

[2] From: "Neal F. Lane" <nlane> at NOTE 1/5/94 5:54PM (3616 bytes: 63 ln)
To: irotberg at nsf6
Subject: Re: Hard Questions

----- Message Contents -----
----- Original Header Lines (From NOTE) -----

X-Sender: nlane@notel.nsf.gov
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----- Message Contents -----
Dear Iris: Thanks for your comments and your story. I also look forward to
talking with you. Best wishes. Neal

> I enjoyed your comments this afternoon. Your story about
> the professor who asked difficult questions
> reminded me of a similar incident that occurred at Johns
> Hopkins when I was a graduate student in the Experimental
> Psychology Department.
>

> At Hopkins, a requirement for the Ph.D. degree throughout
> the university was an oral examination by seven members of
> the faculty, of whom four had to be from departments outside
> your own. I remember well the English literature candidate
> who, because of her background in the great Victorian
> writers and her understanding of the unconscious motivation
> of characters in the modern novel, decided to choose as one
> of the "outside" departments for her oral examination the
> Graduate Department of Psychology. She was confident that
> she could handle, as a doctoral English literature
> candidate, the questions which might be asked by
> psychologists whose expertise, she thought, was in the works
> of Freud, Jung and Adler. The Psychology department, on its
> part, designated--of all people--a professor whose
> expertise was in human engineering and statistics and who
> also happened to be the most intimidating member of the
> faculty.
>

> The professor, as he later described it, realized that the
> candidate might not have had the same training as his
> graduate students. Therefore, he decided to ask her a
> routine question which, as he put it, was so simple that
> every graduate student, whatever the field, surely would be
> able to answer--to describe the statistical formula for the
> "poisson distribution." The professor, even when he told
> the story, was still puzzled by the dumbstruck response of
> the student and the inadequate training in the Graduate
> School of Arts and Humanities.
>

> I am a program director for research with the Education
> Directorate. I have been at NSF since 1986 with two
> intermissions--one to conduct a study of technology policy
> and international competitiveness for the House Committee
> on Science, Space, and Technology and the second, recently
> completed, to direct a study at the RAND Corporation of
> federal policy options for improving the education of
> low-income students. The study was designed to provide
> information for Congressional deliberations on the
> reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Act of 1965,
> which will occur this year.
>

>
> I would enjoy discussing with you at your convenience a
> number of issues related to the Foundation's work. I look
> forward to meeting you.
>

> Iris Rotberg
> Suite 855
> 306-1650
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