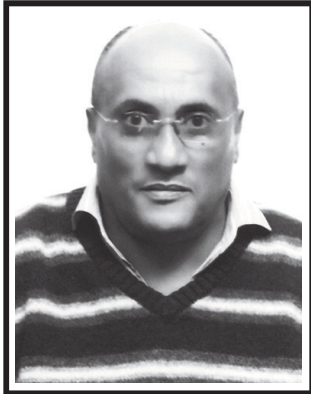


Teaching Tips

Some Guidelines for Testing and Grading



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Test AT ALL Levels

A common mistake made by some teachers is to focus most test items on simple recall of information. It is easier to write and score this type of question because there is usually a single correct answer. However, if the teacher wants to extend student thinking and promote higher-level thought processes, then test questions must require higher-level of thinking. Bloom's taxonomy and a table of specification are devices to assist the teacher in constructing test items at various levels. A basic rule for assessment of higher-order thinking skills is to craft tasks requiring use of knowledge and skill in new or normal situations (Mitchell, 1992). If you only assess students' ability to recall what is in the textbook or what you say, you will not know whether they understand or can apply the reasons, explanations, and interpretations. In short, you must use novel materials to assess higher-order thinking.

Give Students Enough Information Before Testing Them.

It is the teacher professional responsibility to inform students

about an upcoming test and about how it will be scored. To assess students under the best condition you need to provide at least the following information about your upcoming test (Nitko, 2004):

1. When it will be given.
2. Under what condition it will be given (timed, speeded, take-home test).
3. The content areas it will cover.
4. The emphasis or weighting of content areas to be included on the assessment (value in points).
5. The types of performance the student will have to demonstrate (the kinds of items on the test, the degree to which memory will be required).
6. How the assessment will be scored and graded.
7. The importance of the particular assessment result in relation to decisions about the student.

Communicating clearly to students what they will be tested on is a paramount importance if we want students to perform at their best. As we may all know, a favorite question from students is "will we be tested on this?" Effective teachers make it very clear to

students which of the ideas presented in a lecture or found in the textbook will be included on the test. Some teachers will write key ideas from a lecture on the board or give them to students as a handout. Some provide the same type of tool for information in the text. This communicates to students exactly what they are responsible for on the test. Other teachers spend time in review, outlining key ideas to be covered on the test. Still others provide study sheets with sample questions. The goal in each case is to alert students to what is expected to them.

Some teachers believe that surprise quizzes motivate students. There is no evidence to support this point, but there is some evidence that students will do better if they know in advance about a test (Tyler & Chalmers, 1943). Students with special problems often benefit from knowing about an assessment well in advance. Test anxiety and fear are likely to diminish when a student can rationally plan a program of study for a forthcoming assessment (Mealey & Host, 1992).

Teach Assessment -Taking Skills

Students need more than information about what an assessment is. They need to learn how to take tests.

You may need to teach students the following minimum assessment –taking skills, perhaps through direct instruction in the classrooms (Ebel & Frisbie cited in Nitko, 2004):

1. Paying attention to oral and written directions and finding out the consequences of failing to follow them.
2. Asking how the assessment will be scored, how the individual tasks will be weighted into the total, and how many points will be deducted for wrong answers, misspellings, or poor grammar.
3. Writing their responses or marking answers neatly to avoid lowered scores because of poor penmanship or mismarked answers.
4. Studying throughout the course and in paced reviewing to reduce cramming and fatigue.
5. Using assessment time wisely so that all tasks are completed within the given time.
6. Using their partial knowledge and guessing appropriately.
7. Reflecting, outlining, and organizing answers to essays before writing; using an appropriate amount of time for each essay.
8. Checking the marks they make on the separate answer sheets to avoid mismatching or losing one's place when an item is

omitted.

9. Reviewing their answers to the tasks and changing answers if they can make a better response.

Find Ways to Deal With Test Anxiety

There are at least three types of test-anxious students (Mealey and Host, 1992). Your ability to recognize these differences among students will help you to work with them so that they perform their best on the assessments. *First* are students who do not have good study skills and do not understand how the main ideas of the subject you are teaching are related and organized. These students become anxious about an upcoming evaluation because they have not learned well. *Second* are students who do have a good grasp of the material and good study skills but have fears of failure associated with assessment. *Third* are students who believe they have good study habits but who do not. They perform poorly on assessments and learn to be anxious about being assessed.

The following factors were shown to be related to test anxiety (Nitko, 2004) and may be under your control in classroom assessment situations:

1. When students perceive an assessment to be difficult, their test anxiety rises.
2. At-risk students have higher levels of test anxiety than passing students.

3. Students who teachers give them item-by-item feedback after the test have lower test anxiety than students who receive no feedback.
4. Tests whose items were arranged from easy to difficult raise test anxiety less than tests with other item arrangements.
5. More frequent testing of highly test-anxious students seems to improve their performance.
6. Highly test-anxious students are more easily distracted by auditory and visual activity than less test-anxious students.
7. Giving very test-anxious students instructions to concentrate their attention on the assessment tasks and not to let themselves be distracted from the tasks is more beneficial to their performance than simply reassuring them with “don’t worry” or “you’ll be fine” statements.
8. Students with low test-taking skills can lower their test anxiety with test wiseness training.

In addition, Mealey and Host (1992) suggested the following:

1. The teacher should not talk or interrupt while students are working on an assessment.
2. The teacher should review the material with the entire class before the assessment is given.
3. The teacher should not walk

around looking over students' shoulders while they are being assessed.

- The teacher should convey a sense of confidence about students' performance on an upcoming assessment (and avoid such statements "This is going to be a difficult test")

Furthermore, Arends (1994) discussed the following ideas to find ways to deal with test anxiety. When confronted with a test, it is normal, and even beneficial, for students to be a little bit anxious. However, some students (often more than teachers suspect) experience a degree of test anxiety that prevents them from doing as well as they could. Effective teachers learn to recognize such students and help reduce anxiety in a number of ways. One way is to simply help students relax prior to a testing situation. Some teachers use humor and students get relieved from the tension the test poses. Other teachers use simple relaxation methods, such as a few moments for reflection or deep breathing. Sometimes anxious students lack the requisite test-taking skills. Setting aside periods of instruction to help students learn

how to pace themselves, how to allocate time during a test, how to make an outline for an essay question prior to writing, or how to skip over objective questions for which they do not know the answers, has been shown to reduce test anxiety and to improve test performance.

Test Frequently

Some teachers will wait until the end of an instructional unit to test students' knowledge acquisition. It is better to test students frequently for two reasons (Arends, 1994). First, frequent tests pressure students to keep up with what they are learning and provide them with feedback on how they are doing. Second, frequent testing provides the teacher with feedback on how well students are doing on key instructional objectives and allows reteaching of ideas students are not learning.

Make Grading Procedures Explicit

Regardless of the approach (grading on a curve or grading to criterion) a teacher chooses to use in assigning grades, the exact procedures should be written down and should be

communicated clearly to students and if required to their parents. Taking the mystery out of grading is one way to help students accomplish the work expected of them and is also a means of getting students to see the "fairness" of the grading system.

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Great Definitions.....

- Life Insurance : A contract that keeps you poor all of your life so that you can die rich.
- School : A place where papa pays and son plays.
- Nurse : A person who wakes you up to give sleeping pills.
- Marriage : It's an agreement in which a man loses his bachelor degree and a woman gains her masters.
- Tears : The hydraulic force by which masculine willpower is defeated by feminine water-power.
- Lecture: An art of transferring information from the notes of the Lecturer to the notes of the students without passing through 'the minds of either'.
- Conference : The confusion of

one man multiplied by the number present

- Compromise : The art of dividing a cake in such a way that everybody believes he got the biggest piece.
- Dictionary : A place where success comes before work.
- Conference Room: A place where everybody talks, nobody listens and everybody disagrees later on.
- Father: A banker provided by nature.
- Boss: Someone who is early when you are late and late when you are early.
- Politician: One who shakes your hand before elections and your confidence after.
- Doctor: A person who kills your ills by pills, and kills you by bills.
- Classic: Books, which people

praise, but do not read.

- Smile: A curve that can set a lot of things straight
- Office: A place where you can relax after your strenuous home life.
- Yawn: The only time some married men ever get to open their mouth.
- Etc. : A sign to make others believe that you know more than you actually do.
- Committee: Individuals who can do nothing individually and sit to decide that nothing can be done together.
- Experience: The name men give to their mistakes.
- Atom Bomb: An invention to end all inventions.
- Philosopher: A fool who torments himself during life, to be wise after death.

(Source: an email from a friend)

Reflection

What is New about the New Higher Education Proclamation of 2009? A Comparative Perspective

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In Lieu of Introduction

Six years after the first Higher Education Proclamation in the country's educational history was issued in 2003, the Ethiopian government proclaimed the second higher education bill in Sept. 2009. The proclamation had gone through a variety of consultative processes before coming to this stage, though the question of how much it had benefited from this process remains mute.

A very voluminous treatise with 66 pages to its name, the new proclamation is in some ways an extension of the earlier one and in some other respects a significant departure in introducing new

directions.

Unfortunately, some sections of the legal basis for an evolving higher education system that appears to go backwards as compared to the 2003 bill as will be argued later. The discussion in this small paper is structured along these three lines of comparison and offers a personal reflection of the author on some major provisions chosen for closer scrutiny.

1. Areas where significant change has been introduced

There are some provisions included in the new higher education proclamation which were neither incorporated nor emphasized in the previous bill. Some of these provisions could be regarded as results of the need for addressing gaps identified within the sector after the issuance of the first proclamation. Others are

Quite hopefully included to provide higher education system that continues to address emerging issues and needs. One should expect that the new additions and improvements should be a catalyst for meaningful changes ahead, notwithstanding the fact that they await proper implementation by pertinent authorities which has not been always the case in our context.

Quality Enhancement and Internal Quality Audit

One major feature the new proclamation has added is the emphasis it has given to quality enhancement and internal quality audit. The earlier proclamation had no articles on the upkeep of quality and how this works in the context of what are in popular parlance known as

external and internal quality assurance systems, excepting those on pre-accreditation and accreditation mechanisms that were meant to exclusively apply on the private sector. The fact that the new provisions on quality enhancement and internal quality audit are to apply on both government and private institutions is another new dimension that has been introduced through the new proclamation.

In a significant departure from the earlier one, the new proclamation lays an emphasis on the creation of an internal quality assurance system within institutions. The earlier systems of pre-accreditation and accreditation were part of the external quality control scheme the government introduced in 2003. Accordingly, the need for an institutional quality enhancement scheme, and the duties and responsibilities of institutions in quality enhancement were not properly outlined. The proclamation establishes that an institution should have an internal quality enhancement scheme that is expected to improve continuously (Article 22.1). The internal regulations of

institutions should also include provisions for such internal systems (Article 22.4), with the system required to pervade all lines of institutional work and embody clear and comprehensive measures of quality with a significant space for student involvement (Articles 22.2 and 22.3).

Though an emphasis is laid on the internal system, external authorities like the MoE and the Agency are also given the role of further influencing institutional quality through the establishment of a national quality assurance framework that operates on the basis of identifying core learning outcomes or graduate competencies (Articles 22.7). What is obtained both from internal assessment and external quality assurance through HERQA is supposed to inform institutional changes. Where there are recommendations made by the Ministry and/or the Agency, institutions must comply with these requirements (Article 22.5). Concerning the public sector, the Ministry has a special leverage in enforcing institutional quality through the strategic plan agreement it shall sign with each public

university.

Accountability of Public Institutions

The new proclamation goes a long way towards heightening the accountability of public institutions. Although the Ministry previously had a similar practice of supervising the performance of public universities, the new proclamation demands this to be effected through a strategic plan agreement that each public university should prepare for a period of five years. This plan contains the overall plans of the institution, block grant budget commitments, income generation scheme, contingency plan, and mechanisms of accounting, evaluation and reporting (Articles 65.1 and 65.2) and must be in line with the wishes and aspirations of the Ministry of Education (MoE). Every public institution is also expected to produce, based on its strategic plan, annual performance and audited financial reports and publish the educational and expenditure data for the fiscal year (Article 68.1) subject to the supervision of the Ministry to ensure its compliance with the law and strategic plan agreements.

Perhaps as part of the accountability scheme, the new requirements of Proclamation 2009 emphasize the need for more transparency on the part of higher education institutions (HEIs). Accordingly, HEIs are required to establish an organized system of information, an annual publication of financial and educational data and an obligation to cooperate with anyone who seeks information from them. If pursued vigorously, this will surely put on a new pedestal the hitherto seemingly limited accountability that is specially prevalent in the public sector.

Block Grant

One of the major achievements of the new proclamation could be the provisions on block grant that is planned to be introduced in the public higher education sector. The need for a different financial system has for too long been a point of discussion in the public sector as a move away from the existing line item budgeting which has been regarded as very restrictive and unhelpful considering the flexibility public institutions

needed in respect of the rapid higher education expansion that demands more autonomy and flexibility. Article 62 makes such provision and states that block grant will be given to public institutions on the basis of strategic plan agreements they have made with the Federal or Regional government/s.

Tenure and Extension of Retirement Age for Academic Staff

The new proclamation has introduced for the first time the practice of tenure in the Ethiopian higher education sector. Until lately, members of academia in Ethiopia were not treated differently from the way civil servants are concerning their pension and contractual employment. In addition to introducing the tenure system, the basis for the system is now identified as the meritorious continuous service and outstanding scholarly teaching and/or research or institutional leadership exhibited by individual candidates. Introduced as an incentive to such service (cf. Article 33.1), this right can only be waived if the faculty commits a serious breach of discipline as stipulated in senate statutes. The proclamation also establishes

the legal basis for extending the retirement age of an academic staff (with an academic qualification of Masters or above) for two consecutive terms of three years each (Article 33.4).

Appeal System

The earlier proclamation had no provision for appeal if private institutions felt that they need to contest the Higher Education Relevance and Quality Agency (HERQA) concerning its decision on accreditation requests. Institutions that failed to secure accreditation permits were simply required to apply again. This gap was addressed through the appeal procedures later developed by HERQA permitting institutions to appeal to the Director of the Agency. HERQA should be commended for having identified the gap earlier and for being pro-active in developing regulations, though both the decision to accredit and the appeal remained within the Agency itself. This cast a doubt on whether the appeal might be addressed in a neutral fashion. The gap is now

bridged through the formal appeal procedures established by the new proclamation that stipulates that an appeal should be made to the Ministry if the applicant has reservation towards the decision of the Agency. The Ministry then establishes an appeal committee that would look into the matter where the applicant will also be granted the chance to get heard before final decision is made.

Government Subsidy to Private Institutions

The new proclamation has added for the first time the possibility of granting government subsidy to private institutions. The unfortunate part of this provision is that the subsidy will be provided only to non-profit private institutions. These type of institutions are a rarity in Ethiopia, and the possibility of having them in the future is also remote as the grounds for their establishment are not that fertile in our context. Although a good start by any count, how much this provision may respond to the existing cry for assistance from the private sector is not clear. Nor is clear the choice for assisting

institutions that do not exist while there are many that have been craving for a similar support for not less than a decade now.

Establishment of a New Public Institution

As per the 2003 proclamation regions were given the mandate to run and supervise programs offered up to the level of a diploma only. The authority to open, run and control institutions offering undergraduate programs and above resided with the Federal Government. The new proclamation has given the regions additional authority for running degree level programs if they wish to do so. Article 5.2 gives such mandate to state governments which can open degree level programs provided that the state law complies with the requirements of the new proclamation and other federal minimum quality standards.

University-Industry Relations

Another area that has assumed a relative importance in the new proclamation is the emphasis that institutions should give to university-

industry relations. As stipulated in Article 26, a university is expected to put at the service of the wider community the knowledge and skills that have hitherto been restricted within academic communities.

2. Provisions Indicating an Extension of Earlier Practices

The new proclamation embodies a variety of provisions that may be regarded as an extension of earlier practices.

University Governance

The Higher Education Proclamation of 2003 identified three major lines of authority in the running of a public university: the Board which acts as the head of the general administration of the public institution and is accountable to the Ministry or to the appropriate organ of the Regional Government; the Senate which is accountable to the head of the institution; and university presidents who are considered as CEOs of the institution. The new proclamation has extended the previous governance structure in public institutions by establishing additional bodies entrusted with a variety of responsibilities.

One may be tempted to ask whether there is a real need for more bureaucratic arrangements, but the new proclamation adds two high level bodies in addition to the earlier three whose role has also assumed some changes. In the new proclamation the Board is identified as the 'supreme governing body of the institution' but its accountability is not clearly defined excepting a provision that states that the Chairperson of the Board shall be designated by the Ministry of Education (Cf Article 36.1). The Senate in the new Proclamation is given the role of being "the leading body of the institution for academic matters" (Article 49). The president still maintains the position of being the CEO of the University.

The two new bodies included in the governance structure are identified as managing council and university council both of which assume an advisory role. The Managing Council which is chaired by the President is constituted of vice presidents, the officer for student affairs, and others appointed by the president. It is given the authority to advise the president on

strategic issues and on other cases that the president believes require collective information as well as serve as a forum for monitoring, coordination, and evaluation of institutional operations (Article 56.2). The University Council is again chaired by the president and comprises the core members of the managing council, all deans, directors, members of the Senate standing committee, the chief librarian, the registrar, other key academic officers, service department heads, and an appropriate number of academic staff and student representatives with appropriate gender mix (Article 57.1). It offers advice to the president on institutional plans, budget, organizational structures, academic programs, agreements of cooperation, and on division, merger and closure of academic units as well as on performance (Article 57.2).

National Standard for Teaching and Research

Among an extension of the roles and responsibilities given to academic staff, the new proclamation stipulates that there shall be national standard for research and teaching load (Article 30.5).

However, how much this will be able to differentiate institutions with different size, objectives and values is not clear. The Ministry has also taken the mandate to issue the minimum academic staff ratios with regard to educational qualifications and professional ranks which shall be complied with by every institution (Article 30.6).

Teaching- Learning, Assessment of Students and Student Support Schemes

The new proclamation has laid more emphasis on institutionally established and defined systems for teaching and learning, student support, student and assessment which was never the case in the previous proclamation.

The new focus on assessment may be an indication of the level of attention this area has received at the higher level and especially of government's decision not to leave it to the discretion of individual institutions. The proclamation dictates that "there shall be institutionally recognized and well-defined student assessment and examination methods and systems at

academic unit levels to which any academic staff shall adhere, and have been made known to students” (Article 41.5). Institutions are expected to have adequate structures and rules and procedures pertinent to this issue including rooms for complaints which should be indicated in senate statutes (41.6 and 41.10, 41.7). This will hopefully improve the accountability of institutions and the academic community by subjecting them to rules and regulations than to the whims of individual instructors.

Quite different from the earlier proclamation, the new bill also offers an emphasis to academic counseling and guidance. With provisions exclusively dedicated to the issue, it sets the need for informing students on courses, advising on their studies and offering academic support and follow up as needed. Although this must have been practiced by many HEIs before, it has never been made mandatory as prescribed in the new proclamation (Articles 23.1, 23.2, 23.3).

I n s t i t u t i o n a l N o m e n c l a t u r e

It was the 2003 proclamation

that established the requirements for the status of a university. The requirements demanded that there must be some experience for an institution before it assumed the status of a university. The new proclamation maintains the old criteria but has also created the possibility for any new institution to assume the name of a university provided that “it is conceived as such and its resource provisions are well as its institutional plans and vision are such that it can, in the judgment of the Ministry, fulfill the requirements of the Ministry in an acceptable manner” (Article 11.2).

In addition to this, Article 12.3 establishes that a purely distance education and/or a dual mode institution might assume the status after the Ministry has made an investigation or on the basis of an international practice. This is a significant move from the earlier provisions which were highly restrictive and prohibitive as related to private institutions.

A c c r e d i t a t i o n o f P r i v a t e I n s t i t u t i o n s

The accreditation rules and regulations previously institutionalized have

assumed some changes after the enactment of the new Proclamation. To begin with, the pre-accreditation practice introduced in the Higher Education Proclamation of 2003 has been abolished. In its place institutions will be directly applying for accreditation which, unlike the previous years, will be uniformly required for establishing, upgrading or modifying private institutions. Although this scheme could be considered as an improvement from the earlier bureaucratic procedure of passing through two steps, it is not clear how much it addresses the earlier fear of having unscrupulous private providers that might unleash damage to the public if they get recognitions immediately after applying for accreditation. The time that the Agency should take to issue the accreditation permit is also deliberately left open in the new proclamation through the use of the phrase ‘a reasonable time period’.

The new regulations also stipulate that institutions that receive the accreditation permit shall be required to request for renewal of the same after three years. The

renewal process is quite different from the earlier practice. The re-accreditation period has been extended from the earlier three years to five in the new proclamation (Article 77.2). This in a way is an improvement considering the burden the three year renewal period had both on institutions and HERQA itself.

3. Provisions indicative of Regressive Tendencies

Notwithstanding the fact that the higher education Proclamation of 2009 has introduced new elements that would further strengthen the gains of the sector, one can not claim it to be devoid of short comings that could have been easily avoided. A few examples can be adduced in support of this claim.

Government Support to Private Institutions

The 2003 proclamation had relevant provisions related to the support that could be accorded to the private sector. The provision of land and other possible assistance were clearly stated by way of acknowledging the support needed for the private sector. These provisions have now been totally removed or watered down in the new proclamation. Considering the

expectations and demands of the private sector for more than a decade, this can be considered as a serious failure of the new proclamation which was expected to augment but not reduce the momentum gained through the 2003 proclamation.

Joint Appointment of Staff

In a significant departure from earlier practices, the 2003 proclamation had provisions that allowed joint appointment between/among any type of higher education institution. The proclamation was also regarded as the first attempt to recognize the scarcity of faculty in the sector and address this through a formal and legal mechanism. This provision which was hailed as one of the major achievements of the previous proclamation has now been substituted with an article that narrowly defines who would be allowed for joint appointment. Article 34 of the new proclamation states that the need for such an arrangement is established only when an institution has the challenge of ensuring the relevance and quality of education as well as meeting the demand for academic staff. Although this need is certainly there and

highly pronounced in the private sector, the new provisions bar an academic staff of a public institution or a government employee to be jointly appointed in a private institution (Article 34.5). The kind of staff that would be allowed for joint appointment is also restricted to those with Masters degree and above and to professionals with high degree of relevant expertise from industry, business, research establishments and other organizations (Article 34.1). Notwithstanding the unnecessary restrictions laid, the requirements of the proclamation are untenable especially in some specialization areas and regions where the lack of manpower is highly observable.

Admission Requirement for Adult Learners

In the 2003 proclamation the admission requirement for adult learners was clearly laid out for the first time and the mandate was given to individual institutions to design their own admission criteria: 'special admission procedures, to be issued pursuant to the regulations of the institution, may be set for adults and experienced students'. The new proclamation reserves this right only to public

institutions putting restriction on their private counter parts. Private institutions are allowed to apply such rules if and only when the Ministry wishes to extend the provision to the sector (Article 39.5). Such double standard can only be explained by the distrust towards the sector than by anything else.

The Way Forward

Legislations usually embody the will of the state in the governance of higher education institutions. In Ethiopia, the Higher Education Proclamation of 2003 set the first practice in the history of the country in legalizing and setting the ground for the overall direction of the sector. The issuance in 2009 of the second proclamation must have created the hope of further strengthening what was set in the earlier proclamation. As indicated above, the new proclamation has meaningfully addressed some major areas that require the legal ground for further action and implementation. Although

there are areas of improvement which will respond to current trends and gaps on earlier practices, the new regulation cannot be said to have provided the expected results in every respect. A case in point is the lack of provisions that would allow the private sector to further strengthen its current position. Although Ethiopia may not afford to issue new proclamations now and then, mechanisms should be sought to address the gaps that seem to exist still after the second proclamation has been issued.

Another critical consideration to be made is how much what has been stipulated in the proclamation is implemented by pertinent authorities and individual institutions. The sector does not seem to have a successful experience in this regard. As noted by Teshome (2006) a significant percentage of people at academic institutions (including those at higher level) are sometimes unaware of the contents and/or the existence of such proclamations. Equally important is how much government authorities have been able to enforce the provisions that are supposed

to guide the sectoral engagement. For instance, although, as stipulated in the new proclamation, the block grant system was supposed to be introduced in public HEIs as of Sept 2010, no such implementation is in place yet. The same thing applies to the governance system at public institutions which in most cases still continue to follow their earlier systems and structures. The way forward thus demands not only encapsulating requirements and needs in the form of newly published bills but in ensuring that we attest to what has already been set to be done at a national level.

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A man who has never gone to school may steal from a freight car, but if he has a university education he may steal the whole railroad.

Attributed to Franklin D. Roosevelt (1882 - 1945)