Margaret Talbot, “Best in Class” / David Foster Wallace

* What is Talbot’s goal in “Best in Class?” Does she demonstrate a particular bias in her writing? How?
* Does Moeller’s system eliminate (or exacerbate) the problems Talbot’s essay delineates?
* What is the purpose of having a valedictorian?
* What is the purpose of a valedictory address? How does Foster Wallace’s address at Kenyon College fulfill the requirements / purposes of such a speech?

Menke: “I’m going to sue Moeller because John is valedictorian.” The problem is people who are suing.

* Liam: Some arguments are valid, some are stupid.
* Fendinger: Down the road, few people care.
* Liam: You sound douchy.
* JJ: Problem—many colleges have bell curves that require a number of failures.
* Spuzzillo: What does that have to do with valedictorians?
* JJ: How can you give one person the title—we start looking for faults instead of the person who does the best.
* Worobetz: I’m still confused… we’re still looking for the best… the stress will still be there…
* JJ: They did perfect “grade-wise.” Outside stuff determines most credits…
* Geyer: Everyone accepts that it’s a quantitative versus qualitative ranking… spoke about Man of Moeller.
* Nick Wright: You can put a number on valedictorian.
* Spuzzillo: Valedictorian = playing the game best. But suing?
* Wright: Already into college…why care?
* Taylor: Too much with too little gain…
* JJ: One has a goal, but then is unable to gain it…
* EVERYONE CLAMORS
* Weber: False analogy!
* Sanders: Why care about a quantitative award?
* JJ: Why take it to a lawsuit? They approached with that much energy… backlash of despair…
* Sanders: Change the whole system…
* Spuzzillo: If someone devotes themselves to an ideal, goes crazy over it…
* Wright: That happens in sports… quarterback analogy
* Sanders: Good QB goes to another team…
* Liam: Only working towards the valedictory award…
* JJ: Why have the title, then?
* Eippert: Playing the game right, but those people have put in thousands of hours over four years… “studious girls.”
* Geyer: Personal pride is a huge thing… extended president analogy…
* JJ: Taking a low math class…
* Menke: I didn’t see the problem with taking a lower class… high school is all about playing the game, so why not reward this?
* CLAMOR
* Geyer: Ethics of taking classes…
* Sanders: Took more work…
* JJ: We don’t know what else they were doing…
* Spuzzillo: Playing the game the best…
* Sanders: Quantitative score…qualitative score…
* Worobetz:
* Spuzzillo: Awarding this to whoever succeeds with the system set up…
* Fendinger: Patriots analogy

Eble: Argumentative bias of Talbot?

* Geyer: Paragraphs 31 / 32
* JJ: Points at which she was going too far.
* Spuzzillo: They’re all fine…
* JJ: The jab of getting kicked out of Harvard for plagiarizing
* Eble: Read from 227 from Talbot.
* Menke: That’s life… things happen.
* Wright: That happens…
* JJ: People sue over it because people still stare. Connection to *Gatsby*…
* Menke: That’s an ongoing process…
* Liam: How is this traumatic?
* Menke: Tried to talk…
* JJ: Bob Marley concert…
* Eble: Challenged JJ’s thought experiment; also challenged folks not to discount “trauma.”
* Liam: Trauma is too strong of a word.
* Sanders: And she was trying to sue for millions…
* Geyer: This is also the fact that colleges have become cutthroat… going / not going to college = a huge deal.
* Sanders / Wright: Already in college…
* Geyer: You know you class rank by the end of junior year…
* Sanders: Valedictory nomination…

Eippert: So…multiple valedictorians…

* Wright: First honors, but called a valedictorian…
* Geyer: This system makes people feel worse…
* Callahan: She’s sarcastic about it—I hope the chairs are comfortable.
* Spuzzillo: She supports the idea of a valedictorian, but undercuts the ridiculous urges to “get A’s in everything.”
* Fendinger: If you’re solely motivated to become a valedictorian, something is wrong…
* Liam:
* Menke: Not to get the award, but I don’t buy the “I’m going to high school to learn and broaden myself.” I’m going to have to play the game the best.
* Fendinger supported,
* Weber: Not many high schoolers want to go to high school to “broaden themselves.”
* People questioned…
* Weber clarified…
* Olinger: More opportunities—school is about playing the game.
* Geyer: Harvard Graduate School of Education study… intrinsic motivation, walking the line…
* Sanders: Do intrinsically-motivated people care about the award?
* Geyer: I don’t know if they care…but if a kid who loves to learn watches a slimy bastard get a valedictorian award.
* Sanders: Instead of changing the system, why not redefine what “valedictorian” means?
* Eble: Have we done that at Moeller?
* Wright: “World Series” mentality…
* Sanders: Lawsuit problems…
* Marshall:
* Sanders: Filing lawsuits…
* Wright: Every example from Talbot = people getting screwed over by minutiae.
* Menke: You gotta play the game the best…
* Sanders: Reason to file lawsuits = those who were given awards, then had them rescinded.

Eble: This is a symptom of a larger problem.

Wright: Current system works.

* Geyer: Academic top ten, awards assemblies… becomes impractical as a school gets larger.
* Menke let JJ talk.
* JJ: Counterargument to high school as a game… everyone at Moeller goes here (and not somewhere else) for a reason. Then, made another point which I could not follow, which eventually led to the playing field being level or not…
* Weber: Chapman… recruiting…

Eble talked about the difficulty of leveling playing fields.

Menke: So… Nick Wright… taking away the speech from the valedictorian = good or bad?

* Nick: This makes it less competitive…
* Fendinger: Valedictorian doesn’t necessarily want to give a speech to a large group of people.
* Sanders: Nor does the valedictorian have the best public speaking skills.
* JJ: People sat in a chair like a public reading. ALSO, the idea of AP affecting grades…

People were upset with JJ / ideas.

* Geyer: Absolute versus relative success.
* Wright: CP1 = tough
* Eble talked…

Sanders: Went to end paragraph on 225/226, asked if students are really working as diligently.

* Wright: Dad’s experience.
* Sanders: Dad’s opinion—5 AP classes doesn’t mean I’m taking as difficult of classes. Are students actually working as diligently.
* Menke: We have dumbed-down education.
* Geyer: I emphatically disagree with that. What we’re learning now in terms of what we know, we’re learning stuff earlier and faster.
* Menke: Yes, earlier and faster, but getting more…
* Geyer: This school grade inflates… extra credit, choosing easy problems… shared an anecdote about grade inflation.
* Menke: As a student, I’ll take every advantage I can get to play the game.
* Spuzzillo: Difficult material in a simplified college course. Some grade inflation is fair…
* Wright: Chemistry is like that…