

The Sheedy Award Acceptance Speech

delivered

by

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Thank you. I am honored and grateful to receive this award which is named after Father Charles Sheedy, C.S.C. The Sheedy Award honors Father Sheedy's many contributions to the U of Notre Dame, including the College of Arts and Letters and the Congregation of the Holy Cross.

An English major as an undergraduate, Father Sheedy received a law degree from the University of Pittsburgh before earning his doctorate

in Theology. He was a prodigious reader, able to condense his vast knowledge into clear, straightforward thoughts; Father Sheedy was my teacher, my mentor, my colleague, my Dean and my friend.

In 1952, O'Shaugnessy Hall opened as the new home of the college of Arts and Letters. In the same year, Father Theodore Hesburgh, C.S.C. became president of the University of Notre Dame. One of his guiding principles was that at the core of a great university should be a great College of Arts and Letters. And Father Hesburgh decided that the person who could

accomplish this mission was Father Sheedy, Professor of Religion. Father Sheedy served as a strong dean for the next 16 years, from 1952 until 1968, leading this college to higher academic achievements, while retaining its Catholic Identity.

That same year, 1952, I arrived at Notre Dame as a freshman in the General Program of Liberal Education, originally known as G.P. now called the Program of Liberal Studies or P.L.S. It was then a 4 year course of study based on the Great Books and built around a seminar each semester, led always by two professors.

I was fortunate- blessed to have as my seminar professors-Father Sheedy and Dr. Otto Bird, founder of the G.P., now P.L.S. What a fantastic, challenging educational experience! This was my first contact with Father Sheedy and it would continue until his death. He was my Professor in other classes in addition to the P.L.S. seminar. He was a great teacher-stimulating, challenging, witty- always leading his students to seek the truth. From this initial contact in the classroom, our relationship progressed into his being one of my mentors, my Dean and my

friend. This award honors an excellent academic and person in Father Sheedy.

From Father Sheedy and others, I was fortunate to receive certain guidelines and lessons which I have tried to apply in my own teaching.

1. Students are more than just students.

We faculty have students in class for approximately 150 minutes per week.

Yet they spend most of their time in other roles, relationships and activities- just as we teachers do.

They are involved in social work, sports, band, clubs, drama, etc- they are friends, aunts, uncles, big brothers and sisters, etc.

Accepting this basic approach to viewing and interacting with students as more than merely students, I needed a game plan and specific project to implement this theory. One was given to me by my wife Sharon, who taught at Notre Dame. It is the use of an interview form whereby two students interview each other, using this form as a base, and then introduce each other to the class. The interview form seeks to elicit such information as:

Who is your family?

What is unique about you? (And only you)

What are your interests?-What you care about?

Why did you decide to come to Notre Dame?

This interview form also gives me basic information as to who these people are and a starting point to get to know them as people. It also enables two students to get to know each other the first day. Additionally, each student gets to listen to all the others being introduced and to see each as individuals and that each brings a diverse background and thus has a unique perspective and contribution to make. Additionally, these



introductions often generate instant rapport between two students who suddenly realize they have something in common, such as an interest in chess, or horseback riding, or Mozart. I also introduce myself to the class in terms of academics, family, interests, etc.

## 2. Chemistry

Life and academics are similar to sports in that they are about the "we" and not the "I." A sports team with chemistry will accomplish much more than a team without chemistry. The same is true for a class. With chemistry, the class will accomplish

much more than a class without it.

Classroom teaching is a collective endeavor. Chemistry is difficult to define and obtain, but I can recognize it whether it be in the classroom or on the sports field. It includes:

A sense of unity

An ability to get along and to help each other

Respect- for each other and each other's viewpoints

Responsibility- to one's assignments and to others

Sharing and working together

Open-mindedness

Humility- remaining teachable

A sense of humor

Motivating each other

One project I use in an attempt to develop chemistry is to start each class with a former Notre Dame graduate's name on the board who was in one of my classes and I then say a few words about the alumnus. I tell my students this can be them someday. They can be an Alan Page, Minnesota Supreme Court Justice and last year's commencement speaker, Joseph Pickler, President and CEO of Kroger, Professor Kelly Kamm, U.S. District Court Judge William Zloch, Dave Dureson, President and CEO of the Duerson Group, etc.

Another way I try to develop chemistry is by going to lunch and breakfast with 2-3 students at a time, I aim at doing this 2-3 times a week for about 1- 2 hours each, often before or after class. The College of Arts and Letters deserves much credit for being willing to absorb this cost to encourage faculty to interact with students outside the classroom.

To me, this is a statement by the College of Arts and Letters of the importance of faculty/student relations.

From my early mentors, including Father Sheedy, I was impressed and

personally have tried to follow the idea that a teacher must not just work in terms of his own career and vita but also for:

1-The Department- in my case, The Department of Economics and Policy Studies.

2-The College- including a commitment to College orientated courses such as core and freshman seminar.

3-The University of Notre Dame.

Fourth and most importantly, -The Students-infusing them not only with academic expertise but also with an ethical education so that our graduates are not only good in their careers but

also good people guided by ethics in living their lives.

My wife and I sent 6 good children (4 girls and 2 boys) to Notre Dame.

They graduated with fine academics but most of all, they were better people.

This is the great strength of Notre Dame—an ethical education.

I recently asked a vice-president of Eli Lilly Corp, "What difference, if any, does your corporation see in graduates of Notre Dame, Princeton, Yale, Michigan, and Virginia?" The reply I received was they they are all well-trained and educated, but the Notre Dame graduates have an ethical

approach that differentiates them from all the others."

The four most important elements of teaching for me are:

-Viewing students not just as students but as complex beings.

-Developing chemistry, or unity, in the classroom.

-Infusing academic learning with a sense of ethics, and being loyal to my department, my college, the University of Notre Dame, and most importantly, my students.

It has been a blessing to teach at Notre Dame and in the College of Arts and Letters. Indeed, I have a love

affair with this university and I try to pass this love affair and education to my students in a grateful and enthusiastic manner.

Once again, thank you for this award and thanks to all of you, and thank you Sharon. Thank you to our Lady on the Golden Dome, and thank you Father Sheedy.