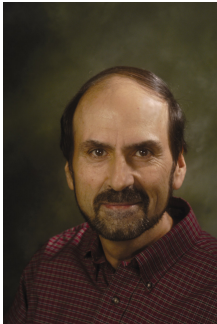


SOME REFLECTIONS ON TEACHING RIVIER EVENING STUDENTS SINCE 1980: A BRIEF RETROSPECTIVE

(Speech at the Celebrating Pedagogy Conversation Panel-X, October 1, 2007)

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When Dean DeCiccio invited me to be on this panel, I tried to think about the impact that teaching evening courses at Rivier College has had for me during the past 27 years, and especially how teaching evening course eventually led to me joining the full-time faculty at Rivier. I taught my first course at Rivier College in the fall of 1980. You might say that there was some serendipity at work that led to this, so please allow me to tell you a short story: When I moved to Nashua in May 1980, I was working for a computer company as a software technical writer. I had changed careers the year before, following the completion of my Ph.D., because of the serious decline in the job market in philosophy for fresh Ph.Ds.

One day, my wife happened to read a note in *The Nashua Telegraph* about a Rivier philosophy professor who would be giving a talk to the public on the interpretation of dreams – a topic that was not of particular interest to me. However, she decided that she would go to this Rivier talk, where introduced herself to Paul Santilli, then chair of the Philosophy Department, after his lecture. She told him about my background, and Paul suggested to her that I send him my resume or *vita*.

Paul then followed up by inviting me to the College for an interview, and he offered me a section of the Introduction to Logical Reasoning course to teach that fall in the evening school. He said that he had numerous applicants for the part-time position, but since mine was the only resume from a philosopher who also had experience in the business world, he thought that I might connect better with evening students from companies like Digital and Wang. (So it occurred to me for the first time that to become a candidate that was considered attractive to hire to teach philosophy courses, I actually had to leave the field of philosophy for an alternative profession or career.)

Paul was right in his intuition about my fitting in with the students that I would be teaching. I felt an affinity with many of my evening students who were also working full-time in industry during the day. It was also a delight to teach these students, because most were highly motivated to learn and many had the maturity to take philosophy seriously (even if logic and critical reasoning didn't always seem intuitive to them). On the downside, however, some evening students who noted that they had been successful in industry, often times leading to promotions, etc., were surprised to learn that their logical reasoning skills were not as sharp as they would have assumed. Many of my day students, on the contrary, tend to be more malleable in this respect because they are still developing their reasoning skills. But day students often lack both the maturity and motivation that I found in many of my evening students. In fact, evening students tended to be sufficiently motivated to interact in class – so much so that I did not feel required to develop many in-class activities to supplement the lecture and exercises, as I have had to do for my day students.

Between 1994 (when I joined the full-time faculty at Rivier) and 2004, I continued to teach at least one evening course per semester (and often two per semester, if I could maneuver my schedule accordingly). I still preferred teaching evening students during that period, because of their maturity and

motivation. In 2004, however, something happened that disrupted my teaching schedule in the evening: the implementation of First-Year Seminar (FYS) on Reasoning. This changed my teaching life dramatically because of the redistributed course load that the FYS demand created for me and my department. This event was followed in 2005 by a reduction of philosophy requirements in the Rivier undergraduate evening core. Together, this has meant that I am seldom able to teach evening courses (without teaching overload courses).

I still teach evening courses in the summer. In these courses, which also include many day students taking summer courses, I find that the day students in those classes behave more maturely and perform in a more serious manner. So the evening students often have a positive effect on day students in classes that are combined of each.

As I mentioned at the beginning of my presentation, my words are more about reflection – a retrospective, if you like – as opposed to strategies about pedagogy for evening students and how mine differs from that used for day students. In reflecting on some of the differences between my evening and day students, three criteria came to mind: motivation, maturity, and malleability. While the day students might have the edge in the third of these categories, the evening students clearly excel in the first two. It has been a pleasure to teach them. Thank you for listening.

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