

William Dorman Livingston Lecture Oct. 17, 2006

For reasons I hope to make clear, I've decided not to deliver a lecture about my usual area of concern, which is American foreign policy. If people are still not convinced that U.S. policy in the Middle East is a frightful mess, I can't imagine what I could conceivably say that might convince them otherwise.

What I want to do instead is reflect on what it has meant to me to be a member of this faculty for 40 years. I want to explore why teaching at Sacramento State seems to me to be about the most important work a person could do—and certainly the most satisfying. In other words, I want to share the life of a Teacher.

However, the way I've chosen to approach this inquiry is by looking primarily at the professional life of another man rather than my own. After all, it was the values represented by Professor Livingston, for whom this lecture series is named, that set me on my way. It was the values that he represented which a good many others and myself came to find so attractive and satisfying. And it is the values he represented that I believe ought to be recalled as we move through yet another defining period of change.

Given the focus of my remarks today, it gives me the greatest pleasure to know that Jack's widow, Ethel, and members of his family are in the audience.

Many of you, of course, will have never heard of Jack Livingston. Certainly, very few of you were here when he died 25 years ago this year. The hiring surge over the past five to ten years has meant that fully 60 to 70 per cent of faculty and virtually all of the central administration at Sacramento State have no links that go back much beyond the past decade. It is precisely at moments such as these when stocktaking of values is most useful before they get lost in the mists of change.

If there was a difference between when I was hired in 1967 and today, it is this. As I remember it, we were welcomed by a core of senior faculty in their 40s and 50s who weren't ready to retire, who were highly visible, who were deep into the business of building this campus and a faculty culture. Easily the best known of this cadre was Jack Livingston. While the academic values I'll be discussing were neither original or exclusive to him, I can think of no individual in the history of this university who did a better job of articulating or promoting them, which is why I think it's important to address Jack's legacy before it passes out of memory.

My primary audience today, I suppose, are new members of the faculty, but I hope students in particular, not to mention staff and administrators, will find something of interest as well. I am going to assume that you're at least mildly curious about how someone like me who has long experience on

this campus sees the origins of a value system upon which, to varying degrees, this place has been built. As for the rest of you, I will count on your good manners and your capacity to stay awake. My nine-month-old grandchild, of course, excepted.

In quantitative terms, Jack has more index entries in the university's volume of history than any other single faculty member. In qualitative terms, the phrase I heard most often after his death was that he was the *conscience* of this university. I haven't heard that said of anyone since.

Kurt Vonnegut once suggested we are what we pretend to be, so we must be careful what we pretend to be. There were lots of us who quickly decided we would pretend to be Jack. We would pretend to be as good a thinker, or teacher, or colleague, or scholar, or simply as good a citizen. Of course, we came up short time and time again---but that was not for lack of the wanting.

Before I turn to the question of the values articulated by Jack, I should give you at least a brief understanding of the historical man.

Like many of his colleagues, Jack was a veteran of WWII, in which he had received a battlefield commission in Europe. He attended college on the GI Bill and taught at the University of Denver, where he would first enter the public eye. It was the height of the McCarthy era and Jack's activism in the ACLU, his public defense of school teachers accused of being Communists, and his own method of teaching attracted the attention of a demagogic state senator, who

denounced Jack on the floor of the Senate. At one point, Jack was barred from teaching at the downtown Denver campus. Given his belief in the power of reason over hysteria and ignorance, Jack fought back with courage and tenacity at every turn. Large parts of the community came to Jack's defense, and the Senator eventually lost the battle of public opinion. But the experience was terribly hard on Jack's young family, and when a grand experiment in Sacramento beckoned, he moved west.

Jack joined the Government department at then-Sacramento State College in 1954. For all of its promise, the campus then was run pretty much as a benign dictatorship under a kindly but autocratic founding president who permitted a Faculty Council whose influence was virtually undetectable. From the beginning, Jack joined in the work of creating a system of shared faculty governance throughout the state college system and on this campus. He was a founder of the statewide academic senate and served as its third chair. He also served as an early chair of our campus senate. Today, of course, both Senates remain the chief means by which faculty can wield influence in areas having to do with the quality of the education our students receive.

For the students in the audience who may wonder what all this has to do with your interests, may I propose that a campus without a vibrant and effective faculty body is likely to have all the intellectual vitality of a well-run Gap outlet.

For those of us who had wandered into college teaching with only a vague sense of calling and purpose, Jack put a name on things. Sacramento state was nothing less than the promise a democracy had made to its people.

A now-retired faculty member tells a story about his first semester at Sacramento State. One day in the faculty coffee room in the presence of some older faculty members he made some idle and pretentious comment about looking forward to his next job after a stint in purgatory at Sac State. One of the others at the table responded something like this: "You know, I could probably get a job at a place with more prestige. But I'm very glad to be here at Sac State. Because this place represents a marvelous promise. The people of California have said to their youth, 'We will provide high quality higher education to any one of you who has the ability and the ambition to make use of it.' No one else in the world has made such a promise; I'm here to help keep it." That was his introduction to Jack Livingston.

Perhaps because I had been an undergraduate here, it didn't take me long after I joined the faculty to get a good grasp of who was who, not just in my own school but also across campus. Under the circumstances, it was easy to *apprentice* myself to senior faculty in a variety of disciplines who quite clearly by reputation and performance were worth emulating. In retrospect, I realize I watched these faculty members closely in committees and in their approach to questions of ethics, faculty responsibilities, and shared

decision making with the administration. I watched no one more closely than Jack.

In several instances that I can recall I audited their classes for a semester if I thought I might learn something about teaching, and I did. This is just as well because like most new college professors, I came out of graduate school with a mastery of content, perhaps, but all of the technique of one of the teachers in "Ferris Buller's Day Off."

To a person, my senior faculty models seemed to agree with Margaret Mead, who once suggested that boredom must be taught. Early on they convinced me not to teach it. Bring passion to what you do, and students will respond. Similarly, it is the big ideas that interest students, not small detail. And last but hardly least, never, ever punish students for disagreeing with you.

What I learned from these people influenced my teaching for the rest of my career. Many of them were first or second generation college students themselves. They were fascinated by and committed to the idea of making higher education available to anyone who could benefit from it, not just those who could afford it, which had been the case up until World War II. Many of them had come from somewhere else, excited about the prospect of building a new college in the California mode from the ground up.

As for Jack, the first thing that mattered to him was teaching, and teaching at a place like this. We spent hours discussing the why and the how of it. Beyond anything else,

Jack taught me that sometime early in my career I was going to have to make a fundamental decision about students, particularly students who did not fit an elite profile, students like those at Sacramento State. I was going to have to decide whether to trust them in the most elemental sense, which is to say trust them to be able to learn. It was all too easy, he felt, for a faculty member to be seduced by the view that our students were a cut below, not really capable of dealing seriously with ideas and suitable only for training.

The worst mistake we could make, Jack held, is to elevate mere training over ideas: it does a disservice to students and the public.

I remember Jack once putting it something like this: "The thing that makes a college special is the liberal arts. ***It's about learning how to make a Life, not just a living.*** If all taxpayers really wanted were job certification for their kids, they'd send them to Heald's Business College. And even then, whoever heard of an alumni license plate holder for Heald's Business College."

He had absolutely no patience for the perspective that Sacramento State was a bit of a backwater, its students incapable of dealing with a genuinely challenging curriculum, slothful, indolent, given to social excess, the academy's lumpen, as it were. I once heard him gently chide a whining colleague thus: "It's as if you're arguing there's no hope of prison reform until we get a better class of prisoner in

there." His view was that you take students from whatever point they arrive and you proceed from there. His view became mine.

He rejected categorically the notion that the educated foreman class, so to speak, would go to community colleges, while future classroom teachers, middle managers and lower level professionals could find "training" at the state colleges. Under this rubric, decision makers and other assorted shakers and movers would go to Cal, where, of course, they would get a first-rate liberal arts education.

Nonsense, said Jack. That's a kind of class analysis masquerading as educational wisdom. Our students more likely than not might be first generation, as was the case with my wife and many of my friends. They may have arrived here expecting only certification for jobs, and they might be unfamiliar or even uncomfortable or even unprepared for the notion of a life of the mind. But all of this, Jack believed, was only a matter of what was true of the moment. Put another way, what I learned from Jack is not to confuse a student's stage of development at any given time with her or his capacity to learn.

I followed his advice, and in turn I saw it validated over and over again. You don't have the patience or I the energy for me to call roll of the students I've had over 40 years who have gone on to accomplish remarkable things. Whether it be Lorenzo Patino, who went on to be a judge and for whom Sacramento's Hall of Justice is named, or Giselle

Fernandez, who went on to report on CBS Evening News, or Mel Assagi, who went on to become chief of staff for the President of the California Senate and is now one of California's most prominent lobbyists, or the countless other of my former students who may not yet have had buildings named after them but who hold responsible positions in government, journalism, business, education.

Similarly, what Jack understood and I came to grasp is that our students are not at present who they will become. Unlike, say, a Stanford undergraduate a Sacramento State student's destiny is not nicely in order. He or she is still making up a mind about who and what to become and what choices to make. If you really wanted to make a difference as a teacher, this was the place to be. I believe it still is.

I came to understand all of this more clearly about ten years after I joined the faculty. A young man approached me in the coffee shop and told me he had been a student of mine several years before. He had been working on a small newspaper up the valley and wanted me to know he had been trying to live up to the ethical principles I'd taught. "That's nice. So how are things going?" "Well," he said, "they fired me." All I could think to ask was how he felt about it. Without any hesitation, he replied: "Great!" Here is someone who had discovered the difference between making a living and making a life. To the extent that my teaching had something to do with it, I felt great as well. Incidentally,

he wrote a year or so later to tell me he was working on another, more principled paper and he loved his career.

In addition to Jack's unwavering conviction that Sacramento State students deserved a first-rate liberal arts education, he felt that the ripple effect on society could be profound. Perhaps because of his experiences in Colorado with the ugliness of McCarthyism, most certainly because of his life-long love for Thomas Jefferson, Jack understood better than most that a citizen incapable of informed political judgments or lacking the courage to dissent was no citizen at all—but merely a *subject*. It followed, therefore, that the last thing higher education ought to do was simply provide society with spare parts. By contrast, our most useful task is to make citizens aware of the forces seeking to define them and encourage their willingness to challenge these forces when necessary.

His own personal and intellectual courage were unmistakable, witness his willingness to stand up in Colorado. Just after the Americans were taken hostage in Iran in 1979, a number of us joined Jack in speaking at convocation across the way from this ballroom in the Redwood Room. Essentially, our message to the overflow audience was to take a deep breath, trust to diplomacy, and don't vent anger at Middle Eastern students. For our troubles, the then-editor of the Sacramento Bee, C.K. McClatchy, wrote an OpEd column mentioning each of us by name and labeling us as "pro-Khomenists." You can imagine the public reaction in an atmosphere almost as heated

as post 9-11. In any event, I remember having coffee with Jack the morning after I had received another late night obscene phone call, and I recall his mordant advice to this moment: "Remember, Bill, they can kill you...but they probably won't eat you."

As an aside, I can tell you that Jack would have been terribly disappointed that more Americans over the past five years weren't willing to run the risk of ending up on the White House menu. Never in the history of this country can I think of a time when informed dissent has been more necessary yet so long in coming as today.

There is one final argument about teaching and learning that I'd like to make. If the recent hires in my own department are a useful sample, younger faculty members hired during the most recent surge are wonderfully gifted and very much open to the values represented by Jack Livingston. My hope is that they be given every chance to build a career based on those values. I'm speaking here about my concern for the emphasis on research and publication that I have heard of late, an emphasis that did not exist at my hiring and which, if left unchecked, can undercut the teaching mission of this university by diverting faculty energies, creating free-floating anxiety, and, in a favorite phrase of Jack's, introducing invidious distinctions between individuals. Jack Livingston was a superb published scholar. He co-authored what I consider one of the finest introductory government texts ever published, and his book on affirmative action, *Fair*

Game, remains a classic. But I can tell you that he was also adamant that this is a teaching institution first and foremost, and that a young faculty member's fortunes ought to be determined on the basis of energy and skill in the classroom, not on production of journal articles for production's sake.

In my own case, I think I've published enough so that I can speak to the subject without being dismissed as a lay about. I don't know how far the "powers that be" actually intend to go with the idea that publishing, per se, ought to be a significant criterion for tenure and promotion, but let me suggest that *useful* publishing, to coin a term, will occur *organically* in a faculty member's career, not because it's mandated.

In my view, a faculty member's department should decide and define for itself how scholarship ought to be manifest, and its judgment about a faculty member ought to prevail in this regard.

Again, in my own case, I didn't publish an article until after I'd been here nine years, or almost four years after the decision was reached about my tenure, and I didn't publish my next piece for another three years. I was too busy getting my classes under control, and acquiring something worthwhile to say. True, my publishing eventually took off--but for my own reasons and on my own terms. Had publishing been a major criterion in my tenure decision, I wouldn't be speaking to you today.

I genuinely believe that this university, which demands such a heavy load of its junior faculty and can't provide the necessary resources for serious research, is no more likely to be known for its faculty's publishing record than it is for its architecture, which as a colleague in English once remarked, rather unfairly I thought, reminded him of nothing so much as the headquarters of the Nabisco Company. It is good teaching and solid programs that will be the jewels in our crown.

Turning at this point to the attributes of Jack Livingston as a faculty leader, if I were asked to identify his single most remarkable characteristic it would be his sheer *moral authority*. No matter how deeply people disagreed

with him, and a number did, it simply did not occur to even his most vociferous critics to question his motives or ascribe personal gain to his actions. And I can't remember anyone launching a personal attack against Jack. People might think him misguided, naïve even, but they did not believe him in pursuit of a hidden agenda.

Why Jack should enjoy such trust, at least in my view, can be traced to two things: his unwavering belief that the common good ought to trump narrow personal interest, and his absolute unwillingness to engage in *ad hominem* or to ascribe base motives to his opponents. Yes, he could be a fierce critic of your argument and your reasons, but never of your person. He genuinely believed that reasonable people could disagree reasonably. And he was just as ready to criticize flawed or self-serving faculty thinking as he was administrative folly.

Jack simply did not understand how collegiality could ever be achieved in an atmosphere given over to emotion rather than reason. I read something recently about a Native American tribe's approach to governance that immediately put me in mind of Jack. According to this description, the Indian system was based on eloquence, consensus and the constant reaffirmation of common values. That was Jack.

The academy is *not* without its contradictions, of course, and a public university such as Sacramento State least of all. On the one hand you have faculty who feel a calling and take on a responsibility like none other in society, and jealously

guard the academic freedom needed to fulfill it. At the same time, we are a group that is hardly infallible or particularly well suited for sainthood, our self-image to the contrary.

On the other hand you have a board of trustees who are *political* appointees and whose life experience and value system, quite frequently, are at some other end of the spectrum from the faculty's, and I haven't even discussed—and promise not to--the legislature and the chancellor's office. Yet these latter elements are precisely those that have the ultimate say over the allocation of material resources for the university, not the least of which are faculty salaries.

Throughout my career, this structural scene has been rife for conflict, particularly given that it is most likely to play out on the local campus level where politics can and usually does get personal.

Jack spent his entire career on the problem of shared governance. I think he came to conclude that because the structure was not likely to change or the contradictions disappear, or the state wither away, both sides of the divide on this campus would do well to remember that *all* politics are local. Put another way, faculty and administrators should never lose sight that they live and work together here in Sacramento, not in Long Beach.

Only half in jest, may I suggest that perhaps one way of achieving this mutual empathy might be put into effect an idea I got years ago when I read about some Eastern big city police chiefs who were moving themselves and their families into the

inner cities to get a better sense of the problems these citizens faced. My thought is that university President Gonzalez and Senate President Fitzgerald might move into Draper Hall for a semester and take a full load while working at an AM/PM on the shift of their choice. Or not.

Where then do I think we stand twenty-five years after Jack Livingston's death? Let me close with two concerns and two suggestions.

My first concern is that I think the American university may once again be drifting away from first principles, as it periodically tends to do. The values that Jack Livingston represented and I've been talking about are not self-evident in the present atmosphere in this country and they desperately need to be burnished anew. How this might be so can be seen in a recent *Newsweek* magazine article headlined: "Is Your College A Lemon?" It details how Education Secretary Margaret Spellings would go about making colleges and universities "more accountable" to the public. One of her suggestions is a national database, which, among other things, would make known the average salaries of graduates of various colleges and universities. Presumably, this would give parents and students a rank ordered list of which universities add value to the lives of graduates that they can take to the bank.

There may be a crisis in the American university all right, but it is not the one Secretary Spellings imagines. Among other things, it may be related to the marginalization of academic values in favor of workplace skills. For instance,

it constitutes a crisis to me that recently the most extensive study ever done of university students' knowledge about the civic principles upon which this country was founded revealed what amounts to rampant illiteracy. The same held true for knowledge of global issues. And the most disturbing thing was that the situation improved little from the freshman to senior years. In other words, we may be producing subjects rather than citizens. And in a society where the number one cable news channel is Fox News, which is to serious journalism as Jerry Springer is to family therapy, our students need all of the critical faculties they can acquire.

Indeed, under these circumstances, I would suggest that Secretary Spellings' proposal to reveal graduates' average incomes is somewhat akin to prescribing aroma therapy for a broken ankle: It may smell pretty, but I wouldn't plan on running a marathon anytime soon.

My second concern is that the cost of a higher education at Sacramento State seems to be rising exponentially, putting Jack's dream, and mine, I might add, at risk. The late Mayor Joe Serna, the son of a farm worker, was a classmate of mine here at CSUS and later a colleague and lifetime friend. I know that for Joe, as well as for me, and for my wife, and for a good many of our friends, this campus and the others like it in California made it possible for us to have the lives we've led and for us to make the contributions we've made. Every effort must be made to keep higher education affordable. It's for that reason that I'm pleased to see recent fundraising

efforts on this campus have yielded significant amounts for scholarships and academic uses, not just buildings or a new stadium. The university has an obligation to continue to find ways to make certain that higher education is not just reserved for those who are already on life's fast track.

Now to my suggestions.

I'm well aware of the tensions between faculty and administration. They've waxed and waned throughout my career. The one thing I've become certain of is that we must try and find common ground. Mine is not a plaintive, Rodney King-like plea, "can't we all get along." What I'm suggesting is that either we find ways to move forward together, or we're not going to move very far at all. A start might be for each element in the equation to thoughtfully decide what is genuinely essential to its position on the one hand—and what is negotiable on the other, and try not to confuse the two.

My other suggestion turns on the fact that my generation at least found a core of faculty like Jack Livingston to give us our bearings. Such a core is much smaller today because of the recent wave of retirements. One result is that fully 60 per cent of today's Faculty Senate is untenured. Therefore, let me suggest that I think you need a council of elders for more than ceremonial or ornamental purposes. The Emeritus Association is ready made for the task. For instance, the Association's representative to the Senate is Dick Kornweibel, a man who in my view knows more about this university and understands it with greater clarity than anyone I can name. If

the Senate doesn't make full use of resources such as these, it will not only be reinventing wheels, it will be spinning them as well.

Let me conclude by saying simply that Sacramento State has been one of *my* life's most extraordinary gifts, a gift that Jack Livingston and many of his peers helped me unwrap and enjoy to the fullest. I wish those of you who are new to the campus the same good fortune that I've enjoyed. Perhaps something I've said today will help you find it.

The interaction I've had with my students here at Sacramento State has been the most stimulating and satisfying that any professor could hope for. As for my colleagues, a number of whom are here today, they have constituted a company of men and women whose talents and friendship have combined to enrich me beyond measure. I have no problem at all defining "the Good Life." And neither did Jack Livingston.

Whatever comes next after my final class session in May, I can assure you that my thoughts will never wander far from this place and its people. I thank you for this honor and for the honor of your company.