

## What is a Student?

Numerous times during the more than two decades which this writer has been teaching, he has been asked to give some explanation as to what constitutes, in his opinion, a student. In as much as the teacher should regard himself as but an advanced student and should regard his students as followers of the most dignified vocation extant, such an explanation should be made in order to clarify the roles and objectives necessary to educational processes.

A student, by derivation of the term, is one who studies. This is his calling, his dedication, his concern while he has time to be a student. While study needs bits of counterbalance in non-student roles in order to maintain its efficiency, the dominant preoccupation of the student must be study.

He is engaged in a search for truth. In a world increasingly dominated by false imagery, political pressures, and insincerity, the student goes beyond the simple cynicism which justifies selling oneself, as a prostitute to the so-called "realities" and thence futhering the lies and deceptions himself. In a somewhat painful and lonely route, he seeks both the knowledge and the wisdom of truth, being aware that his search will never end, and ultimate truth may never be revealed. He further knows, or at least learns in a short time, that any step toward greater wisdom will be gained slowly and patiently, accompanied by the torture of self-doubt and the humility of awariness of the huge magnitude of his undertaking. However, it will also hold the rewards of knowing enough to think confidently, and the pride of self-discipline which must be experienced to order to be known.

He studies at least as much as he would work in another, practically applied, occupation. That is, he would spend at least forty to forty-eight hours per week in constructive reading, study, and class attendance. If he is truly dedicated to the monastic tradition on which his vocation was founded, he will dedicate himself even more fully to the search for knowledge in the same religious manner by which his predecessors sought salvation in their faith.

The student frees himself from the role of a slavish pupil, who merely reacts to the lashes of examinations, quizzes and the grading system, or who merely seeks the entertainment of an amusing professor. These mere pupils are much like aneels, reacting to the touch of a pin and whining over their environmental fate. The student studies as directed as an act of faith, the validity of which orders and value thereof may only be determined after the course has been completed. He seeks to know everything his mentor can teach him, and even more. He adapts himself to the method and discipline of the study in order to master and thus be freed through his own strength of knowledge, hoping he may reach such a point that he will look back in laughter at what he regarded as restrictions and regulation. He does his own shackling; he does not, as a slave, await the checkling by someone else. He is aware of the words of Clemenceau to the effect that democracy can only exist in self-discipline; that all other governmental forms rest on external discipline. Other forms are for pupils, enrollees, slaves; freedom is for students.

As a part of this discipline, he maintains an open mind, continually struggling to free himself from bias and prejudice. He examines varying facts, conflicting opinions, and diverse methods. He seeks to present ideas, welcomes challenge, and hopes to preserve systematic methodology by which thesis and antithesis can be presented without political, emotional, or religious pressures. As such he cultivates clear language habits, avoids discourtesy to others, dresses in such a manner as to convey respect for others engaged in this highest of pursuits, and avoids artificial and insincere appearances to promote pre-determined ideas in others or to deceive his fellow scholars. When he writes, he removes himself from the content of his writings as much as he possibly can do so, holding to the third person and documenting his factual presentation with the learnings of those who have proven their cases; at the same time, having acquired such facts, he attempts objective interpretation and the use of his thinking ability, presenting it as a thesis for evaluation. His respect for authority leads him into the test of his own authority,

supplying new thoughts for consideration in light of the established facts.

A student cultivates the awareness of what vast amounts he does not know, and renews the desire to learn more. A never-completed process. He thus gains genuine scholarly humility, the most precious quality in a student of any level. He learns to ask good questions, not designed to show off his knowledge or cleverness but to gain more knowledge or to gain more insight.

In regard to the practical world, he has dedicated himself to the knowledge that change is inevitable, and hopes to acquire the usefulness to make himself a director of that change in the only way he can, by study and self-mastery. He will learn to conduct himself with care, compassion, and the same scholarly humility when he is given the opportunity for power to change the directions of his culture. He remains informed of all aspects of the social and political world that he can while still a student, and will avoid isolation of himself from pain of others. He works now to develop a philosophy for himself, one which remains forever open-minded, but holds a useful premise for the direction of change.

In manners he is calm and respectful of all, both those he regards as his mental or educational inferiors and those to whom he would subordinate himself. He knows that all men can teach him and those with skills beyond his own, be they manual skills, experience in life, or scholarly skills, are potential sources of his wisdom. Thus he feels honestly superior to no one except the artificial, the superficial and the dishonest. To these, he feels a sympathy and a tolerance. He respects age which has survived; he respects authority which must take responsibility; he respects honest work which supports his academic pursuits; he respects his family which brought him to this role; he respects his teachers who he must presume to have established mastery as students; and he respects his fellow students. In all of these, he exercises a critical attitude within such respect, hoping to find the nature of needed change and improvement. While his faith is based on knowledge and wisdom he further respects the faith of others who are humbly caught up in the same paradox of life that he sees in himself.

This is only a portion of what constitutes a student. Little has been said here of the pupils and enrollees. Pupils, those disciplined slaves, are more numerous than students but still deserve respect for their endurance and their tough patience. Enrollees, the largest share of the college enrollments, are unknowing slaves, out of place, vanity-ridden, self-centered, and of no academic consequence until they become at least pupils.

The student, however, is one of dignified calling. When he has earned the honor of society in bestowing upon him the baccalaureate degree, he knows his days of permission as a novice are ended and he must now be at the commencement of a lifetime of being a recognized student. May he never be less.

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