



Great Books Curriculum

Wright College
4300 N Narragansett Ave.
Chicago, Illinois 60634

October 8, 1999

Dear Harriet, Joo and Phil:

I am writing to bring you up to date on the arrangements for the faculty symposium and help to make it a pleasurable experience for you.

Before I get into the practical details, however, I think it is more important to explain why I believe you will walk away from this deeply gratified. I base this on my experience as the moderator of the first student symposium last spring. This is symposium is going to accomplish several things for Wright College:

1. This is a unique opportunity for colleagues and students to see the exceptionally erudite, perceptive and articulate you are. I know the first rate minds Harriet and Phil have through being your colleague, and I have heard from Don Barshis wonderful things in praise of Joo. This is no small thing. Basically, we engage each other normally only on the level of office gossip and family life. To see a colleague's deep mastery of his or her area, believe me, is a revelation and it is inspiring. I had just that reaction listening to colleagues leading a roundtable discussion at the University of Chicago last year. Also, keep in mind you will be addressing an audience that respects learning and recognizes and appreciates erudition. In short, your participation will communicate that Wright really is a place where talented people pursue intellectual depths and this is good for faculty morale and for the Great Books Curriculum in particular. Just as importantly in my own opinion, is your participation can enable you to receive recognition for your abilities.
2. Your participation will give students who have grown up without such models, a direct experience of what academic inquiry is and what it can do to a person's psyche who pursues it. It is also going to stimulate students to think for themselves about something important that affects them, This is for them will be a relatively uncommon and uncommonly gratifying experience. Student responses from the first symposium included several who asked to participate directly next time and several more whose one complaint was that they wanted more time for audience participation. Lastly, you participation is likely to attract a number of students to your classes.

Now on to the specifics:

When: Carol Guzman, the PTK student coordinator, is asking student services for a date on the third or fourth week in November—preferably just after Thanksgiving. The event will be held during the “noon period”

Where: in the Events Building

Faculty:

Bruce Gans
Committee Chairman
English

Don Barshis
Dean of Instruction

Perry Buckley
English

Al Casal
Social Science

Margo Garipey
English

Polly hover
Humanities

L.J. Komai-Thompson
English

Joo Lee
Humanities

Susan Maurer
Humanities

Harriet Rosenman
English

Jane Upin
Humanities

Phillip Virgen
English

Successful event insurance: There will be one quick run through prior to the event a week ahead of time to make sure we all know where to go, what we are going to say, and I can get whatever information I need to introduce you properly and help shape the overall discussion into something concise and focused.

The perk: It will be videotaped and you should all get copies if you wish.

What you need to know RIGHT NOW: To make your job easier I am taking the liberty to suggest a structure. Whatever we do should be decided collectively so let me know if you prefer a different approach and I will try to facilitate a discussion and final decision if that is necessary.

The theme is “The Quest for Identity: Reflections for the new millennium.” I would suggest that you adapt some of the insights one or more of the great books authors you are teaching this semester have to offer. Here it could simply be an extension of what you are teaching anyhow.

If you prefer you can bring in other great books authors. Since this is a great books event it seems only appropriate and fair that at least half the people you bring into the discussion are from the great books.

My own sense is that the great books offer perennial truths and their value lies in precisely going beyond and implicitly rejecting the facile, superficial and insincere bromides offered students on television and in popular magazines.

Since we want to have plenty of time to entertain questions and comments from the audience and have you respond to them, and since we also might find it fun to direct a question apiece at each other after you present we might want to keep our own individual presentations to about five minutes apiece. As you may recall I said at the meeting that 750-1000 words ought to do it but if you are more comfortable speaking from notes or extemporaneously that is fine too. Just be prepared to do so at the run through. Having everyone present prior to the first symposium identified problems (including complaints about my stiffness) that we were able to straighten out before show time.

Best,
Bruce

Cc: Don Barshis