to send abroad for the starving, write CARE on it in large letters — CARE. Care about your academic work. (You obviously do — or you wouldn't be here tonight.) Care about your fellow students. Care about the world in which you live and the people who live in it with you, even those you have never seen. If you need a motto for tomorrow, change it from "Thou shalt not commit — thyself" to the one word: care.

Neither the faculty nor the administration nor your parents should ask you to avoid controversy. Rather, we should ask you and eternally encourage you to care about something — and to care enough to become involved.

Now even a Last Lecture has its last paragraph: I wanted to pass on to you the words of the two professors who meant the most to me in the 20s when I was a student, when I, too, was under 30. Their commitment shone round their heads like halos and to me they were, and are, Chapel Hill and the University. We all need our heroes and these were mine. Let them be your heroes too, or find new heroes of your own.

Playwright Paul Green once said: "Life is like a tree forever growing." So may it prove to you.

And University President Frank Graham once wrote: "Where and when men are free, the way of progress is not subversion, the respect for the past is not reaction, and the hope of the future is not revolution, where majority is without tyranny, the minority without fear, and all people have hope of building together a nobler America in a freer and fairer world."

When I was a student, Paul Green gave me a volume of his plays. On the flyleaf he wrote: "To Walter Spearman, with a belief in his ultimate triumph."

My last word to you as a teacher is this: "I have a belief in your ultimate triumph." And I care. Develop and cultivate and use your mind — but don't sacrifice your heart.

Letter policy

The *Daily Tar Heel* welcomes reader comment. For style and clarity, we ask that you observe the following guidelines for letters to the editor and columns:

■ All letters/columns must be signed by the author(s). Limit of two signatures per letter or column.

■ Students who submit letters/columns should also include their name, year in school, major and phone number. Professors and other university employees should include their title and department.

■ All letters/columns must be typed. (For easier editing, we ask that they be double-spaced on a 60-space line.)

Editorial cartoons do not necessarily reflect the opinions of *The Daily Tar Heel's* editorial board. The cartoons express the opinion of the cartoonist.

