

STOP

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IT IS NOT REALLY INTENDED TO BE DIVISIVE; NOT TO READ IT MAY RESULT IN DIVISION!

TO: Mod Sci Faculty
FROM: Richard
SUBJECT: Us, them and the current state of affairs

7 December 1972
(Pearl Harbor Day)

This was originally composed on Tues. afternoon, 5 Dec. We were supposed to get together as a "faculty team" to discuss self evaluations. Fred was sick (a legitimate excuse). Byron took his son to the dentist. Al took himself to the dentist. That left Jake, Jeanne and myself. Jeanne told me Jake didn't want to do evaluations then. She and I then bitched about things for a while. I stewed and cleaned off my desk and sat down to write this. Two days later it is still valid. It is also in tune with what we were supposed to do.

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Modular Science was my first choice of program last June because (in no particular order) (1) I was excited by the prospect of working with Byron of whom I had fond memories as a good teacher, (2) I felt Fred and Byron wanted me to be in the program, and (3) I felt it was an intriguing idea and wanted to see how viable an alternative the interdisciplinary, topical approach is to the standard introductory course. I was also not 100% committed to the choice because I also wanted to teach in the science/public policy/decision-making area (more as "Politics, Values and Social Change" than "Human Ecology").

Modular Science has not been disappointing from the standpoint of the potential it has presented. To be sure there are problems with 5-week long modules and Evergreen's crazy schedule. But at its best, there are good interdisciplinary interactions, I enjoy them and I learn from them and, I hope, the students learn from them. The inclusion of a political scientist even makes that other goal a viable possibility.

But I am so severely disappointed in other aspects of our endeavor that I am about ready to give up worrying about the "success" of the "program" per se, do as good a job on the next modules as I can by myself, and help my students struggle through the boredom of the core seminars.

What do I see as the problems? I can only state what has been communicated to me through your behavior. I now question the total commitment of the Modular Science faculty to the ideas that (1) this is a coordinated (i.e., interdisciplinary) studies program and (2) we have an obligation to work together to improve our teaching. I don't think we have gotten it all together, as they say.

Questions (and some answers?):

Why am I not excited by faculty seminars -- not even book discussions -- as the faculty in other programs seem to be (at least some of them)? Is it because the "core" is not a core at all but the skin on the apple? (I can't figure out a better metaphor - or is it simile - and I can't figure that one out either.) Just what is the faculty's commitment? Is it a commitment to tie things together and make it a common, exciting experience for us all or is it a commitment to the concept of teaching courses (i.e., the same old concepts) with the core as the excuse for calling it a program at all? In other words, are these just group contracts with a pretty pink ribbon for embellishment?

more questions ... →

*I have eliminated some prefatory remarks illuminating the extent of my commitment and some self evaluation. They are available upon request.

Why is there no interest (there is no discussion) in what's happening in other modules? Why haven't we found time/desire to share experiences/ideas/advice on what is teachable (or not) or how to do it? Why don't we discuss how the material in the modules ties into the core - if it does?

Why haven't we kept Mondays inviolate from 10:30 to 6:00? Is that a reflection of where are priorities really are? I want to know what other people are doing, get feedback from them as to what I'm doing right or wrong, etc. I think we need to discuss the substance of Modular Science because I still believe its concept is great even though current practice leaves much to be desired. I have made and have more suggestions for our discussions of these kinds of issues, but....

I sometimes wonder if I'm the only one who feels that he can improve his teaching - or at least wants to try it by talking with others about it.

Am I wrong that that is one way, at least, that Evergreen is different?

Or did I make the wrong turn back there at Ogallala, Nebraska?