

# *31<sup>st</sup> & Pearl*

## **Don't Talk to Them**

As I was reading the essay on collegiality posted at [www.usmpride.com](http://www.usmpride.com), I began to think about a CoB tradition – administrators telling young faculty and/or new hires to stay away from certain older faculty members who have a history of being outspoken.

As a new faculty at a new school, you really don't know what's going on with the politics of the place. If it's your first job, you may tend to lend undue credence to the words of certain administrators when they tell you that "Old Bill has his own way of doing things," "Jack's a valuable member of our college, but I'm not sure he's the kind of person you want to emulate," or "I don't want to see you end up like Larry – he's such a negative person." Those who do not know the "lay of the land" may think that Bill, Jack, and Larry are people to be avoided, because Chairman X or Dean Y told them so.

This phenomenon is insulting on many levels. First, dissonance or disagreement should be valued in academia – viewed as a positive rather than as a negative. Why are administrators afraid of too much disagreement? Is it because there is a critical mass that, if it builds at the right time, could bring down the status quo? To use "fatherly advice" to maintain control of the "plantation system" is insulting to academia. Second, the act of trying to turn young/new faculty against dissenters is insulting to the dissenters, who have been around long enough to have something to dissent about. These people may be productive faculty members who perform well in teaching, research, and service/professional development, and to use discord as a reason to marginalize their other positive contributions is insulting to these faculty. Third, this behavior is insulting to the young/new faculty members. After they think about what the kindly administrator is doing, they should rightly be insulted – anyone intelligent enough to earn an advanced degree should be afforded the opportunity to form his own opinions about faculty members in general and in specific.

Sometimes, the “fatherly advice” doesn’t come from a current administrator; it comes from a former administrator or other administrative sycophant. The kindly senior professor who makes a habit of always taking the new guy out to lunch a few times in the first few weeks, cultivating the perceived trust that leads to the “talk” described above. Make no mistake about it. This is choreographed behavior to the n<sup>th</sup> degree. Every new person who swallows the tale hook, line, and sinker is another vote that can be counted on when the chips are down. They’re team players. They go along to get along.

Unfortunately for the administrative planning team, the illusion of wisdom eventually wears off, and the young/new faculty see the nonconformists in terms of their academic worth and not the innuendo spread by the administrators. Sometimes it takes no time at all for the insinuations to dissolve away, but sometimes it takes longer. One thing’s for sure: the jig is up in the CoB. Those who want to be informed can now be informed, and those who want to be ignorant can offer no excuses when confronted.

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*31st & Pearl is a new series housed at [usmpride.com](http://usmpride.com) that features commentary on aspects of life in the CoB from a variety of columnists.*