



## Friday at the Center: June 17, 2005

### Please Fill out Your Survey!

All faculty recently should have received in their electronic inbox a survey regarding the work of the Center for Scholarship and Faculty Development faculty. As the school deans, Les, and I work to design and refine our faculty development programs, we need to hear from you! How should we spend the limited funds available for faculty development? How can we make a case for increased funds? What programs do you think are most needed? What currently works and what doesn't? You will have until July 1 to complete this survey on-line, but please don't forget to participate! In addition, those faculty who have participated in either the Social Mentoring or Senior Mentoring Program this year have received a short (one page) evaluation form via campus mail. Please participate!

**Summer Reading:** Time to catch up on all those journals stacked up in your office? If you are looking for something else to read, here are a few suggestions:

### Teaching:

***Letters to a Teacher***, by Sam Pickering (Atlantic Monthly, 2004). Written by the professor of English who served as the inspiration for the main character in *Dead Poets Society*, this book does not presume to offer advice; instead it relates a series of witty and charming reflections on teaching. Pickering's descriptions of interactions with students ring all too true. Once he told a student that she needed to learn civility. "The girl looked puzzled. 'Civility?' she answered. 'What's that? I'm not an English major.'"

***Clueless in Academe: How Schooling Obscures the Life of the Mind***, by Gerald Graff (Yale UP, 2003). A professor of English at the University of Illinois at Chicago, Gerald Graff argues that we need to do a better job of explaining what academic life is about to our students. We too often use "Intellectualspeak" while the students talk "studentspeak." The most important thing for academics in all disciplines to do, he argues, is to teach students the habits of thought that lead to convincing arguments. And if we need to start with where students are at—*The O.C.* or *Batman*—we should. We can then lead them to Plato and Shakespeare.

***I'm the Teacher, You're the Student: A Semester in the University Classroom***, by Patrick Allitt (U of Penn, 2005). A daily account of academic life, written by a professor of history at Emory University, this honest chronicle both acknowledges Allitt's own failures as well as includes some harsh criticisms of his students. The book quotes many of the kind of bon mots that we enjoy sharing at the end of each quarter, such as the following gem: "Many did not survive the harsh journey west, but they still trekked on."

### Christian Higher Education:

**Educating for Shalom: Essays on Christian Higher Education**, by Nicholas Wolterstorff (Eerdmans, 2004). A collection of essays that trace Wolterstorff's philosophy of Christian education as it has developed over twenty-five years. The book makes a persuasive case for a form of Christian higher education that is faithful, as opposed to unique; oriented toward action as well as knowledge; and is perspectival rather than purely objective.

**Conceiving the Christian College**, by Duane Litfin (Eerdmans, 2004). The President of Wheaton College examines the idea of a "distinctively Christian college," in opposition to the radical constructionism of postmodernism and the fact/value division of modernism. Litfin explicates his understanding of "Christ-centered learning," in a book that represents a more oppositional approach than that articulated by Wolterstorff. Together, these two works provide a good contrast of two ways of thinking about Christian higher education.

**Fiction:** And lest all of the above is too much like work, and you want something for the beach, backyard, or airplane . . .

**The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night Time**, by Mark Haddon (Vintage, 2004). Now available in paperback, this debut novel opens with Christopher, its autistic 15-year-old narrator, discovering his neighbor's poodle impaled on a garden fork. Christopher resolves to solve the mystery, and his account is a fascinating rendition of the world as perceived with limited emotional empathy and through a different kind of intellectual understanding. Ultimately, the novel poignantly demonstrates the many ways in which family love can function. My fourteen-year-old son loved this one, too.

**Gilead**, by Marilynne Robinson (Farrar Strauss, 2004). Another tour-de-force of first-person narration, this novel is in the form of a letter written by 76-year-old John Ames to his 7-year-old son, reflecting on his long life in Gilead, Iowa. Ames tells his son about the nature of love and friendship, as well as the role that faith and prayer have played in his life. The recent winner of *Christianity Today's* Book of the Year award in the category of fiction.

**The Time-Traveler's Wife**, by Audrey Niffenegger (Harvest, 2004). An unusual love story about a Chicago librarian with "Chrono Displacement" disorder, which causes him to suddenly and without his control disappear and find himself in the past or the future. Unfortunately, he shows up without any clothes or money. While his affliction is useful for investment purposes, it makes personal relationships difficult. Told from the alternating viewpoints of the librarian and his wife Clare, the story traces their relationship in, out, and through time. The clever concept is well executed, but the strength of the novel lies in its depiction of the complex emotional relationships of the two main characters.

And that's all for the 2004-05 academic year. *Fridays at the Center* will be back in September.

Cheers,

**SUSAN**

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