

INTRODUCTION



In 1987, Princeton University Press published *Ever the Teacher*, a collection of William G. Bowen's writings while he served as president of Princeton University (1972–88). It is a reference work that documents not only the major issues facing higher education during that period but also provides guidance on one uniquely talented man's efforts to address those issues. A notable attribute of that collection is how relevant it remains today, thirty years later. Some of the issues addressed include the university's role in society; the purposes of a liberal education; diversity, opportunity, and financial aid; and reflections on the importance of preserving everyone's right to speak on campus. In his work Bill was both fearless and prodigious. The collection of writings and speeches from his sixteen-year tenure as Princeton's president not only address a set of issues so challenging that they remain on the front pages today, but they also represent a nearly comprehensive overview of the broad issues facing a university president, and indeed higher education in general. That encyclopedic compendium totals six hundred pages!

Ever the Teacher is long not because its editor, Bob Durkee, refused to make choices. It is long because of Bill's unparalleled productivity and the incredible originality and depth of intellectual rigor in his work. There was so much to choose from. And so it was as I dove into the task of reviewing Bill's work after Princeton, during which time he served as president emeritus of the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation and as the founding chairman of ITHAKA. After the publication of *Ever the Teacher*, Bill published sixteen books and a long list of booklets, book chapters, and articles, a selected list of which is included in the appendix. If you have opened this book and are interested in learning about higher education and leadership, that reading list combined with *Ever the Teacher* is a compelling core curriculum.

If the issues in *Ever the Teacher* have stood the test of time, and if Bill documented so carefully and thoroughly his ideas through

his research and publications after that, why publish *Ever the Leader*? One answer is implied by the title, that the emphasis in the selection of the works should be on leadership; but truthfully, there is much leadership to be found in *Ever the Teacher*. A second answer is an obvious one: that the issues addressed get more contemporary treatment. Most important in this regard is the advent of new information and network technologies, an issue of great interest to Bill, which was only just beginning to have an impact in 1988 and has accelerated relentlessly since that time. But the third answer, and the most important one from my perspective in terms of leadership, is that Bill accomplished all that he did in a very special way, and this book offers an opportunity to share his approach more widely. Those of us who knew Bill had the good fortune to see the joy and passion he brought to every task he took on, the unquenchable motivation he had to make a lasting difference, and the deeply and consistently held principles that governed all of his work. These humanistic qualities and his commitment to others were key parts of what made his leadership so special and impactful, qualities that are hard to infer or discern from the formal arguments made in a published book or scholarly article. They are also qualities that depend less on Bill's rare gifts and talents, and more on choices he made—and that anyone can make—about what kind of person and leader one wants to be. This brief introduction, and the selection of works included in this book, are my attempt to convey those special qualities to present and future leaders who never had the chance to know Bill Bowen.

In pursuing that task, I must confess to the fact that I do so without objectivity. Our relationship began in June 1984, just following my graduation from Princeton, when I was surprised to receive a congratulatory handwritten note from “President Bowen.” I didn't know him at the time other than to have said hello while walking across campus or after a football game, and did not understand why he would write to me. But that note opened a door that gave me the courage just a few months later to reach out to him, a contact that led to a thirty-two-year relationship that not only determined the course of my professional life but also had a

profound impact on me personally as well. He was a father figure, mentor, partner, and friend.

This pattern of reaching out to near strangers and drawing them into his orbit of influence was not unusual for Bill—far from it. Over the years I witnessed him initiating, developing, and nurturing such relationships with people of all walks and stations. He wrote to the accomplished and the neophyte, to the privileged and the disadvantaged. But, as with me, these notes were just the entry points to much deeper relationships that were characterized by Bill's desire to use his talents and standing to help others, and most often to help others less fortunate than he. I cannot begin to count how many people regarded Bill as a close personal friend or had a relationship with him that they considered life altering.

Bill's personal attributes start with an intellect that was unmatched. He was supremely brilliant and was as fast as he was smart. He completed his PhD in labor economics at Princeton in three years, was a full professor by the age of 32, and became provost of the university at age 34. He became Princeton's president when he was just 38. As Taylor Reveley said at Bill's memorial service:

I've never known anyone whose work ethic, sheer energy, and delight in the chase was as robust as Bill's. Work for him was not work as most mortals experience it. This was, in part, I believe, because he was so good at what he did, drawing on his powerful intellect (really, a giant throbbing brain), on stamina akin to that of a bull elephant, and on sheer quickness, his capacity to produce telling results far more swiftly than is the norm.

Working with him later in his career, I marveled at this rare combination of intellectual firepower, speed, and determination. He combined those qualities with a remarkable ability to communicate in all forms with one voice. All of his writing—his speeches; his papers, articles, and books; his emails—and his conversation sprang from his mind fully formed, brilliant yet accessible. If you were a competitive type, you learned quickly that you would never be able to outthink him or outwork him. You just counted yourself

fortunate for the opportunity to work with him. As Mike McPherson once said, writing a book with Bill was like being strapped to the outside of the space shuttle as it was taking off.

Despite his enormous intellect and his ability to think around and beyond others, he never, ever was lazy in his thinking. Bill chose difficult and important problems to tackle and pursued them with rigor and discipline. What is remarkable as you read these writings and speeches is the consistency of his approach. Time after time he breaks down and defines a problem carefully, marshals evidence to support his argument, and then defends that argument forcefully and with courage, regardless of criticism or controversy.

In the time since Bill left Princeton, he gave over two hundred speeches—or at least that is how many we found in the files! In selecting the writings and speeches for this volume, I have attempted to include works that supplement the previously published books and articles and that demonstrate the principles and values that defined Bill’s particular form of leadership. These writings and talks are organized into the following six chapters:

Chapter 1: University Values

Chapter 2: Extending Opportunity

Chapter 3: Athletics, Admissions, and Campus Culture

Chapter 4: Technology and Scholarly Communications

Chapter 5: Technology, Education, and Opportunity

Chapter 6: Profiles in Leadership

The book opens with several talks and commentaries in which Bill reflects on important challenges facing universities. In each of these he addresses the particular topic at hand, whether it be the impact of new technologies, the growing bifurcation of wealth, or controversial speakers on campus, in the context of what he regarded as enduring values that are essential to universities. Bill’s intellect was tethered to principle.

The first of the talks is the Romanes Lecture delivered at Oxford University in 2000, which outlines Bill’s expectations for what technology and the associated “markets” were likely to impose on higher education. In it he demonstrates his singular capacity to reduce an important and complex topic to its essential core. He

defines what he argues are universities' "most essential purposes." He says:

[Universities' most essential purposes] include educating students broadly so that they may lead productive lives in a civilized society; serving as engines of opportunity and social mobility; creating new knowledge of every kind including work that either has no immediate market value or may even threaten some commercial end; encouraging and protecting the thoughtful critic and the dissenting voice; and defending cultural, moral and intellectual values.

Bill's view was that the shift of communications mechanisms from the physicality of ink on paper to bits on a network would draw universities into commercial marketplaces and activity. For universities to understand and embrace their essential purposes was so important—is so important—because there is both challenge and opportunity in the use of electronic technologies. He reminds us: "The disinterested pursuit of learning, commitments to tolerance and social justice, the belief that learning is enhanced by studying with those who have different perspectives and come from different walks of life—these and other core elements of university life defy the logic of the marketplace."

For most of the challenging problems he chose to address, there are no easy answers; Bill used to say that the answer to any interesting question is "It depends." He demonstrated in such matters the need to define clearly what is important, to collect evidence on the effects associated with various choices and outcomes, and to rigorously defend one's decisions. He often argued that what was most important was to do the right things for the right reasons. Taylor Reveley tells the story of a moment shortly after he became president of William and Mary, when he asked Bill what was the one thing he should watch out for at all costs. Bill instantly replied: "Don't let other people set your agenda." Do the right things for the right reasons.

Although he was reluctant to talk about himself or explain what motivated him, upon reflection it seems that the core of Bill's motivation came from a drive to preserve opportunity, particularly for those who have historically been denied it. He himself had been

from a lower-middle-class family and was the first in his family to attend college. As Jerome Davis, a former student and friend for nearly fifty years, said at Bill's memorial service:

From the beginning I saw that his approach to delicate and complicated educational, social, and racial issues started with a deep respect for others as his peers.... Bill made it his business to advocate for those not historically recognized to be "worthy of Princeton"—initially women, blacks, and browns; and later, among others, students from low-income families lacking a tradition of higher education.

This particular moral compass sets the direction for the papers and talks that have been selected for chapter 2. One aspect of Bill's approach that emerges from these talks is a willingness to state his position clearly and strongly and to defend it. In "Life on the River," Bill states:

Educational institutions, in my view, are obligated *by principle* to do two things: (a) create as rich a learning environment as possible for everyone on their campuses; and (b) contribute to meeting the needs for larger numbers of exceptionally well-prepared students of color of a society that is far too stratified by race. If someone disagrees with those objectives, so be it. But let us not be reluctant to state them and argue for them.

He later goes on to express his frustration with people's unwillingness to speak their minds in support of race-sensitive admissions. Despite the fact that 80 percent of white graduates surveyed as part of the *Shape of the River* research agreed with these admissions policies, many people express an unwillingness to say so on the record. Bill responds: "Why not? What is there to be afraid of? Are we going to allow ourselves to be intimidated by controversy?"

Bill extends these arguments further in the other entries in this chapter to justify providing an admissions advantage for students from low socio-economic backgrounds who have to overcome long odds to compete for spots in selective colleges. In "Extending Opportunity: 'What Is to Be Done?'" (2005), Bill highlights the gap between the rhetoric of college admissions offices that claimed to

give special attention to applicants from economically or culturally deprived backgrounds and what the data actually show: no admissions advantage. He models the statistical increases in numbers of students that would be admitted from these backgrounds if they received the same benefit as children of alumni. He states: “All that we are suggesting is that high-achieving students from modest backgrounds deserve at least some break when being considered for admissions—it would be splendid if rhetoric and reality were brought into closer balance.”

Bill’s attention to admissions and its impact on college communities was not limited to those students who he felt should get favorable treatment; he also studied the impact on campus communities of admissions preferences offered to those he did not feel should be so favored; namely, recruited athletes. Although this topic was covered extensively in *The Game of Life* (2001) and *Reclaiming the Game* (2003), chapter 3 includes two talks on the subject: (1) the Edge Lecture at Princeton, in which Bill presented research from *Reclaiming the Game*, and (2) “Why You Came,” which Bill delivered at a dedication for a new student center at Centre College, where he assessed the impact of athletics on life at a small Division III college.

I included these talks for three reasons. First, the Edge Lecture demonstrates Bill’s meticulous commitment to careful research and gathering of evidence. Second, this topic was important to him, not because he did not care for sports—quite the contrary, he was both a college athlete and a sports fan—but because he felt that the degree of commitment to sports had reached a point that was in conflict with the values of the university. Third, and finally, his commitment to address this issue all the way back in the late 1990s demonstrates one of Bill’s other leadership talents, his ability to envision a problem or opportunity ahead of its time. Nearly twenty years after this research was conducted, people may continue to argue with the conclusions about the impact of having larger numbers of recruited student athletes on campus, but there are very few people—coaches, parents, or athletes—who believe that the time and effort invested in the recruiting of student athletes is in proper balance with the role of athletics and education for high school and

younger athletes. It was the impact of the recruiting on the campus community and on the athletes themselves that troubled him most, and he saw before others what might be the longer-term impact of those policies. As Bill says in the Centre College talk: “Looking beyond the campus, we should not underestimate the ‘signaling effects’ of current practices (especially giving substantial admissions advantages to recruited athletes) on secondary schools, prospective students, and their families.” The idea that an 8-year-old child would be pressured to specialize in a single sport (or even in a single role in a sport—say that of a relief pitcher or face-off specialist) to improve his chances for admission to college would seem absurd if it were not true. Bill was so right about that, but it has gone far beyond even what he imagined.

Chapter 4 includes talks and papers that further illustrate Bill’s inclination and ability to see around the proverbial corner, in this case related to the impact of technology on scholarly communications. The chapter starts with a speech Bill delivered to librarians about JSTOR in the fall of 1995. It is an entertaining talk, in part because Bill’s entrepreneurial instincts and persuasive skills were on full display. He was selling! Even so, he didn’t abandon his commitment to rigorous research, as even the justifications for JSTOR’s fee structure are backed with scholarly citations. The talk is also a reflection of Bill’s willingness to make big bets and to stake his reputation on big ideas. He believed that institutions should focus on a small number of grand initiatives—what he used to like to call “a few tall trees”—and he was not afraid to back them. Although JSTOR is now a highly successful enterprise and an important part of college research and teaching infrastructure, it was not pre-ordained to be the case, and Bill used his considerable powers of persuasion and leverage not only to get it started, but also to maintain it. Without his leadership, there would be no JSTOR.

Bill’s ability to anticipate the future was brought into even sharper focus by a speech he delivered as part of a celebration of the New York Public Library’s Centennial in the spring of 1996. In this talk he reflects on the impact of new technologies on libraries, first highlighting the need to embrace opportunities to harness increas-

ing productivity to do more with less. In anticipating the economic impacts of technological change, he foresaw economic and operating principles that have become a hallmark of successful Silicon Valley tech firms. The first is a basic product development tenet; he states that one of the lessons he learned through his “intimate and at times grueling involvement with the JSTOR adventure, is that in the field of technology, perhaps especially, we learn principally by doing, and then correcting our errors.” The second was a fundamental business principle; he anticipates what has come to be called the freemium business model when he expresses one of JSTOR’s challenges as the need to “find a sane balance between the need to make the ‘basics’ equally available to all, and the desirability of assigning some costs, and especially the costs of ‘extras,’ to those who can and should help to cover them.” It is a balance that JSTOR still works to strike.

His willingness to focus so much of his time and energy on the business and pricing model for JSTOR and similar initiatives was less a reflection of his background as an economist and more a practical realization that new initiatives needed to be sustainable. Bill often spoke about the fact that foundations and governments were disinclined to provide perpetual subsidies and that new enterprises needed to develop their own recurring revenue streams. He reiterates this point in his celebration of the successes of MIT’s OpenCourseWare (OCW) project in 2004. He says:

In today’s environment, when there is much heated debate as to whether it is ideologically acceptable to seek to recover any part of the costs of a digital project by imposing user fees of one kind or another, it is well to recall that the decision about the pricing of OCW (make it free to the world) was not ideologically driven. Rather, it grew out of a careful analysis of the pros and cons of different approaches. Let me suggest to my economist friends at MIT and elsewhere that there is a real need for good analytical thinking about the circumstances in which one distribution/pricing approach or another makes the most sense. In brief, I think that the right pricing structure depends on, among other things, the applicability

of the “exclusion principle,” the shape of costs curves, the ability to segment markets, and the availability of alternative ways of achieving “fair access” without sacrificing sustainability.

Bill was a self-proclaimed “convert” to the idea that information technologies would make productivity gains available in teaching and learning that would be both “better and cheaper.” Having been the co-author with Will Baumol of the principle that the cost of teaching and education increases inexorably because its dependence on “manual” labor limits gains in productivity (Baumol’s cost disease), his support for technology’s likely impact surprised some. But he had seen that outcome realized in scholarly communications, and more specifically with JSTOR, and he saw similarities in the potential for shared activity and collaboration in teaching and learning, especially in fields and for courses that “have a right answer.” These notions are brought together in a number of talks and papers that make up chapter 5, in which Bill speculates on the potential that the increasing need to reduce costs in higher education might be addressed by intelligent uses of technology.

Despite his advocacy for the potential of technology, he was never a full-blown technology enthusiast. He lamented what he regarded as a paucity of quality research and called incessantly for more research about what works to improve learning outcomes both in the classroom and online. As always, he thought there was no single right answer to the question and that thoughtful, nuanced approaches would be necessary. In the Stafford Little Lecture at Princeton in 2014 he expressed his view that the notion of a demise of face-to-face instruction because of online technologies was “unthinkable.” He framed his response by articulating what he explained as the nuanced skills of great teaching that enable students to

[learn] how to frame questions in value-laden subjects, how to distinguish evidence from opinion, how to take account of different points of view, how to formulate one’s own position on complex questions, how to express oneself verbally and in writing, how to engage with others as a member of an intellectual community, and even how to approach an understanding of “life lessons.”

He did not believe that an online experience could replace the benefits that came from interacting face-to-face with a teacher and other students, and he was convinced that there would always be demand—and by that he meant people willing to pay—for that opportunity.

Nevertheless, the potential for productivity gains in teaching certain subjects appealed to Bill precisely because he thought they might help to extend the opportunity for education to more people. He saw ways that technology could be used to extend access to education to more students by, among other things, helping address the increasing length in time-to-degree and by reducing the costs of teaching. He was disturbed, therefore, by what he regarded as a lack of willingness among faculty to find ways to control costs associated with teaching. He states:

Unappealing as it may be to focus on costs (which of course can mean unwelcome changes in faculty staffing and in faculty roles), and satisfying as it may be to focus instead on the glories of teaching in both old and new modes, it borders on the irresponsible to ignore the pressures to control costs—and the concomitant need to make the most intelligent educationally sensitive trade-offs that can be identified.

Through the aperture of technology and its impact on teaching and learning, a whole range of challenges came into focus for Bill, including those related to ownership of intellectual property, proper development of teaching methodologies and content, the tensions between teaching faculty and tenured research faculty, equity of access to quality education, and, finally, shared governance. These areas of interest are covered in this chapter as well as in his two most recent books, *Higher Education in the Digital Age* and *Locus of Authority*.

Unlike what is true of the other topics covered in this volume, we don't have the benefit of hindsight and the passage of time to evaluate whether Bill's views in these areas accurately predicted the outcomes. We are living through this transformation as we speak, and so the story is yet to be written of how digital and network technologies are going to impact education. The talks and papers in

this chapter therefore provide historical, current, and near-future assessment of the changes going on around us; they provide valuable food for thought and reflection in their own right, in addition to having value as case studies in leadership.

Chapter 6 offers a series of tributes Bill delivered about people whom he admired. They are marvelous in a number of dimensions. First, they describe wonderful accomplishments of inspiring people, all of whom we would do well to emulate. Second, they convey succinctly some of the essential qualities of superb leadership, but also Bill's particular form of leadership. In delivering these talks, he illuminated the very qualities that he most valued. Third and finally, they are beautifully rendered reflections on special people whom he knew and loved.

His remarks at such events as retirements and funerals were not always formal, but they were always thoughtful. At the retirement celebration for Margaret Massiah, the beloved housekeeper of many years at the Mellon Foundation, Bill summed up the love everyone felt for her and reflected it back when he said something I will never forget: "You get the relationships you deserve." And he meant it.

Bill was obviously a man of many talents, but even more he was a man of many relationships. He invested in them without expectation of return. This was true of his relationships with his colleagues, former colleagues, staff, associates, friends, and sometimes even strangers! I saw him offer advice and invaluable counsel nearly every single day. Make a call to open the door for an important job. Find the right doctor for a sick friend. Make his apartment in New York City available as a refuge for someone from out of town. Extend countless kindnesses. He was, fundamentally, a generous man. He was generous with his time. He was generous with his intellect. He was generous with his relationships.

As Jerome Davis said so eloquently: "Bill Bowen was the kind of man who helps us measure ourselves. It is not so much a question of how people feel or felt about him, but of wanting to be worthy of the love, time, attention, guidance, care, and support he gave to so many, and to some of the most vital causes of our time. He

seemed energized by ... a love for people and an enthusiasm for helping them.”

I am obviously profoundly grateful to have had the opportunity to work so closely with this special man for nearly thirty years. It was a labor of love to work with someone who had such a love of labor. His form of leadership was like being on a dogsled team with him in the role of lead dog. You are running along and after a while you start taking it a little easy and you realize, “Wait a minute, this sled is still flying along and I don’t think I’m doing much,” and right about that moment the lead dog turns back and barks, “Excellent work! A+!” And you resume your running even harder. Bill led from the front, and while doing so had an amazing ability to bring out the very best in others. And so it is with this book. Bill has done the work yet again, and I am along for the ride.

I cannot close this introduction without paying tribute to Mary Ellen Bowen, Bill’s wife of sixty years. Together since the fourth grade, they were not just husband and wife; they were true intellectual partners, as I experienced many times over the years working with Bill. “That’s a good idea,” he would say, “but last night I was speaking with Mary Ellen, and she thinks ...” So one cannot reflect on the impact of this man without recognizing Mary Ellen. I want to thank her here for welcoming me as a member of the extended family and for giving us permission to publish this book, allowing me to intrude on her life for work yet again. Probing through files and personal papers gave me an opportunity to have a special conversation with Bill, and enabled me to partner with him this one last time.

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