



Other Viewpoints

KU looks at access and admissions

Coming up with the right admissions policy to build KU's stature without limiting access will be a tricky job.

On the surface, the Kansas Board of Regents request that Kansas University change its student admissions standards. Sounds easy enough: Raise your admissions standards and you'll get better students, retain more students, graduate more students and help preserve KU's membership in the prestigious American Association of Universities.

In reality, the task facing KU officials is more complicated and difficult.

What the regents want KU to do is come up with an admissions policy that doesn't necessarily restrict access to the university, but focuses on higher retention and graduation rates and keeps more academically talented Kansas students in the state. While doing this, KU has to figure out how to avoid further enrollment declines and try not to aggravate its reputation as the "snob hill" university in the state.

Lurking in the background will be the goal of solidifying KU's position as a member of the AAU, which ousted the University of Nebraska this year and accepted the resignation of Syracuse University after informing the school a committee review likely would show Syracuse no longer met the group's criteria.

But, hey, KU, no pressure.

The regents seem to be coming around to the idea that the six state universities can serve different missions in the state's higher education system. The message was that the regents are willing for KU to distinguish itself from other state universities by setting different standards that enhance its national reputation as a comprehensive research university.

Providing access to higher education is a high priority in Kansas, but as Regents Chairman Ed McKechnie noted, "I've come to realize that the most important thing is for a kid to have access to a regents university as opposed to all universities."

The state's six universities all have the same admissions requirements for Kansas high school graduates, but the demands placed on students at those six universities vary. For some students, attending one of the state's smaller universities or starting their post-secondary careers at a community college may be a better choice than jumping into work at KU, but setting standards and selecting students who can be successful at KU without "restricting access" can be a tricky business.

Having an AAU university in Kansas is an important asset for the state, and the Board of Regents is right to place a high priority on maintaining KU's membership in that group. Revised admissions standards may be an important part of that goal, but coming up with the right policy will be a challenge for KU officials. —*The Lawrence Journal-World*

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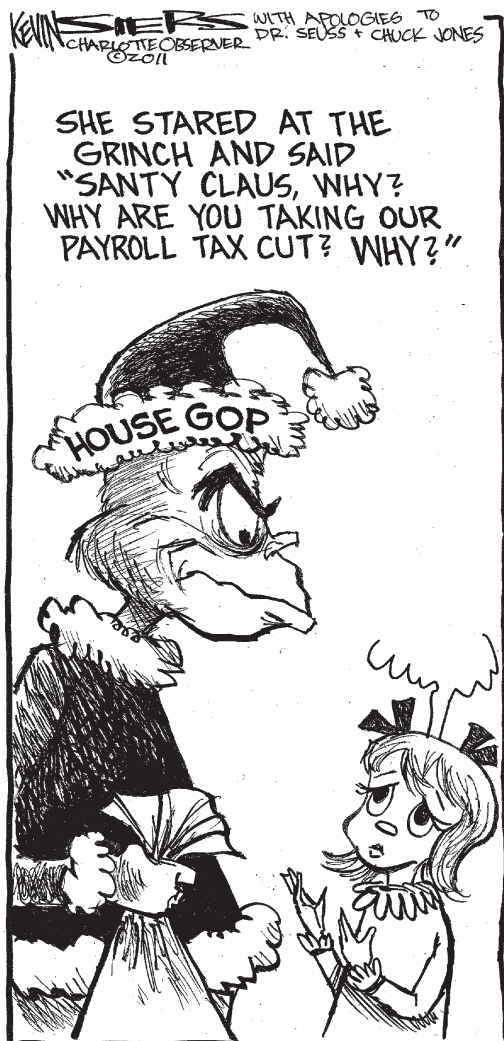
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The ghost of downtown Christmas past

Each year at Christmas, I long for the days before malls. I know, the malls decorate beautifully at Christmas time, but it still can't take the place of the way it used to be in the downtown areas of the cities before malls took everything to the outskirts of towns.

One of the biggest pleasures I had as a child growing up in Oklahoma City and later in Bethany, Okla., a suburb of the city, was to go to town when they turned the Christmas lights on to watch Santa Claus arrive during the Christmas parade.

Even more important than the parade was when we would walk up and down the downtown streets to see the displays in the large department store windows. We would be all bundled up in coats, stocking hats, mittens and overboots while the snowflakes landed on our noses. Each store tried to outdo the next with automated displays.

There was always at least one business with an exhibit of Santa's workshop. The elves would be sawing and hammering to make toys while Santa sat in his easy chair checking his list. Mrs. Claus would be serving cookies to the elves. The next window might have Santa in his sled flying through the air, reindeer legs moving like they were climbing into the sky.

I also liked the Christian Book Store where they had a nativity scene of Joseph and Mary with baby Jesus in the manger. I don't remember hearing anyone complain about religious scenes in those days, either.

I remember one Christmas in particular when I was eight or nine years old. World War II was going on and my dad was drafted into the army. Since he was taking basic training in Texas, he took his pickup truck so he could come home when he was given time off. Of course, that left my mom with four children and no transportation.

Since my grandpa, George Wheaton, who



Marj Brown

• Marj's Snippets

lived in Colby, felt sorry for Mom, he brought his old Model T Ford to Oklahoma for her to drive. It had to be pretty old; I understand the last Model T was made around 1926 or 1927. Since this one had to be hand cranked, it was probably older than that.

One day, Mom drove the old Ford into downtown Oklahoma City to see the Christmas lights. She knew how to drive that car well, because it was the one she learned to drive in. It was quite a project to get it cranked and started, but Mom got the job done.

Just as we approached the main business district of the city we had a flat tire. We could hear the flap, flap, flap of the tire as it got ready to leave the metal rim. Knowing there was nothing she could do about the flat, Mom pulled over, left the car running, got out, took the only tool she found in the car (a pair of tin-snips) and worked for quite some time to remove the rest of the rotten tire and tube from the rim.

When she got back in the car, her hair was hanging in her face and she looked a little flustered. However, with no hesitation, she took off through the heart of the city driving on the metal rim. The car was making the loudest rattling noise I had ever heard. I was so embarrassed I slumped down in the seat. Shirley was in the front with Mom and since I couldn't see her head, I guessed she was slumping, too.

To make matters worse, a street car went by with the people looking out the windows.

Fads will not replace traditional lectures

This is the season when parents go to school or to church to hear their children perform in seasonal plays and sing. There are also Santa parades down many main streets. Everyone knows that it is more exciting to "be there" in person than to watch it on some distant media. Likewise, our troops coming home from Iraq are being greeted by families who have been able to Skype their soldiers daily – but to have them actually present is so much better.

Therefore it is surprising that direct face-to-face speaking in a classroom is derided as inferior communication. An article in the Dec. 6 *New York Times* even proclaims: "Death Knell for the Lecture."

For two decades, my students preparing to be biology teachers have walked into my office to report that another education professor has told them that cooperative learning or personalized programmed learning or some other fad has made lecturing obsolete.

I do not even need to look up when I say: "And what were they doing when they told you that?" A grin spreads across his or her face. The student leaves reassured.

Speaking is the most efficient method of communicating what is in a presenter's mind to the listener's mind. And we do it nearly all the time we are interacting with others. Straining our words through keyboards and keypads and other media slows down the process and reduces communication accuracy and effi-



John Richard Schrock

• Education Frontlines

ciency. Even recorded or transmitted speech or music is inferior in impact. Live concerts have far greater impact.

To be effective, any speaking including lecturing must involve a common experience base for both speaker and listener. This "speech chain" was laid down by early research at Bell Labs. If a listener lacks experiences to make the words meaningful, communication fails in both lectures and electronic media. So teachers supplement words with pictures and videos and labs and field work; only these last direct experiences really provide a rich basis for effective communication.

Lost experiences are a rapidly growing problem. Electronic devices are pulling a new generation away from sand boxes and climbing trees and otherwise directly defining the real world and how it works. As more students – especially boys addicted to videogames – sink into artificial worlds, they become oblivious to the natural world around them. Electronic media can be the problem, not the solution.

Is there research to support lecturing being superior? This summer, researchers Guido Schwerdt and Amelie Wuppermann of the University of Munich published their analysis of U.S. eighth graders' test scores in math and science. They asked the students' teachers the percentage of class time taken up by students "listening to lecture-style presentations" rather than the popular problem-solving and look-it-up-online techniques promoted in education classes.

"Contrary to contemporary thinking, we find that students score higher on standardized tests in the subject in which their teachers spent more time on lecture-style presentations than in the subject in which the teacher devoted more time to problem-solving activities.... Among this group of students, a shift of 10 percentage points of time from problem solving to lecturing is associated with an increase in test scores of almost 4 percent of a standard deviation – or between one and two months' worth of learning in a typical school year."

So the next time someone tells you that lecturing is a poor way of communicating and learning, be kind as you ask them why they have chosen to tell you this – by lecturing?

John Richard Schrock, a professor of biology and department chair at a leading teacher's college, lives in Emporia. He emphasizes that his opinions are strictly his own.

Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley

