

teaching nonMAJORS

Advice for
Liberal Arts Professors

P. Sven Arvidson

TEACHING NONMAJORS

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NONMAJORS

Advice for Liberal Arts Professors

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*to Dr. Henry Rosemont Jr.,
teacher and friend*

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Preface

Perhaps I had visited the *Twilight Zone* of academia, but it was just an upper-level nursing class. The students dutifully took notes, arrived promptly and returned promptly from the break, and attended sharply to the intricate PowerPoint presentation and lecture. All of this could happen on a good day in one of my classes. What unsettled me was the students' appearance and demeanor. In a classroom of forty-five students, not one of them slouched in his or her seat for two hours. There were no torn or patched jeans. There were no caps or hooded sweatshirts pulled down to hide a face. No students sat alone. No pink hair, no green hair, no wild hair. All students had brought their course materials to class!

It took me awhile to come to grips with how this other world compares to my world. In that other world, the teachers are professional role models for students. The teacher is a nurse, the students are to be nurses. My students are not looking to be professors, much less philosophers. In that other world, all the teachers know all the students in the program, as in a big family. In a building built especially for their major, these students and professors see each other in the hallways, in classes, in gathering rooms, at regular functions over the span of four years. My students generally do not have the opportunity to take another course of mine—one term and out—and we are unlikely to have another conversation. In that other world, students have to pay attention to the course content because someone's life depends on getting it right. For my students, daydreaming in class is nonfatal. In that other world, students are trained early how to be competent and responsible students and as seniors, how to be professionals in a workplace. My students do not expect such training, nor would they accept it easily.

I primarily teach required "core" philosophy courses to students who are not philosophy majors. I enjoy having nursing majors and all the other majors one finds on a campus in my classes. Yet I envy the institutionalized