

# opinion

## Intellectual relativism hinders student involvement

JEFFREY CATALANO

Although it is not specifically stated in the University's mission statement, a change takes place in nearly every student during their years at the University. The basic value system that a student has upon entering the University is not the same as that which they have upon graduating.

Although some of the change is quite subtle, the more obvious changes include a broader and more open perspective on the world. Students, overall, seem to leave the University more liberal-minded and more aware of their own prejudices. What was black and white when we were freshmen becomes subtle shades of grey.

Our education requires us to be more introspective and more reflective than we have ever previously been taught. Indirectly, it forces us to take notice of how diversified the world is that we should not be prejudiced against other cultures but should respect everyone's point of view.

While all of this is certainly a great thing, one grave danger may result. Students seem to be falling

into an intellectual relativism. The attitude seems to be, "Your view is just as truthful as my view because I respect your view too much to condemn it." There are two problems with maintaining this point of view.

The philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre stressed that this relativism is devastating to society. If every person's concept of what is right seems to hold as much credence as every other person's, then society does not progress.

The tendency is to simply give up the argument because there is no point in trying to come to a resolution. The result is that students become apathetic. Since we are increasingly tolerant of others, we tend to turn our back to injustices in the world. We look the other way because we believe we never have the right to tell a person how to live.

This leads us to ignore the homeless, the drug users and people with AIDS. It is all too easy for us to leave these people without help under the pretence that we are protecting their individual right to do as they please.

The second problem is not having strong beliefs marks an alienation from our community and each other. Without a common cause,

there is nothing which can bind us together and give us a common identity. We become a world of self-centered individuals trying to stay out of each other's way.

While the University takes us so far, it leaves the rest up to us. We can either fall back into relativism, or we can jump into activism. We can find this sense of identity in working for causes that promote human dignity. We can become part of organizations with a clear definition of purpose.

Having an open mind and being tolerant should not mean believing that everyone is right. Some things are clearly wrong. Apartheid is wrong. Homelessness is wrong. Everything that desecrates the fundamental integrity of the human person is wrong. Current world situations do not admit of one sided arguments in that the world is a rapidly changing place. We cannot easily distinguish the good guys from the bad guys. But that does not excuse us from our mission.

The challenge then becomes for us to search out the hidden injustices that still exist and become associated with political activist groups, like Amnesty International, that

fight these injustices.

These groups have had tremendous success, which is evident in actions like the releasing of prisoners of conscience in South Africa. We can easily sit back comfortably and watch as the Berlin Wall crumbles or we can stand up and say "Yes, that's great but we want more." The task of preserving the fundamental dignity and freedom of

the human being is a never ending one. And we have an obligation, a moral obligation, to use our education to promote these causes in whatever way possible. The message is simple. When you leave this university, do not become deaf to the world, stay awake.

Jeffrey Catalano is a senior philosophy major from Moosic. His column appears every other week.

## Faculty quality criticized

KEVIN SULLIVAN

Of course, the University gloated over its national ranking in *U.S. News and World Report*. But did anyone bother to notice that this University's faculty was rated 78th against other schools in its class. This is an insult to the student. Must we be subjected to a below average education because the administration will not hire qualified teachers with actual teaching skills. Registering for classes is difficult enough. When the quality of the teacher is involved, getting classes becomes impossible.

The professors, and the schools they attended, are listed in the back of the school catalog. Some of these teachers went to schools I do not recognize. I know I am not an expert on colleges, but I think I would have caught wind of these schools when I was searching for a college myself. Why is the University hiring and giving tenure to unqualified teachers?

The unqualified teachers I am referring to are the ones who cannot speak English, are academically unqualified, and/or do not have the desire or enthusiasm to teach. I pay a lot of money to come to this school. Maybe the reason why this bothers me so much is because I am the one paying my tuition, not my parents (No disrespect meant to those whose parents pay. They should be as upset as I am). I do not see the justification for tuition hikes when I am not getting solid teachers for my classes.

I am not complaining about every teacher at the University. I am only a sophomore, so I must admit I have limited experience. I have had some great teachers, teachers who challenged me to learn, to understand, and to grow. However, they are unfortunately only a few in number. Poor teachers are continuously given tenure (which means they can stay here indefinitely without fear of losing their jobs). Tenure is a problem the University must address and correct.

When a teacher works here for X many years, a teacher goes before a tenure board. The board evaluates the teacher's performance and decides if the teacher is given a permanent position. From my point of view, tenure is given to unqualified teachers and those who cannot speak English even after being here for X years. Obviously, if a teacher does not have the background to teach in certain field or cannot communicate with students, then he or she should not teach. Why are these teachers given tenure? How come students have no say in who stays and who goes?

Sometimes when a teacher has the qualifications and a grasp of the English language, tenure ruins the teacher. They lose enthusiasm because they are guaranteed a job as long as they don't kill anybody or commit any other felonies. Tenure is an ineffective policy because too many unqualified teachers receive it. The administration must phase out tenure and implement a different form if promotion.

Three things are needed to improve this situation. One, tenure must be eliminated. I do not want Father Panuska to do it tomorrow, but maybe before 1991. Second, the administration and the students must take the teacher evaluations very seriously. Most students take the forms seriously, but unfortunately, their efforts are fruitless.

The administration can use these evaluations as part of a merit-based promotion/dismissal program, which is my third point. A merit-based program would weed out teachers grown lackadaisical, who can not speak English, or are unqualified to teach. The student would have some power as to which teachers remain and which are promoted. Maybe a new type of review board could be implemented.

This problem must be addressed soon. It's great that the University is nationally known. I love this school, and that's why I'm writing this. However, the faculty must be improved so the school can compete with other universities.

Maybe if a program along the lines of the one I suggested is put into effect the University of Scranton will become the number one school that I already think it is.

Kevin Sullivan is a sophomore math major from Randolph N.J.

## Student questions minority recruitment

JASON RUSH

In the editorial that *The Aquinas* ran last week concerning minority enrollment which "should remain top priority among the University goal for the 1990's," I feel that this should not be the top goal but one that should be examined on a lesser scale. The "top priority" that the University should be considering is improving the academic standing that it currently enjoys and build upon that. The second "top priority" should be directed to the faculty of the University where professors are selected and hired. They should actively recruit the creme de la creme of the nation, a policy which can only enhance the reputation of the University.

Although I do not consider myself a racist, recruiting from inner city schools with high minority enrollments is not a very prudent campaign that the University should do. Since the University is the number one school in the country with respect to the Fullbright Program and International Rotary, it should be using this as a principal tool with which to attract students to the University.

Since the standards of the University have steadily increased over the past decade, the admissions standards should also continue along this same course. In order to insure the fairness of the admissions standards being applied to every applicant, the condition of being a minority or a

commuter should not affect the admission requirements to the University.

I would agree to a stronger minority mix within the University, provided that the students are held to the same procedures that my application went through.

However, I believe that the commuter percentage must go down from its current percentage of 33.9% in the class of '93 to a fixed percentage of 25% to insure the requirements are ensured for all students who apply, but also kept within the Statement of Mission's point seven, where it states that "The University serves not only the local community, but other communities as well...while at the same time retaining its special commitment to the community of Northeastern Pennsylvania."

The following point in the Statement of Mission is number eight: "The University is committed to academic excellence." Focusing on point two, which deals explicitly with the faculty of the University is the main concern for me. The first sentence in Point two is "We begin with the acknowledgement that the quality of the University depends essentially on the quality of the faculty."

We have already seen one article in *The Aquinas* that faculty evaluations to be published for all to see. I will say, although I do have limited experience here at the University,

for the most part the faculty fares well. However, the point that I want to make is the tenure position that one can achieve in six years at the University. I think that this number is just right, but the faculty who have achieved tenure should be evaluated on an occasional basis so they don't become totally complacent and stop doing their job.

I suggest that there should be a limited tenure granted after six years so that a faculty member feels secure in his job, yet has to still put out; otherwise he will be out of a job.

In order to achieve the best faculty possible at the University, the University should court some of the top professors. I am pleased to see that the economics and finance departments acquired some of the "big" names in their fields.

Whoever wrote that editorial obviously seems to have lost reality for a second. Would one think that a school such as Dartmouth would want this as part of their image? I think not, since they are now rated higher than Harvard or Yale. In fact, at the Dartmouth-Harvard game, Dartmouth students yell over to the Harvard side that "one day you'll be working for us."

That is what the University should have in its mind when establishing policy, to become the premier university that it can be, and not just part of the pack.

Jason Rush is a freshman political science major from Bethlehem.