



Dr. George Henderson . . .

The Faculty

The role of the faculty is a very intriguing topic, but after spending, I don't know how many hundreds of hours on the various committees that we have at our university and trying to find out what some of the more pressing problems of students are like how do we fix what's wrong, and perhaps more pertinent, who's really fouling things up around here, I began to feel very much like Pogo when he goes out trying to find the enemy. After many months he comes to the stark realization that "we have met the enemy and they is us." I think to a great extent a lot of what's wrong with our university today are faculty. I'm pointing the finger inward, and I'm saying "I accuse." I'm not pointing it outward to students or administrators. I'm saying that until I get my faculty house in order, it's improbable that the other pieces will fit together.

I'm reminded also that as a faculty member I must do many things. I'm responsible for teaching, and I consider that to be my foremost reason for being. I'm also responsible for a certain amount of research. I do this too, the writing, the publish or perish. But I'm the kind of individual, and many faculty members are this way, that if you tell me that I must write, I probably will stop writing. I write because I enjoy writing. I'm also responsible for public service. I was commenting before coming on today that this will be my tenth straight day giving some kind of public speech, most of it at night. I think I average about a hundred public speeches an academic year.

Before I give you my ideas of what teaching is all about, let's go back to Horace Mann. Horace Mann pointed out that teaching is the most difficult of all arts, the profoundest of all sciences. And certainly 20th century university teaching borders upon both an art and a science. Aristotle said those who educate children well are more to be honored than even their parents for these only give them life but those the art of living well. It has been said that the best teacher is the one who suggests rather than dogmatizes and inspires his listener with the desire to teach himself. I agree with all of these.

I think that as a faculty member, as a teacher, I'm a guide. I'm going to personalize it because I really can't speak for all of my colleagues. I can speak only for me. As a teacher, I'm a guide who must show his students the pathways to this thing we refer to as learning. There are many destinations that we call academic learning at the university level. As a guide I determine the sequence of the trip. I decide which route is best to take in order to get there. I must try to make the journey as interesting as possible so the student traveler will have the tenacity and the interest and the desire to complete the journey. I must awaken within him, therefore, a kind of love for learning.

A good teacher is a model for his students to emulate. A good college professor is indeed a model. Like it or not, good or bad, we are models for our students to emulate. I really became struck with this when a young student came up to me after one of my classes the first year that I was here. This student was a little quiet lass who sat front row, took very copious notes I believed, and at the end of the semester she came up to me and said, "You know, Dr.

Henderson, all semester I forgot that you were a Negro." So we do indeed become models, and we don't know how we influence the young people watching us.

A teacher is a counselor. We are well aware, those of us who counsel students, what the drug problem is on our college campuses. We're well aware of the kinds of militancy brewing. We're well aware of the alienation, the incipient kinds of anger. We're well aware of the loneliness that one gets in living in some of our dormitories. We're aware of many things. And then students come to us with personal problems, some of them major and some minor. But every problem a student has is major to him because it's his problem. He has to live it and has to resolve it, hopefully.

Speaking of being a counselor, I was involved in something recently. I noticed that the headlines in the student newspaper pointed out that we're going to an invitational tournament. Well, I've been involved with the black athletes, involved with black and white students on campus, and I don't know how many of you realize how disastrously close we've come at the University to not having the kinds of headlines that we have today. As a counselor, you see, I've been struck by the kind of power that I have. I've had students come and ask me "What should we do? Shall we negotiate or shall we burn it down?" So you see, yes, yes indeed, that's a tremendous amount of responsibility, and I'm not too sure many times that I'm capable of handling it.

I do know that more than anything else the college professor is an actor. We take Shakespeare's definition all the world's a stage and all the men and women merely players, they have their entrances and their exits, and one man in his time plays many parts. We play many parts as professors. On the legitimate stage one reads the script; he memorizes it and tries to know the character, and then when he's on stage he communicates the character in such a way that the audience learns the character. As college professors, we are indeed actors. We select the areas of academic inquiry that we really want to become specialists in. We learn our roles; we learn all we possibly can, and we go before our students. We communicate. If we do our jobs well as actors in the classroom, the student is able not only to identify with us but to learn the concepts of our characters. I like to think sometimes that bad college professors are bad actors.

Let me say this about our university here: we have some of the most imaginative, some of the most creative and some of the most humane human beings that I've ever met here at this institution. I was very hesitant to come. Some of my friends up north of here felt that I had been drugged, that I must have slipped and fallen one of those cold winters and jogged something loose upstairs when I said I was going to the University of Oklahoma. They said, "Why go to Oklahoma? You can go to . . ." and they named several places. And it was true, I could have gone to all those other places. But I said, "I'm going to the University of Oklahoma because I feel that I can make a difference, and I also believe that it's the kind of climate where things will happen with the

kinds of committed people that I met during my interviews." I have not changed my impression of the University of Oklahoma.

Now let me tell you something about the different kinds of faculties that we see. If I told you that all of our faculty members are the kinds of individuals who should be teaching, I would be dishonest. We do have some people who just don't like students. They're in a minority, however. I do think most of our faculty do like students. We have some faculty members who only see dirty clothes or clean clothes; they only hear correct or incorrect speech; they only see colors. These are not the kinds of faculty members that I would call dedicated committed faculty members.

The preceding speakers mentioned the fact that the college is changing. We're getting a wide range of students. I work with perhaps as broad a range as one can imagine. I have the highly gifted and talented students, and I have the extremely low achievers. I feel guilty about this sometimes because I work with both extremes and missing is that broad range of students in between.

As a faculty member I'm confronted with the reality that either the subject matters that we're teaching are not relevant or we're not relevant. I'm rapidly reaching the conclusion that it's not the subject matters which should be changed but many of our faculty members. Let me elaborate on this for a moment. We, as faculty members must be concerned with more than committee deliberations and the increments that we will receive, as important as these things are. We must be concerned with allowing students to fail or to succeed. Some of you are concerned about what happens to a student who takes certain kinds of courses and will not be employable. I believe that a student has the right to succeed and also the right to fail. Now I know parents footing the bill won't see it that way. You want to see the maximum amount of production for the dollars that you spend. You want to make sure that daughter is either married or employed after those four years. I can understand this too. But as a faculty member I must be concerned about the student inside the classroom and also outside the classroom. I must be concerned about human beings.

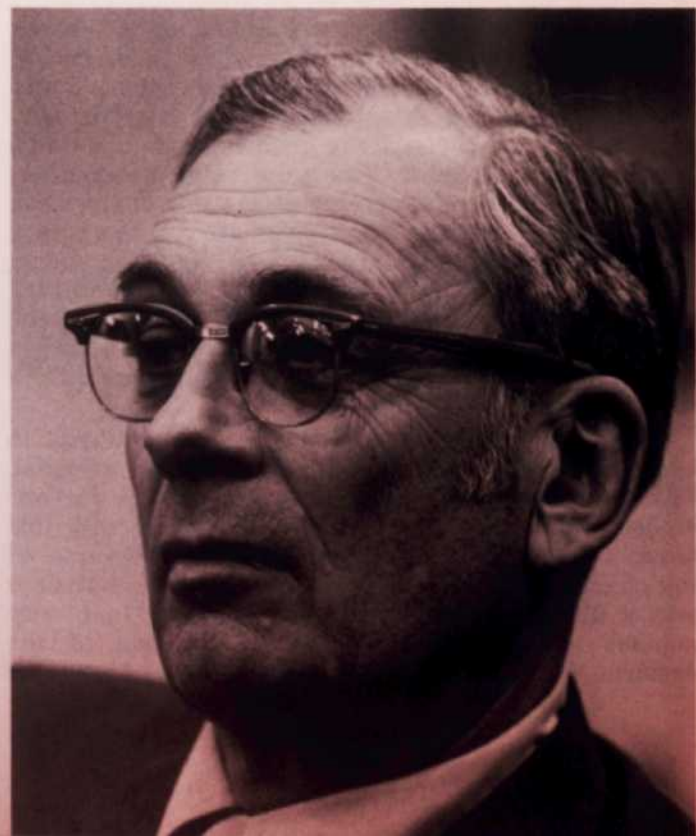
Some of us can shut our eyes to things happening outside the classrooms and say they really don't exist. We can say, for example, that students aren't protesting; we can say that cities aren't burning; we can say that schools aren't being desegregated, but that's kind of living in a make-believe world. And we can say that we're very objective in the classroom because we're not going to talk about any of these things, but the students will sit and tune us out. Then we cease to be relevant.

I would like now to talk about some things that I feel particularly close to as a faculty member. More and more you're going to find faculty members, young ones in particular, who will be devising new curricula. You'll find students taking courses that you may find no relevance in at all. Don't be frightened. Don't be appalled by some of the new kinds of concepts in learning that will emerge. I was in the same position when I first entered college. I walked into

my counselor's office, and he said, "Now what did you say you were going to major in?" and I said, "Psychology." He said, "Aw, come on." He said, "Before me I have your test scores and I have your aptitudes. You don't want to be in psychology." I said, "Yes." He said, "Well, what are you going to do with it?" I said, "I'm going to get a doctorate and teach." Oh, that blew his mind. He said "The only thing you people can do with a doctorate in psychology is to be social workers. You can never teach in a university with a doctorate in psychology." At that time there were very few black psychologists. I later changed to sociology, but the point I want to make is that I had to have an opportunity to fail or to succeed.

So young people will be asking for new kinds of things. Some of the more effective faculty members will be innovators. Now let me tell you how I work. I don't sell anything in terms of ideologies to students. I expose them to the broadest range of ideas that I possibly can. Some of you may shudder at the kinds of things we talk about in my classes. But if students are thinking these things, we may as well talk about them.

Too many parents have what I call the "john syndrome." They know that the dirty words are written on the walls of the john, but they don't want people to talk about them. They think if you don't talk about them, the words will automatically erase themselves. Students are talking about drugs and thinking about drugs outside the classroom; we may be able to bring in some ideas that will clarify some of their feelings about them. So, yes, we will do some things that may be different. We may even get into some areas that will make parents feel uncomfortable. Like it or not, the most pressing areas in the minds of many students center on race and on the whole area of human relations or the student's relation to the larger society. Some of you may think that I'm pushing racial integration on students. I do not. I simply can-



not push racial integration or racial segregation on students, nor do other faculty members whom I know. Nor could I assume they don't exist. What I'm trying to tell you is that the real world of the classroom is no different from the real world outside of the classroom.

What kind of things are we getting into? In my classes, some students complain about this, all of them go out into the field and do some work; they go out and talk to people in the community. Parents, and alums in particular, complain when they see university students going out into the field more, but if your houses are in order, if you're operating business as it should be, you have nothing to fear from our students.

What I'm afraid that our students will learn initially is that as parents, as adults, we've told them a lot of lies. We've told them about equality, but we don't believe in it. Now how does this relate to faculty members? If I'm concerned with the concept of equality, then I should not, as a faculty member, be trying to do things that will not allow open housing to exist or school integration to come about. Now, some of you look at me and say, "Yeah, but you should be committed to school integration and to racial integration and equality. You have more to gain than anyone else." And I say that if my colleagues who are white are not as committed to school integration, not as committed to equality as I am, then they will communicate this in all the ways they communicate things to their students. And the college students we graduate will be as bigoted, will be as narrow minded as they are.

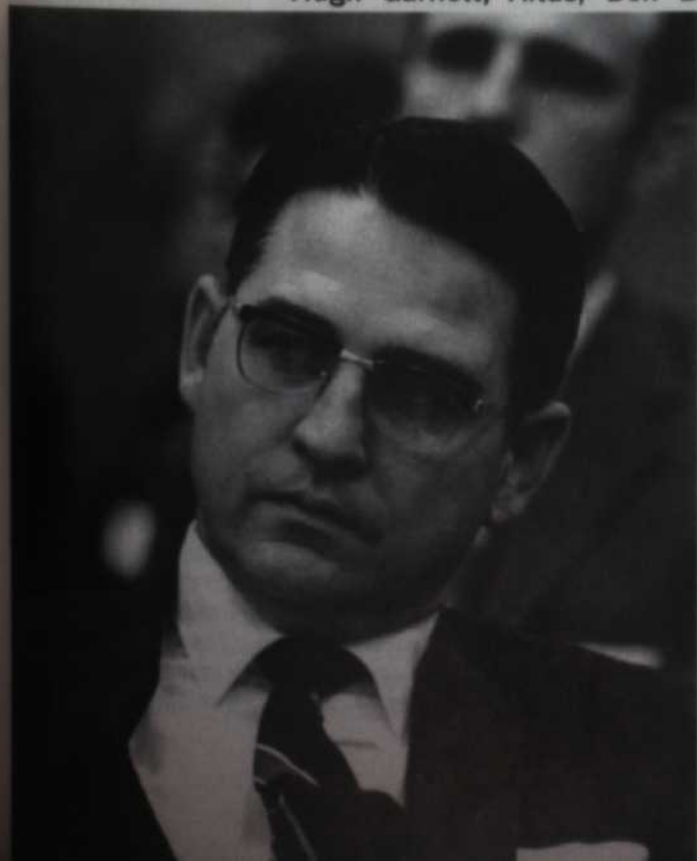
Some faculty members, I will agree, become so involved with their students they lose their objectivity. We have the power to mold, and to build and to shape students into almost anything that we want them to be, and we must be careful not to make them into things that we want them to be but to allow them to become things they want to be, people they want to be.

If we as faculty members, in our unguarded moments of conversation, talk about poor white trash, hillbillies, Niggers and other things, and our students hear us talking about these things, then they know what our commitment happens to be to such an area as human relations.

So you will find more and more students challenging us to live what we believe, and challenging us to live it both in and out of the classroom. So the role of the college professor becomes another kind of role. No longer do we have the luxury of saying our lives begin and end in the library with our books. Our life is a community. When students are asking us to be relevant, think of what they're asking us to be. They're asking us to look, for the first time perhaps, and see people. They're asking us to realize perhaps that you can't teach math, you can't teach engineering, you can't teach English or anything else and make it unrelated to people and have it relevant for students. It's that simple.

They're asking us, for example, such hard-nosed questions as: What do you do with the disadvantaged student after he comes to the University? It's one thing to get them here; it's another thing to help them after they're here. They're asking those of us who are sponsors for the varying kinds of activities that students participate in: How can you continue to be a faculty sponsor for a student organization that is racially segregated? These questions make some of you uncomfortable, just as they make faculty members uncomfortable. I know some of you will say that we hire faculty members to teach and we shouldn't get involved in social issues. Well, let me assure you that it really doesn't matter how many faculty members you have, the social issues will still be there. If we are concerned about a peaceful resolution of some of these problems, then within the classroom students must be allowed to discuss, analyze, dissect, and offer possible alternatives to some of the more pressing issues.

Hugh Garnett, Altus; Don Barnes, Okmulgee; Mr. and Mrs. Fred Cochran, Wewoka



The University of Oklahoma in 1970 is certainly not the university it was in 1950, and the University of Oklahoma in 1980 will not be the university it was in 1970. That's good. The University is a living, viable kind of institution because the University is comprised of people, and faculty happen to be one part of those people. More and more we will have young faculty members who will come to you in the community and they will be giving this thing they call community service. That means they will become involved in trying to solve some of the more pressing problems like pollution, poverty, and race relations. As alums, you can apply pressure, I know. You can apply pressure that will cause people to think twice before hiring these kinds of college professors. But think about it like a football team. The faculties that make their subjects most relevant are considered the best faculties, and they're going to win that long battle called survival, preparing their students. If we are allowed as much innovation in the classroom as we allow our football coaches—do anything to win, devise new plays—we'll produce better students.

I'm kind of biased. When I was asked to talk about the role of the faculty, I could only think about my perceptions of how a faculty should operate. Yes, I should be a guide; I should be a counselor; I should be an actor. But more than all of those other things I should be a human being relating to students as human beings. The worst thing I could do to my students is to look at them and not see them, not see them as concerned, reliable young adults. Then they became very invisible, and during these moments of invisibility, (and if you really want to understand the kinds of protests that are going on throughout the nation, this will clarify it) when we cause students to feel invisible, they want to kick out, they want to curse, they want to throw things so we will acknowledge that they exist, and not only do they exist but they have a reason for existing: they want to be part of this thing we call life.

How much better it would be to admit initially that they are indeed very visible people. Involve them in the classroom dialogue. You see, I can let students become involved in the dialogue, but the mere fact that we talk about controversial subjects does not mean that I condone one view or another.

When I think about my students, I really get carried away. I'm sorry, but you see, I'm an addict. I'm an addict who probably will die with this addiction to students. There is no cure for me. I have no reason for being except for the students in this university. I can do research elsewhere. I can do public service elsewhere. But I can't teach university students except at a university.

As alums, I think there are certain things that you can do for me as a faculty member. You can keep me honest, and we do need you to keep us honest. Sometimes, you see, we get carried away with our degrees, and we think the doctor of philosophy will allow us to do all kinds of things. Challenge us if you think that we're off base. Question us if you think that we're doing things that we should not be doing. Communicate with us; don't have secret meetings or take secret polls and do things without involving us. Above all else, give us a chance to learn

about you. I think it's great to have meetings like this. I think it's much better to have an open kind of interesting dialogue that will allow me to know you and you to know me.

If I could make a final summary in terms of the role of the faculty, I would say this. I must first believe in students; I must believe in me, and I must believe in you. I must believe that we are so inter-related that when I talk about the University I cannot separate students from me, the administration or you. I'm saying we must become one; we must realize that we can't have a great University until we're all involved in the great University, and we can't have creative students until we allow them to be creative.

QUESTION: Do you think there are any limitations on what a teacher can do?

HENDERSON: Oh yes, I think there are. I don't think it's my role to proselytize. I don't think I should try to convert students to do anything. I don't get involved in the area of religion. I don't try to produce organizational men and women. I think that if I'm directive, directive to the point of allowing the students to see that nothing can be gained by destroying the institution, then that's as directive as I will be. Within that open arena all ideas, I think, are fair game. Interaction is fair game. I learn as much, maybe more, from my students as they do from me. Ultimately, if I do my job well, I'll be producing young people who will be much better teachers than I am or would ever dream of being. These are the young people who will be replacing me, and that's how it should be. If they're going to replace me, I want them to be better than I am, and in order for them to be better than I am, I shouldn't restrict their thinking. I don't want to produce people who have tunnel vision, who can only see in one direction. I want them to have peripheral vision. I want them to see as much as they possibly can. I don't think, for example, that I should become involved in trying to commit them to one ideology or another. I think it's my responsibility to be aware of the many ideologies and to expose them to the broad range of thinking because ultimately they must decide. You know, I get students who will ask me, "What should I do?" I'll always respond by saying, "What do you want to do?" and "Why?" Within my classes there is one simple rule, you can be as critical as you like, but if you are going to say "X" is bad, I want to know what you would substitute for "X" and why. It's a very simple game that we play.

QUESTION: One of the comments was that professors can do a great deal to shape the thinking of students. Do you really think you can?

HENDERSON: Yes, I do. Let me give you an idea. We get students from many states—students whose parents wouldn't want me living next door to them, wouldn't want me attending the same restaurant eating with them, playing golf in their country clubs. They send their children to the University of Oklahoma and their children take my classes, and I blow their minds. What I'm suggesting is that I have students now thinking about things that they've never thought about before—new concepts, new ideas. I'm faculty sponsor of a group called Student Action. These are students who are dedicated to constructive change. They believe now that they can work within the system and

bring about change. We teach in other ways too. We teach by example. If I can find time to talk to the student groups, if I can find time to devote to the many things that I do throughout the state, then students begin to see by example that maybe they can find some time to do some of these other things too. What I'm saying is that we teach not only by means of what happens in the classroom but also by illustrations of the way we live.

QUESTION: Do you think you can have an impact on students when their attitudes are already pretty much formed by the time they get here?

HENDERSON: Yes. You see the kind of impact that we have is to a great extent a reflection of the involvement the faculty will have with the students. I think, for example, that if you ask the young people who are activists, who are really involved in constructive and also destructive change, what has influenced them, they will point to one or two professors.

QUESTION: What does constructive change include?

HENDERSON: It includes allowing them to become involved in the process of creating something that comes closer to the principles that we've dangled before them. If we believe, for example, in democracy, they want to see some democratic things happening not only on campus but off campus. Not all students are committed to constructive change, let's be very honest about that, but for those who are, they're saying, pointing to me and other faculty members, "This is your moment of truth. If these are the kinds of ideals you say we should hold, then you, by example, show us how it's done and allow us also to show you by example how it's done. Let's have an open end dialogue and interaction." Most of my students really are asking to be given an opportunity to be heard and an opportunity to be, to exist.

QUESTION: Since good faculty members have so many other duties, do we have the best people teaching the majority of classes?

HENDERSON: That's a problem, but let me point out something about this. I probably do more work with students outside the classroom than within the classroom. A lot of other professors are doing the same thing. You know, such small things as coffee breaks with students; such small things as going to the dorms and sorority houses and interacting with them. Take office hours, for example. My kids don't really believe in office hours. I say office hours are 11 to 12. They come in at 9 o'clock and say, "Let's talk." There are other faculty members who are this way too. What I'm saying is, yes, we do need more money for more faculty members, but we find ways. We find ways when perhaps we shouldn't find ways — late at night, early in the morning — but we do. Ask the young people on our campus. They have a group of professors they can get to. But we're human. We're no better and no worse than the general population around the University community.

QUESTION: Could you tell us what some of the frustrations of the black student and the black athlete are on the campus?

HENDERSON: One has to realize that this is a predominantly white institution. Then you have to realize that, like it or not, the first two years of college is a time of social activity for a lot of young people.

The loneliest time for a black student at this university is the weekends. That's when the fraternities and sororities and other kinds of closed groups are doing their things. One also has to realize that the black kids who come here come from communities that have been exposed to other kinds of things, places where rioting has erupted, where Black Nationalism is now. So we have young black kids entering universities in large numbers, and they're not too sure whether they're fish or fowl or just foul fish. They're looking to us to give them a definition. "Are we really integral parts of the university? Or are we just there as black students?" Are they only there to attend classes, or are they there to participate in all that we consider vital in university life, and that includes social activities too. The frustration then becomes two kinds of dichotomies. On the one hand the student, probably subconsciously, would very much like to be involved. On the other hand, because of the trend toward black separatism and nationalism, they don't know how to publicly express that they want to become involved for fear that they will be labeled as traitors. Black kids are torn today like they've never been torn before. So we have a large number, a growing number of white students, who want to pull the black kids in, and the black kids hesitating. We are seeing the rejected rejecting the rejectors. And this blows the minds of kids — "Well, look, you told me I should go out and help, and now these kids are rejecting me." It's a lack of definition as to whether one's black, one's a student, or what.

In relationship to athletes, I think the athletes are caught up in the civil rights movement. For a long time athletes were kind of like special people. They were not involved until many of them, maybe out of conscience or maybe out of just out and out commitment, began saying and doing things to show that they too are part of the black community. There are no easy answers. I think the most important thing we can learn from the black students are these: people who are taught to love, love indiscriminately; people who are taught to hate, hate indiscriminately. Black students have been taught how to hate. They can hate with the kind of tenacity, the kind of desire, the kind of vigor that white students have hated for years. Black students to me are telling us — faculty, administration and others — that we better hurry because we may be running out of time to have an integrated university. We may have separate kinds of communities within the university. I think that's bad, from my perspective. What do black kids want? I feel they believe in this thing called the American Dream, but they don't perceive that they can get it. They don't perceive that the structure's open enough to get it. I don't know of any university throughout the country where an administration has been more receptive to trying to understand and work out the problems of minority, not just black, but minority group students than this administration at OU. One doesn't appreciate this kind of administration until you've had an opportunity to see the other kind where students are not allowed to become involved, not allowed to talk. It's no accident that our university didn't burn these past two summers and falls and springs. No accident. A lot of hard work went into it.