

# Editorial Comment

## FORM VERSUS SUBSTANCE

By Roger A. Harris

*Knowledge: a vessel whose form is experience, whose substance is understanding; constantly filled through the passage of time-Gyendör*

It's sometimes very hard to discern the difference between what issues are at the heart of a situation and what issues merely address the situation's surface cause and effect. This argument is more commonly referred to as form versus substance. What's more, form is often mistaken for substance when viewed through the smoked-and-mirrored perception of subjective reasoning. Examples of this effect can be noted in the comedic firing of former Secretary of Health Joycelyn Elders for promoting sex education (in an era of AIDS); the Reagan administration's overly simplistic, ill-targeted, and patronizing "just say no to drugs" campaign; that fiasco in the sand, otherwise known as Operation Desert Storm (I know because I was there); and of course, our government's insultingly blundered Haitian national policy. In these examples, perceptions magnified their form while at the same

time distorting (or altogether hiding) the real issues affecting their substance.

This circumstance begs the question (at least for me) "What issues are more form than substance at FSU?" In what areas are we simply going through the motions; of doing "feel good stuff" that makes FSU look good but actually has little effect in the here and now. Here are my top seven observations:

**(1) Administration.** Although it's 1995, many administrators at the top of our university carry the archaic and paternalistic opinion that students should be seen and not heard; instead, it is thought that they should concern themselves solely and only with their academic development. "How dare students question larger issues such as our internal staff promotions, hiring, firings, salaries, etc.," they might be heard to say. In other words, stop asking questions and get to class. What's not understood here is that when you change academic vice-chancellors five times, deans in the College of Arts and Sciences six times, and deans in the School of Business three times, and all this within the last six short years, that even Ray Charles and Odie would have to see and question what's really going on. What's

also not understood here is that the student is the number one customer at FSU and should, therefore, be the administration's number one concern. To that point, any question a student may ask (concerning any topic) should be answered quickly, correctly, and with a smile, not a condescending attitude. Today's student (regardless of age) realizes this fact; it's time the administration does, also. The stereotype of the typical FSU student who is disadvantaged and humbly grateful to be given academic "pabulum" should be abandoned and replaced by a more realistic and complimentary image of an intellectually alive student who is demanding to be given a substantial, competitive education.

**(2) Management.** Chancellor Hackley was a great ambassador for FSU off campus. Respect due. But it's no misstatement to say that the homefront suffered academically and administratively. We still haven't gotten answers to questions we've been asking for the past two years (Scurrying around call in registration and knocking on Woods about "Lift Every Voice and Sing"). We send thousands of dollars' worth of printing off campus every semester. Proper equipping and staffing of the print shop would see

those thousands returned to FSU (and the upgrade would pay for itself in as few as two years). Financial Aid releases our guaranteed student grant and loan funds weeks after their posted release date, while at our sister institutions, students receive their funds days after their posted release date-why? Do we students realize what a powerful tool we have in our faculty evaluations? They were used as part of the rating criteria to identify and award 25% of the faculty with *lifetime* base pay increases. But does it strike you as odd that the Teacher of the Year (1993-1994) didn't also receive the award? To be honest, our phenomenal six-year growth in student enrollment (56% as compared to the national average of two percent annually) has affected management as well as other services at FSU. Managers are like ship captains; they get paid lots of money not only to apply vision to develop and plot future plans, but also to anticipate and adjust to unexpected changes in course. Remember the Exxon Valdes incident? FSU is that ship; management, its oily cargo; we students, the unspoiled shoreline. 'Nuff said.

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