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VOICES ON CAMPUS

Dr. Francis T. Cullen ('72)

Remembering Bridgewater:

Coming Home after Four Decades

In spring 2013, Bridgewater State welcomed home one of its most distinguished graduates, Dr. Francis T. (Frank) Cullen, Distinguished Research Professor at the University of Cincinnati. A leading scholar of criminology and criminal justice in the U.S., Cullen is among the most prolific in his field, having published more than 300 scholarly works; he is perhaps the most widely cited authority in the field. He has the rare distinction of having served as President of both the American Society of Criminology and the Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences.

After many years away from BSU, Cullen returned to campus to BSU to receive two honors. The first was a scholarship in his name (the Francis T. Cullen Criminal Justice Graduate Research Scholarship), which will help fund graduate student travel to professional conferences in criminal justice. The second was an honorary degree from his alma mater: Frank was “hooded” with an Honorary Doctor of Public Service at BSU’s Spring 2013 convocation. What follows is an excerpt of the address that he delivered to faculty, students and administrators at an April 26 symposium organized in his honor by Dr. Carolyn Petrosino and the BSU Department of Criminal Justice. “April 26th,” he later reflected, “was one of the happiest days of my life.”

I arrived at Bridgewater in 1968, an Irish-Catholic city kid from Boston. I intended to be a high school history teacher and coach, and I had applied to Bridgewater and to Harvard. As one friend said to me: “Oh, that means that Harvard was your back-up school!” I had grown up in Dorchester and in St. Gregory’s parish, where the good Sisters of Notre Dame taught me to diagram sentences and to feel guilty about,



Dr. Francis T. Cullen ('72) at BSU’s Criminal Justice Symposium, April 2013. (Photograph by John Winters).

well, most everything. After 8th grade, I broke the 11th Commandment—“Thou shall not go to public school!”—and, following in the footsteps of my father and older brother John, chose to attend Boston English High School. English was a large, all-male, public inner-city high school and a place where I had my first multicultural experience. I learned many things, but to this day I can recall coming to understand what lack of opportunity meant. So much of what I could take for granted—such

as going to college—was far beyond my classmates’ grasp. I suspect that this realization made me sensitive to how context matters and shaped intimately how I would come to view the world as an academic.

I attended Bridgewater largely because that is where my brother (three years my senior) had chosen to go to college. Today, John holds the rank of Professor and the Huber Chair of Entrepreneurial Studies in the Department of Management at Washington State University. Growing up, he was an ideal brother. Whereas most older siblings strive for perfection, he set the bar very low for me as I followed behind him. When the nuns at St. Gregory’s said “you are nothing like your brother,” they meant it as a compliment! In his first semester at BSC, he earned a 1.6 GPA. He needed a 2.0 to stay in school and to avoid the draft and a likely trip to Vietnam. The next term he earned a 2.4 and barely got his 2.0 cumulative average.

So, when I first stepped onto the Bridgewater campus, I was just hoping to earn a 2.0, to stay in college, and to not get drafted. I remember to this day that in my first semester, I was tracked into an honors class in Western Civilization. It was taught by Dr. Stephanie Husek, who was an expert in Russian history and, I concluded, hated communists... She was short, but put the fear of God—actually the fear of her—into us. She smoked unfiltered Camels and called on us randomly. When she asked a question, I would slink down in my seat behind Ron Petrin, now a history professor at Oklahoma State University, who knew all the answers. I would pray not to be called upon.

But I survived Dr. Husek’s class and the rigorous training it gave to us. I thought I was on my way to study history in my career. At that time, I also enrolled in my first psychology and sociology

courses. I had not taken a social science course in high school (they did not exist at Boston English or most other schools back then), and I was stunned to discover how fascinating these fields were. I loved to analyze and understand human conduct, but whereas history mostly studied the behavior of dead people, the social sciences studied the behavior of living people. This was thrilling to me. Early on in my time at Bridgewater, I found an exciting intellectual atmosphere.

These initial memories and the prospect of my invited address today prompts me to revisit my days at BSC more carefully and to assess how they impacted my life experiences and trajectory. This exercise brings me back 45 years but, strangely, many vivid mental images, deeply felt emotions, and important connections are easily evoked. Four “lessons” came to mind in the course of my reflections.

Early on in my time at Bridgewater, I found an exciting intellectual atmosphere.

Lesson #1: I was lucky I did not get into Harvard

When I entered Bridgewater—at age 17—the college did not seem to be much larger than my high school. But it provided me with a place that was accepting and that became my home. It was not, as the University of Cincinnati is, huge and impersonal but intimate and friendly. It was what I needed at that time in my life.

In particular, it was an environment where the professors were able to give us a lot of attention; they would shape my life in incalculable ways. It also

was a place where I could make close friends. I was able to grow personally, arriving on campus with black glasses and short hair (which would make me fashionable today!) and leaving with longish hair, a beard, and horned-rimmed glasses...

Bridgewater also gave me the opportunity to play varsity sports, which I would not have been possible at a larger university. I was a member of the first BSC varsity hockey team. I proudly accepted the nickname of “Gump”—after Lorne “Gump” Worsley, a goaltender for the Montreal Canadiens. Gump had short hair and was a tad plump, an apt description of me in my freshman year. Thus, the name seemed to fit and I trumpeted its use. Gump is still how my classmates would know me today.

Hockey was my first love, but it was gradually replaced by tennis. I “made” the tennis team—as the #15 and final

member—only because nobody was cut. Yet my tennis and hockey fortunes went in opposite directions. I was soon consigned to permanent back-up goalie status (a status well deserved), but I rose to play #3 singles in tennis by my senior year. This opportunity to develop my skills made tennis a life-long sport for me. Soon after my daughter Jordan was born, she grabbed my little finger. I moved it upward two or three times, saying: “backhand, backhand”! ... My point is that Bridgewater influenced my life in many ways. I hope that students in attendance today are so fortunate.



Frank Cullen, Senior portrait published in BSC yearbook, The Interim (1972).

Lesson #2: Faculty matter

I eventually made my way into psychology as a major and sociology as a minor. My fellow students and I were among the first to major in what, back then, were new fields, added to the curriculum as BSC started its transformation from a “normal” (or teacher’s) college to a comprehensive university...

I can still recall how various professors impacted my life. I must start with Professor James Scroggs who, unbeknownst to him, changed my career plans. It was during finals week, and I was studying for his examination. At that time, there were tennis courts in back of the student center that my dorm room in Scott Hall looked onto. It was 10 in the morning, and I glanced out the window. Alas, there on the tennis court was Professor Scroggs. At that point, I said to myself: “That’s the kind of job I want, where you can play tennis at 10 in the morning on a weekday! And my goal of being a college professor was cemented. But Professor Scroggs taught me other things as well. He believed that professors should not merely lecture from textbooks but invent and teach their own ideas. He also assigned a book on the brain, which advanced a view—commonplace today but uncommon then—that human behavior may be controlled by brain processes beyond our conscious mind. In short, he taught me the value of thinking outside the box.

[Bridgewater] was a place where I developed the skills and values that guided the personal and professional decisions that allowed me to lead a good life.

Professor Louis Schippers was the George Clooney of Bridgewater—handsome to a fault. But I recall that I had never heard a professor lecture in such a melodious way. He taught me the power of words and the importance of how they are communicated.

Then there was Professor Herbert Greenwald, who may have had the most profound influence on me. He was a remarkable social psychologist with a theory of conflict resolution. He also taught a course on Experimental Social Psychology. It was in his course that I conducted my first research study that, in 1975, appeared in the *Journal of Educational Research*. He supplied me with a passion for using research to discover the intricacies of human conduct.

And, though others could be mentioned, I will end with Professor Morgan C. Brown, who would always greet me by asking, “What’s the situation Mr. Cullen?” Dr. Brown was my first African-American professor. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, a tumultuous time in our lives and in the United States, the call for social justice was often present in his lectures. But first and foremost, Dr. Brown was a rigorous scholar, a product of The Ohio State University. He taught me the value of giving lectures replete with content. He taught me that knowledge, not mere ideology, was the bedrock of a scholarly life.

At the time, I am not sure that I knew that my professors were influencing me in these ways. But on reflection, I

can see how they left indelible impressions on me that I have not forgotten to this day.

Lesson #3: Bridgewater helped to establish the intellectual foundation of my career

When asked about my criminological perspective, I often describe it in the following way, “I am liberal, but not stupid” (to which one colleague once responded: “Well, you are half right!”). By liberal, I mean that I have a firm belief in social justice. In part, this orientation comes from the Sisters of Notre Dame who preached concern for the poor and Catholic charity. In part, it comes from growing up as an Irish city kid and having friends and relatives who resided in the projects and poorer parts of town—of having parents and grandparents who lived through the Depression and had little. In part, my concern for social justice also comes from my high school experiences that allowed me to realize that many of my classmates faced restricted opportunities. And in part it comes from being at Bridgewater at the height of the Sixties when we were concerned about the denial of rights and equal opportunity—when we marched in hopes of creating a better society. To me, individual choice always seemed bounded by context—context beyond a person’s control at times.

As I have hinted, Bridgewater affected not only my heart but also my mind. I drew from my experiences an inclination to believe in science and in data.

The “not stupid” part comes from my firmly held view that *science matters*. In my academic career, I have been one of the foremost advocates of evidence-based policy and practice in corrections. This is the *Moneyball* approach—basing decisions not on biased gut feelings but on statistical data. Indeed, ignoring evidence can cause all sorts of bad things—from failing to win a pennant for nearly 90 years (e.g. the Red Sox) to subjecting offenders to ineffective programs that leave their criminality untouched and needlessly endanger public safety (e.g., placing wayward juveniles in “boot camps”). Put another way, my message is as follows: never be afraid of the truth, even if it is a touch inconvenient.

Lesson #4: Bridgewater can be a stepping stone to your dream.

I remember being in Maxwell Library ... about 41 years ago. I was holding my acceptance letter from Columbia University into its Sociology and Education program. My hands were trembling; I could not imagine that I had been admitted. I would attend Columbia, where I somehow ended up studying under a famous criminologist (Richard Cloward) and moving into criminology as my field of study.

When I left BSC, my hope was to return to Bridgewater to teach and be the tennis coach! This particular dream was not realized. But the general hope to be a college professor, to be a scholar, and to have a happy life were within my reach. And Bridgewater did much to make this “dream” happen. As in any good home, it was a place where I developed the skills and values that guided the personal and professional decisions that allowed me to lead a good life. Coming home—and remembering Bridgewater in the process—has been an enriching experience.