

The Lecture Paradox

The Paradox, by LeRoy Kuehl, Ph.D.

Three students on the door did knock;
With their Professor they would talk.
He welcomed them most cordially;
Asked: what could their problem be?
And in the office of that Saint,
They laid before him this complaint:
Your course falls short, you can't deny,
Since lecture notes you don't supply.
So all we do while in your class,
Is take dictation, notes amass.
Preoccupied with pen and ink,
We have no time to learn or think.
Your pearls of wisdom, priceless quotes
Slip by while we sit taking notes.
The good Professor promised this,
That they'd have lecture notes forthwith.
Six days he toiled and evenings too,
And when his task was finally through
Then all his lectures without fail
Were written up in great detail,
And basic concepts were defined,
Because they were all underlined.

Next year came students as before
To knock upon that good man's door;
To tell him how he was remiss,
And now their grievance read like this:
In lecture everything you say
Is in the course notes anyway.
And since we all know how to read,
Of hearing you there's little need.
We could as well remain at home
And learn the subject on our own.
Could you not tell us something new
That isn't in the handouts too?
The good Professor promised this:
To remedy the flaw forthwith.
Three days he toiled and evenings too,
And when his task was finally through,
He added data and more quotes,
And minor points and anecdotes
To supplement and underscore
The topics that he'd taught before.

Next year the students came to bleat:
His lecture notes were incomplete.
For much of what he did expound,
Could nowhere in the notes be found.
Although this caused him much chagrin,
Soon to their braying he gave in,
and once again without delay
He wrote down all that he would say.
And to the old notes this was added--
His outline now was quite well padded.

When yet another year had passed
And he thought he'd found peace at last,
There welled a cry from student throats
That all he did was read his notes.
The poor professor paced the hall
Feeling like a ping-pong ball.

Thus year by year his lectures grew,
And longer were his outlines too.
And students found to their distress
They had to master an excess
Of obscure facts, minute detail;
Of information dry and stale.
A situation that attained
All because they had complained.
The moral is easy to observe:
Students get what they deserve.

The Solution, by John C. Nemiah, M.D.

The moral of your lines of verse is
Clear to those who heed them:
You'll not escape your students' curses
No matter how you feed them.
To cast your lectures on deaf ears is
Folly's height -- debride them!
The only way you'll find surcease is:
Let the blighters read them.