

Appreciating Pat Cross

by Russ Edgerton

Welcome! Thanks to the hard work of Robert Gabriner, Andrew Roderick and colleagues at San Francisco State University, you now have instant access to every major speech Pat Cross made over the course of her career. So the question now is, what will you make of this opportunity?

If you come to this website with a question or plan already in mind, you may want to get on with it. But if you're open to other possibilities, I hope you will view this collection as I do—as a way to celebrate Pat's extraordinary contribution to higher education and carry on her legacy.

Pat's career as a scholar moved into high gear in the late 1960's when after directing a research program on learning at Educational Testing Service, she maintained her interest in research on learning as she moved to Harvard and Berkeley and a speaking schedule that spanned the globe.

A Scholar Who Thinks Differently

From the perspective of nearly all policy makers at that time, the task at hand was to deal with the vastly increased *numbers* of students who wanted to go to college. But what intrigued Pat was not the number of students but that there were new *types* of students entering higher education. One new group was adults who were non-traditional with respect to their age. A second was learners who were non-traditional with respect to their academic performance in high school. College students traditionally had ranked in the top one third of their class; these "new

students" came from the bottom third. Recognizing that higher education would need to think (and behave) differently to serve these new students well, Pat launched parallel studies of the distinctive educational needs and interests of both groups. As a consequence, questions about how to educate adult learners and underprepared students became enduring issues on the agenda of national associations, subfields of research and practice, and rallying points for educational reform.

A Scholar Who Shapes Both Practice and Policy

Pat's conclusions about the new students had major implications for national policy toward higher education and for practice in the classroom. Though non-traditional and often underprepared, Pat argued, these students were fully capable of learning. The problem was that the instructional practices they encountered in the traditional classroom did little to motivate and facilitate their learning. Facing that fact head-on, Pat resisted the idea that these new students must adapt to the dominant methods of instruction, insisting, instead, that colleges and universities share the responsibility for their success, developing approaches that matched and met the needs of new learners. In short, at a time when both policy makers and academic leaders were totally absorbed with expanding higher education's capacity for access, Pat turned a light on the quality of learning. It made no sense to help students get into college without also creating the conditions for their success.

Pat's Major Engagements

Pat's career can be viewed as a series of successive engagements with particular issues. To do justice to her contributions, I would treat each engagement as a story

and describe what role Pat played in shaping the outcome of that story. If this essay were a book, each engagement would be a chapter.

Chapter 1, Beyond the Open Door would tell the story of how in the early 1970's Pat rode through town like Paul Revere, shouting that new, poorly prepared students were coming, and then founded and led a sustained national effort to foster the conditions and practices that would enable these students to succeed.

Chapter 2, The Adult Learner would tell the story of how Pat took up the issue of adult learning, bringing research and practice together in ways that permanently altered higher education.

Chapter 3, Taking Teaching Seriously would tell the story of how in the early 1980's Pat contributed to a widespread revival of interest in the quality of teaching and the integrity of the curriculum.

Chapter 4, The Role of the Faculty in Assessing Student Learning would describe how in the later 1980's Pat worked to shift the assessment movement from a largely top-down accountability exercise to one that invited faculty to explore and improve the learning in their own classrooms.

Chapter 5, The Engaged Scholar would focus on the emergence in the 1990's (fueled by Ernest Boyer's *Scholarship Reconsidered*) of a new and broader conception of scholarship. Pat figures here not as someone who engaged this issue directly but as a person who had always thought differently about the role of scholarship and perfectly embodied the idea of the engaged scholar.

A Genius for Making a Difference

A large part of Pat's impact in these diverse arenas comes, I believe, from the imagination and creativity with which she approached issues and designed projects. She has always had a special talent for *spotting trends* that are about to become lightning rods for policy makers and educational leaders--as she did in calling attention to the new students that were arriving in college, or in identifying the need for a form of assessment that was situated in the classroom where teachers and learning meet—and where improvement must happen. She is a genius, too, at simplifying complex issues and framing them as concrete choices--as she did by rendering the increasing diversity of learners arriving in college as traditional and nontraditional students—and then pointing the way to changes that framing requires.

But spotting and framing issues is only a part of the picture. Pat's genius for making a difference comes as well from her willingness to stay engaged and move beyond her role as a scholar to become an advocate, facilitator, coach, mentor, or whatever it takes to bring about real and lasting change. As someone who has benefited over many years from Pat's collegueship, I am grateful not only for her wisdom but for her generosity.

A Powerful Legacy

As I ponder how to extend Pat's legacy, I believe that the chief lesson we need to heed is that she broke out of the mold of traditional academic research and pioneered a new form of scholarship that focuses on the reform of policy and practice.

Traditional researchers take cues from their peers about what questions are most important. Their motivation is to advance the state of their disciplines. Pat, in contrast, has always taken her cues from observing the changing conditions in the larger society. Her scholarship is in the service of the broader public interest.

Traditional researchers generally gain influence through specialization. Pat, in contrast, is a bold and imaginative synthesizer, always on the lookout for integrative ideas that will provide a more holistic vision.

Traditional researchers typically view the publication of their findings as their last act, the final step in bringing a project to a close, and a way to enhance their own status. For Pat, sharing her ideas—be it as a teacher in her own classroom, in scholarly journals, in practical guides and handbooks for faculty in their classrooms, or through a galvanizing conference presentation—is the beginning of an effort to bring about change.

Throughout her career, Pat has beckoned to her colleagues to leave the tidy, abstract world where variables are controlled, and venture into what Donald Schön once called the "swampy lowlands" where the difficult and messy problems of practice—like improving teaching—must be addressed. What you have in this website is the prodigious result of a commitment to face and grapple with those messy problems. It's an amazing collection, so have at it, and bon voyage!