



Faculty Forum

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Editor's Note

Two More Issues this Semester

The Faculty Forum will have two more issues this semester. Deadline for entries will be mid April and the start of finals week. These will be my final two issues as Faculty Fellow. To help facilitate a change in the culture of silence, if you desire to remain anonymous please make that known. I do need to verify the source of the material. I look to you to present solutions to problems, not just expose problems as you see them. Let us try to gain strength in our collective voice so we may be heard above all of the clutter.

Hand Written
Mark Mattheis

In a metal box stashed away somewhere in the back of a closet, are a few of my cherished possessions. Inside the box is a couple of old coins, some baseball cards, and an odd toy or two. Also included are some letters written by people who matter to me. A few are post cards, some on stationary, and I have a pile of those light blue airmail letters. What they have in common is that they are all hand written. A person touched the paper and slid their hand across the page forming visual images in my mind from miles away. There is a feel and smell that creates a sense of connection to the person and I can form a bond. The words themselves are secondary to the swoops and swirls and the staccato beat of a hurried pin. A hand touched that paper and sent it across a distance, allowing my own to hold their thoughts, completing the process of communication that is very, very, personal.

The open meeting last week on campus that covered the new Digital Measures Activity Insight software was sparsely attended yet produced many questions from the audience. The software is designed to allow faculty to input data during the year that can then be accessed by department heads, deans, and certain administrators. The desire to unify the campus in the use of one piece of software will enable information to be gleaned in a more efficient manner. Data typical to an AFE and/or TPR will have specific areas of entry and can be somewhat customized for each department. The end result will be a faster and more detailed data retrieval system for those who have access to the information. Each faculty member will still need to output the entries into a document that can be printed and turned in for review. No on-line review process is scheduled at this time. The white binders will continue to stack up at the appointed place and time. But with

the new system, specific information can now be retrieved without combing through stacks of paper.

This process seems to be rather straightforward. There are competing software companies that provide a similar service and some UNC campuses do use the other vendor. No mandate from GA is in the works to specify which system is preferred and it appears to make sense in some respect to move forward with the software that is suitable to those at the data-gleaning end. But one comment was made at the presentation by an administrator that faculty do not know what their neighbors are doing. That is probably very true. If it is out of your department and not published promoting the efforts, then it would be rare to know. This software will not help that particular situation since your neighbor will not have access to your entries. Unless you are on an AFE or TPR committee you probably have little knowledge about what departmental faculty are up too, let alone your neighbor in another department. A good deal of effort is put into documenting activities inside and out of the classroom. We are asked to provide detailed data on community engagement, student evaluation scores, committee activities, publications, and courses taught. Who we are as educators is entered into the software and eventually those binders. But does the data say anything about us as a person? Are we missing a key element that eliminates the person from the process? I believe we do.

Seldom do I ever see it, but I know my fathers handwriting. He was a draftsman for many years and it is distinctive to who he is. The voice of my mother comes through in every word she has ever written to me. I know my wife's and our kid's hand writing and though they are now on there own, some is still tacked to the fridge door. We can learn interesting details about a person from the way they write. Are they left handed or right? Are they shy or bold? Are they big thinkers or do they need to be exact in everyway? I could probably remember my friends writing from school from those notes passed around during class. I have kept some old school work not because it was stellar, but mainly because a teacher wrote on it. Our students might know our handwriting from white boards and feedback on papers. I always enjoy reading my final exams because it is the only time in class that I test on paper. Blackboard is the tool to use. It calculates and puts the numbers in the right slots. It gives instant feedback if the answer is wrong and it is down right convenient when it isn't cantankerous. It gives me data. My final exam has several areas left blank so students can tell me first hand, by their own hand, what they learned during our time together. It is good to know a person by the use of a pin.

Ask yourself, is the faculty member next to you right handed or left? Do they print or use cursive? If everyone in your department put the same hand written sentence in a box could anyone figure out whose is whose? Maybe the department head or the administrative support assistant could figure it out, but I would doubt if the rest of the faculty could even come close. A hand written note exudes so much power in today's society because of the rarity in creating such a simple act. I find it touching to receive one. Emails, tweets, text messages are placed in folders with headings, deleted, or left to languish for another day. Just a few words handwritten on paper will be placed where it can easily be seen or better yet stored in a sacred place for safekeeping.

Some of our most important documents on this campus have a space for handwritten comments. When that area goes unused there is no sign that a meaningful connection has been made in our institution. There is only data being conveyed, taking humans out of humanity and excluding the person from personnel.

Whee should do better than that.

A handwritten cursive sentence that reads "The quick brown fox jumped over the lazy dog." The handwriting is somewhat slanted and informal.

The quick brown fox jumped over the lazy dog.

Disclaimer

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