

Creative Teaching

NEWSLETTER OF THE WILMINGTON CAMPUS TEACHING RESOURCE CENTER

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Schools R Not the Same as Businesses

Everyone has probably heard by now of Microsoft's plan to partner with the Philadelphia School District in the development of a \$46 million completely digitized high school over the next three years. This is certainly not the first time that a major corporation has been involved in a fundamental way in the building of a school, the development of a curriculum, or the delivery of educational materials. But it is probably the most ambitious to date. And it highlights the potential dangers of too much of an emphasis on technical and economic *efficiency*; nowhere in the discussion has the effect of this approach on the *effectiveness* of such an education been seriously evaluated.

Yet there is a far more basic issue on which attention needs to be focused, and in which the above news needs to be located. It involves the interplay—and delicate balance—between the missions of institutions of higher education and the objectives of business organizations operating in a market-based economy.

It was observed recently in *The New York Times* (Felicia R. Lee, "The Academic Industrial Complex," 9/6/03) that "The combination of sometimes desperate financial need and innovative ways to make money is a hallmark of a new era in the relationship between corporate culture and higher education. In articles, symposiums and a host of new books, scholars and educators have been warning that the traditional mission and standards of the university are at risk of being compromised by increasing commercialization."

Of course, colleges and universities—including community and junior colleges—have *always* had important ties to the world of business, specific business firms, and the men and women who run them. After all, as Eric Gould, chairman of the English department at the University of Denver and author of *The University in a Corporate Culture*, is quoted as maintaining, "A degree from a college or university is a market-driven commodity. In other words, degrees are valuable because they translate into good jobs and good money." This is especially true for community colleges, because a key part of their mission is to provide graduates with job-ready skills.

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FOCUS ON...

...LARRY KEEN

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lthough it is generally the practice of this newsletter to select each issue's featured faculty member randomly, from time to time it comes to the attention of the editor that a member of the faculty is preparing to retire soon. In such instances, the editorial policy is to feature them before they leave the Delaware Tech "family," so that their devoted service can be honored—present them with a well-deserved *bouquet*, so to speak.

Larry Keen fits this criterion, owing to his impending retirement at the end of this semester after thirty-four years (*thirty-four years!*) of teaching and administrative service to the College. So what makes Larry Keen tick? What brought this mild-mannered man—this "Clark Kent" of the Wilmington campus—to teaching, and how has he weathered the challenges he has faced as an educator? These and other topics were explored on a recent Friday afternoon.

Larry came to Delaware Tech in the fall of 1969, a year after the 30th street campus opened. Prior to that, he had taught at Goldey-Beacom for four years, and had done stints in banking and retailing, including working for Wilmington Trust, a drugstore, a grocery, and even an undertaker (which may shed light on his sense of humor). But owing to a male sixth grade teacher who really inspired him and was a role model, Larry had known that "I always wanted to teach—that was my first love."



Larry Keen

Larry earned the AAS in accounting from Goldey, and went on to earn a BS in business administration from East

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But being attuned to the job market is one thing. It can be seen as *one* important factor—along with the need to produce a diverse body of civilized and responsible citizens—in determining curricular and course offerings. It is quite another thing, however, to so thoroughly mimic commercial goals and practices that fundamental aspects of an educational institution’s mission or values are compromised or lost altogether. David L. Krip, a professor of public policy at U.C. Berkeley and author of *Shakespeare, Einstein and the Bottom Line: The Marketing of Higher Education*, also quoted in the *Times* article, observes: “‘Market. Consumers. Branding. That we take for granted that higher education is a business is a huge step toward the marketization of higher education.’” He goes on to note that “‘the precarious balance between ‘the bottom line and the life of the mind’ has been disturbed. Although some colleges have indeed balanced academic concerns and those of the marketplace, others ‘have struck bargains only Faust could love.’”

So what can we learn from this debate about the influence of commercial values on educational ones? One thing that seems to be noteworthy is that these two sets of institutions depend on each other’s continuing vitality. To stay vital, each must do for society what it does best, and, *where appropriate*, learn from the other. It can be perfectly appropriate, for example, for educators to lend their expertise and advice to industry—as long as it is practical and useful to their clients. In fact, educators who perform consultation and training in the world outside academia have the opportunity to become better educators as a result. Similarly, it can be perfectly appropriate for leaders of industry to serve on school boards or boards of trustees, teach courses, or even finance educational programs—as long as in doing so, they help to *enhance* the educational process, not divert from its primary goals.

There are considerable pitfalls, however, as suggested above. It must be noted, too, that two values which drive successful business activity, competition and efficiency, have far more unsettling implications in education. True, competition can be a powerful motivator. But it’s also true that according to the rules of competition, there must be both winners *and* losers. Unless we want to subscribe to a pre-ordained outcome in which a certain number of our students *must* “lose”—that is, get low or even failing grades—then there are limits to the role competition should be allowed to play. When it comes to efficiency, here too there are limits to how much of it belongs in education. Ultimately, the most *efficient* educational program is one without full-time teachers, or perhaps without teachers at all. All that is necessary is a team of “content specialists;” gone is the meaningfulness and continuity of teacher-student relationships. A final point can now be made: in education, it may be much more important to strive for *effectiveness* and *equity*, two other values which are not wholly compatible with competition and efficiency. Without enough of these, the fundamental value of education to our society will ultimately be lost. In an era of budget squeezes and general economic distress, that is a risk which may go too easily unheeded.

Andrew D. Zimmerman
Editor

Carolina University, and an M.ed. from the University of Delaware. He also has thirty credit hours from the University’s Master of Public Administration program.

Like his superior, Lonnie George, Larry has had “trouble holding onto a job,” as Larry Miller once quipped about our President. He has been an instructor, a chairperson, an assistant dean, an assistant business manager, a business manager, a vice president, and an instructor—in that order.

As to what he offers his students, Larry says “I try to put myself in their place” as students learning difficult material, “so they will understand, particularly accounting.” Larry likes the acronym “KISS”—Keep It Simple, Stupid, which he first learned from Paul Weatherly, the college’s first president. “I have always prepared for every class,” Larry reports. “I’m always looking for a new way to present something.”

Larry claims that, even after all these years, “Every new semester, I get butterflies in my stomach...and they’ve never gone away.” He finishes the thought by saying that if that had ever stopped happening, he hopes he would have the good sense to stop teaching. Yet he sees challenges in the classes of today that were not there in the past. Chief among them is “less respect shown by students today than there used to be,” as evidenced by chronic lateness and other disruptive behaviors. Larry says that he tells his students, “If you don’t want to get on my bad side, you’ll come on time.” To reinforce this message, he sometimes gives “pop” quizzes; students who arrive late are not allowed to take them. On a positive note, he recognizes the challenge to make class as interesting as possible, so students will want to come.

Larry has been married to his wife, Sharon, for thirty-seven years. They have three sons, two daughters-in-law, and one grandson. Larry is very much looking forward to being able to spend more time with them in his retirement. We wish you all the very best, Larry!

Wilmington Faculty Member to Present Distinguished Lecture on Cultural Competency

Dr. Jill Black Lattanzi, coordinator of the Physical Therapy Assistant program at Wilmington campus, is slated to lead a seminar titled “Delivering Care Across Cultures: Cultural Competency Development for Rehabilitation Professionals.” The all-day seminar will be presented at Delaware Tech’s Owens campus on October 18, 2003. In addition to having been a physical therapy practitioner for many years, Jill’s doctoral research focused on multicultural education for the physical therapist professional. She authored the award-winning article, “Hands of Hope: A Qualitative Investigation of a Student Physical Therapy Clinic in a Homeless Shelter.”

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