



Crowding the Hours, Sending Out Light

Author of the bestselling *Bobos in Paradise* and a noted public intellectual, David Brooks published a provocative article titled "The Organization Kid" in *Atlantic Monthly* in April 2001. It was an unforgettable musing on the values and goals of undergraduates at Princeton, those privileged college students whom he labeled "the meritocracy" and described as high achieving young people who have known only prosperity and peace.

As impressed as Mr. Brooks was with these students' abilities to cope with technology, fill their Daytimers with back-to-back enriching activities, succeed in their academic programs, plan their futures, and move smoothly toward never-ending self-improvement, he, nevertheless, wondered if something was possibly missing. In his interviews with these undergraduates, Mr. Brooks found only one student who identified with the idea of noblesse oblige - the obligation of the privileged to serve society. He pondered the meaning of his encounters at Princeton: Are universities and our culture encouraging students to probe deeply into their sense of service to others? Will today's "best and brightest" step up to do their duty for the Common Good, as earlier generations of the elite university undergraduates have done?

I wished Mr. Brooks could visit Baylor. I believe he would find the elusive, exemplary quality here that formed the heart of his search, and he would find it in a significant number of our students. Recently I had lunch with Andy Black, a Baylor Honors Program graduate in 1997 who also has completed a master's degree at Truett Seminary. He spoke easily of his future, not because he knew with certainty where he would be in five years but because - wherever his future study and vocation lead - he would measure the rightness of the journey by standards of Christian virtue, standards that call us to use our talents in humility and with gratitude.

Andy is serving as the program coordinator of a non-profit organization that helps low-income families save money for down payments that will lead to home ownership. This is accomplished through financial literacy classes, helping people set up individual development accounts, and networking among community-based entities such as churches, banking, and social services. Faith Covenant Support Services is a beautiful story with green and gold swirled through every element. It was conceived and founded five years ago by concerned citizens of Waco in concert with Stephan Fairfield, (B.S. 1983) whose transforming work in the Houston innercity has earned him national acclaim. Working closely with Stephan, a talented and impassioned undergraduate, Beau Egert (B. A. 2001, Master of Public Policy, Harvard 2004), became the first chair of the board of directors. Beau devoted endless hours for more than two years to this fledgling agency and credits both Stephan Fairfield and Dr. Gaynor Yancey, a Baylor social work faculty

member, for their vital contributions. Baylor alumni, faculty, and students truly created the firm foundation on which Andy and others now build this fine agency in Waco.

Baylor students such as Skye Perryman (Truman Scholar 2002, B.A. 2003 in economics and philosophy), John Hill (Truman Scholar 2003, B.A. 2004 in Russian and political science) and Kristin Kan (Truman Scholar 2004, a premedical University Scholar) have committed twenty or more hours a week throughout their undergraduate schooling to help change the lives of Waco citizens as well. Skye's work with the Gear Up program in middle schools here received state and national acclaim. John's initiating a "One Book, One Waco" project two years ago brought diverse peoples of all ages together across our city to read Earnest Gaines' *A Lesson Before Dying*. Kristin Kan's vision and outreach through the Baylor Student 2012 Council to help initiate and implement a Service Summit among Waco nonprofit agencies and the University this past spring provided a touchstone for new and exciting relationships between the "town" and the "gown" for years to come. These students have not simply recorded countless service hours that look good on a resume; they have been change agents building a more civil society.

Every week I have the privilege to talk with students who - through courses, their religious moorings, and meaningful experiences outside the classroom- have somehow broken free from the cultural messages that fill the television and magazine world. These students exhibit a passionate desire to contribute to a better world. They are not cynical, nor are they blindly optimistic. Rather, they are fully awake to the challenges and complexities of today's world, and they courageously step forward to say "Count me in!" Life is a noble mission, and they are taking it very seriously as they separate those issues that are weighted with moral gravity from those that are based in trivia - something Mr. Brooks said students he interviewed were not eager to discuss, but something that is a way of life at Baylor.

Young leaders like Beau, Skye, John, Kristin, and Andy have fires in their souls. And their decisions to invest their lives in selfless deeds in a weary world are genuine and energizing. It was students like these to whom John Hibbens, president of Princeton in the early 1900s, addressed his graduation remarks in 1913. Mr. Hibbens exhorted the graduates whom he described as "enlightened, self-sufficient, self-governed, endowed with gifts above your fellows," to answer the world's call to duty.

He reminded them further that the world requires that they fight [their] fight in the name of honor and of chivalry, against the powers of organized evil and of commercialized vice, against the poverty, disease, and death which follow fast in the wake of sin and ignorance, against all the innumerable forces which are working to destroy the image of God in man. . . There comes to you from many quarters, from many voices, the call of your kind. It is the human cry of spirits in bondage, of souls in despair, of lives debased and doomed. It is the call of man to his brother . . . such is your vocation; follow the voice that calls you in the name of God and of man. The time is short, the opportunity is great; therefore, crowd the hours with the best that is in you.

Mr. Brooks provides the Hibbens' quotation within his essay to contrast the student culture of 1913 at Princeton with the student culture of the 21st century, a seemingly more comfortable, less burdened one. And he laments the loss of articulated value systems that provide students with an identity tied to an abiding sense of service, courage, courtesy and social obligation. Mr. Brooks sees "moral combat" to have been central to the university's charge a century ago, suggesting that "the stakes were higher [then], the consequences of one's decisions were more serious, the goals were

nobler."

Thank goodness there seems to be a time warp still in place at Baylor. Now as always, the University fosters discovery and inquiry in such a way that students may explore their own sense of identity, purpose, calling, and duty while they are studying intensely and sorting out how and where they will contribute their knowledge and skills beyond college. Mr. Brooks' view of Princeton today, indeed of universities in general, contrasts with Baylor's historic mission.

Mr. Brooks Says: Although today's Princeton and today's parents impose all sort of rules to reduce safety risks and encourage achievement, they do not go to great lengths to build character, the way adults and adult institutions did a

century ago. They don't offer much help with the fundamental questions. . . . [I]n general the job of the university is to supply the knowledge that students will need to prosper, and, at most, to provide a forum in which they can cultivate character on their own. . .

Mr. Brooks goes on to say that universities and parents in modern America "expend enormous energy guiding and regulating" student behavior and providing every sort of training and opportunity, but "when it comes to character and virtue, the most mysterious area of all, suddenly the laissez-faire ethic rules: You're on your own, Jack and Jill; go figure out what is true and just for yourselves."

Baylor's Baptist heritage and commitment to development of the whole person have always been attractive to students who are committed to faith, virtue, and goodness as well as fine academic programs. Likewise, many faculty members are predisposed to take seriously the importance not only of the educational enterprise but also of personal relationships with Jack and Jill - and Rebecca, and Ben, and LesleyAnne - because of the covenant made between professors and students. At the ground level of faculty-to-student interactions that take place daily on this campus, one encounters a special, value-added gift that is central to our identity - the caring faculty mentors who not only challenge our students intellectually but also often provide an environment where students are safe to ask the big and sometimes frightening questions of their lives as well.

Numbers of students take the opportunity offered here to do more than simply earn a degree. I mentioned a few of those outstanding individual leaders earlier, but the list is long - and every faculty member, with an affectionate and appreciative sigh, could add names. The students, likewise, tell the story of their encounters with great scholar-teachers, those who not only demanded rigorous attention to subject matter and skills but in many cases were themselves well-rounded, civic-minded individuals who believed in the students and pressed them to move beyond their comfort zones to become all that they were meant to be. It is not uncommon to see our service-minded faculty encouraging students to become involved in Habitat for Humanity, the World Hunger Farm, Caritas, other nonprofit agencies, or programs of ministry at home and abroad through their churches.

David Brooks has returned to Princeton since the terrorist attacks and continues to be extremely impressed with the elite, ceaselessly striving students. Nevertheless, Mr. Brooks in various recent publications remains concerned about what our best and brightest need to do in order to understand and feel some kinship with, maybe even burden for, their fellow citizens. He asks what if "Ameri-Corps became a rite of passage for young Americans, so that at least for a year of their lives they would be with people unlike themselves."

Given Mr. Brooks' hope that universities might continue to raise ultimate questions and that students might continue to be urged to take up their roles in the betterment of society, it seems time to

invite Mr. Brooks to Baylor. If he spent a few days among us, he would encounter students and professors whose lives send out light like stars. They are our pride and joy, as well as the hallmark of our University, Mr. Brooks. And we'd be glad to have you tell the world our story.