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Hard Eight

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Hard Eight

Auto-ethnographic essays on academic culture featuring the end of
the Arts & Sciences College, University of Toledo, 2010

by **'Professor Xtreme'** (Dr. David J. Nemeth)



David J. Nemeth

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Preface

I hail from the Far Southwest. That is where I earned my PhD in Geography. For the first three decades of my life I dearly enjoyed the sand, surf and desert breezes.

Nevertheless I hitched my career wagon as a professor to an Arts and Sciences College in America's heartland. When the planets lined up for me, I was headed to the University of Toledo. That was in 1989. I discovered the position advertisement for a tenure-track Assistant Professor of Geography and Planning in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*. I clearly remember pausing to romance the logo that highlighted that job description:



A proud eagle clasp shield and crown riding into battle against ignorance: “Contributing to the Present, Shaping the Future.” What adventurous romantic in search of an ivory tower could resist this allure? The icon captivated me by symbolizing the prestige, power, and dignity of a venerable liberal arts university with deep roots supporting, oak-like, an invincible College of Arts and Sciences?

I was hooked! The UT campus turned out to be a beautiful blend of nature and industry. Not only did a lively river run through it – but an active train track as well! Paradise! I signed up and things went well for me there for a good, good while.

Then came the bloody iconoclasts.



It is a cruel alchemy that transforms old gold into common brass. What cheek they had! It was 2006. A new administration drove its irreverent anti-intellectual business model onto and across the Bancroft campus like a panzer attack. It was tenured-faculty-unfriendly and spawned a malevolent marketing campaign that added insult to injury, for example, by claiming to the world that at the University of Toledo there was to be “No more Ivory Tower!”

For me at mid-career it was flight or fight. I was accustomed and loyal to the venerable UT tradition. So I dug in. It appeared to me that an evil empire had arrived and that its army of bureaucrats had hit the ground scampering like ravenous ship rats onto a virgin tropical isle. These irreverent managerial bureaucrats immediately deployed their business model strategies and stratagems to deliberately disrupt and undermine what at the time an accomplished, highly productive academic community already in place. Total strangers and carpetbaggers were conspiring and waging war with a seasoned, unionized, entrenched UT faculty –my doughty colleagues -- and with our beloved library books!

This new administration envisioned transforming the University of Toledo, long a successful regional State of Ohio taxpayer-supported non-profit higher educational institution of modest national repute -- and a lot of local, civic pride -- into a very different sort of animal: a placeless, privatizing, profit-making enterprise with no moral compass. Inevitably these wily exotic agents of “transformative change” calibrated then concentrated their wicked weapons of mass disruption upon upending the College of Arts and Sciences, towering citadel of the liberal arts departments and faculties. Buzz words like “silos” and “synergies” became the

buzz saws that functioned only to trim back and then topple the grand old oak of A&S College, which proved to be *not* “invincible” after all was said and done.

The entire story of the dark pathway leading to the destruction of A&S College between 2006 and 2010, followed by its demoralizing continuation down to the present, is archived in detail here: <http://ascforum.blogspot.com/>

The following eight essays bearing witness to this the tragedy were disseminated in UT’s student newspaper, the *Independent Collegian* under its brave editor at that time.

These auto-ethnographic essays reveal the intensity of the cultural conflict the professoriate and administration on the UT campus over the future of Arts & Sciences College in the Fall Semester of 2010. They are deliberately provocative and at the time of their IC publications spanning a tumultuous period of three months garnered 181 reader comments. The majority of the comments were salvos of *ad hominem* attacks on “Professor Xtreme.” These were offered up in fair exchange for his observations, comments, pronouncements and occasionally outrageous broadsides.

What triggers the compilation and republication of these contentious essays at this time to a wider audience is the pending arrival of a new president and administration to UT after a long eight years. Happy Days at last! I am glad I stayed and fought it out with those misanthropes who ultimately destroyed the Arts and Sciences College at the University of Toledo. Most of them have by now departed while I have survived on the job to wave them a one-fingered fare-thee-well.

Today I woke up whistling. I welcome a new morn at UT which may very well bring back the potential of a reversal of fortune for its demolished Arts and Sciences College. My hope is that out of its proverbial ashes a New Phoenix – a rebuilt and rededicated Arts and Sciences College -- will eventually rise up and soar. I am eager to stick around to help accomplish its glorious restoration.

David J. Nemeth
(March 11, 2015)

and its members regularly joined forces as equals in the spirit of cooperation to discuss campus issues and to resolve them productively. This was called “shared governance” and it worked well. Through this shared governance, all the campus cultures contributed to preserving the venerable tradition of the University of Toledo as a fine public university.

About four years ago, shared governance and the cultures of the professoriate and staff suddenly came under attack by a disrespectful new administration. Like kids vandalizing Dad’s liquor cabinet, the Lloyd Jacobs administration began irascibly moving everything around for no good reason and randomly shaking things up. They had attitude, this swarm of angry men and women, carrying hammers in search of nails to pound on. Why? It remains a mystery. Perhaps they pound away just because they can and because they continue to get paid and promoted for it. The outcome after four years is that shared governance is now in the toilet, faculty and staff cultures are seriously demoralized, and the administrative ranks have grown and prospered.

Meanwhile, UT students pay an increasingly higher price to support destructive, wasteful and academically unproductive administrative shenanigans. I think it is high time for the student, faculty, staff, and alumni cultures to jointly put pressure on the UT Board of Trustees to silence all the malicious hammering and take this rogue Administrative culture to the woodshed!

The Origins of Professor Xtreme

CANNONballs! I'm such a lucky guy, and so very fortunate to have met more than my fair share of interesting people over the years. My father tops the list. He was a born and raised in the heart of hunkydome on steep slopes overlooking Youngstown's vibrant valley of smokestacks and steel.

During school hours, Dad fed coal to furnaces inside a mill along the Mahoney River. He grew up as tough as the nails and rails that were forged and stamped out there beneath the billowing concrete chimneys. Youngstown was a lot like Toledo in its prime. Soot in the air and gyres of foam in the river meant another paycheck was on the way. Everyone employed breathed deeply over that and ignored the consequences.

A man of steel, my Dad was an amateur boxer, a footballer and a heck of a numbers runner -- until Pearl Harbor shuttled him far away into the South Pacific. This unexpected overseas adventure (in addition to his having met and married my Mom) likely saved him from becoming just another late-Depression Y-town mobster.

Surviving under canvas in the sweltering heat of hostile, jungle-covered islands like New Caledonia, New Guinea, Espiritu Santo and Fiji, Dad rose to every occasion and earned the rank of Captain on a field commission. I keep an old photograph of him wearing a grass skirt, holding a bottle of beer and smoking a Lucky Strike.

Dad never spoke much of his war experience other than to say he was for a time the personal bodyguard and Jeep driver for a gung-ho general named "Sandy" Patch. Eventually, I was able to piece together a patch-quilt story of him killing many enemy soldiers and suffering deep remorse. It was soon after the war that he discovered, through self-hypnosis, how to contain those ghosts of war that might otherwise have driven him crazy.

When Dad returned from the war he walked through the front door and into my life as a complete stranger. I met him then, this most interesting fellow. I was four years old. From that day forward he threw himself headlong into the American Dream. He vowed to help heal the ravages of polio and leveraged the GI Bill into a college education and a sweet career of professional physiotherapy.

It was in his spare time that he began also to study the hypnotic arts. He practiced on me throughout my childhood. In the evenings, after dinner, he would swing a ring on a string in front of my face and ask me in his sonorous voice,

“What do you want out of life today, Jimmy?” and then proceed to attempt to provision me with that item or experience via his power of suggestion.

The results of his experiments were as often as not satisfying and long-lasting. To this day, for example, my glass of ordinary tap water tastes just like ice-cold Coca-Cola©. Dad eventually became a certified hypnotist. Sly Stallone was one of his classmates.

There are other folks on my list, both great and small. In 1996, while participating in a grandiose “World Philosophers Meet” convened in Poona, India, I found myself seated facing the Dalai Lama at close quarters. He borrowed my five cent Paper Mate© ball point pen to autograph some books and then returned it to me about an hour later. While I am not yet convinced the Dalai Lama is a Holy Man I can attest from this first-hand experience to his honesty. Incidentally, that nickel pen has yet to run dry of ink! Come by my office and I will show it to you.

Further down my list and less renowned (but hardly less interesting) is a pleasant fellow named Roy I met early one morning around dawn at the Baker Street Restaurant and truck stop in far eastern Indiana. That place is open around the clock and has the best biscuits, gravy and trucker toys north of the Mason-Dixon Line. He was interesting to me mainly because he conversed fluently in proverbs and nostrums (which are almost — but not quite — the same thing).

For example, on first greeting Roy he responded to my “Good morning!” with “The early bird gets the worm!” to which I replied without hesitation, “The second mouse gets the cheese.” I like proverbs, too, you see. In that way we hit it off. We shared a window booth and traded pithy wisdoms from around the world as powerful Peterbilt and classic Kenmores rolled across the parking lot outside, their chromium-covered dual exhaust stacks belching diesel and glistening in that morning’s sunshine.

By noon Roy and I had ritually bonded, finally entrusting each other with our very favorite proverbs. It was high time to cash out and seek our separate paths through Life. Who picked up the check? Roy said “He who pays the piper calls the tune,” and I countered “He who sups with the Devil should have a long spoon!” So we smiled, called it a draw and split the bill.

In case you are wondering: My favorite proverb on that day was “The sun shines even in a rat hole.” His was “There are few in the world that can resist the urge to help their rice plants grow.” Today I like his best.

Here at the University of Toledo the Lloyd Jacobs Administration, capping four years of futility on the academic front, is on the verge of dismantling our venerable College of Arts and Sciences and transforming it all or part into a “School of Sustainability.” This term, “sustainability” is a euphemism for “development” and a vaguely green rationale for continued economic growth and reliance on technological fixes to remedy technological disasters. Oil spills, global

warming and such are viewed by crass developers as opportunities for making more profits.

Further technological disasters are accepted by such evil clowns as collateral damage along the road of progress. Their favorite nostrum for a stalled economy is “A rising tide lifts all boats.” Thus, relentless, cancerous growth is portrayed as natural and necessary for improving the human condition.

I believe there is an ethical alternative to the instrumental/rational arguments for a sustainable future. I call it “enlightened underdevelopment” and it involves creating a world society that can “resist the urge” to pursue an economic growth model that continually depends on promoting selfishness, usury and profiteering while accepting starvation, war and poverty as business as usual.

Interested? Come by and talk to me. Don’t forget to ask to see that pen.

3

Happy ending for CAS

Join me. It is approaching the end of a long, hot day. We observe two strangers near the summit of a steep hiking trail in Arizona. They are standing on a treacherous lip over the Grand Canyon, facing to the West, toward the sinking sun. Exhausted and silent, they gaze off into the rugged abyss and down to where the Colorado River is wending its way through the crags and crevasses, here and there bathed scarlet in a scattering of sunshine.

Both hikers are transfixed and held spellbound by the panoramic play of light on the pillars of detritus -- the debris within that vast crevasse all carved out of stone by the ancient, tireless river at work. Eventually one of them breathes, "Wow!" and the other responds, "You said it!"

"It is a red ribbon chasing after the sun!" claims the hiker we shall call "The Poet."

"No. It is the outcome of an inexorable erosion process gradually moving sediments to the sea!" asserts the hiker we shall call "The Scientist."

What happens next? To find out you must now take Professor Xtreme's first quiz of the season.

Please Choose the Best Response:

- a) Overwhelmed by the magic of the moment and in their ecstatic enthusiasm, the two strangers suddenly embrace and leap into the abyss.
- b) The Poet shoves the Scientist into the abyss with a victorious shout of, "So THERE!"
- c) The Scientist performs an eye roll of disgust and abruptly heads further up the trail. Having taken twenty paces, The Scientist turns dramatically about and shouts, "You LUNATIC!"
- d) They agree to meet back at the lodge. Once there they retreat to the Poet's room and have sex in the shower.

e) They politely take leave of each other, return to their cars in the parking lot, slip their keys into their ignitions and drive off in different directions.

f) None of the above is a better choice than any other.

g) a, b, c, d, and e are all absurd, I hate this quiz and I hate this column.

Thank you for taking my quiz.

Rather than overanalyze the choices let us just agree that "d" – the happiest ending -- is the best response, so we can move on.

Most people would applaud a happy ending to every human drama. For example, the story of the venerable University of Toledo College of Arts & Sciences should end "... and so they lived happily ever after" [applause!] because it has accomplished so much good work while performing its academic mission as a state public institution of higher education during its first ninety-six years.

Everything seemed indeed copasetic with the College's masterly performance until 2006 when the Lloyd Jacobs Administration arrived on the scene and proclaimed, to everyone's surprise, that the College was "broken" and irrelevant to the instrumental-rational trends of the new millennium.

Then, without articulating clearly what was broken or irrelevant, a highway-to-transformation of the College was swiftly paved by a sequence of five notorious documents prepared by administration-appointed, -coached and -controlled teams of authors that recommend, justify and thus enable the systematic dismantling of the College and its constituent departments [cat-calls and boos!].

On September 24th, President Jacobs will decide whether or not to implement the recommended restructuring plan, all or in part. Meanwhile, public meetings have been and will be held by the administration's Strategic Plan Committee and Implementation Committee on Strategic Organization to describe and explain the progress of the planned transformation. Most of their work, however, occurred over the summer break when students and faculty were absent and had no opportunity to directly participate, to contribute or offer critiques.

Internet rumors began circulating among members of the campus community excluded from the planning process about the possible impacts of the planned transformations, if implemented, and there was wild speculation about a top-level administrator conspiracy against the College. Anxiety levels rose rapidly. Incivilities ensued over this issue of top-down A&S College transformation and restructuring that appeared to circumvent both the spirit and the letter of shared governance.

On August 24th there was a "Strategic Plan Committee of the Whole Meeting" and a PowerPoint© presentation that addressed and condemned the circulating rumors. The presenter representing the university's structural reorganization team proclaimed there was "absolutely no evidence" that the following still-circulating rumors are true.

1. Structural reorganization will increase tuition.
2. Structural reorganization will result in increased bureaucracy.
3. Structural reorganization will devalue student degrees.
4. Structural reorganization is a way to sell degrees.
5. Structural reorganization will lower the quality of education.

To claim that there is "absolutely no evidence" that these rumors are true is a preposterous statement! In the first place the word "absolutely" invites skepticism about the claim of there being no evidence. Beyond that are general characteristics of rumors themselves that serve to explain why they exist and proliferate.

The best way to spread a rumor is to assert it is untrue. Also, rumors have legs and it proves near impossible to knock the legs out from under a rumor on the run. Finally, a rumor without a leg to stand on will get around some other way.

I forgive anyone for thinking that these particular rumors must have some truth content since the administration has its underwear in a big knot over them and asserts too loudly that they are untrue. Moreover, since the specific negative impacts of the implementation of the recommended restructuring described in the rumors will take place in the future, the administration can hardly claim there is "absolutely no evidence" of their validation in the present.

If they prove to be true, on that day of infamy the present administrators and their minions will be long gone, as will the A&S College, the tenured professoriate and the good academic reputation of the University of Toledo.

Or, there can be a happy ending to this story yet. Students, faculty, staff and alumni campus cultures can unite to convince President Jacobs to reject the proposed plans for transformation and restructuring as unnecessary and ill-conceived.

A word on stewardship from Prof. Xtreme

In 1908, near the end of his eight-year term as President of the United States, Theodore Roosevelt resolved to dramatically change certain coinage of the United States. He commissioned a gold Indian Head Quarter Eagle, face valued at two and one-half dollars. It went into mass circulation in 1909. It was a beautiful coin. The obverse honored a Native-American in profile wearing a full-feathered war bonnet. On the reverse was a proud standing eagle; a symbol of peace, yet preparedness.



Few of these coins have survived to the present. Ironically, most were rounded up and melted down under the presidency of Franklin D. Roosevelt! There are exceptions. Here is the story of a 1909 Indian Head Quarter Eagle that outlived the purge.

A young woman named Ruby Grey from Zanesville, Ohio decides to enter college at the University of Toledo. She has an aunt there she can live with while earning her degree. Her aunt writes that Toledo is a booming city and home to many hard-working peoples from around the world. She also writes that there will

be a new College of Arts and Sciences established there. She knows Ruby wants to become a teacher.

Ruby is also crazy about American history and literature. She is in fact related to P. Zane Grey, an aspiring writer, and his determination to succeed is a great inspiration to her.

So Ruby moves to Toledo in 1909 to begin her college years. She takes along two trunks filled with personal possessions. In her purse she has fifty-two dollars and fifty cents. Her father gives her fifty dollars to help her "settle in." The remainder is a tiny gift from her mother: a freshly-minted 1909 Indian Head Quarter Eagle! It is in a tiny wooden box. "For luck!" Ruby's mother says as she hands her the box.

And Ruby had good luck, indeed. She moved to Toledo, earned her degree, married the son of a banker, and taught middle school for fifty-six years. She had three children. The eldest was a boy she named Zane. When Ruby died in 1971, Zane inherited some of her possessions and one item was the small box containing the handsome gold coin now worth several hundred dollars (even though its face value remained two dollars and fifty cents.)

Ruby once told Zane that the coin in the box was a very special family treasure and some day it would be his and he must take ownership of it and care for it and give it to his own son someday. She called this responsibility "proper stewardship" and he realized that he had hardly ever heard that word used before, so he immediately looked it up in the dictionary: "One who manages another's property."

Several weeks after Ruby's funeral, Zane was in his kitchen watching an NFL football game. It was halftime and he had an idea. He retrieved the small box from his bedroom dresser drawer and placed it on the kitchen table with some steel wool, powdered soap, a sponge and a bowl of water. He opened the box and removed the coin and inspected it closely. It had the patina of one hundred years passing upon its surface. He proceeded to abrade and polish the coin to an unprecedented luster, rubbing hard to ensure that the coin's value would increase substantially through his efforts. He thought he was practicing good stewardship.

The Lloyd Jacobs Administration at the University of Toledo claims to be practicing good stewardship of this taxpayer-owned university. However, it has inspected the College of Arts & Sciences and has found fault with, rather than appreciation for, its unique and valuable patina earned after 100 years of excellence. There is a strong possibility that upon the implementation of the Jacobs "Directions" strategic plan beginning in November of this year, the College will be abraded and polished, perhaps beyond recognition. Is this good stewardship? Happy Anniversary, CAS!

5

The Conspiracy of Trees

The interdisciplinary study of squirrels is growing by leaps and bounds, right here on the University of Toledo main campus. By observing animals close at hand, humankind can learn much about itself. Humans have become gradually alienated from nature since the onset of the Industrial Revolution. Adrift from nature, humanity quickly forgets how to survive.

Squirrel studies can open up profound areas of inquiry. For example, philosophers in Scott Hall gazing out the big window of their seminar room can observe and contemplate how squirrel essence informs the human condition, by reflecting on this koan:

Zen master Fa-ch'an was dying.
A squirrel screeched from the rooftop.
"It's just this" he said, "and nothing more."

Squirrel studies are happening all across campus this year as never before, and not only in philosophy. Students everywhere are bonding with each other and with their faculty mentors while gazing out of their classroom windows. "Eruditio ex squirrels" is the slogan of this intellectual enterprise. It is all about a newly-identified relevancy in our transforming university. If you are not learning about squirrels you had better see your advisor right away.

When curriculum begins to follow the money it can lead many academics in search of grants funding some exotic avenues of creative research. As the barista at our campus Starbucks put it to me yesterday, "Whodathunk ten years ago that I'd be studying for a career in solar and wind power? WhoooooWheeeee! I'm a windologist! My boyfriend gives me constant encouragement and says I'll go far! ..."

Here is the latest scoop on the reasons for the rapid spread of scientific squirrel studies across campus at this time: The Pentagon apparently leaked to a few Wall Street firms some exploratory interest in squirrels as related to its well-funded global War Against Terrorism. Our new UT administration proactively pounced on the rumor and today squirrel power is already being discussed across campus as "the new solar!"

Just so, squirrel studies are considered an essential branch of STEMM research (Science, Technology, Engineering, Math and Medicine). Meanwhile the

Arts and Science College deans and chairs have agreed unanimously that squirrel studies can provide insights into human food security issues locally and on a global scale. As I write, some social scientists on this campus are scrutinizing the squirrels as an "invasive species" (along with the zebra mussel and the "toe-sucking" monster carp) and as an example of "urban wildlife."

So what? Well, if the sound of money makes you stand erect and salute, thanks to the Pentagon leak there are all sorts of government agencies, the World Bank, NASA (flying squirrels) and even the United Nations quite happy to fund the scientific study of the squirrel.

Researchers in the USA have to do most of the heavy lifting on this front since there are as many squirrels as pigeons in our public places: brown squirrels, grey squirrels, red squirrels -- a rainbow of squirrels -- all destined to be tranquilized, tagged and analyzed until external funding ceases.

What about the competition from India and China, you might ask? Don't fret. On a global scale, squirrel studies are a money game that the Chinese and the Indians cannot or will not play. This is because in China and Australia there is a dearth rather than a plethora of local squirrels to study.

Think about this: In the south of China around Old Canton where it was well-known that the locals "ate everything with legs but tables and chairs," you cannot today find a single squirrel burger. Meanwhile giant squirrels of India apparently never in their lifetimes touch the ground to bury nuts, and so are for classified reasons of no interest to the Pentagon and Wall Street at this time.

It is common knowledge that if you crave to eat squirrel morning, noon and night, you must go to Kentucky or Tennessee. The squirrel season officially opened this year in Tennessee on August 26th but it's never too late for the avid Appalachian sportsman to lock and load. Apparently anyone of any age or sex, when south of the Mason-Dixon Line, may choose their hunting weapons with abandon. Southern cougars and wild boar, for example, have been killed with frying pans, and on at least one occasion an adult black bear was killed with two banjos.

The all-time favorite rim-fire cartridge for squirrel hunting down south is the .22LR. Bigger bore rifles are occasionally used but condemned — by damn Yankees — as "overkill" and unsportsmanlike. An elephant gun is of course totally impracticable if you plan on making squirrel stews or pies out of your targets.

Bow-and-arrow enthusiasts also hunt the squirrel. According to one, who needs to take a WAC course at UT:

"Its fun and a lot more challenging. It's also good for the environment. Example a .22, you could just mop 'em up; a bow, its harder and funner, and you could be hunting for a few hours and only have a few. So you're not just slaughtering

squirrels. I like to shoot a few cottontails before a family BBQ. Great off-season sport and keeps you in shape for shooting!"

Remarkably, "down home" in Alabama some squirrel hunters choose to enter even the darkest woods bearing only slingshots. Many are grown men. Much of the chatter from up in the trees must be laughter -- "Watch out, Bucky! Man's got a slingshot! Har! Har!"

I am one of those who in mid-October join with the members of my class to gaze out of the high windows of University Hall facing Bancroft Street to contemplate the frenzied squirrels there hard at work. All is arboreal splendor rooted in green grass and a joy to behold. You can't duplicate this classroom learning experience on the Internet with distance learning. There is no substitute for the camaraderie of the classroom, which generates invariably a quality conversation like this:

Q. "What are they doing, those busy, frantic squirrels?"

A. "They are burying acorns and nuts."

Q. "What for?"

A. "To dig up and eat during winter so they don't starve."

Q. "Perhaps. But what per cent of the nuts they bury do you think they will dig up later to eat?"

A. "Who would know?"

Q. "Well, I asked some STEM scientists in squirrel studies. Their answer is 40 percent."

A. "Gosh! So those squirrels out there on our front lawn working dawn to dusk at 100 percent are for the most part wasting their time and energy? Why don't they just slow down 60 per cent so they can live longer, happier lives?"

Q. "They are too dumb to think it through. Each squirrel just goes about doing its job."

A. "Which is what?"

Q. "Mainly burying acorns and nuts that grow into trees. The squirrels work for the trees -- only they don't realize it. Squirrel labor is being manipulated and exploited by conspiratorial forces beyond their awareness."

A. "Holy Toledo! A conspiracy of trees against squirrels! Right here on campus! Anything else?"

Q. "Just a final question: 'Who do YOU work for?'"

6

The Kraken attacks

Something BIG is happening on campus this week. Before I comment on it, please take this survey:

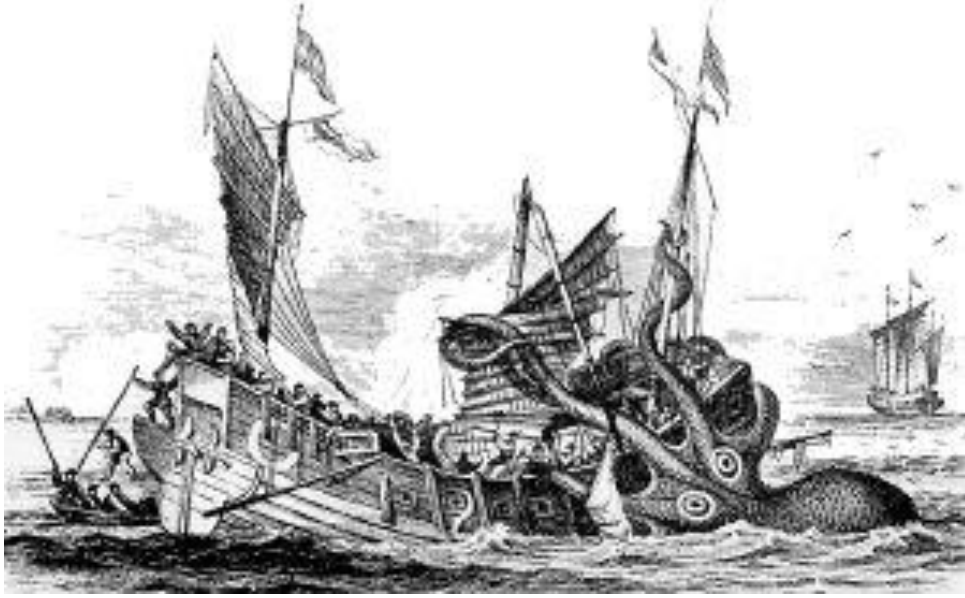
Where do you get your hardcopy news on campus?

- a) UTNews = Free lemonade, sugar galore.
- b) The Blade = everything and the kitchen sink you never wanted to know about dogs locally.
- c) USA Today = Where is Waldo Lindsay Lohan today?
- d) The Wall Street Journal = Greed is good! Really!
- e) The Independent Collegian = A trusty anchor in a Storm of Spin.
- f) The Free Press = Toothless critiques amidst endless adverts.
- g) Other print media.
- h) Rest room graffiti.
- i) The same place on campus where I buy my cold beer on draft (nowhere).

Now to the BIG happening! Tomorrow President Lloyd Jacobs will open the Door to the Future for the College of Arts & Sciences -- with significant impacts for its students, faculty, staff and alumni. Will it be the lady? Or the tiger? (Drum roll begins.) Stay tuned.

Meanwhile, senior members of the tenured faculty, in spite their rapidly declining numbers, remain the strongest and most vocal advocates for improving academic quality on the Main Campus of the University of Toledo. They feel they have a professional obligation to break the slimy grip of the Kraken of capitalist expansion that four years ago suddenly rose out of the depths in an attempt to engulf and drag down our proud ship of public higher education.

The precious cargo now at unprecedented risk is student and public trust invested as tuition and taxes in the value of a University of Toledo education that manifests as its earned diplomas. That trust is now in danger of being betrayed.



The Kraken seems intent in its mindless determination to destroy Arts & Sciences College. On board, the fierce fight being waged to save the ship and its cargo rages on.

Tomorrow perhaps, the battle ends.

Angry ghosts of CAS

The College of Arts & Sciences is being axed, pending the imminent approval of the Board of Trustees. By presidential decree, our century-old College will be unceremoniously chopped up into three morsels and fed to Mammon.

I wouldn't want to be in the shoes of any of the leadership and conspirators behind this dastardly deed. If you need to know why, right now, skip to the last paragraph.

Mammon is featured in the Bible as the false god of greed and avarice. His name in Aramaic stands for “money” tinged with “evil.” Mammon appears in both the Old and New Testaments. He thrives into the present where the entire world — thanks to the burst of the housing bubble — is now all too aware of his current address on Wall Street.

The films *Wall Street* (1987) and now *Wall Street: Money Never Sleeps* (2010) are perceptive primers in the ways of Mammon. In *WS* we were reassured by the trader Gordon Gekko that “greed is good.” In the sequel, Gekko reminds us that greed is not only good, but now it is legal.

WS:MNS is not only perceptive — it is prophetic. I encourage all students to see the film and think critically about its profound message and its timely warning. It is hardly a secret on Wall Street these days that there is a huge higher education bubble that threatens to burst. Even President Lloyd Jacobs has spoken of it.

Predicting when the bubble will burst depends in large part on how far into the future students continue to borrow heavily from banks in order to pay for their expensive college tuition loans. The *Wall Street* films have educational value, though everyone may not agree with director Oliver Stone's interpretation of the housing bubble's complex causes.

If there is an education bubble, and it grows and blows, there will be in the aftermath of its “big bang” a few winners and many, many losers. As the devilish Gordon Gekko gloats in *WS:MNS*, “Bulls make money. Bears make money. Pigs get slaughtered.”

Why does Gekko claim “Pigs get slaughtered” rather than “Lambs get slaughtered?” Are not the victims of Mammon and his minions as innocent as lambs? Hardly: “Pigs” seems the appropriate term. Lambs are few. Many worship Mammon. That is why these bubbles grow so fast then burst. Look in a mirror.

These are disturbing times. If you don't believe so, just glance at the Franklin Park cineplex marquee when you go to see *WS:MNS*. Also playing are

films titled *Devil*, *Resident Evil: Afterlife* and *Barbie: A Fashion Fairytale*! What implications for an indictment of our selfish, sick society! Some say judgment day is just around the corner. Meanwhile, money never sleeps.

I was having a chat with an administrator a few months ago and I mentioned what a shame it is that tuition is so high these days at the University of Toledo. He corrected me, saying: “Actually tuition costs here are relatively low, allowing students to acquire a quality higher education degree at bargain rates,” or words to that effect.

I was not convinced, but I thought to ask this question: “Do you believe public colleges and universities, and UT in particular, have any legal or ethical responsibilities for how much students borrow and whether or not they can pay it back?” He wandered off with a smile, without replying.

Lately I have come up with a subversive idea that Mammon might not like, and which might deflate the expanding education bubble before it has time to burst. I propose here for discussion purposes that higher education institutions wedded to the business model, whether private or public, should immediately be obligated to guarantee or warrantee that their products are tickets to jobs.

Why are college degrees any different than vacuum cleaners in a competitive market? Maybe I’m crazy.

Every so often — but not nearly often enough — the administration opens up the Libbey Hall Great Room for an informal get-together.

Members of the faculty, staff and administrators are invited to relax, trade ideas, and enjoy each other’s company. Snacks and liquid refreshments are available and the university picks up most of the tab. There is live music. It is quite nice and demonstrates that administration has a heart and some of the essential ingredients of a great idea — a University Club on the main campus!

If you are ever in Libbey Hall, note that on the walls of its Great Room are displayed the visages of the pantheon of heroes responsible for founding and maintaining the College of Arts and Sciences during the past 100 years. Even after their deaths, their representations remain as sentinels on guard, possessed of duty, taking note of current events on our campus.

I wonder if they also pass judgment and act — as only the dead are able — upon threats to their legacies? If so, I pity those fools, those satraps of Mammon, who conspired or aided in the conspiracy to whack CAS on its hundredth birthday.

Now, with Halloween just around the corner, they must endure the visitations of whatever angry ghosts from the past they may have loosed upon themselves by their cold-blooded murder.

8

For all sad words of tongue or pen

It seems like it was only yesterday. Just five years ago President Lloyd Jacobs arrived to administer over the University of Toledo's Main Campus. He invited us all into Doermann Theater where he humbly introduced himself and enthused over the bold essentials of his innovative "Directions" Strategic Plan.

He gave us a rousing, spirited speech on that historic day, immediately winning the hearts, minds, trust and confidence of the entire campus community. Etched into my mind and the minds of all those in attendance — my professional colleagues, inspired students, staff and alumni — were the opening words of the President's heartfelt address: "What do you want to be, and I'll help you become that!" he promised.

The rest is history. Those famous twelve words became our UT "brand" of academic excellence, the flying carpet of success that has brought us at supersonic speed from that historic event to the present day. President Jacobs has kept his word — and then some!

We recall how the entire main campus community responded to his address as one. We helped build the realization of our common dream, which was to dramatically and rapidly improve the academic reputation of our beloved university. We recall with pride how our College of Arts & Sciences, under its charismatic new dean, swiftly led the campus surge toward unprecedented academic excellence.

We will never forget how all this growth was made possible by the president's generous promise of investing great sums immediately into new faculty lines and into myriad teaching and research resources.

We now recall best of all how in five short years and to the entire nation's great surprise, the University of Toledo surged to the head of the MAC pack and earned its first top-tier ranking in the 2010 U.S. News and World Report. Today, our shining star is still rapidly on the rise. Our future remains boundless.

Or does it?

What you have just read is not a lie, nor is it a fairy tale. It is called a "counterfactual history" and it is an increasingly popular learning tool in many of today's higher education classrooms. A counterfactual classroom exercise basically

surveys present conditions in history, geography, society, etc. and asks in order to stimulate critical thinking: “What might have been” if only a few initial conditions leading to “what is” are altered?

“Counterfactuals” are part of a toolkit of successful new millennium teaching methods often termed “postmodern” by both the supporters who embrace them and by the detractors who disparage them.

If someone asks you “What is postmodernism?” I suggest you can respond with confidence “Back to the future!” Or, sometimes a simple “whatever” will suffice to sum it up. If postmodernism in higher education teaching seems like madness to you and makes you howling mad, I can only say that there is some method in its madness and that its origins are reputable.

First, about its method: It helps to speculate that postmodernism is not a “thing” or a belief system as much as it is an attitude. For example, a postmodern attitude in the classroom is deliberately iconoclastic and irreverent. We see this when postmodernism manifests as “counterfactuals,” as it toys with reality and with history. Postmodernism behaves like a cat having its way with a ball of yarn. As an intellectual exercise, postmodernism is controlled chaos.

You might ask yourself, “Am I a postmodern thinker?” Perhaps you are and never realized it. Do you practice random acts of kindness instead of giving to United Way? How postmodern!

Are you willing to explore the following ideas when mapping out your lifestyle? “Put to the question ~~all~~ basic assumptions;” “Speak and write with contingency instead of with certainty;” “Cross boundaries without a license;” “Present the un-presentable;” “~~Never~~ explain, ~~never~~ complain;” “Expect the ~~worst~~, hope for the ~~best~~.”

Why do some of the above words contain strikethroughs? Think it through, and if you are stumped please stop by my office or email me so we can discuss it.

The postmodern attitude as a best practice in higher education classroom teaching has its reputable origins at Harvard, as inspired by the writing of Professor Ellen Langer, author of *The Power of Mindful Learning* (1997). She has a Wiki page that notes that she is the first woman ever to be tenured in educational psychology at Harvard University — how’s that for postmodern! Go girl!

Her postmodern attitude motivated her to challenge these seven “myths” in traditional classroom learning:

- 1) The basics must be learned so well that they become second nature. Myth.
- 2) Paying attention means staying focused on one thing at a time. Myth.
- 3) Delaying gratification is important. Myth.
- 4) Rote memorization is necessary in education. Myth.
- 5) Forgetting is a problem. Myth.

- 6) Intelligence is knowing “what’s out there.” Myth.
- 7) There are right and wrong answers. Myth.

Perhaps my examples of a postmodern attitude combined with my introduction of Ellen Langer’s “myths” help you better understand why counterfactual histories today can help promote critical thinking and writing in the college classroom.

Perhaps you now better appreciate what might be had these twelve words, “What do you want to be, and I’ll help you become that!” been boldly spoken in Doermann Theater five years ago. What nobody needed to hear was a twelve-word supercilious sentiment like: “You are broken. I’m a fixer. Stand with me or stand aside.”

Where might the University of Toledo and the College of Arts & Sciences be today, if only ...?

The Kraken attacks

Something BIG is happening on campus this week. Before I comment on it, please take this survey:

Where do you get your hardcopy news on campus?

a) U/INews - Free lemonade, sugar galore.

b) The Blade - everything and the kitchen sink you never wanted to know about dogs locally.

c) USA Today - Where is Wade Lindsay Lohan today?

d) The Wall Street Journal - Greed is good! Really!

e) The Independent Collegian - A trusty anchor in a Storm of Spin.

f) The Free Press - Toothless critiques amidst endless adverts.

g) Other print media.

h) Rest room graffiti.

i) The same place on campus where I buy my cold beer on draft (nowhere.)

Now to the BIG happening! Tomorrow President Lloyd Jacobs will open the Door to the Future for the College of Arts & Sciences - with significant impacts for its students, faculty, staff and alumni. Will it be the lady? Or the tiger? (Drum roll begins.) Stay tuned.

Meanwhile, senior members of the tenured faculty, in spite their rapidly declining numbers, remain the strongest and most vocal advocates for improving academic quality on the Main Campus of the University of Toledo. They feel they have a professional obligation to break the slimy grip of the Kraken of capitalist expansion that four years ago suddenly rose out of the depths in an

attempt to engulf and drag down our proud ship of public higher education.

The precious cargo now at unprecedented risk is student and public trust invested as tuition and taxes in the value of a University of Toledo education that manifests as its earned diplomas. That trust is now in danger of being betrayed.

The Kraken seems intent in its mindless determination to destroy Arts & Sciences College. On board, the fierce fight being waged to save the ship and its cargo rages on. Tomorrow perhaps, the battle ends.

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