

Ross' Rave: Anything. Anytime

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"Take out of piece of paper and write this down."

I begin every class like this.

"r" "o" "s" "s" "l" at "csufresno.edu"

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It's like an infomercial.

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I walk around the room checking, repeating, fooling around a little bit.

"My name is Ross, that's my email address, and you can ask me anything, about anything , anytime. Anything!"

"Anything," someone usually asks amid some light tittering.

"Yep."

What an offer.

Years ago, when my grandmother was in, what turned out to be, the last day of her life, she made me that same offer. There she lay, pressed and starched like her hospital sheet. Flashlight, blue eyes locked on to my blood shot brown ones. She usually didn't have much to say. When she did, one paid attention.

"Is there anything you want to ask me," she said. "Last chance," she smiled drowsily.

I didn't really know what to say. I knew what she was offering. Keys to three generations of unopened closets. Uncorked silences. A lifetime of the unanswered.

I had a million questions, but the only thing I could think of to ask was, "Are you thirsty?"

She shook her head slightly and closed her eyes again. I'm not sure who was more disappointed.

I knew I had blown it. Last gas before freeway.

Sometimes students take me up on the offer and email me questions. Thankfully, they are usually something mundane and simple. "Where are like magazines, 'cause my teacher says we can't use Yahoo?" Or, "Do yous guyses [sic] have old newspapers on microfish [sic]? I need to bring in a copy of the day I was born. Do you have anything that old? I was born in 1986."

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Engaging Honors Students continued from p.3

Assessment

Though we made inroads with this program by incorporating a library session into at least half of the sections offered that semester, we were not as successful in developing an assessment instrument. This would have been an ideal situation since we had a control group of honors students who did not have a library session to compare to those who had.

Anecdotally speaking, students seemed genuinely engaged in the activity. One young woman came into class feeling indignant about having to take a critical thinking course at all since she had already taken such courses in high school. The librarians teaching this section made sure to ask her after the session if she felt like the session had been a waste of time. Perhaps she was being nice, but she indicated that it was the best class in the course to that point. Overall, each time we taught the session, we as teachers felt extremely satisfied with the way the students responded. All seven faculty members, many of whom participated as if they were students in the class, responded well to the session. Though we have not done so yet, we feel confident that this instructional approach could be used with non-honors courses as well.

Oblinger, Diana and James Oblinger. "Is It Age or IT: First Steps Toward Understanding the Net Generation," In: Diana G. Oblinger and James L. Oblinger, eds. *Educating the Net Generation*. Boulder, CO: EDUCAUSE, 2005. <http://www.educause.edu/educatingthenetgen/>

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I have take-out in my fridge older than that, I want to tell her.

Every once in a while, I get something a bit more personal. More exploratory. "I was in your class last week and you said we should pick a topic we care about. And, I really want to do my speech on depression in teenagers." Red flag.

Last semester after my zillionth class, I got an email from a student in a Comm 8 class. (Group Communications, General Education requirement, taught by TAs slightly older than my dog.)

She told me her class had come in for a library tour and that I was really funny and could I help her find something about her topic which was about sweatshops and she was taking the pro side but even though she looked like everywhere she couldn't find anything that was in favor of them even though she was using words like "in favor of" and her group was doing the presentation tomorrow and she'd be really, really grateful for whatever I could find and could I email her back at sorrory-chicklet-4U@hotmail.com.

Ok, this is slightly embellished (that's not her real email) but the dilemmas were real: Her dilemma was she needed reputable information on a position which was going to be very difficult to find articulated. My dilemma was my moral convictions were being pitted against my professional ethics. I try to be open-minded, but I honestly can't see how working 80 hours a week in squalid conditions, sewing Pocahontas tee shirts [yet another insult] for 17cents an hour has much merit. Compounded by the fact that big Mickey Eisner himself pulls down over \$100K in the same hour and could give a sh*t!

Librarians face this dilemma all the time.

For many years I shared a closet-sized office with a wonderful librarian and passionate humanist. She made her own granola, carried plastic bags everywhere and wore other people's clothes. We got along great ... even after I

delicately mentioned one day that perhaps Lilly's All Natural Crystal Deodorant may not be living up to its promise.

One day she suggested we declare the office a "Nuclear Free Zone". I wasn't sure what that meant, but knew it involved a colorful sticker and I was big on stickers. She told me that, once declared, our office would neither contain nor support any product or device that promoted or used nuclear materials. Our tiny office couldn't hold a coat rack, let alone a cruise missile, so I was pretty sure the declaration was more symbolic than practical. Besides the sticker was cool.

The dilemma came the day an electrical engineering student asked for help finding an NTIS document on submarine guidance.

Sorry buddy.

At the reference desk a few semesters ago, a student asked for some help researching HIV/AIDS funding. We did the usual library dance (books, articles, government sources, organizations, etc) and found some great stuff.

For example: In 2002 Viacom donated \$120 million in airtime to HIV/AIDS awareness.

"That's a lot of money," he said.

"It's a lot of money for you and me. I wonder if that's a lot of money for Viacom," I replied.

We found out that \$120 million is 1/2 of 1% of their annual sales. That certainly puts things in perspective!

I don't know about you, but whenever I'm faced with these kinds of issues, I turn to ACRL's *Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education* for guidance!

Figuring we were dealing with one of the more com-

plex, higher order skills, I flipped past Standards #1 and #2 (hunt and gather) and zoom in on #3.

#3 (6) The information literate student validates understanding and interpretation of the information through **discourse with individuals**, subject-area experts, and/or practitioners.

This could work. I'm an individual. Mostly.

#3 (7) The information literate student determines whether the **initial query should be revised**.

I like this one. It gives the students permission to change their minds, and it gives me permission to help them.

Surely, my own biases are interfering with objectivity. Yet given the over simplified, homogenized, rating driven, edutainment which passes off as truth, I feel ethically obligated to challenge students' thinking every chance I get. In fact, not doing so would be malpractice.

A student once asked me to read his paper on the death penalty. His tune was pretty much, "Fry baby, fry!" When we talked about it, I pointed out that while his thesis clearly showed he advocated the death penalty, all of his statistics and arguments actually supported its abolition.

"You have a choice," I told him. "Either change your arguments or change your mind."

"I guess I really don't believe in the death penalty after all," he said. "I used to."

"I'm glad you asked," I said.

"Ask me anything you want, anytime."