

Republican Perspective

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At Least They Won't Be Surgeons

Under this banner on Nov. 9, 2016, in an essay titled “Shielded from the Truth,” I reported to you on an exceptionally hare-brained scheme cooked up and implemented by a New York private boys school. They had made a blanket offer to all the parents that school officials would raise report card grades if the parents thought their student would be emotionally traumatized by actually seeing his earned grade.

Assuming any parent would go along with it, the effect of this plan would be to deprive the student of knowing his need to put forth more effort. It would therefore ensure his delusional understanding of his own performance. And in turn it would virtually condemn the deceived student to unexpected but inevitable failures in the world awaiting him after his bogus graduation. I refrained from naming the school or staff involved

Could anything be stupider than concealing a student's performance from him? Well, maybe so. Along comes a professor at a respected state university. As in the earlier column, I refrain from naming the professor or the university. Let's just call him Professor Plum. (If you feel compelled to fact-check, all the gory details are available on campusreform.org.)

Professor Plum teaches business courses at his university. He apparently wants to make his courses as stress-free as possible for his students. To that end, the syllabi for two of his courses described his “stress reduction policy.”

Examples of his stress reduction efforts, quoted from the syllabi, include these:

All tests and exams will be open book and open notes, including the use of material on your laptop.

All tests and exams will...assess low level mastery of the course material.

Only positive comments about [students'] presentations will be given in class. Comments designed to improve future presentations will be communicated by email.

And best of all:

If you feel unduly stressed by a grade for any assessable material or the overall course, you can email the instructor indicating what grade you think is appropriate, and it will be so changed. No explanation is required...

Apparently Professor Plum felt the need to square his approach with reality, so he added:

While this approach might hinder the...mastery of the course material, ultimately these are your responsibility. I will provide every opportunity for you to gain high level mastery.

In a nutshell: the exams will be without rules; the exams will be geared to assess only minimal achievement; students will never receive criticism in class; and students get to choose the grade they think they deserve.

So for Professor Plum, mastery of the course material is less important than a stress-free experience. But to be fair, he does indicate willingness to help any who really want to “gain high level mastery” (translation: learn the material).

I confess that I am congenitally incapable of learning a foreign language. In fact, to pass the required three college semesters it took me five tries.

Where was Professor Plum when I needed him? I could have saved myself two wasted semesters. And had a better GPA to boot.

The sad thing here is that Professor Plum's students are being cheated by his leniency. They are being passed along through the system without being prepared for whatever they will tackle after graduation. Stress-free undeserved grades will inevitably lead to stress-inducing future failures.

In addition, it is significant that Professor Plum holds the title of "Regents Professor," which is "bestowed by the Board of Regents on truly distinguished faculty."

It may be of some comfort that the "stress reduction policy" has been removed from the course syllabi. But not before campusreform.org managed to archive it for historical value and also for well deserved and eternal ridicule.

I suppose we should look for the silver lining, so here it is. The ill-prepared students of Professor Plum will go on to fail in the business world. At least they won't be failing as air traffic controllers or cardiac surgeons.