

# **An Example of Learning**

By Don Sutherland

I had just left Carman Hall bearing another freshly-delivered batch of unavailing mail. Most of the mail came in the form of glossy advertisements from one textbook publisher or another, each positioning for the pleasure of charging students \$200 a copy (before taxes). I reached the Lehman College bookstore—the desired destination for those publishers. Across the bookstore, I witnessed a remarkable scene unfolding near the bleachers overlooking the South Field.

There, I saw the persistent and meticulous progression through what seemed to be innumerable pages of text; the careful sifting of evidence; the steady gathering of one kernel of knowledge after another. Seemingly, brick-by-brick, a magnificent skyscraper of higher learning was being constructed before my eyes.

The synthesis of knowledge in its design was breathtaking. Its glistening windows were like novel insights. The building knowledge nourished the growing number of insights, giving birth to new discoveries and rise to a deepening thirst for even more learning. This was almost a magical or spiritual scene.

What I had seen was nothing less than the blossoming of the college experience. A college education was no longer an abstraction. That education was now a living, thriving, glorious entity. The bearer of its degree stood before a bright future with a liberated mind, abundant opportunities, and the possibility for deep personal satisfaction.

With my fall 2017 class having struggled to submit their assignments on a timely basis, I now had proof to convey that others were taking a more productive path. What would I tell my class tonight?

Well, if I stuck to the literal facts, I would tell them that I had seen a squirrel diligently brushing aside early October's fallen leaves and finding countless acorns among those leaves. Without that effort, those acorns might well have gone undiscovered, uneaten, and unburied. Then, the squirrel's life might well have become an increasingly unhappy one as winter eventually descended on the sun-soaked Lehman College campus. Effort truly was the thin boundary that separated an unfulfilling fate from a satisfying future.

If that were the only lesson furnished by that squirrel's example, it would have been valuable enough. But there was more.

The squirrel had reached to the limits of its ability. It had left nothing to chance. It was no prisoner of fate. It was rewarded by a large harvest of acorns.

That bumper crop revealed that a college degree is more than a piece of paper or an electronic credential. Its value is found in the knowledge, experiences, and capacity to continue to learn that give it its substance. Without such content, it would be an empty vessel. It would rightly be ignored by employers and graduate schools, alike.

Without the investment of passion, persistence, effort, and curiosity required to fill the degree with substance, the bearer of the degree (or one who lacked the degree altogether) would find themselves in a plight similar to that of the grasshopper of Aesop's Fables. Instead of "dying of hunger" in the midst of winter, that person would find himself or herself hopelessly blocked at the towering gates of opportunity or buffeted without respite by the raging storms of life's challenges.

The squirrel came to Lehman College's scenic campus. It called no particular attention to itself. It made no excuses of any kind. It worked. It persevered. It made the most of its time.

Many students, not just those in my class, would benefit from the powerful and timeless lesson that squirrel provided from its example. Perhaps, taking into consideration the true worth of that lesson, that humble squirrel deserves the title Professor Emeritus *Sciurus carolinensis*.