

Re: Epistemology 201: The Science of Science

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>>*From Osher Doctorow*

Fear of Ignorance (FOI) is commonly encountered by most people as students, when after asking a question of their math or science teachers they get an insulting reply. Now, there is some reason to convey the message to some people that they should take earlier math or science ("prerequisite") courses if they illustrate lack of knowledge of commonly expected facts or relationships in a later course. Otherwise, they get promoted for nothing, also called social promotion (of which being promoted for being a member of a culturally disadvantaged ethnic group is an example). In classes, one could do this without humiliating the questioner in front of the class, by simply talking to the student after class and so on.

Many teachers or professors or instructors (many of my former college colleagues in fact) don't wait to tell certain students that they perhaps should go back to a previous course at the end of class. A major reason for this is that if somebody's hand is up (say the student's allegedly lacking prerequisites) and the professor has already heard his previous question, many professors and teachers are scared to let the student's hand stay up without answering him or else to say: "I'm going to let somebody else have his/her turn at a question for a while." With the current crop of undisciplined students who're used to their parents buying them everything except the kitchen sink (oh, sorry, including the kitchen sink), the students could actually drown out the professor. In fact, they actually do that in colleges that don't promptly send in police escorts outside communities that very very much value older people and education. We even have several "spontaneous" ethnic groups who regard it as a cultural right to say the first thing that pops into their mind, and who are cherished by some political types for their "childlike innocence".

So FOI has many causes, starting with professors' and teachers' fears of not managing classes and spoiled students and ethnic groups valuing ignorance and politically obsessed students valuing "childlike innocence", all the way to the "opposite" side of feeling fear or anger when somebody says something uncommon. When I was young, we used to

sci.math: Re: Epistemology 201: The Science of Science

call this fear of nonconformity, but now that generations of students have gone through high school and sometimes even college together pregnancies and all, there is a tendency not to recognize the difference between conformity and nonconfo