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# Our University - Mission Integrity

Walter V. Wendler
*Southern Illinois University Carbondale*, wendler@siu.edu

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# Our University - Mission Integrity

Seven in a series on integrity

The fundamental purpose of the university, its reason for being, is to change the way people think. This sounds torturous but it is the root of what universities do. In order to fulfill that mission, tenacious focus is required. There are too many distractions, too many opportunities to wander, and too much pressure to lose focus. Pressures for the university to be a jobs bank, a social service agency, or a political machine are real.

The primary mission of helping people change the way they think is always undergirded by academic excellence. Anything that gets in the way of academic excellence should be addressed or eliminated. Some suggest that athletics get in the way of academic excellence, and I would agree, except for the many examples of excellent universities that maintain competitive athletic programs at competitive academic institutions.

Stanford comes to mind, as do Michigan, Berkeley, UCLA, North Carolina, and a number of others. I would argue that there is no conflict here when priorities remain focused.

Other aspects of campus and student life can also get in the way of academic excellence. One of the great distractions from purpose is alcohol abuse by students.

I commented on this issue on September 5, 2008.

*"According to a Harvard School of Public Health Study, nearly half of all college students who abused alcohol during the 1993 academic year experiences five or more serious problems including missing class, physical injury, arguing with friends and engaging in unprotected sex which could lead to HIV infection." From "Binge Drinking on America's College Campuses," Harvard School of Public Health, Henry Wechsler, Ph.D.*

*…in plain language, the more you drink, the lower your GPA. This is not a casual relationship. It is profoundly frightening to understand the implications of alcohol consumption on intellectual acuity and academic performance."*

Universities concern themselves with safe sex so students avoid the deleterious impact of sexually transmitted diseases on academic progress and excellence. Public universities hold no moral perspective regarding sexual relationships between consenting adults, other than consent justifies anything.

That irresponsible foolishness aside, universities should do everything possible to discourage the use of alcohol in settings where underage students are present - almost every conceivable campus event, academic, artistic, social, and athletic. The message is simply that it is possible to have a good time without consuming alcohol and avoid the downside of irresponsible alcohol consumption - impeded academic performance. No morality here any more than the morality implied in advocating for safe sex.

I know many campuses feel compelled by donors to serve alcohol at events.

Blather.

Decades of fund raising experience at some very good universities prove to me that donors do not support a university because they had a glass of wine, a few beers, or a highball. Donors contribute to a university because the institution helped change their life.

Frequently, life changing experiences were grounded by faculty members and leaders encouraging, cajoling, demanding, expecting and rewarding excellent academic performance, or at least holding it up as the coin of the realm, usually when some not-yet-but-soon-to-be successful graduate won fame and fortune through some combination of a keen mind and a work ethic that was nurtured in a university setting.

A university sponsored or condoned beer party has nothing to do with excellence or academic purpose.

As the school year begins, the marching band cranks up, and the footballs fly, our university and all others should relentlessly focus on mission. Activities that might be seen to be helpful to the cause by the naïve, but are hurtful to those we serve, should be reviewed on instant replay.