

Education Review: <http://www.lib.msu.edu/corby/reviews/posted/allitt.htm>

Allitt, Patrick (2005). *I'm the Teacher, You're the Student: A Semester in the University Classroom*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Patrick Allitt's book is essentially a semester-long journal of his experiences and thoughts during one section of an Emory University history course. Allitt writes in an open and friendly style, sharing his thoughts and experiences, allowing readers to feel as though they were being mentored in Allitt's office. New and aspiring faculty members would do well appreciating the contribution of Allitt, who has been recognized for outstanding teaching.

Most of the book follows the chronology of the semester, beginning with Allitt's preparations. He shares his process for writing a syllabus and even provides the syllabus as an appendix. As the semester develops, Allitt uses the occasion of the first research paper to describe his experiences and thoughts on student plagiarism. One diversion from the chronological format is a chapter in which Allitt illustrates Emory's annual summer semester at the University of Oxford.

At times, Allitt's writing is comical. For example, he satirically writes about Emory's efforts to create "global citizens." "In Oxford you could watch as a crowd approached.... The Italian teenagers, dark, lawless, all shouting at once.... Next the Swedish teenagers, quieter, blond, and decorous. Behind them, a cluster of American teenagers wearing baseball caps, baggy shorts, flip-flops, and sloganeering T-shirts. 'Look—here are the Italian teenagers, there are the Swedes...behind them, the global citizens'" (p. 54-55).

Recurrent themes include Allitt's efforts to build students' confidence and respect for their teacher and their teacher's efforts to resist the stream of excuses students convey for poor performance. Reading students' excuses gave me the chance to think, "That happens at Emory, too," which I found both encouraging and discouraging.

As the title suggests, Allitt views the professorship rather traditionally and hierarchically. He certainly incorporates a great deal of student involvement in his courses and challenges students to become personally engaged. Still, he strives to establish himself as the definitive authority. During the first meetings of each semester, he comes to class with a coat and tie, just to demonstrate to students that he is not like them. Further, he writes, "It's wrong to make friends with students who are members of a current course, but sometimes it's OK to develop mentoring relationships afterward" (p. 48).

I found Allitt slightly stoic in such philosophies. Perhaps it is because I invite students to call me by my first name and always welcome conversation with them. Allitt's detachment is probably the reason he consistently laments spending too much time with the least studious students. In his conclusion, Allitt writes, "In the nature of things you have to spend more time dealing with the problem cases than with the successes.... There are so few opportunities to meet and talk with the good ones, because they're steadily doing everything right.... Most will just fade into the background, to be seen

occasionally...names forgotten until they ask me, two or three years from now, for letters of recommendation” (p. 231). Such musings are not likely to be used by Emory as marketing jingles, but they illustrate the level to which Allitt opened up to his readers.

Ultimately, I enjoyed *I'm the Teacher, You're the Student*. Allitt gave me ideas and inspirations for my own classes, as well as thoughts to consider. I finished the book feeling as though I spent time with a colleague—not necessarily my exemplar, but nonetheless, a dedicated and experienced colleague who graciously offered me a look into his work.

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