

A Lament from the Founder of The Drake Group - February 21, 2021

By Jon Ericson

Dear Diary

75 degrees under sunny skies today as I seek shade from my favorite ocean bench. . . . Another day of pondering the tally: wins and losses, ups and downs, hits and misses, successes and failures. *Failures*: why did I let *that* creep in? Next thing you know, pondering means about The Drake Group. . . .

a lament

A recent [December 17, 2020] article by Daniel Libit and Luke Cyphers opened:

Jon Ericson, the 84-year-old former provost of Drake University, lives in a waterfront condominium in Coronado, California, with dueling views of San Diego Bay and the Pacific Ocean.

My, maybe I will look good in this. It's a long, very long, a really long piece, and so far, so good. Then comes the closing. Alas, Donna Lopiano enters and ruins everything:

To The Drake Group's current president Donna Lopiano, history proves university faculty and administrators simply weren't capable of confronting the increasing money and power of college sports. . . . The faculty is AWOL. So what do you do? Keep banging your head against the faculty wall?" Capitol Hill as holding the best chance for college sports reform. . . . how can you motivate Congress to step up and do what the faculty is too chicken or the presidents are too chicken to do?"

"Chicken?" "AWOL?" Not "capable?" Faculty? What a Spoilsport! Talk about raining on my parade.

Except that she is right. So where was she when I started all of this? When I could have saved hundreds—make that a number way bigger, larger than hundreds—of hours? Think of all the things I could have accomplished—or, wasted my time.

Donna, however, is not the only one who sees or saw reality. I was warned from the beginning. Good grief, I even quote some of it in my Little Red [*While Faculty Sleep*] book:

Faculty not facing reality is old news ". . . available evidence suggests a common and consistent failure on the part of faculties. . . . The troublesome question remains: where were the faculties?" John C. Weistart, "College Sports Reform: Where Are the Faculty?" *ACADEME*, July-August, 1987, p. 12.

Where are they?

Faculty members go on about their business as if this corruption at the heart of their universities were none of their business. It is, like bad weather, or the poisoning of the environment by industrial chemicals, something regrettable but about which they feel no responsibility. The football field or the basketball court is not in their field. When a particularly lurid scandal hits the institution that employs them, some of them rise at faculty meetings to excoriate the culpable individuals and demand reform. But reform never comes. Page Smith, *Killing the Spirit, Higher Education in America*, New York: Viking, 1989, p. 16.

Or, to be blunt about it:

I will aver, and doubt anyone can successfully contradict me, that faculty members by and large do not give a rat's ass about athletics. Period. And what the faculty don't care about (as with any group of human beings), they are not going to spend time on fixing, even if it is broke. There is a small subset of faculty who are interested, but that is a VERY SMALL group (and, in my experience here and from what I know elsewhere, it is typically an unrepresentative group). The senior and most distinguished faculty, in and out of governance, do not care. Gary Engstrand, November 22, 1994 email to author.

Even worse, I still have this quotation read somewhere in my first decade as a professor:

For a profession in which its practitioners delight in charting the amusing peccadilloes and sub cultural quirks of office workers and Amazonian aborigines, there has been remarkably little inclination to turn the microscope around.

Herbert Livesey, *The Professor*, January 1, 1975

At the time, maybe I was simply bemused when I should have been warned.

So, accompanying my *Mea Culpa*, do I have a defense? Weakly, . . .

Met many sharp people and made many friends. Sure, but a book club, bridge club, or square-dance gathering provides opportunities to meet new people. True, but those I met in The Drake Group believed deeply in something, and they were willing to devote time and energy to work for that cause. I never met a Drake Group person I didn't like even though I often disagreed with most of them.

To the faculty thing: Donna and I are two peas in a pod. Really? Let me explain. My whole argument for disclosure was based on Donna's view of the faculty. I was against Faculty Review Committees. Tried it at Drake and failed. Against Faculty Athletic Councils and Faculty Athletics Reps. Posing, concerned, caved . . . in the end, to borrow someone's phrase, jock-sniffers. I wanted only truth-telling. If every Duke basketball player majored in "X" and took professor "Y," let the world know. If the Duke president, faculty, and alumni are comfortable, let it be.

Finally, at the risk of self-pity, I saw wrong and tried to right it. I'm no Bobby Kennedy, but the test faces us all. I saw African-American young men being used, and I tried to stop it. At Drake and nationally. That Black coaches and even Black professors went along with this made me even more committed. Take your racism charges and stick them up your ass was my answer. Not a winning ticket.

So, worth it? All those hours wasted? I ponder. For the answer my mind turns to:

An Uncomfortable Thought

Remarks at The Drake Group luncheon, April 16, 2009 in Chapel Hill, North Carolina

Worth it?

Ten years ago this month, I awoke one morning and recall only that I was fed up with the endless laments about the corruption of college sports, and it was time to put up or shut up. So I called two professors often in the news, names Dowling and Sperber to see if they would attend a national

conference. I assumed they would say no, and that would be the end of it. I would be able to say I tried.

Oh, oh, they said yes. If they had said no, there would be no Drake Group.

The struggles and fights at Drake that led to that conference make for an interesting story. The good news is I won't tell it. And the creation of The Drake Group is another interesting story; more good news: I won't tell it.

What is worth telling is that all of it was worth it. But worth it for Tiffany, Linda, and Jim? Would it be worth it for me if I stood in their place? It is an uncomfortable thought.

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Comforting thought

Would it be worth it? A month ago, as I left Drake's recreation building, a voice called out "You're professor Ericson aren't you?" "I used to be," I muttered, as I noticed the voice came from a good-sized man sitting in a Drake Athletics Buildings & Grounds truck. "You're the guy who caused the academic standards for athletes," he said. Picking up the pace to get away from what I assumed would follow, I replied, "I'm afraid so." Now almost out of range, I heard him holler, "No, no, what you did was great."

Back in my car, as I turned on the engine and fastened my seatbelt, I let his comment soak in, soaking in his simple, short comment reminded me that it was worth it; yeah, it was all worth it. It was a comforting thought.