

Paulo Freire, the Brazilian educator of the oppressed, wrote that education could be “the practice of freedom”¹ which “affirms men and women as beings in the process of becoming”² and asks them “to participate in the transformation of their world”³. The Stevenson core course “Self and Society” represents to me just this vision of education. It begins with Jean-Paul Sartre telling us that we are all “condemned to be free”⁴. “[O]nce thrown into the world” we are each “responsible for everything”⁵ that we do. There are many unique ways to live, to act, to engage your freedom which may serve as your response to this fact. But Stevenson core as an ever-evolving, experimental project is unique for a university course in that it poses this question of our freedom at all. Not only as scholars or as students, but as living, breathing, thinking, actively conscious and articulate human beings. The core course is a question, not an answer. How it is posed changes. Who poses it has changed each generation. But the question remains: we’re condemned to be free, so what do we do about it?

Participation and social responsibility seem to be among the fundamental values we hold as a community — a community created by the core course more than by anything else. And it seems to me that all of us here today are embodying those values.

As a first generation generation college student, I hope that I do not have to explain why the format of the small seminar class embedded in a residential community was important for my retention. As a person of color, I hope that I do not have to express why reading the Autobiography of Malcolm X and Gloria Anzaldua’s *La Frontera* was a transformative experience for me. And do not suppose that as a person of color and as a first generation college

¹ Freire, Paulo. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. New York: Bloomsbury Publishing Inc., 2000. Print, p.34

² Ibid, p.84.

³ Ibid, p.34.

⁴ Marino, Gordon ed. *Basic Writings of Existentialism*. New York: Random House Inc., 2004. Print.

⁵ Ibid.

student, that I do not know who would be most affected by any changes that would restrict our core course from meeting its most fundamental mission. The core course compels us to embrace diversity, to be more just, open, purposeful, and caring. In other words, all the Principles of Community. For many of us, this meant encountering realities and hearing ideas that were uncomfortable. Yet that discomfort was exactly why the process was so important.

Stevenson Core embodies the values we should strive for as a university, particularly now. Professor Alexander Astin has written that there is an “unrealized potential of American higher education”⁶. While our universities have the ability “to try out radically different approaches” to both education and the “problems of our larger society”⁷, there has been a move to link our “institutional self-worth” with “resources and reputation”⁸. Consequently, students are “viewed more as a resource than as a people to be educated”⁹.

This transformation is evident from the history of UC Santa Cruz. The 1965 Academic Plan called for a campus “well suited to educational innovation”¹⁰. Yet, over time, what was so experimental about this campus has been severely diminished. Do I even have to mention the loss of Narrative Evaluations? Or the major in Modern Social Thought once housed in Stevenson? Or the Journalism minor? Once, Stevenson Core was a three quarter course. It should be again. Once, sections were held in the house lounges. Now, we have no lounges — and even if we did they would not be big enough, because Stevenson is more than twice the size that it was ever expected to be.

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Nonetheless, through it all, our core course has persisted. In my opinion, there are few examples which demonstrate the values of Stevenson core more than a little known document published by students in 1986 — a task force report titled “A Paradigm of Renewal”. It is a sweeping 34-page defense of the UCSC colleges. They write that “the question of the role of the colleges is a question about the very nature of Santa Cruz”¹¹. They state that “the role of the colleges is the very soul of this institution”¹². It seems to me no coincidence that 5 of the 12 members of the task force were Stevenson students.

Yes, in recent years the university has lost significant state funding. Yes, it is pressured to take more and more students each year. Yes, there are hard choices that have to be made. But there comes a time when the choices we make run up against the values we hold as an institution. It is those hard choices which separate what we *truly* value from what we merely *claim* to value.

So the question that I ask to the to the faculty members of the Academic Senate, to the administrators of UCSC, to the UC Regents, and to everyone inside and outside of this room who wants an educational system that meets its full potential — which rises with the occasion of this challenging time both within and outside of the universities — is the same question I was asked the first time I stepped into Stevenson 152 as a freshman: we’re all condemned to be free, so what are we going to do about it?

There is no better location to realize that potential than here. No better time than now.

Thank you.

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