

We Need To See More Fear In Our Students



Written by Victor Brown

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I suppose it's nothing like the five stages of grief, but as I followed the coverage of the recent round of campus protests, I certainly did experience various emotions.

I felt anger at times, such as when the protesting students invaded a library and harassed peaceful students who were simply doing what they are supposed to be doing—studying and learning.

I felt amused at other times, especially when a self-righteous faculty member like Melissa Click is self-exposed for who she really is — and I have found that there are others just like her.

But more than anything else, I feel a sadness about the entire situation, a sadness that is hard to shake.

I suppose my vantage point is a little different from most, as I spent a three decade career in the international business environment prior to teaching at a liberal arts college for thirteen years.

At this stage of my life, I am more keenly aware of the enormity of the challenges facing us today. We are engaged in a long, deep, global cultural war which will demand the best in both hard and soft skills to suppress the violence while seeking ways to eliminate its causes.

Globalization has affected our economies in ways that we did not anticipate, with power flowing to consumers in terms of choice and price, but power at the same time flowing away from skilled workers as the actual work itself shifts to lower wage countries, or falls victim to advances in process automation, or both. The result is indeed an income gap, but one that cannot be remedied on a sustainable basis through simple tax-enabled wealth transfers. Once again, we need the brightest minds, using highly developed skills, to understand the many competing forces at work and to develop policies that will continue to maximize the many benefits of globalization, while minimizing the negative effects.

I can think of no other challenges that will demand more of the next generation of citizens and leaders —

who will need to be steeped in the hard knowledge of science, engineering, math and technology, while at the same time culturally attuned and able to communicate across the barriers that separate us — the barriers of race, gender, religion, and ethnicity.

Who are in the best position to take their places as the leaders tomorrow? Of course, it would have to include the students currently studying in our highly touted network of American colleges and universities. We are told that they are the best and brightest of their generation, paying handsomely to have the best instructors and the best learning facilities in the world. We are told that they will graduate and take leadership roles in the professions, the corporations and the non-profits that are the foundations of our society.

But that is not what I see on the news today. I see students with entirely too much time on their hands. I see “manifestos” and emails from students and professors that are juvenile in the extreme, and even lack the level of writing that I would demand of high school sophomores.

I read lists of demands that are patently absurd, as if firing an administrator or professor here, or demanding a cultural sensitivity class there, is really going to address the depth of the problems we face.

I see students without a sense of global context, who do not understand anything about the real world, about the complexity of global policymaking, or about the general rigor of life that awaits them after they leave their campus bubble.

Faculty must demand more, much more of these students. In fact we need faculty members who themselves understand what lies ahead for these students, and who will push them relentlessly to develop the skills that are needed by our global community.

Setting up pup tents on the campus quad, harassing anybody who does not share their views, and demanding

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free tuition financed by the 1%, are all evidence of an extreme level of immaturity - on the part of the student protestors and the faculty that enables this type of behavior.

Why in the world would anybody pay these exorbitant tuition costs and be content to be educated in such an inward looking environment? The role of students and faculty in our great institutions of learning is to look outward and upward. To understand the problems and the differences that separate us, to think deeply and creatively about the solutions, and to hone their personal knowledge and skills through vigorous debate, study and involvement in the outside world.

The student protestors I see are failing to demand the best of themselves, and to demand the best from their gold-plated education. The professors I see calling for "trigger warnings" or "muscle over here" are failing to understand anything about their own roles and the world around them.

I went to work everyday, whether at college or in the corporation or later back on campus, a little bit afraid. Afraid that I did not know enough, was not working hard enough, and was not keeping pace with my competition enough. That fear was uncomfortable, to be sure, but it spurred me on every day and the results were good.

I'd like to see a little more fear in the eyes of these student protestors, and the faculty who abet them. While we are at it, I'd like to see more video of those students trying to study in that library, who seem to know what they need to do today, in order to prepare themselves for their lives and responsibilities tomorrow.

[For more about the author, visit VictorBrown.net](http://VictorBrown.net)