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## Silence is golden



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**twilde**  
Guest

Posted: Tue Mar 09, 2004 2:38 am    Post subject: Silence is golden



A few years back, while completing research at UCLA, historian David F. Noble summed up his campus experience dealing with a UCLA Internet teaching project this way: "[O]nce it became known, and controversial, faculty were reluctant to talk about it for fear of administration reprisal. Silence, after all, is the unspoken but well-understood rule on campus, where collegial conformity and resigned cynicism pass for sophistication."

Noble's assessment of faculty vis-à-vis administration (in this case, on the UCLA campus) might appear quite unwarranted, given that there exist courses such as ED 229 and forums such as this one, where lively discussions on "radical" structural changes in education and society surely contain no hint that faculty are in any way fearing "administration reprisal" for talking freely about issues of great concern. Indeed, how is it that Noble can conclude that faculty silence is a "well-understood rule on campus," when this campus air is quite filled with every topic but silence?

Prior to Noble's work at UCLA (and his withering comment on its faculty), a UCLA faculty member, an Emeritus Professor, made the following statement to one of his graduate student advisees, who had just been given the boot from UCLA: "I will argue that it [the advisee's termination] indicates that you have been made to pay with your academic career for department error (...), professor and university disorganisation (...), carelessness by whoever (...) issues the dismissal notice (for their failure to verify the situation)."

This UCLA faculty member never made his argument, though it is clear enough that the making of this argument is central to the mission of the university itself (to say nothing of making it for the sake of protecting the academic careers of faculty and students alike from "error," "disorganisation," and "carelessness by whoever issues the dismissal notice (for their failure to verify the situation)."

It appears then that talk can flow freely and debates can rage wildly on the radical restructuring of the university itself, but should an argument exist that UCLA does

indeed make inevitable human mistakes, this argument will not be made by UCLA's own Emeritus Professor.

Noble's assessment of faculty now holds in the case of one UCLA professor (insofar as this faculty member has not made his argument). And as attempts to have other UCLA faculty at least examine this professor's argument are met with silence, perhaps the argument itself can provide a test case for the much more generalized conclusion that Noble has arrived at. Perhaps "Silence is golden" can well be taken to mean that silence is simply exchanged for what has long been most golden, gold (\$) itself.

And perhaps, too, we might consider that the "topic of silence" itself is not such an odd-sounding and far-fetched idea; indeed, the fact that there is silence on the topic of silence might put the lie to much of the talk that is drowning out this topic. At least in such a discussion on silence, students might arrive at an even better understanding of what is already know by university faculty as a "well-understood rule on campus."

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