Jus Ubique Docendi

Maybe It's Time We ***All*** *Take Our Diplomas Seriously,*
And Train Masters and Doctors to be Mentors

By Jerry F. Cammarata, Ph.D., Sc.D.

In the office of every physician, every lawyer, every priest, minister and rabbi, every engineer, every architect, every certified public accountant, every principal, and every professor you will find on the wall the same document. It may be on paper or parchment, in English or Latin, but whether printed on card stock or hand-lettered on vellum, it will declare "to whosoever these presents shall come, that the holder is entitled to each and every right and privilege attendant upon the degree to which the bearer has been admitted," or words to that effect.

I dare say that not one in a hundred of us has ever read our diplomas and pondered what those "rights and privileges" might actually be. The main right, at least by traditional reckoning if your degree is from a university, is the *jus ubique docendi*, the right of teaching everywhere.

Yes, whether or not you ever took a single course in the School of Education, whether or not you are classified "pedagogical personnel" by your school system, whether or not you have ever stood in front of a classroom and taught a single lesson, the mere possession of a university degree entitles you, at least in theory, to prepare other scholars to take their places among the fraternity of instructors.

This is not just a bit of quaintness to be stored with your academic tippet. If you had stopped John Duns Scotus on a street by the Rive Gauche, and asked him to direct

you to the Teacher's College or the Normal School or the Faculty of Education of the Medieval University of Paris, he might have looked a bit puzzled for a moment, and then made a wide gesture with his arms: if you seek the Ed School, look around you. Perhaps it is time, in this age when education is a life-long, holistic, multidisciplinary event that we return to this Medieval ideal, and see to it that all of our graduates are prepared, certainly for their particular professions, but also as mentors of the next generation of scholars.

Let's go back for a moment to the origins of our universities.

Universities, as organized institutions, arose in the Middle Ages, in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. They grew out of the Latin grammar schools run by cathedrals and monasteries – that's why our universities often have "chancellors" (this chap was once the chief record keeper of the bishop, and would have overseen the cathedral school) and "deans" (from the Latin *decanus*, a monk in charge of a sort of platoon of 10 monks).

Groups of scholars began to collect around larger schools and settle in important towns – Paris, for instance – and just as the goldsmiths and cloth dyers and glass makers formed guilds to serve as a licensing board, trade union, mutual insurance company, and political party, so too the scholars formed themselves into a guild. Enough scholars, teaching enough different subjects (the seven liberal arts, theology, law and medicine) came to be called a "university" (or, roughly, the "whole" of a thing, a word first used of societies and guilds, before it was applied to schools).

When a young man had trained for a long while as an apprentice, he would go before his guild with the very best example of his work, something special he cooked up to show off all of his skill. If the guild's leaders thought the piece showed sufficient craftsmanship, the lad was given the title "master," as in master goldsmith or master

mason, and his "master piece" became his combination final exam and resume. Now he was licensed by the guild to have apprentices of his own, and teach them the ways of their particular craft.

But how did an apprentice scholar prepare for a degree? Students took courses, as they do now. There were "ordinary lectures," which we might think of as "core curriculum," courses in the basic texts. These were taught by the professors, and to this day in many European schools, "*professor ordinarius*" is a highly coveted title. It may seem odd to us, but while senior faculty taught the core courses, the "extraordinary lectures" or "cursory lectures" in less central texts, what we might think of as electives, were taught by students who had earned their bachelor's degree and were preparing to take their master's degrees.

There was also the seminar, which was guided discussion held over dinner each evening where a handful of students would discuss and debate ideas raised in the lectures that day – and who led these wonderful, and sadly lost, dinner chats that were one part bull session, one part study group, one part homework, and one part debating society? The senior students themselves did.

When a scholar had received sufficient training to be admitted to the final stage of study, he went from being a mere pupil to being a "bachelor," a term for an apprentice knight borrowed by the universities. When his study was complete, he too would show his stuff: instead of merely being a participant in the highly formalized debates known as disputations, he would be the moderator, and so would not only preside, but would sum up the debate and then give a critique of both sides of the question, and offer his own solution. If he impressed the university officials, he would be given a license to "incept" as

a master (if he were still under the faculty of arts), or as a doctor (if he had completed his arts training and passed on to the "higher" faculties of law, medicine or theology).

As an "incepting" master (and this "inception," or "beginning" is really where we get our term "commencement," not from some image of marching out the gates of our alma mater), he would be lifted into the chair used by the teacher for lectures, a biretta would be placed on his head (the origin of the modern mortar board, which is Oxford's version of this hat), a ring would be placed on his finger to wed him to Dame Knowledge (this is the origin of our school rings), a book would be placed in his hands from which to "lecture" (which, after all, means "to read') and he would give his very first lesson, entering on his teaching career.

In short, anybody with a university degree was not only certified an expert in the liberal arts or in one of the other disciplines, but had also taught at least a few courses, overseen a few disputations and moderated a few discussion groups of students before he went on to whatever career he undertook.

The degrees, like the degrees of the guild, implied that new graduate would be an instructor: "master" is from the Latin *magister*, the standard term for a schoolmaster, and "doctor" literally means "teacher," from the Latin *docere*, "to teach."

The difference between a true university and a mere *studium particulare*, was the added notation to the degree that the holder enjoyed the *jus ubique docendi*. So, the diploma, the document from the guild or university certifying that the holder is, in fact, a master, commands each and every person, wherever he or she may be, to recognize the right of the bearer to teach, without further examination or test.

Every person who received a degree from the ancient universities then, whether he was a physician healing the sick, a lawyer arguing cases, a theologian pondering sacred mysteries, or a student of the liberal arts who had secured a position for himself at court, had been taught the core curriculum for his field, true, but had also been trained, first and foremost, to be a teacher in the field, to beget children of his intellect by passing on the accumulated knowledge of his discipline to new apprentices.

That is not a bad model for creating well-rounded, generous and responsible graduates today. When our universities confer degrees on candidates, do we not hope that we are sending them out as men and women for others, and scholars (however junior) who will live lives of learning. Do we know hope that the children of *alma mater* who will beget her grandchildren?

The practical effect of taking this seriously today will be a renewed sense of purpose in our colleges and universities. We will begin to think of students not merely as customers, but as missionaries of knowledge, proselytizers of education, who will take back to their neighborhoods and communities a zeal for learning, and who will feel a need to give of themselves by finding apprentices of their own.

We require many things of our graduates: a minimum competency in the liberal arts, a level of expertise in their particular fields of study, an acquaintance with general research and communications skills. Should we not also provide them with courses to insure that they also have at least a basic ability to teach, so that they will be able to take advantage of casual and informal opportunities to impart knowledge, even if they do not undertake some formal teaching work? Ought we not to demand they complete some basic training in educational techniques? Could we not use this opportunity to inspire them

to be masters and doctors as volunteers and informal mentors, even if they are not professional pedagogues?

The diplomas we give our graduates, the diplomas we own ourselves, speak of "rights" and "privileges," and they are themselves a symbol of the privilege we have of being members of the fraternity of scholars, a privilege not afforded to everyone, but we should never forget that they are also commissions that lay an obligation on us, and our teaching should prepare graduates so that in their lives they may recognize and fulfill that responsibility.

Jerry Cammarata, an author of several books on parenting and numerous articles on politics, is a member of New York City's Board of Education.