



Teaching Concerns

Newsletter of the Teaching Resource Center for Faculty and Teaching Assistants

Hotel D, 24 East Range * (434) 982-2815 * trc-uva@virginia.edu * <http://trc.virginia.edu/>

Spring 2002

Who Are Today's Students?

Penny Rue, Dean of Students

We are grateful that Penny Rue, our Dean of Students, addresses new faculty and TAs at the TRC's August Teaching Workshop. This past August she focused on U.Va.'s undergraduate students, and we believe that her excerpted remarks below will give you some insight into the people sharing classrooms with you.

Not long ago, I was new, too, to the University of Virginia community; and I hope that as incoming faculty and TAs you can experience U.Va. as a treasure hunt, a place full of riches and surprises that are not always easy to find. Our students help make up our dynamic community, our world-class university; and they are much like you—successful in all previous endeavors, talented, striving. But they are themselves, too, in unique ways. I would like to share with you my own observations about these students as well as those of colleagues.

Technology is a way of life; our students process information.

Our students are plugged in with pagers and cell phones; comfortable with cyber-relationships and cyber-communities, they know IMing and chat rooms. They expect 24-hour per day communication and web-based services, and have zero tolerance for delays. Some are sloppy about academic attribution because everything “out there” seems free for the taking. With learning habits often

developed in front of a computer screen, they are impatient with long tasks and find it hard to stay on one topic for a long time. Thus they are less used to reading books and more used to dealing with rapid-fire information.

They want to do well and do good.

They espouse individualism, lack faith in such systems as Social Security, and distrust government solutions, looking instead to local solutions; they value community service. While concerned about their personal financial security, they also worry about global challenges. Since so many are very goal-directed, those who aren't feel especially lost and out of step.

They experience greater psychological distress.

Anxiety and depression are extremely common among these students, a sort of “walking wounded” who nonetheless remain highly functional. Often members of disrupted families, they can experience stress over family issues. These students show special confusion about intimacy; many tend to engage in group dating and some favor random hook-ups.

Safety and security are also key concerns; even before September 11, many students feared terrorism and random violence. At the same time, ironically, they are unaware of their own mortality and take some serious risks. They are truly stressed and tired.

Their lives have been over-programmed.

They are less prepared for enjoying free time or for structuring their own lives. As described in the April 2001 Atlantic Monthly essay "The Organization Kid," they even schedule "breakfast meetings" with their friends. Some may not know how to be still, quiet, contemplative.

They are post-multicultural.

Unconnected to the civil rights movement, they take diversity for granted. Many grew up with a diverse group of friends; some come from blended backgrounds. They dislike being grouped or labeled but expect sensitivity and are especially uncomfortable when others self-group. Yet despite their familiarity with diversity, they are more willing to discuss sex than race relations.

They are consumers.

The class of 2005 is likely the most marketed group ever: many events in their lives have had product tie-ins. Highly comfortable with credit cards, some prefer to buy their way out of situations. Thus they may treat education as another consumer experience.

They are unaccustomed to academic difficulty.

They are used to being stars and to understanding, to "getting it." At U.Va., then, difficulty in learning challenging material can be a blow to their self-esteem. And many hesitate to ask for help.

**The Class of 2005
at a Glance**

- 2,985 students, from a total applicant pool of 15,052
- From 46 US states plus the District of Columbia as well as from 56 foreign countries
- 67% are Virginians; 12.6% are children of alumni
- 82% scored above 1200 on their SATs; 30% scored over 1400
- 81% were in the top 10% of their high school class
- 9.0% are African-American; 11.5% are Asian-American; 2.6% are Hispanic