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Identity Papers

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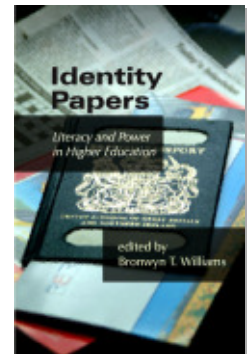
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EXCELLENCE IS THE NAME OF THE (IDEOLOGICAL) GAME

Patricia Harkin

Imagine for a moment that you are not a practitioner of composition studies but instead a bricklayer. You have earnestly prepared for your profession. You enjoy building strong, useful structures. Eagerly you arrive at the worksite where you have been engaged to build a wall. You look around, puzzled.

There are no bricks. Instead, you encounter a perky woman in a Liz Claiborne suit carrying a sheaf of thick beige paper engraved in gray gothic letters: *The Brick Foundation*. She explains,

What you need to do is fill out this application. In five, single-spaced pages, you are to establish your bricklaying competence, explain the project, describe the bricklaying method you plan to use, estimate the time it will take you to complete the job, and provide a budget for mortar, trowels, and protective kneepads. Next, you find three other bricklayers familiar with your work, and ask them to take time out from their own bricklaying to write a letter in support of yours.

Frustrated, you ask whether there's a way for you simply to start working without producing all the bureaucratic paper. Rather than answer, Suit Lady tells you more about The Brick Foundation and its philanthropies—America has been good to the Foundation, she explains, and they just want to give back. Resigning yourself to the notion that you'll have to compete to work, you ask about the criteria the Foundation uses to make its decision. "We just look for excellence," Suit Lady says.

COMPOSITIONISTS AS COMPETITORS FOR FUNDING

This parable has, I hope, suggested that competition for the wherewithal—the actual raw materials—to do one's work is an inefficient way of getting a job done. Nonetheless, as compositionists in the academy, we often find ourselves competing for external and even internal funds to do the work that has historically been entrusted to us, work that used to

be sustained by university and department operating budgets, work that, when grant applications are unsuccessful, no longer gets done.

When capitalism appears to be inefficient at one thing, it is often being very efficient at something else. This essay is about that “something else” and its effect on our sense of identity as professors and practitioners of composition studies. We might be said to have composed an identity for ourselves as persons who raise questions about how to define writing so that we can teach it. That identity has both research and service components. In part as a consequence of our success in establishing ourselves as researchers, many of us now find ourselves in a position wherein we are required to compete for the opportunity to deliver the service. For instance, I heard recently of a writing center director who is seeking grant funding because the English Department that used to support the center through its operating budget has withdrawn that support.

In other cases, the grant culture is capable of changing the work that we do, prompting us to do work that’s fundable rather than to look for funding for work that we see as necessary and/or interesting. As an instance, I would cite a recent meeting I attended as a member of a think tank for a national professional organization charged with devising projects for the entire association to investigate. Someone suggested, for example, that the organization investigate and take a position on the use of contingent labor to teach writing courses. “But there’s no funding available” was the immediate response. True enough. But it is hardly surprising that multinational capital is disinclined to fund studies that are likely to be critical of outsourcing. Maybe, though, an organization that represents teachers of English should look into it for free.

I worry about what it has done to us—this tendency to identify ourselves primarily as competitors for corporate funding rather than as teachers, historians, scholars, or (even) as activists for social change. What is the job that this competition is accomplishing? Why do we do it? One answer comes of course from classical economic theory: competition improves the commodity and (therefore) allows the invisible hand to set a higher price for it. Although the culture seems long ago to have decided that education is a commodity, many scholars and researchers in composition studies still believe that the work through which they define themselves—that is, inquiring into writing in order to teach it—is not entirely comprehensible in that way.

Another answer is that we do it because we are called to, actually called into being as competitive seekers after corporate and governmental capital. When university managers encourage or require us to compete

for the funds to do our work, they do so in the name of *excellence*. In *The University in Ruins*, Bill Readings (1996) asserts that the posthistorical university is in fact best understood as a techno-bureaucratic institutionalization of “excellence”—an empty signifier that emerged as an answer to the peculiarly postmodern question:

How can incommensurable entities be competitively measured?

How, for example, in the absence of transhistorical, transcultural conception like truth, nature, or reality to which to refer does a review committee adjudicate among three proposals for grant funding—one to develop a computer application, one to offer a formal reading of “Lycidas,” and one to conduct an ethnographic study of Puerto Rican dance? No problem. “Excellence” serves as what Readings calls a “principle of translatability.” The unstated assumption is that each proposal is evaluated in its own disciplinary terms, which are then converted into imaginary units of excellence—a kind of academic *euro*—that can then be measured to produce a winner.

In his analysis, Readings is somewhat dismissive. His claim is that because the word “excellence” is meaningless, because it has “no external referent or internal content” (23), and because, in other words, it doesn’t call on us to *be* anything but “excellent,” it is not ideological. The implication is that after a few laughs at lunch over the university’s newest and most ludicrous use of the word “excellence,” the serious thinker will return to her library carrel or his computer to continue a serious individually fashioned and self-sustaining inquiry, leaving the corporate types in the administration building to the play of empty signifiers.

“EXCELLENCE” AND IDEOLOGY

Notwithstanding my admiration for Bill Readings’s analysis, I disagree strenuously with his assertion that “excellence,” lacking internal content and external reference, is not ideological. My argument is that, in the context of the contemporary academy, the content of the word “excellence” is competition, and its referent is winning. “Excellence,” in my view, waddles like an ideology and quacks like an ideology, and it is quite useful to critique it as one. To do so is to see that the emphasis on excellence is not (as Readings would have it) silly, but really rather dangerous.

I’ll begin with the definition of ideology that Readings and I share. In “Ideology and the Ideological State Apparatuses,” Louis Althusser defines ideology as “the imaginary relation of individuals to their real conditions of existence” (1971, 162). This relation occurs when and

because the subject is called upon—interpellated or hailed—by the apparatuses of the nation state—church, educational institutions, and so forth—and, through that hailing, is called into being. An ideology calls a subject into being by teaching her the “techniques and knowledges” (e.g., spinning wool into yarn, teaching writing through the use of peer group workshops) that are necessary to reproduce her way of life. In addition, every worker also learns what Althusser calls “the attitude that should be observed by every agent in the division of labor, according to the job he is ‘destined’ for: rules of morality, civic and professional conscience . . . [or, more abstractly] a reproduction of submission to the ruling ideology for the workers, and a reproduction of the ability to manipulate the ruling ideology correctly for the agents of exploitation” (132). In a very famous formulation, Althusser explains how a culture accomplishes this teaching:

Ideology “acts” or “functions” in such a way that it recruits subjects among the individuals (it recruits them all) or transforms individuals into subjects (it transforms them all) by that very precise operation which I have called interpellation or hailing, and which can be imagined along the lines of the most commonplace everyday police (or other) hailing, “hey, you there!”

That call comes, and that being is evoked—even if the calling is inconvenient, even if it makes it necessary for you to believe and do things that run counter to your interests.

One classic example is the church. If I am poor, and my church calls on me to accept that poverty in this life, without complaining or trying to change things, because I shall be rewarded with eternal life in the next, then Althusser would call my religious belief ideological. That belief forges for me an imaginary relation to the real: it is a narrative I tell myself in order to make my real poverty intelligible and bearable. The church (acting for a God in whom I believe) calls, “hey, you, poor person! Yours is the Kingdom of Heaven.” And I respond by accepting my poverty through all kinds of provocation. As a narrative, this notion that I shall someday, in some other life, be happier may have the corollary effect of making me less likely to participate in a strike or to declare a revolution against the persons to whom I sell my labor, the persons who keep me poor. In that sense the ideology supports a capitalist status quo.

By analogy, a university personnel committee calls upon us to compete internally and externally for grants, and we know ourselves to be members of the university insofar as we answer that call. “Funded

researchers” get jobs and keep them, and so we strive to become funded researchers. In answering the call, we find rewards of sorts—raises, tenure, promotion, invitations to dinner at the Dean’s. But if the analogy with the church is to hold, and I think it does, something also is lost in this imaginary relation we forge to the real conditions of life in the academy. What is lost, I think, is a different sense of identity—a way of knowing ourselves as researchers into questions that we ourselves raise as a consequence of actual problems we encounter in the classroom, library, or culture.

The terms of our inquiries change when we follow the money. As we construct our inquiries to follow the money, we also construct our “selves.” All there is of you, according to Althusser, is what ideological state apparatuses call forth. There is no essential you beyond the reach of interpellation.

In the tradition Readings and Althusser describe, the university (as an ideological state apparatus) call upon a man (I of course use the gendered term self-consciously) to act as a subject of universal reason who strives to embody the best that has been thought and said in his nation state. One becomes the subject of universal reason through disinterested inquiry. But the notion of disinterested inquiry is sustained by—and perhaps only comprehensible in a context of—a notion of universal, transhistorical truth. If you believe in disinterested inquiry, you can also rather easily believe in competition. You can even believe that competition might get you closer to the truth.

In postmodernity, though, we’ve lost the notion of transhistorical truth. It has been replaced by disciplinary piety, an almost religious eagerness to demonstrate that we conduct our inquiries within the parameters of our discipline’s regulated way of raising and answering questions, that we use its lexicon correctly, that we trust its experimental and analytic procedures, and that we reveal our results to other researchers through its representation techniques. One instance of such disciplinary piety might be the instruction to place an asterisk next to “refereed journals” on one’s annual faculty activities report, as though the value of one’s work is a function, not of its ability to describe and solve problems, but of certain *kinds* of competitive readings.

When this disciplinarity is located in a system that requires “competition” for limited funds—whether those funds come from external grants or from internal operating budgets—situations arise in which ethnographers are forced to compete with—to be measured against—formalist literary critics and cognitive linguists. The “judges” are then forced to

invent “excellence” as (in Readings’s good words) a “principle of translatability” that allows for the measurement of the incommensurable.

GRANTS, AGENCIES, AND POWER

The university calls on us to be measured—not in Aristotle’s sense of finding a golden mean—but in corporate capitalism’s sense of competing in terms of size. But by whose authority does this call come? For Althusser, of course, the conception of the nation state inheres in the relation between interpellator and the interpellated subject. That is, the educational system of which he wrote in 1969 operated as an arm of the nation state when it called upon its subjects to know the best that had been thought and said in (for example) France or Great Britain. But Readings suggests (and I agree) that in global capitalism that has emerged in the nearly fifty years since Althusser wrote, the nation state has become virtually irrelevant.

(Such an assertion may seem counter-intuitive at a time when, as I write this, several nation states are engaged in armed conflict. According to the terms of this analysis, however, it is arguable that corporate capitalism has used the names of the nation states who constitute the Coalition of the Willing in order to authorize its war for oil.)

If the nation state can no longer serve as the author of interpellation, it would nonetheless be unwise to throw the Althusserian baby out with the nation-state bathwater. Even though the nation-state may no longer be essential to interpellation, some governing power that can authorize an institution like the university system probably is. Multinational corporations, I think, are such a power. “Granting agencies” that serve as the philanthropic branch of such multinational corporations can, then, have the kinds and extent of control over the day-to-day behavior of ordinary people that were exercised by the nation state in older forms of capitalism. Like the nation state, they assign subject positions (like “funded researcher”) on the basis of an idealized order, a structure of interrelations (like the hierarchy of research, teaching, service) that reflect the design of the institution and name its social function. Universities, for example, are designed as conglomerates of departments that embody disciplines. Two hundred years ago, teachers and researchers sought to produce subjects of universal reason. Today, they produce competitors—for grant monies, for rankings by national publications, for test scores, for larger and greater endowments, for internationally known faculty members, for graduate students. The multinational corporation has replaced the nation state; disciplinary piety has replaced transhistorical

truth. But competition remains, and “excellence” emerges as the mark of the winner. Just as it fostered “truth” two centuries ago, the university now generates “excellence.”

And we are called into being as competitors in its name. I would argue, then, that in this context it is the hailing itself—rather than the “content” of the belief system—that is the important part of Althusser’s formulation. Today’s narratives of excellence operate similar to the more traditional kinds of interpellation that Althusser describes. In today’s stories, a university is “excellent,” or, more precisely, *has* “excellence” (because part of the problem is the nominalization, and the reification) if somebody measures it—or a part of it—say its basketball team or its Department of Polymer Chemistry—as somehow *measurably* the best. *It is that measurement that produces the excellence.*

The “ideology” I find in the floating signifier “excellence,” then, is the belief that we become subjects—not as Americans or Catholics or subjects of universal reason—but as competitively measured entities. Recently, the Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning at a major university staged an internal competition for fifty thousand dollars in grant monies. Eighteen departments competed for this award on a form whose first question was: “how do you measure excellence in teaching?” The two “winning” departments got twenty-five thousand dollars each; the others got nothing. In this situation, the university decides to spend fifty thousand dollars on teaching, but then it decides to *superimpose* the notion of competition over that of spending money on teaching. And in that context, the notion of competing for twenty-five thousand dollars is evidently more appealing than the idea of sharing fifty. If I believe for a moment that the English department lost because it doesn’t have as much excellence as the department of mechanical engineering—or that it won because it has more—then I’ve bought into that ideology. I have become a member of either an excellent department or a nonexcellent one.

But even as I answer the call, I really know that you can’t compare the work of the department of mechanical engineering to the work of the department of English. Still, I compete. “You should strive to be excellent,” they tell us. And we do, even though we know that excellence is an empty signifier.

This circumstance is important precisely because it is contradictory. Indeed it is that contradiction that marks it as ideological, this time in Fredric Jameson’s sense of the term. In his *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (1981), Jameson invokes

the ethnography of Levi Strauss (among many other theoretical documents) to analyze the narratives that constitute what Althusser calls our imaginary relation to the real. In Jameson's account, these narratives, which he calls "the central instance of human consciousness" (13), emerge from an attempt somehow to bridge a double bind presented by the mode of production. Jameson then borrows a representation technique he calls the "semiotic rectangle" from the French narratologist, A. J. Greimas, as a "methodological starting point, as a set of categories to be explored [in order to] constitute the empty slots and logical possibilities . . . against which the content of a given social text is to be . . . sorted out" (46). A Greimasian analysis of the grant culture might look like this:

<p>Prescription: compete to win Seek grants in order to measure yourself and your inquiry against others and defeat them.</p>	<p>Taboo: don't compete Pursue inquiry for its own sake; Different inquiries are incommensurable. The human subject is transcendently beyond measurement.</p>
<p>Nonprescriptions: compete and lose Even unsuccessful grant applications are good. They make you and your university more visible and will therefore be rewarded when you record them on your annual report of faculty activities.</p>	<p>Nontaboo: win without competing If you make yourself and the university visible through something other than the <i>usual</i> competitive pathways, that's OK, too. You can win by refusing to follow the rules, if you do so in a spectacular way.</p>

The value of the Greimasian rectangle, in Jameson's formulation, is not that it *solves* a problem. Rather, one might say that it deploys four bad answers onto a grid in order to offer a heuristic picture of the ideological terms of the particular problem at hand. The rectangle makes the double bind visible, in other words, and prompts us to go on to the next step, which is to ask, "why *this* double bind, in *these* terms, *now*?" The answer to that question will illuminate the mode of production that gives rise to the double bind. The current mode of production, which Jameson calls postmodernism, is characterized by a multiplicity of contradictory interpellations (see his "Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," 1991, ix-xv). On the one hand, for example, we are told that we must compete to survive; on the other, we also know that (absent universal truth) competition between incommensurable entities is impossible.

THE COST OF GOING ALONG

We are called into being as contemporary academics in part through this double bind. We believe in competition among the incommensurable even though it doesn't make sense. *Credo quia absurdum est*. Excellence,

as a principle of translatability among incommensurable scales of value, is ideological, then, because it's an *imaginary* conception that solves a *real* problem—the impasse between “competition” as a necessary component of capitalism and the undecidability of the postmodern. The University of Excellence calls on us to believe that even among incommensurable entities, even when meaningful measurement is impossible, competition—being measured—is good.

To go on, to get along, we have to make that double bind tolerable, or even invisible. We need, to return to Althusser, an *imaginary* relation to the *real* double bind, a way of hiding from ourselves, or hiding ourselves from the *contradictions* that have their source in history. To understand the historical source of these contradictions, it is necessary to remember that, two hundred years ago, people believed in truth. To support that belief they established a disciplinary system that taught people how to look for it. Now, even though we no longer believe in transhistorical truth, we retain the search engines designed to find it, engines that now carry us directly into the contradiction.

Those engines are competitive. They are still around because competitive measurement is crucial to capitalism. Please recall Treasury Secretary's Paul O'Neill's remarks about Enron: “Companies come and go. It's part of the genius of capitalism” (*New York Times*). The empty signifier excellence becomes necessary only in a culture in which somebody wins *because* somebody loses. What's won and lost is capital—of both the actual and symbolic varieties. Our lives as academics offer many examples of the genius of capitalism. I think especially of the kinds of calls that come in times, like now, of straitened budgets, demanding that departments compete—and offer measurements—in order to survive. In their essay “Excavating the Ruins of Undergraduate English,” for example, Bruce Horner and his colleagues describe Drake University's requiring its English department to justify itself in terms of its value to the university (2002, 78–79).

Within the postmodern university, though, competitive measurement can only be accomplished by applying an empty signifier to the incommensurable. Measurement precedes essence (to borrow Existentialism's formulation) but the essence that measurement gives us is a chimera. Nonetheless, we believe in that chimera—at least enough to desire to be called excellent.

But how do we hide? How do we construct a narrative that allows us to live with the double bind? Instead of recognizing the system as absurd—and I use that term in its full existential sense—we hide its

absurdity, and our own powerlessness in its face, by calling it a *game that we have chosen to play*.

Game is a phenomenological space in which meaningless measurements count. For example, merely carrying a football for a hundred yards is relatively meaningless. But carrying a football for a hundred yards between two goalposts while ten people are trying to help you and eleven others are trying to stop you is a touchdown—six game points. What makes this run a touchdown is the system of arbitrary rules that differs from “earnest”—from real life—precisely because those rules limit interference from actuality. The referees, for example, can be relied upon to prevent the guys on the bench from jumping up and tripping the runner. Rules make it possible to keep score. Scores make winners.

It’s a game. It is true that our lives are governed by competitions in which a floating signifier is used as a standard of measurement, but never mind, it’s just a game. Old folks tell young folks, tenured professors tell probationary ones, to learn to play the game. You get higher scores on computerized teaching evaluations by adjusting the questions rather than changing your classroom behavior. But those bubble sheets don’t really measure anything, and besides, it’s just a game. A department chair urges a candidate for tenure to rewrite her account of a Marxist thinker, not as an explication of his thought, but rather as a critique of “post-Marxism” because that’s where the game is. A speaker urges a group of graduate students to teach argument—it’s the only game in town. A member of the audience objects that there’s more to the game than argument. The speaker, looking pained, responds that that objection is part of the game. You say my position is absolutist; I say yours is amorphous. That’s the game. Your chairperson tells you that the only grants that count in the ranking of English departments are Guggenheim’s, NEH’s, and ACLS’s. If you happen to be a department member who doesn’t do the kinds of inquiries those grants support, you’re cut from the roster before the season begins. It’s just a game. Soon the “just” drops out. The game’s the thing and winning is all-important.

From theoretical accounts of game, it is possible to see how the notion of game has come to be our bridge over the double bind. In *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture*, Johann Huizinga (1950) describes the cultural function of medieval drama as a kind of *play* that helped believers to deal with the incomprehensibility of religious “mysteries.” In so doing, Huizinga importantly discriminates “play” from “game” and establishes a continuum from play to earnest. Play is random. Game is

play with rules. Children play in relative rulelessness. Adults engage in games whose comforting rules set up an alternate world from the terrifying randomness of everyday life. If the rulelessness of the everyday gets you down, you can play chess. There, a kind of certainty about winning or losing (with relatively low stakes) is relaxing. That certainty frees you to return to the world of earnest, where things are more serious and less certain. For Huizinga, both play and game prepare you for earnest. Like a puppy whose play with a toy allows him to practice breaking the neck of some imaginary prey, we learn through play to deploy the techniques that allow us to survive real life.

GAMES AND GRANTSMANSHIP

Although Huizinga's distinction between game and play is useful, it does not take us far enough. For an application to the specific circumstances of the postmodern, it will be useful to look at Jean-François Lyotard's use of Wittgenstein's theory of language games to examine the problem of justice. In his conversation with Jean-Loup Thébaud that Wlad Godzich translates as *Just Gaming*, Lyotard comes closer to the circumstances that I'm trying to understand when he describes the "social web [as] made up of a multitude of encounters between interlocutors caught up in different pragmatics" (1985, 73). There can, of course, be no transhistorical conception of "justice" to which to refer and adjudicate them. In the absence of universal standards, Lyotard says, game may be all there is—but that circumstance does not *necessarily* authorize relativism. Justice is not anything that is conventionally called "just," says Lyotard. If it were, Hitler's conventionally approved genocide (and by extension other more recent genocides) would be "just." One still wants to have a reference—an abstraction, even if that reference is not absolute, even if it seems to be altogether arbitrary. Lyotard offers a Kantian notion "the future of further inquiry [in which] there is a free field left open to the reflective judgment's capability" (76). In the context I develop here, I extrapolate from Lyotard to assert that we can create a local and contingent earnest, explain it, and work within it to accomplish something that seems—locally and contingently—useful. Such an "earnest" might be a project in community literacy, or a materialist analysis of an aspect of university life. In any case, for Lyotard, what would make such a thing worth doing is one's *informed and contingently ethical desire to do it* rather than its "fundability."

In other words, the problem is not grants *themselves*, but rather "grantsmanship"—the name I'll give to the (ideological) belief that a

compositionists should aspire to be a “funded researcher” rather than as a person who seeks to theorize writing so that she can teach it. The difference is not in the activity itself but in the understanding—one’s naming of the work that one does. It certainly is not possible in late capitalism for the university to eschew grants completely—nor does it seem prudent or possible to attempt to avoid competition. What can and should be avoided, however, is the notion that competition in terms of the empty signifier “excellence” is the only game in town and therefore the one that we have to play, uncritically, according to terms set by others for their own—very earnest—ends.

What I’m suggesting is that agency (even within late capitalism) still emerges from the perception of a double bind *as* a double bind. Agency comes when you see that the ways in which you are called into being contradict one another and run counter to your apparent interests.

How does agency come from perception? Perception can foster *articulation*. I use that term in Stuart Hall’s sense, as “both a way of understanding how ideological elements come, under certain conditions, to cohere together within a discourse, and a way of asking how they do or do not become articulated, at specific conjunctures, to certain political subjects” (1996, 142). In “The Theory and Method of Articulation in Cultural Studies,” Jennifer Daryl Slack writes that “[e]pistemologically, articulation is a way of thinking the structures of what we know as a play of correspondences, non-correspondences, and contradictions, as fragments in the constitution of what we take to be unities” (1996, 112). My epistemological effort here has been to make an ideological double bind visible as contradictory: we are enjoined to allow ourselves to be measured in a context in which we know measurement to be impossible.

“Politically,” Slack writes, “articulation is a way of foregrounding the structure and play of power that entail in relations of dominance and subordination” (112). Politically, in this essay, I have sought to rearticulate competition and measurement as surveillance and control in order to reveal, for example, who profits and what is lost when grant writers focus on “what’s fundable” rather than on inquiries that interest them.

“Strategically,” Slack writes, “articulation provides a mechanism for shaping intervention within a particular social formation, conjuncture, or context” (112). Now, I shall attempt to suggest an intervention.

I would urge practitioners of composition studies to rearticulate game as earnest, to figure out what would count as earnest for us as individuals, and act on that judgment rather than submitting thoughtlessly to institutional measurements. For example,

Don't use the word excellence—not even in a grant application. If someone else uses the word, ask for a definition.

Don't ever answer any question on any form that asks how you measure excellence. Instead, if you actually do measure something, say what and why, even if your answer doesn't fit in the box.

Ask how measurements are arrived at—especially rankings. For example, if your chairperson announces that your department is ranked in the top twenty five percent of English departments, ask who did the ranking and what the criteria were.

Resist simplistic equations of excellence with time to degree, or with the prestige of the degree or press or journal.

Resist equations of excellence with professionalism. Model “earnest” for your graduate students (by, for example, explaining what would make a stronger argument) instead of teaching them to publish prematurely.

Don't supply measurements that will (or even can) be used for purposes of which you don't approve. Think carefully as you respond to questionnaires rather than scribble numbers so you can get on with the process of finding more money.

Resist zero-sum internal competitions, especially for funds that used to be (or that you think should be) part of the operating budget. Call attention to the ways in which the grant culture encourages us to compete among ourselves rather than cooperate—and try to change that.

Avoid competing for symbolic capital instead of the real thing. If the only prize in a competition is a certificate of excellence, don't compete.

Be mindful of the ways in which universities use external grant money, with all the strings attached, to do the jobs historically entrusted to it, rather than using their operating budgets. Strive to be alert to the expenditure of the actual capital it takes to sustain the grant culture in the academy.

When they call you to write a grant to build a wall, ask not only whom you're walling in and walling out, but also who's paying, who profits from the construction, and whether you really need the wall in the first place.