

Has respect for education been lost?

If you were paying an annual tuition of upwards of \$12,000 to attend a college where you expected to receive a B.A. degree after completing four years of study, how would you feel about a New Jersey college that offers for credit, under the auspices of an anthropology professor, three courses designed to review the television situation comedy, M*A*S*H?

Saying that students look to colleges for vocational or technical training, and that he hopes the course will lure students into the study of history, drama, and sociology, the professor acknowledges student resistance to studying the classics.

Just as the quality of education at the high school level has declined, that at the undergraduate level has similarly deteriorated. Not too many years ago, a high school diploma was a mark of a good basic education; today, all it may mean is that its possessor attended school through the 12th grade. And even more recently, a bachelor's degree indicated its possessor had successfully completed a broad spectrum of courses including the classics. Now the study of anthropology, in one college at least, may include M*A*S*H which, though excellent entertainment, should never be confused with a portrayal of the history of the Korean conflict or the sociology of either the Korean or American people.

To pretend that studying M*A*S*H might shed light on the reasons the United States became embroiled in the conflict

between North and South Korea, or might reveal useful facts about American or Korean sociology is outright deceit. When any institution of higher learning perpetrates such a cruel hoax as this, not only its own students, but those of every other college are victimized. The intrinsic value of every college degree is reduced when standards of excellence and achievement are lowered.

Making diplomas easier to obtain does nothing to enhance the education of those who acquire them without really earning them. Conferring degrees upon those who lack the educational training does no degree-holder a favor. The practice can be compared to the devaluation of money. When a dollar has a high value, one dollar buys a lot of groceries; when the dollar is devalued, it takes many dollars to buy a few groceries.

Holders of high school diplomas were once respected and considered to be better-educated than their peers who did not complete high school. A college graduate was admired for his or her education . . . knowledge . . . wisdom.

At the same time we have seen our dollar depreciate, we have watched the devaluation of educational awards. Standards for earning diplomas and degrees have eroded to the extent that respect for education has been lost, and the tangible evidences bestowed upon alumni by schools and colleges to indicate successful completion of courses of study have become virtually inconsequential.