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Not Filling A Bucket, But Lighting A Fire

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I do not view Jesuit tradition as the mere dissemination of facts. A computer can do that. William Butler Yeats once said that “education is not the filling of a bucket but the lighting of a fire.”

My next two expectations from professors appear to contradict each other. Perhaps the idea is undeveloped. Nonetheless:

Perhaps more than any generation in history, we have been subject to intense commercialization. Nothing irritates me more than when students from the business school force some product on us at the behest of their marketing professor. Indeed, that the corporatization of the university seems to be the most dire threat to authentic education should beget critical thinking. This warrants separate attention in a different piece.

What is worse than having a product forced on us, however, is having an ideology. Nothing offends me so much as the notion that I am not being educated, but rather sold something. It is cheap and it is a violation of the implicit trust that students place in professors. When I take an economics class, I do not want the subjective policy preferences of my professor mixed in with my notes on fundamental theories. If opinion need enter the discussion, let it at the very least be clearly delineated.

Furthermore—and I am a decidedly liberal and partisan—nothing is less appealing than a cheap joke at the expensive of our previous president. I’m proud to volunteer on President Obama’s reelection campaign, but leaving a class where a liberal professor uses his pretense of objectivity to mix fact and opinion makes me a less ardent supporter, not more. I do not want your ideology.

And now, the contradiction. When I entered an institution founded in the Ignatian tradition, I entered into a covenant. I do not expect to be fed stale facts in my four precious years at BC, not even as tools for my future career. I remember a state representative who came to Bishop Feehan, my high school, and talked about the difference between Catholic and public schools: the fourth R. All schools teach reading, (w)riting, and ‘rithmetic. Catholic schools do so as well, but all in the context of the fourth R: responsibility. Jesuit schools inculcate core values into their students: solidarity, social justice, contemplation in action, and so many more. My fellow students and I want to be changed by these values after four years. If our schools can do that, then you can forget the technology and the personal attention and the politics. If you can do that, we’ve all succeeded.

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