

A Parting Shot: Who was Richter H. Moore, Jr.?

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(This essay originally appeared as the monthly “E-xcellence in Teaching” e-column in the *PsychTeacher Electronic Discussion List* for September 2003.)

For the past two years, I’ve been one of those lucky guys who has had his cake and eaten it, too. During the regular academic year, I teach at Auburn University, my “home school”—a large Research I institution located in east central Alabama. During the past two summers, I have taught at Appalachian State University, my “home school away from home,”—a Regional Comprehensive institution located in the high country of western North Carolina. Although in my 21 years at Auburn I have accumulated a number of interesting teaching-related stories, my purpose in this column is to share with you one such recent story from App State.

The Monument

When I walked across the App State campus on my way to my first day of summer teaching last year, I spotted a small monument nestled in a beautiful garden full of hosta (h. caerulea, to you plant aficionados) not too far from Smith-Wright Hall, which houses the Psychology Department. The concrete monument is perhaps 15 inches high and a foot wide. In the center of the monument is a brass plate that reads:

Dr. Richter H. Moore, Jr.
8/19/28 to 3/12/96
He loved to teach

Although I’ve walked across many college campuses dotted with monuments to founders, college presidents, and wealthy benefactors, this is the first monument that I had seen dedicated to a teacher. Professor Moore must have been one heck of a teacher for somebody to take the time and trouble to erect a monument, even a small one, to honor him. (And, likewise, App State must be a unique institution to have such a monument on its campus.) I was curious to learn more about Professor Moore and his love for teaching.

Unfortunately, I became sidetracked and made little progress in uncovering anything about him during that first summer. However, on my walk to campus on the first day of class this summer, I came across the monument again and was immediately reminded of my earlier ambition. I resolved then and there to learn something about Professor Moore this time around.

A Little Gumshoeing

The first person I consulted about Professor Moore was Nadine White, the Psychology Department's Administrative Assistant. When I asked her if she had heard of Richter Moore, her only reply was, "Oh Lord, yes, he was a man who would run to a fire!" Being unfamiliar with this expression, I was left wondering whether this was a good thing or a bad thing. Perhaps Professor Moore enjoyed watching fires—sort of a pyro-voyeur—and was in a hurry to see them full ablaze or perhaps he ran to fires because he sought the opportunity to perform a daring rescue and thereby become a hero. As I learned, and if you don't know already, the expression has quite a different meaning—it means to have boundless energy and enthusiasm.

A short while later, during a conversation with Paul Fox, the Interim Chair of the Psychology Department, I learned that Professor Moore was indeed quite an outstanding teacher. I also learned that he was not a psychology professor—he was a former chair of the Political Science/Criminal Justice Department.

I next queried Stan Aeschleman, Interim Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences regarding Professor Moore, and he kindly put me in touch with Dennis Grady, the Chair of the Political Science Department at the time the monument was put in place. Stan thought if anyone could fill me in on the escapades of Professor Moore that it would be Dennis. He was right. Based on what Dennis told me, supplemented with a couple of folders full of written materials from the App State Archives, I was able to put together the following composite of what made Richter Moore so deserving of his garden memorial.

Richter Moore, The Legend

To say that Richter Moore was a broadly educated individual is an understatement. He received his BS in 1949 from the University of South Carolina, where he studied both English and Psychology. In 1951, he earned his law degree from the same institution and then served two years active duty in the US Air Force (and another 32 years in the Air Force reserves where he worked as an investigator and Judge Advocate and from which he retired at the rank of Colonel). Five years later he received his Master's degree in Political Science from the University of Kentucky, followed by his PhD in the same discipline and the same institution in 1964. He began teaching part-time at East Tennessee State University in 1955 and in 1964 became the Chair of the Political Science Department there. In 1970, he moved to Boone, NC to chair the Political Science Department at App State. He served in that capacity until 1983. During these 13 years, he played the pivotal role in establishing the Criminal Justice undergraduate program at App State, did all of the undergraduate advising, and played the primary role in establishing the following organizations: the North Carolina Association of Criminal Justice Educators, the North Carolina Political Science Association, the Southern Association of Criminal Justice Educators, and the Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences.

Professor Moore's motivation to pursue college teaching as a career stemmed from his work as a Judge Advocate. In that work, he witnessed first hand the sorts of trouble in which young people find themselves as a result of poor decision making and planning. He believed that through teaching he might have a positive effect on students' lives and thus encourage them to

make beneficial rather than harmful life decisions (Simon, 1996). His specialty areas in teaching included Supreme Court jurisprudence, privacy, courtroom publicity, organized crime, gang activities, and the behavior of specific Supreme Court justices. (Interestingly, Professor Moore had the uncanny ability to anticipate the significance of social phenomena before those phenomena became well known—for example, Professor Moore discussed privacy problems and the World Wide Web before the Internet even existed [Dennis Grady, personal communication, July 22, 2003]).

Professor Moore was highly involved—perhaps the better word is connected—with his students. For example, during each summer in the late 1970s and early 1980s, he traveled to England with his students to study the origins of the British and American legal systems. He involved his students in a unique Study Abroad Program before studying abroad was a common idea in American higher education. In addition, he regularly took groups of students to Washington, DC to observe the Supreme Court in action.

Professor Moore also established an extended internship program for Criminal Justice students so that they could gain valuable service experience as part of their undergraduate career at App State. This program highlights another instance of Professor Moore anticipating trends in American higher education—he was doing service learning long before service learning became a popular pedagogical platform in higher education.

Another example of Professor Moore’s connectedness to his students is evident in some of the exercises he used in his constitutional law classes. For instance, near the end of each semester, one of his students adopted the role of the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court; other students assumed the roles of the justices of the Supreme Court and still other students pretended to be lawyers who “argued” cases before the mock tribunal. He succeeded remarkably in challenging his students to become involved actively in their coursework.

Clearly, Professor Moore was a creative, challenging, and passionate classroom teacher. His passion for teaching was not confined to the inside of the classroom, though. He established programs curricula and state, regional, and national associations to promote undergraduate learning and teaching. He was quite humble about his achievements and willing to share the limelight with others. When he received the Founder’s Award, the highest award given by the Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences, Professor Moore noted (Appalachian State University Office of Public Information, 1983):

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This is the proudest moment of my career. However, this award is not just for me, but for all those who have worked with me over the years to develop, improve, support, and nurture criminal justice education, and for those who have supported me in my efforts to assure criminal justice a place in the academic community.

The Take Home Message

I guessed correctly when I first came across that monument in the hosta garden—Professor Moore was one heck of an outstanding teacher. However, he was not a teacher in the way most of us think about teaching these days. What he contributed to his students' education transcended what he taught in the classroom—he promoted their education at every turn. In addition to riveting classroom exercises, he involved his students in service learning projects and foreign travel. He worked tirelessly behind the scenes to promote the teaching of his discipline through his involvement in associations created specifically to enhance and extend his and other students' education.

Excellence in teaching knows no boundaries. It is not specific to discipline or academic level. It is not limited by classroom walls or institutional property lines. It demands only that we be passionate about our subject matter, our students, and teaching itself. Without such passion, we are blind to teaching opportunities as they arise around us, whether we are on-campus or off. Professor Moore was both passionate about his teaching and visionary in his life as a teacher. His excellence in teaching certainly knew no boundaries.

Let me bring this essay to a close by issuing a challenge to all of us. As we think about our teaching at the outset of this new academic year, let us resolve to make our own classroom teaching as creative, challenging, and stimulating as Professor Moore's teaching. Let's not stop there, though. Let our passion for teaching permeate our professional lives to the extent that we, too, work tirelessly to enhance undergraduate education in whatever shape or form it may take. Indeed, let us all learn to run to the fire.

References

Office of Public Information (March, 28, 1983). Boone, NC: Appalachian State University.

Simon, K. M. (1996). Dr. Richter H. Moore, Jr.: "He loved to teach." *International Social Science Review*, 77, 3 & 4, 49-52.

Author Note

1. I would like to thank Stan Aeschleman, Paul Fox, and Nadine White for providing me leads for finding information about Professor Moore. I am indebted to Dennis Grady for providing valuable background information on Professor Moore. Thanks, too, to Kathy Simon for providing additional facts regarding Professor Moore's life. Finally, I also wish to thank Pam Mitchem of the Appalachian State University Archives for assisting me in locating files and other resources regarding Professor's Moore's career at App State.