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CONFESSIONS OF A COLLABORATOR

Chuck Huff

I sit here in my office alone (as I ought) writing my confession. The Deans and the faculty have asked me to write; expect me to confess. I confess that I am a collaborator.

I confess that I have always collaborated. In elementary school I talked with my friends and my parents about my report on dinosaurs. In junior high I read Cliff notes on William Faulkner. In my weakness, I sought help. I perverted my individuality. I failed. Collaborator. Cripple. Cheat.

In high school I showed my poems to others and asked for help on algebra. To teach me independence my teachers and friends gave me no help. They accused me (rightly, it is true, but I confess to hating them for it) of cheating.

In college I continued to fail the American ideal by working with a classmate on a project. My instructors showed me my error. They exclaimed that my work could not be judged, and that they would not know how to grade me, but I persisted.

I confess: I collaborate with my colleagues. I ask their opinion. I borrow their syllabi. The work I now publish in my own name I have done with help. No matter that some have given me this help freely. I stole it. The fault is mine. I should not have asked. No matter that I thanked them in acknowledgments. I sullied my work with the thoughts of others. I used their ideas. Miscreant. Malefactor. Miscegenist.

I confess that I collaborate in my classroom. I invite suggestions from my students. Yes, I confess to enticing my students to collaborate. I have required them to work in groups, though they

rightly despise it. They yearn to do their own work. To stand on their own. They are independent, but I have tempted, even compelled, them to go astray. I have lured my students into collaboration. Piper. Pusher. Pederast.

I confess that I have attempted, in the safety of my office, to collaborate with my students in tutorials. In their independent studies I have collaborated with them. They study selfhood, self-reliance, self-esteem, self-righteousness, self-fulfillment, self-flattery, self-employment, self-deception, self-assertion, self-adjusting-self-feeding-self-congratulation. But, I confess to helping them, even to forcing my opinions and help on them.

It is true. I fear to stand alone. My mother and my father, my classmates, my colleagues and my students influence me. But this is not their confession, it is mine. I cannot think alone. I circulate drafts. I ask for comments. I have even borrowed my bootstraps. Thief. Thespian. Fool.

And if all this were not shame enough, I confess that my colleagues and students have helped me to write this confession. I confess that I hoped for their praise and their criticism. I confess I changed my words and writing because of their help. I could not even confess alone, but collaborated in my confession. And, I confess; I enjoyed it.

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