

AASCU Academic Affairs Winter Meeting  
February 12, 2011  
Submitted by Virginia Horvath

## **On the Road to the Red Balloon: Faculty Discuss New Directions in Higher Education**

**Gena Christopher**, Instructor, Jacksonville State University (AL)

**Maurice Hamington**, Associate Professor, Women's Studies and Philosophy; Director, Institute for Women's Studies and Service, Metropolitan State College of Denver (CO)

**Richard Reddy**, Professor, State University of New York at Fredonia

Maurice Hamington

- Background of Metropolitan State—an insanely complex campus with 3 institutions on a single campus.
- Metropolitan State has 24,000 students (urban, open enrollment)
- 45<sup>th</sup> anniversary
- First graduate programs this year
- Institute for Women's Studies and Services: combines an academic department and student services. MH is in an academic line but has a variety of people reporting to him. Provide lactation spaces, interpersonal violence counseling, etc. There is a certain efficiency in bringing together women's studies and women's services—a co-curricular pipeline that coordinates with classes. Others are skeptical of this alignment, but those involved think it's a good combination.
- Faculty and staff have won awards for research, assessment, activism, GLBTQ allies
- The Red Balloon at MSCD is maybe pink: language just beginning
- George Mehaffy's white paper includes focus on the "moment of destabilization." MH wants to focus on what works well.
- Concrete example: Learning communities share a deeper philosophical transition in how we think about knowledge creation. It's not just a framework but a philosophy based on connected knowledge, shared intellectual inquiry, innovation. Model is Evergreen State College and Washington Center.
- If you take learning community concept seriously, you move away from the expert delivery model and toward the disposition to learn together.
- Tremendous cost-effectiveness in learning communities, particularly in light of student success and retention, physical configurations, as well as virtual configurations. It is a framework that can foster care.
- MH's focus is on *care*: it's an overlooked aspect of institutional culture, a relationship-based approach to organizational development that has a moral and epistemological dimension. It's relational, attentive, experiential, and active. Institutions can be caring.
- You can create a framework for change if there is a culture of trust and caring that go with it.
- "Respect and concern for students" is considered a leading indicator of student satisfaction with a course. They feel it and know when it's genuine.

Gena Christopher

- Movement toward learning-centered focus at Jacksonville State University

- GC became involved with RBP in October 2010 when she was invited to a meeting, trained as a discussion group leader, and posted an article on *JSU Newswire*
- In December, discussion groups elicited feedback through an online survey
- In January, GC introduced the RB initiative to the Trustees
- Responsibilities and resources are on the website:
  - Read materials
  - Recruit a co-leader
  - Identify a place to meet
  - Publicize the meeting place and time
  - Submit meeting instructions to OIRA for inclusion on website and PR website
  - Convent meeting
  - Ensure attendees introduce themselves.
  - Communicate rules of meeting, etc.
- Establish meeting ground rules: no side talking; no idea is a bad idea; all ideas and opinions will be respected; listen actively; all ideas tested by “relevant test”
- Background on composition of department of English, with all teaching the range of courses. Department is THE university service department, providing 15 of the 64 hours required by general studies. Department has a very traditional mindset, traditional degree, which may not be what students want. It has a smaller technology budget than most departments on campus.
- GC described her process with the department: started a blog before the meeting, started a Facebook group, gave links to research, cooked for the meeting (Red Balloon cupcake!)
- Session: one hour of griping, followed by a real discussion. It was the first departmental meeting in 17 years. They want to meet again, perhaps by talking about using technology in freshman composition and how blended courses affect the attendance policy.
- Provost Becky Turner reported that a department head said, “I didn’t know we were doing it wrong.” It wasn’t about teaching online but communicating about student learning and how we can change. Specific actions emerged: pilot of hybrid classes and a guest lecture series

#### Richard Reddy

- Ways the speakers found themselves on the program varied, and the topics changed from the draft of the program.
- In many respects, trying to implement change, you don’t really know how well it’s working while you are doing it. Only later can we get a sense of analysis of success.
- Even though we’ve talked about change and the need for change, we haven’t talked about how change actually works out in reality. RR sees it as a journey, a travel event, even if it’s in circles. He was inspired by thinking about Florida, and three names came to mind as change stories: Christopher Columbus, Walt Disney, John F. Kennedy.
- Columbus knew where he wanted to go, found resources, had three ships based on reality of survival. But he never got to where he wanted to go, finding only two small islands instead of the two large continents. He still made a contribution, is considered a success.
- Disney: RR remembers Disney on TV touting his image of a theme park in Anaheim, but he didn’t get enough land to expand. Imagining Walt Disney World, he enticed people to buy up large amounts of land in Orlando in the hopes of building here before revealing his secret plan. He could not have imagined what this area became. Despite his vision, what’s happened surpasses that vision.
- Kennedy: the nearby space center is based on the idea of competing with the Soviet Union in the space race. His vision of putting a man on the moon within 10 years guided the space

program, which accomplished this on schedule. Resources were put together, but then it seemed there was nothing more to do. The international space station became a new goal, but the next step remains unclear. It wasn't a sustainable vision for the future.

- In essence, we're talking about change and great dreams that require incremental steps and teams that are needed for implementing change. Provosts inherit the vision, the team, the culture shaped before his or her arrival.
- RBP is wise to recognize that it will take different shapes on each campus.
- At Fredonia, we've found a number of ways to have faculty meet and learn together. However much of the sharing tends to be disciplinary focused, not on the needs of our institution and the direction of the institution. Faculty tend to align themselves with the discipline, not the institution. They tend not to have civic mindedness about the world of HE that address issues. They are "deficient citizens," not really knowing the culture of HE even though they inhabit it. This includes junior-level administrators as well, who don't know the big issues in HE that should be modeling to students and guiding our practices.
- Two principled efforts so far are small, important steps that should help people understand the context on which we will build.
- Red Balloon Book Dialogues: this initiative recognized that faculty may not have the time or inclination to read entire books. Volunteers read and summarize the books, and then they lead discussion of the key ideas. So it's an easier way to engage in considering the ideas of the books. Democratic process of selecting the books—three in the fall, three in the spring. A core of people have said they're interested in discussing these.
- Most successful was Gardner's *Five Minds for the Future*, perhaps because he was also coming on campus. But there is an effort to have multiple themes, with different dimensions of HE and intention to have more people talking about them. Engaging the deans was important, as they had a chance to learn and show others about their perspectives. It's an effort to get more people thinking about key issues and implications for whatever will happen next at Fredonia.
- Strategic planning process: democratic kind of process includes RBP. A series of exercises were put together to encourage people to gather in their own choices of groups to generate ideas for strategic planning. The whole idea is to use exercises to consider how Fredonia should define its efforts in the next few years. One of these exercises uses the title of Red Balloon Project as a way of considering context. Mehaffy's essay was featured, and RR compiled articles that highlighted a whole series of issues in a probing, challenging way. It formed a digest of key ideas organized into topic areas, such as diversity, K-12, reinventing HE, faculty roles, liberal arts, libraries, college success, generational issues, graduate employment, perceptions of state employees, and other topics.
- As a body, the readings RR compiled offer many ideas from the *Chronicle*, *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, and other sources. It's enough to find nuggets of ideas to prompt discussion and have people look at core ideas.
- In the process of trying to empower faculty and leadership of changes in HE and learning about what is there. We know about the past, a little of the present, but this is a way to imagine possibilities for the future.

#### Q&A

- Response to process: it's too early to say how it will go, but RR says it's important
- Faculty Development Center at MSCD buys books and has a reading list
- How does care emphasis ripple out: Feminist philosophers began this discussion in the 1970s as a response to rules-based ethics, and it's still being written about. It's a movement within

academia, part of the post-modern era that works outside of categories of binary thinking because it's more about the relationship itself. It's not gender-based, but nurses have picked up on it and are way ahead of physicians.

- Christy Price (Dalton State University) emphasized this in her discussion of millennials, particularly in the perception that the instructor cares. She uses *rapport* literature, which is essentially the same thing.
- *Philosophy and Facebook* was recently published by Maurice. Caring can take place within this technological environment.
- Faculty are not poor citizens if they are not caring of the world of their institutions. That's not their job.