

CASE STUDY: TO THE LETTER

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ABSTRACT

As he is about to retire, professor Ian Finagle reviews some letters that his dissertation advisor, Maggie, sent him over the years. As a PhD student, Ian is especially anxious about 'having it made' so that he can let his guard down and enjoy life. Essentially, he wants to know what it takes to be successful as an academic, especially since it seems to be a moving target. Once a milestone is reached, another one appears in the distance. In her letters, Maggie tells Ian to be his own judge of when he has 'arrived.' She offers advice concerning the dissertation process, how research is done, tenure, and the definition of career success. Our case study encourages Ph.D. students to evaluate this advice based on their current experience, career objectives, and the values that they have been taught in their Ph.D. program. They are also challenged to evaluate their implicit beliefs and values concerning the dissertation process, research, definitions of career success, and the rewards available to academics.

CASE STUDY

Our case study begins one late June afternoon in the office of Professor Ian Finagle. The events leading to this point started some four months earlier when Ian knocked on the door of George 'Dusty' Rhodes, Ian's Dean.

"Hi Ian, what's up?"

"Dusty, I'm going to retire. Research isn't as much fun as it used to be and, as for teaching, it's become, well, the same old grind. I want to retire while I'm still young enough to enjoy it."

"What do you think you'll do instead, Ian? Any definite plans?"

"Some travel, I think, and a bit of gardening, but heck, Dusty, other than that I'm just not sure."

"Well, you'll drop by from time to time, I hope."

"Sure, Dusty, I'll always have time for coffee. In fact, I could use some now, how about you?"

"Sounds good, Ian, nothing happening that can't wait for a few minutes."

What followed was a flurry of paperwork from Human Resources, a nice Faculty reception, and a rather grand Retirement Dinner, given by the University at semester's end. As these things go, Finagle ran into Kathy Kirby at the dinner's Cash Bar. Kathy was Finagle's Associate Dean, had been his student, and was always his friend.

"Hi Ian, you old sot," said Kathy grinning, "Can I buy you a drink? I guess you're past your 'best before date.'"

"Yes Kathy, it's time I left. I kept thinking about teaching folks who take my words but leave my meaning and writing one more paper for The Journal, or going to one more Down South Management Conference. All this is not as appealing as it used to be. But you know what Kathy?"

"What, Ian?"

"I keep thinking about all the nights, the weekends, and the 18-hour days I put in. Kathy, I cared about my students, and I published some good stuff, but somehow I thought I'd have made a difference. But, now I really don't think I have. Regardless, I'm leaving..." said Finagle wistfully, "I just wish I'd have done more."

Kathy looked at him for a moment, then down at her glass of wine. "Ian, are you happy?"

“Why, yes, Kathy, I am.”

“Then,” Kathy said, giving him a hug, “You’re a greater success than most.”

From then on, it was a busy time. It was a major task cleaning out his office, an office he had occupied for many years. He took home a few books and gave the rest to younger faculty. Then one day, physical plant delivered a very large, wheeled recycling bin to his office. Into it went piles of musty journal articles, textbooks no one wanted, and 10 or 12 linear feet of files. All of these were things that he had kept ‘just in case,’ but now they were of no obvious use to anyone. After all, who would want the minutes of a faculty meeting from 20 years ago?

This brought him, at last, to a single yellowed file: a file he had not looked at for decades, a file he had saved for last. It was marked “Letters from Maggie.” Maggie had been his dissertation advisor and mentor those long years ago. Finagle chuckled to himself: that dissertation had been really, really difficult to write. He never thought he’d get the damned thing finished or graduate for that matter. He had pulled through only because of Maggie. When they first met, she advised him, “Finagle, never do your dissertation on a topic you love.” Later on, when he was really stuck, she told him, “Ian, every graduate student wants to write the best dissertation ever written. Your objective should be to write one just good enough to get a degree. Don’t get it ‘just right,’ get it written.” She was right, thought Finagle, in retrospect. In any case, she began writing letters when she was on sabbatical, and Finagle had missed yet another deadline in sending her a dissertation draft. He opened the yellowed, worn file and started to read these letters, which were from a time before email and from a world when ‘things took time.’

Ian Finagle
Facade University

Hi Ian:

I’ve not gotten anything from you for over two months, so I thought I’d drop you a line; I might be on sabbatical, but I want you to finish The Big Book Report, and it’s oh so easy to get lost in the process. I think this is happening to you, and I wanted to say that you’re not off the hook, but more importantly, I wanted to tell you of one of the ways that ‘getting lost’ can happen.

One of the stranger beliefs of our Academic Tribe is that decisions can be classified along a number of different dimensions, and one of those dimensions is Programmed and Non-Programmed. Now, I’m sure you’ve run across this classification before, so you might remember the characteristics of a Programmed decision: “We’ve done it a lot; the results are usually (but don’t have to be) trivial; we can make the ‘decision’ while doing other things, and, since we’ve done it all before, we’ve got a very, very, good plan for doing it.” A few examples of a Programmed decision are sorting the wash, doing the dishes, and cleaning out the fridge. We’ve done these things a thousand times, and we’ll do them a thousand more. We’ve got a ‘plan’ for these events even if we can’t always put that ‘plan’ into words. On the other hand, we have typically never made a Non-Programmed decision before. They’re usually important, and the steps can be complex. Worse, since we’re making this decision for the first time, we don’t have a plan for where to go from here, even at the subconscious level. This means that we’re always second-guessing ourselves.

Now here’s my point: Programmed decisions almost always push out Non-Programmed ones. This happens because with Programmed decisions we’ve got a plan, we have practice, and we feel comfortable. With Non-Programmed decisions, we’ve got no plan, no practice, and we’re uncomfortable. We’re lost, just like a ‘Stranger in a Strange Land.’ This is why, when writing a dissertation, we’ll say, “I’ll start writing just as soon as I get the wash done.” Then, “I’ll do it as soon as I get my fridge cleaned.” You get the picture.

When I had to write my dissertation, I found that reading articles, collecting data, grading papers, and the like were my Programmed decisions. They drove out actually writing the dissertation and committing myself to paper, and, thus, opening myself up to criticism, since writing the damn thing was really Non-Programmed. And I struggled with it every day. Struggled, that is until I realized what was happening and that by doing (by writing that first draft, right or wrong), I’d be building myself a plan and find my way in the strange territory called ‘Dissertation Land.’ The advice I got from a very famous guy, “Don’t get it right, get it written,” really helped because, as I wrote the damned thing, my decisions became Programmed and so much easier. At any rate, I just wanted to share my story with you and encourage you to send me that first draft, right or wrong.

All the best,
Maggie McCarthy

Ian had written Maggie back, sending her a rough copy of the first few chapters of his dissertation along with a letter saying, “Maggie, thanks for the advice. It really helped. But I’ll be glad to get this thing over with because once I get it done, I’ll have it made. I’ll be a Ph.D. and a success, and I’ll never have to worry again.” Maggie wrote back with the following letter:

Ian Finagle
Facade University

Dear Ian:

It's great to hear from you. Your draft will get us moving. I think it's also great that you're focusing on some of your data and ignoring other bits. In research, you'll collect lots of data that are either for another paper or that just don't fit. Part of the art of doing research – and it is an art – is to decide what matters in the current context, and let the go of the rest. Letting go of some hard-won data can be difficult, but that's definitely the way the research game is played. Look at it this way, the entry point of research is everything, as it is in art. If you're the first to be a Cubist, then you'll have an impact, but what if you're the last Cubist? You might have an impact, but don't count on it. As for being stuck, or bogged down, don't worry too much about it. In research, things never go as planned, but the good news is that most great discoveries are made when a researcher thought she'd get 'A,' and the world gave her 'B.'

The dissertation looks like an overwhelming task when you first start it. But you can do it. You see, Ian, a dissertation is a rite of passage. Metaphorically speaking, the 'elders' take you into the woods, tell you frightening stories, build a fire, wait till dark, and then some guy with a gourd mask circumcises you with a sharp rock. Writing a dissertation and its defense is like that: it's a painful process but you can survive it if you know that the pain is momentary, and entry into the tribe is worth the momentary discomfort. It also helps to know that some of the frightening stories (of folks who didn't make it) are made up and that you'll never have to write on the topic again unless you want to. It also helps to know that the guy with the gourd over his head is really your 'Uncle Ralph.' This is my way of saying that, when you get to the final defense, your Committee is going to have a vested interest in passing you, and so will I. So, we're going to be very careful with that 'rock.' My point is that you should relax and enjoy the process, as much as you can.

What worries me much more than your dissertation is that you think you'll have it made once you have your Ph.D. That's not the case, my friend. The degree is only a 'union card' that lets you compete, nothing more. Granted, finishing the Ph.D. is a great accomplishment. As you know, lots of students never finish their programs. Most students who quit get stuck at the dissertation stage. So here's to you: finish!

Also, landing a full-time academic job at a pretty good school is another difficult and critical step in your career, if you want to take the 'academic road.' Getting hired by a good school is often a struggle: the most selective schools pretty much hire among themselves. Moreover, many students who do complete their Ph.D. find that they must go (sometimes very reluctantly) to the real world of business or government, although most of those, frankly, would rather have an academic job.

All of that said, a good degree from us will carry you for a few years, but after that, you're on your own. From then on, you'll determine the path that you'll take, and that is an interesting, Non-programmed, set of decisions in itself. In any case, find enclosed my suggestions on your draft.

All the best,
Maggie McCarthy

Ian wrote Maggie back, sending her a revised version of The Big Book Report as he now called his dissertation. He'd said, surely I'll have it made once I get a job at a decent university, like Facade, and when I publish a few great works and get tenure. Then, I'll have it made. Maggie eventually wrote him back:

Ian Finagle
Facade University

Dear Ian:

Please find enclosed some suggestions for your dissertation. I think that my comments are self-explanatory. But, I want to respond to your last note by sharing one of my experiences and a few of my thoughts.

When I first started my Ph.D. program, I shared an office with a senior Ph.D. student who was studying for her comprehensive exams and was terrified that she wouldn't pass. She was the research assistant for a professor with a very messy office that she was expected to clean. She told me, "Ph.D. students are at the bottom of the food chain. Watch that you don't get eaten!" I didn't know what to think about that, but I told myself, "I can do this." And like you, I thought that, once I had passed the comps and gotten my dissertation done, I'd have it made. Well, my Ph.D. program was challenging but doable, and I really felt at home at a university.

I knew research was important so, after some thinking about what were the important problems in my field, I chose a research area thinking that I would, eventually and once and for all, resolve all these problems. Ian, one of the things that I didn't know then was that the definition of 'important' depends on who you ask, and the only thing that a good theory does is get us to a better one. Finally, I became a Carnival Plate Spinner. What's this, you ask? Well, it's another metaphor which means that I had a lot of projects going at the same time. I was publishing articles with my advisor and a bunch of other folks. I was teaching six different courses, serving on committees, and writing grant proposals. And I agreed to supervise every student project that came my way, instead of being selective like I am now.

You see Ian, a lot of universities use what's called The Donkey Theory of Management: they let their strongest jackass carry the heaviest load. And there's no end to the work that a university can ask you to do. But I bought into it because it was my first job, I wanted to make a good impression, and I was concerned about getting tenure. I thought that, once I'd gotten tenure, things would be different. I'd be able to teach the way that I wanted to teach and write things that I wanted to write with an eye to something other than just another publication. So I worked days, nights, and weekends.

About five years later, I made tenure and Associate Professor, but it didn't feel like a huge victory. I was tired and, by that time, a bit cynical about the politics of universities. Oh, I got a lot of citations, and I was well respected in the international community. I ended up being on several journal editorial boards and thought that I was at the pinnacle of success. But, those boards were, and still are, a great deal of work. And membership on those boards came with a lot of other 'opportunities': manuscripts to review, co-author possibilities, panel memberships, session chairing, and the list goes on. But even after attending conferences where I was recognized, being asked to apply to Other Universities, and then being promoted and achieving tenure, I found myself asking, "Is what I've accomplished really that significant?"

Sorry to say this Ian, but tenure isn't a destination, and when you reach it you won't have it made. One of the things that you'll discover is that the feeling after obtaining tenure is not so much one of 'accomplishment,' but, rather one of a sense of relief. The job doesn't really change after tenure and neither does the world in any significant sense. Either your colleagues want you there or they don't, and the only thing that tenure does is formalize the decision that you're one of them. This is why it's often easier to get tenure from a good university than a poor one: in a good or very good university, your colleagues recognize your contributions. In a bad one, you might be perceived as a threat. And, as we know, threats must be eliminated.

You'll also discover something else: "The Fox was right." I don't know if you have ever read *The Little Prince* by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry. It's a children's tale that is definitely not for children. In it, a small prince goes on an adventure and meets lots of interesting characters. One of them is The Fox who tells the Prince, "It is the time you have wasted for your rose that makes your rose so important." Here's my point, Ian, and one of the answers to the question I asked myself about accomplishment: Our research, mostly, is important because we spend our time, which is our lives, on it. It's not important because it can change the world, although it can. It's not important because it leads to tenure, although it does. It's not important because it leads to other opportunities, as it often will. It's important because it's how we choose to spend our lives.

All the best,
Maggie McCarthy

Now you might gather that, even as a graduate student, Finagle had a bit of 'self-confidence.' Moreover, if truth be told, he was new to the academic game. Even after he had passed his comprehensives, he had only been to a few conferences. It was only later that he learned that Maggie was rather well known in her field and, perhaps, not as easy-going as she appeared. What he discovered was that Maggie was a major academic star with an international reputation, and lesser academic lights would rather pet a cobra than cross her.

But that discovery was a year or two in his future, so with very good intentions, and frankly a lack of boundaries, he wrote her back (including the most recent copy of his corrected dissertation), saying in so many words, "Maggie you must really have it made. You're a Full Professor. I've gone to a number of parties in that grand house of yours. It's like a movie set and a far cry from my life of sandwiches for supper and refereeing quarrels between my roommates about cleaning the bathroom. I mean, Maggie, at your last party, a string quartet was playing. Folks were milling about with wine glasses in their hands, and those folks knew what they were talking about. Your friends are really something else. Why there were cars parked at your house that were worth more than my student loans. As you know, I'm from a working-class background. So, if having a place like that and friends like that isn't 'having it made,' then what the hell is?" After a quite lengthy pause, he received the following letter:

Ian Finagle
Facade University

Dear Ian:

Thanks for the most recent dissertation draft. It's at a stage where we can safely give it to the rest of your Committee for their comments. I've also suggested some secondary data analyses to answer a few questions that I'm sure you'll be asked at your defense. I've made notes about this in your original manuscript (enclosed). If you have any questions or if I have been unclear, drop me a line.

What I really want to do in this letter is to respond to your latest letter, and, Ian, I hardly know where to begin. But let me start with your underlying premise having to do with money. I know that you're intrigued by the trappings of university life, by ideas, and by teaching, and you've been intrigued ever since you were an undergraduate. So far so good, but Ian if one of the trappings you're interested in is wealth, then you're in the wrong game. Don't misunderstand me: by most standards, we're well paid. However, you'll find that, if you're competent, the real money is in consulting and, frankly, in industry, despite the fact many are very reluctant to take this path. Such a path, in university circles, is often seen as 'selling out' and contrary to the intellectual life but, in truth, it's not. That path is simply another way to achieve your objectives. But it's a critical choice, for as I once heard, "The limits of the purse are the limits of your heart." Money is often a limit that is difficult to transcend. Contrary to popular wisdom, money will sometimes buy happiness, and there are few problems in life that having a great deal of money will make worse. But with a few notable exceptions, university life is a path to comfort, not riches, and it leads to ideas rather than treasure.

I thought that your point that my house and the party that you attended were 'like a movie set' was interesting and insightful. The analogy is a good one. Ian, a house is a tool, nothing more, and like any other tool, you should select it on the basis of what you want it to accomplish. In my case, I made my selection on the basis of a number of considerations that I need not go into here, but, rest assured, as with any other tool, I will sell my current house when it's no longer useful to me. But for now, it's a 'stage setting' that I

find useful for what I'm trying to accomplish. To quote an English author from some time ago, "Your happiness does not depend on the size of your house, but on it being safe, clean and in order, and on the materials it is made of being trustworthy." I might also add, to paraphrase the same author, a home results from the use of the house, from the memories, the joy, the sharing, and the grace in the truest sense of the word embedded in it. Never confuse a house with a home.

At my party were some of my friends but also some colleagues. The two can be synonymous, of course, but need not be. In your university life, you'll make life-long friends, but you'll also form useful business relationships with others who are friendly, but not exactly 'friends.' The boundary between a colleague and a friend is in affection and closeness. In my case at least, the 'arena' for interactions between my colleagues and I is more limited than it is between my friends and I. I know, for example, that you and a number of your fellow graduate students meet once a week for an evening meal. I believe it is Dim Sum, right? If your experience is at all similar to mine and my group [we called ourselves 'The Dominate Coalition'], these people will be your life-long friends given that you have shared a great deal together. You've become close because you've gone through the Ph.D. crucible together, and that particular fire has a way of welding those who experience it as a group together.

You also mentioned that my party guests were very well informed. In general, they were, since many of them are experts in their fields. But, Ian, it's a formidable mistake to attribute a general knowledge of all things to an expert. If you become an expert in one of our sub-disciplines, you should know most of the critical information concerning that particular branch of your trade, and you should be also able to talk about information in other disciplines for about 15 minutes without making a critical error. However, the price you pay for becoming an expert is that you're really, as one of my advisors told me, 'an inch wide and a mile deep.' You'll know a great deal about a small part of the world (as did many at my party) and a smattering of knowledge about the rest of it. Such specialization in a group of people creates an interesting illusion. When you come into contact with so many experts, it's easy to form the opinion that everyone knows a lot about everything, and that's simply not the case. It's the group that knows a great deal, not each individual.

Finally, I want to leave you with this observation: University life, when viewed from the outside, can encourage the perception that we spend evenings musing about important ideas by the fireplace or in personal book-lined libraries, or that we spend many evenings hosting erudite receptions replete with classical music – that we're surrounded by sophistication. Ian, sometimes this is true; sophistication really means to form ideas and tastes based on education and worldly experience. We are educated (as are you), and most of us try to see a great deal of the world before we leave it. But Ian, this is not a goal in and of itself.

For me, at least, the goal is to act with wisdom. This means that you must challenge everything, including, eventually, what we've done to you in the Ph.D. process. You see in our program, and in most others, the key is to give you a particular set of values, such as to rely on data, to believe in the power of thought, and to follow thought no matter where it takes you. You're encouraged to tell the truth about your discipline, to argue fairly and to think clearly. The information and the literature that we have you read is the 'bait,' but such values are the 'hook' because – with the exception of those few years when you struggle for tenure or to make full professor – you'll be a free agent, and you must have the good judgment and wisdom to guide others. But every attempt at such 'socialization' leaves unintended marks. Often some of us teach you what to think, instead of how to think. We offer hot theories which, a few years later, cool off in the face of experimental data. Finally, we often transmit the idea that debate, sophistication, and the trappings of university life are ends in themselves when in fact they are not. So, as you'll discover, you'll spend many years not only trying to make your place at your chosen university but also trying to escape your training. Not the core values, mind you, but some of the unintended consequences of us trying to convince you that truth is important and that people are as important as productivity.

All the best,
Maggie McCarthy

After some struggles with secondary data analyses, Ian responded, "Maggie, he said, I'm confused. From your letters, I gather that having a great house and a great car isn't 'having it made.' I also gather that finishing my Book Report, getting a good job, making Associate and getting tenure aren't big accomplishments, but, rather, they're a few moves in a long-run game. You've already told me that research is an end in itself, so, by implication, whether I'm published or not really isn't the issue: I can do research and never be published. But surely making full professor makes a difference? And what about all those articles you had us read? I mean you're the lead author on a lot of them, and as nearly as I can tell, your co-authors are from, well, universities that are a lot better than Facade. So here's my point, Maggie: If it's not a house, a car, a good job or making full that's 'having it made,' if research 'counts' even if it's not published, then when will I ever know I've 'arrived' and when can I finally let my guard down and enjoy life?" Maggie wrote him back:

Ian Finagle
Facade University

Dear Ian:

You have asked a question that I've asked myself now for about 10 years. I'm not sure that I have a good answer for you. In fact, I don't think that anyone does. A few years ago, while at the Down South Management Conference, I asked my mentor the same question. I'm sure that you know Mary Ann's work because you've read a great deal of it in my seminar course. So you also know that she's damn good, and she's always being cited. And, at most conferences, graduate students and faculty are clustered around her three deep. I got her out for supper one night and asked her that very question. She had just become a 'Chaired Professor' at a major university, and supper was to be a celebration of her accomplishment. My opening line, after our first glass of champagne, was, "Well, Mary Ann, what's it like to finally have it made?" And she replied, "I really don't know, Maggie. I certainly don't feel like

I've got it made. Yes, I'm a Chaired Professor, but that appointment is only for five years. And I've got to get paddling to make sure that it's renewed. Besides, there's lots of stuff that I really want to do yet. I'm working 10 hours a day and six days a week. I've got a line on a theory that I really want to develop, and I'm making some headway. But, Maggie, it's slow. I'm not sure that I'll be able to do it. I sacrificed my personal life years ago on the altar of research: I'm single with no kids. Relationships can take a beating in Academia. That might be ok, but, after a few glasses of champagne, I'm not always sure that the sacrifice is worth it."

Ian, that set me back on my heels. If Mary Ann didn't have it made and was second-guessing herself, what hope was there for me? After that dinner, I started paying attention. You know, Ian, our University has folks who are Emeritus: they've been retired for years and still come in every day. They put in a full day's work. Four of them share a dingy office, and the only tangible rewards are the 'BS' sessions at coffee break, another publication every few months, and a free parking pass from the University. Yes, admittedly, they can apply for grants, but those grants lead only to more research and yet more grants. It's gotten me asking myself, "Is that what I want when my retirement comes?"

In any case, Mary Ann got me thinking, and I have reached some tentative conclusions. I'm not sure how right they are, but I'll share them with you. First, "It's a game, but the prizes are real." What I mean by this is that being in the Academy brings with it significant rewards and a great deal of joy. We take part of our pay in money and nice things and part of our pay in being recognized and spoken of favorably. And, some of our pay is a sense of accomplishment and policy side payments. But like many games, it's easy to get trapped in a means-ends inversion where competing for the prizes becomes the prize in and of itself. And for us, there's no external limit to the game: we're sometimes like gamblers with an unlimited budget who have stopped concentrating on winning and started concentrating on the spin of the wheel for its own sake.

I'm also convinced that Einstein was right when he said, "The difference between genius and stupidity is that genius has limits." Ian, in the Academy, if you're bright and dedicated you'll always fail. The reason is simple: if you succeed, you'll then try something much more difficult (to make the most of your talents and abilities). Eventually, you will reach the limits of your strength and intelligence, and you'll fail. It happens to us all, and, because we're not really equipped to deal with failure due to our socialization, we try and fail again. In effect, we keep 'doubling our bet.' I also think that one of the reasons that we work so hard is because it's easy to convince ourselves, no matter how much we know, that we're really here under false pretenses, and so we try to cope. I told you in an earlier letter that it's easy to confuse what the group knows with what an individual knows. Well, that's equally true of a 'field.' In this game, we're always going to be running into folks who know things that we don't, and that makes us feel that we can do a lot better. As a friend of mine once told me, about 50 million academic articles have been published—and ignorance of the literature is no excuse.

That's my thinking so far. But, Ian, since your dissertation is well underway, what I'd like you to do is write a letter to yourself and send me a copy. What do you recommend to yourself as (a) a Ph.D. student; (b) an Assistant Professor; (c) an Associate Professor; and (d) a Full Professor? Tell me about your work, not your ideas but what your work life might be like at each of these stages. Again, the English author I quoted earlier said that the critical question is not "Will I have work?" but "What kind of work will I have?" Outline the values that we've taught you that you'll keep, and outline those that you might set aside. Describe the weaknesses in your current training and what you'll do to correct them. And finally, on retirement: Describe what you would like the Dean of the Day to say about you when you lock your office door for the last time. Concentrate on what you would need to do to feel like you've 'made it.' Don't take my word for any of the above, think for yourself. Try to separate out the values that we've taught you (implicitly or otherwise) about your 'duty' to the field and 'having it made.' Challenge what we've taught you in light of what you think are your duties to yourself. In an earlier letter, I wrote that, eventually, part of your mission is to escape your training. That includes what we have taught you to believe about success in the field. So now's the time to start. I think that you'll find writing this letter to be an instructive exercise.

All the best,
Maggie McCarthy

Well, thought Finagle while closing the yellowed file, it's been a lot of years. Putting the file in his briefcase and laying his keys on the now-empty desk, Finagle walked through the open door and closed it behind him.

Questions: Write to Maggie as if she were your advisor.

1. Which of her advice will you accept? Reject? Why?
2. What values have you been taught in your program? Which will you keep, and which will you reject? Why?
3. What are the weaknesses in your current training and what will you do to correct them?
4. What definitions of success will you keep, and why?
5. Finally, at the end of the day, on your retirement, what would you want the Dean of the Day to say about you?

FULL TEACHING NOTES ARE AVAILABLE TO INSTRUCTORS FROM THE AUTHORS.

END NOTES

1. Our title is a bit of pun, as you will see. To do things "to the letter" is to do them exactly as directed. For a fuller explanation of this rather curious title see Turner, V. (1986). Body, brain and culture. *Performing Arts Journal*, 10(2), 26-34.) (especially his section on 'play'). We thank Dr. Daniel F. Coleman (UNB Fredericton) for his comments and suggestion on this paper. Any errors or omissions, of course, remain the responsibility of the authors.
2. Finagle seems to be quoting from J. Fox (1844, p.1017).

3. Arguably Cubism is still with us. See <http://ezinearticles.com/?Cubism-Today&id=5117198>
4. Maggie seems to be recalling an event in Exodus 4:24-27 [The New King James Version].
5. Bedeian and Field, 1980. This was published around the time that this letter was written.
6. Susan Ashford, quoting Lyman Porter's metaphor, where, an academic has many research projects on the go at one time, in P. Frost and M. S. Taylor (1996, p.121).
7. The authors know this saying, but have been unable to find an exact source for this quote.
8. From A. Saint Exupéry, *The Little Prince*.
9. For the exact quote see The complete works of John Ruskin, Vol. xvii: p. 94.
10. Ruskin, J. (1886). *Fors Clavigera*. New York: John Wiley and sons. p.156
11. Communicated from S. Kerr to J. Tolliver c.1974-1975
12. A "policy side payment" is a 'voice' in how things are run. For an example where editors are more than willing to 'shape the direction of the field' by rejecting otherwise sound articles See Kerr, Tolliver and Petree, 1977.
13. http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/authors/a/albert_einstein.html
14. See The Stones of Venice. *The Complete Works of John Ruskin*, Vol. X, p. 202.
15. Jinha, A. E. 2010.
16. See Fors Clavigera. *The Complete Works of John Ruskin*, Vol. III, pp. 27-29, 535.

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