Larry and Amy:

After having several days for mental digestion, there are still some issues raised and comments made in the QUEST open forum (2/12/15) that resonate with me in a very negative way. I have tried *not* to send this message, but I have to get it off my chest, as they say.

1) Is there consensus among the entire faculty at large that NDSU should adopt nation best practices as pertains to “outcome-based, or competency-based” academic standards?

If a university adopts competence-based standards, who defines what competencies are testable/required? This is just a disguise for relinquishing the standards of educational achievement to business and political interests. Transforming universities into trade schools and job training centers. I think we see that very clearly in the QUEST curriculum proposal. How was it decided that the science requirement needed to be cut by over 40% and that laboratories were not necessary? My guess is, non-faculty influence or perceived student dissatisfaction.

The other problem with competency-based curricula is that it doesn’t seek perfection, excellence, or other forms of higher achievement. The goals are competency, which to me is another way of saying “average.” We should seek averageness and reward averageness.

That brings me to teaching critical thinking. By endorsing classes in “critical thinking,” at any level, there is an overt inference that critical thinking can only be taught in some contexts (classes) and not others. That’s just weird to a science professor. The sciences are built upon critical thinking! Its like saying that fish need specific courses in how to survive underwater - nonsensical, really. The way the QUEST proposal is currently written seems to be an actual step backward in the area of developing critical thinking by reducing the requirement for “integrated critical thinking courses” that we call science in the GEC.

2) Amy stated something like our ‘goal is to help students become employed.’ I never considered this to be important when I was a student and as a professor I certainly do not teach for the employment of my students! UGH! Our goal should be to produce intelligent, well-rounded, citizens who are capable of thinking for themselves and adapting to future challenges. If we are successful in that goal, most of them will become employed as an additional benefit of a university education. **Self-betterment through education is the purpose, employment is the benefit.**

The culture’s current way of thinking about a university education has become very distorted. A university IS NOT for job training! There are trade schools, tech schools, internet schools, and on-the-job training for that purpose. If we at the university adopt a “competency-oriented” curriculum we are reinforcing and perpetuation the warped view that the media and politicians are fostering about university educations; that they are only useful if you get a good job afterward. Hog-wash! Why should universities be taking curriculum guidance from the media and popular culture? Sick (and not the good sick that the kids use). The QUEST proposal seems to be highly influenced by media stereotyping of Higher Ed.

3) The horribly misguided and ultimately highly destructive motion that students are customers. Students are students; there are numerous aspects of an university education that they won’t like or appreciate until later in their lives. We shouldn’t be catering to their whims, likes, or dislikes, when they are 18-22 years old. We really are teaching and training these people for their entire lives. **We have to have the wisdom and fortitude of true professors** not to collapse under the immediate pressures, but to keep the society’s and the student’s long term benefits in mind. This is another example of cultural sickness and misunderstanding of what it means to be educated. As my Grandmother used to say, “You may not like it now, but you will thank me later.” And, she was always right about that!

4) One last thing. Many members of CSM are honestly offended, that the words “science” and “mathematics” were removed from the proposed GEC. Please restore the appropriate academic names of science and mathematics to whatever form the revised GEC takes.

I’m sorry to rant, I just really cannot understand the motivations behind the QUEST proposal. And, as you can see I tend to favor sinister interpretations. Some people call it pessimism, I call it realism.
You may share my concerns with the QUEST committee.

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"No trees were destroyed in order to send this message, but a great many electrons were terribly inconvenienced."