

# Editorial

## The Golden Age of teaching—Over for some, here to stay for those who care

Some unfortunate people define the "Golden Age" of teaching as the time when it was possible to avoid almost all student contact, leaving their "teaching" schedules with as much free time as possible. I am aware, for example, of a full Professor at a major university, who has no administrative responsibilities, and who teaches, on average, fewer than 4 hours a week (this is clinical teaching, so no preparation time is necessary). He has no other responsibilities in his schedule. He performs no research, and never has, so the mere fact that he is a full Professor is a mockery of the system. Others teach a 1-hour course weekly, perhaps for only one semester, while the rest of their "work" time is used in personal tasks. For such parasites on the system, the Golden Age of teaching is over, now that the economic recession is forcing some accountability from our teaching institutions.

The message is the same at universities all over the world: this is not the time to choose teaching and research as a career if you want to take the easy way out. The recession in, or the stagnant economies of, most countries in the world has resulted in major cuts in funding to education. Many dental schools have had to go through a series of budget cuts with significant decreases in operating funds each year. Available positions have been withdrawn and faculty members who have retired have not been replaced.

Despite recent economic concerns, some dental school faculty members have had a pretty easy life until now. By "overstocking" departments with teaching staff, by using part-time teachers, and by dividing teaching responsibilities, they have been able to restrict student contact to a bare minimum. Thus some teachers have been free to do what they want with most of the week. With this free time, some faculty members have chosen to supplement their income handsomely by working in a private or intramural practice several days a week; surely half a day, or at the most, 1 full day a week in practice is more than adequate to maintain skills? Some even are bold enough to flaunt the system with regular golf games

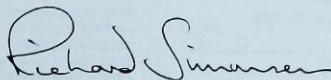
during work hours. Such people are not fulfilling the role of the true educator: someone who is privileged with the public's trust to be active in the areas of teaching, research, patient care, and service to the community.

There is a move afoot in higher education for greater accountability from teachers as to how they spend their time. Professors will need to show that they are productive and worthy of the responsibility of being on the university payroll. They will have to document a minimal amount of student contact. Some would say, therefore, that the Golden Age of teaching as a career is over. But is it? Maybe, for those who define the Golden Age in terms of how little work they can get away with, those days are over. But not for the dedicated teacher.

There are teachers who define the Golden Age of teaching in terms of the satisfaction and enjoyment that they get from the academic environment—the tremendous joy they get in influencing young and fertile minds—the satisfaction they get from the ability to add, through their hard work in research, to the body of scientific knowledge that our profession needs in order to move forward.

For them, the Golden Age of teaching is here to stay. No matter how depressing the economic environment, no matter how many resources are cannibalized by other university departments, no matter how bad the morale of colleagues, they still have the responsibility, and with it the great satisfaction and joy, of changing a student's perception of his or her chosen profession and thus of affecting someone's life in a positive way.

For these teachers, the Golden Age will always be the present.



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