

Reflections on Two Careers in Higher Education

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Because the two of us are retiring at the same time—each after many years of involvement with OSRA, the Journal editor requested our “reflections.” Here they are. Perhaps these thoughts will prompt other editorial or “Making a Difference” submissions.

Bloom’s Taxonomy of Educational Objectives; Socratic Method; Individualized Instruction; Large-Group Instruction; Management by Objectives; Competency Based Education; Distance Learning; Web-based Training.

As I reflect on my 28 years in higher education, each of these concepts comes to mind. During my years of service at the University of Tennessee, University of Georgia, and Western Kentucky University, I have been subjected to and have taken part in the practice of all these. I have worked under the supervision of nine deans and eight department heads each of whom demonstrated unique talents and leadership skills while emphasizing teaching and learning pedagogies in vogue at the time of their administrations. One can conclude that educators will always face a bombardment of innovative methods of training. The words of Charles Darwin are still applicable today: *It is not the strongest of the species that survive, nor the most intelligent, but the ones most responsive to change.*

Courses in our field primarily emphasized skills training in the 70’s. The focus of Office Administration and Business Education programs was to train high-speed typists and shorthand writers. With a sprinkling of business communications and office management, the ultimate outcome was to produce administrative assistants and executive secretaries. Teacher preparation included a mix of content courses and methods. High school and community college offerings basically stressed skills training.

In the early 80’s a combined group of educators and business professionals, under the

auspices of the Office Systems Research Association (now Organizational Systems Research Association), developed a Model Curriculum for teaching office systems courses. Two summer institutes were held at the University of Georgia to train educators to implement this program of study. The curriculum and the institutes were major catalysts in transforming programs in our field from that of a major emphasis on skills to that of a systems orientation and critical thinking. In my opinion the strongest programs in the country were those that responded to change and were willing to make the transition.

Enter the world of the late 90’s where distance learning and Internet offerings became more prevalent on a day-to-day basis. Program offerings in information systems must again become a part of this national and international trend in order to survive in the marketplace.

My career in higher education has included the teaching of courses in office administration, office systems, business and vocational education, and management. I have also served as department head and MBA director, held an endowed professorship for a number of years, chaired several master’s and doctoral studies, taught 30 different courses at both the graduate and undergraduate levels, co-authored four collegiate

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textbooks, consulted in business and education and taught the first web-based course on the Internet at Western Kentucky University in the Gordon Ford College of Business.

Yet amidst the changes, the challenges and the opportunities I've experienced throughout the years, I have attempted to train my hundreds of students in a way that developed their critical thinking skills and their zest for lifelong learning. I believe whatever the method of delivery used to educate our students today and in the future, the development of their critical thinking, problem solving, interpersonal and communication skills should remain at the forefront to prepare them for success in the worlds of business and education.

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Dr. Stallard's reflections concentrated on philosophical and pedagogical issues. Mine will emphasize technology. My career has spanned 39 years—all in higher education—at four institutions: Wake Forest University, Morehead State University, Western Kentucky University, and Ball State University. My experiences, too, provided exposure to a variety of department chairs and deans who ran the gamut from brilliant to (*expletives deleted*). Three years as a department head enabled me to appreciate the woes of administrators. Technologically, my career has ranged from nonexistent to totally involved.

Several previous articles in this journal, e.g., the writings of Professors Edward Thomas, Elizabeth Regan, and Bridget O'Connor, have quite adequately covered the changes in information technology during the twenty-year span of OSRA's existence. My own professional evolution has roughly followed that same transition. A former student's inquiry about whether I was allowed to use Lotus or Excel when I studied statistics in college speaks loudly about the technical savvy of today's students. He didn't understand my laughter and made some remark about "telescoping rulers." Except for the typewriter, my introduction to technology was my first graduate assistant teaching assignment at Indiana University in 1960. I taught a "Calculating Machines" course that

involved Friden, Monroe, and Marchant rotary calculators. Some of my fellow students were already into "data processing," taking courses that involved wiring boards to get punched-card equipment to function; but I managed to avoid that phase of information technology.

Aside from the calculator course, my early teaching involved typewriting, shorthand, business communication, report writing, salesmanship, accounting, personal finance, introduction to business, records management, office management, and methods of teaching everything. More recent assignments have included courses in corporate training, introduction to business information technology, and computer software applications. Prior to the 1970s, college business courses and programs were housed in Departments of Business or Divisions of Business in many colleges. We taught everything. After all, we held baccalaureate, master's, and doctoral degrees in business. Did that not qualify one to teach anything related to business? Late 1960s developments expanded this hodgepodge to include word processing and data processing, two information technology fields that developed independently. Even businesses built separate walls around these work groups. Progressive professionals studied the automation of clerical work, the layout and design of office facilities, and the mechanization of information storage and retrieval. Professional organizations were formed to serve these groups, and the bravest of their members dared to discuss the possibility that "office work" contributed to an organization's success.

During my graduate school days at the University of Kentucky, I somehow managed an invitation to IBM's unveiling of their first Magnetic Tape Selectric Typewriter—that computer that IBM refused to call a computer because it involved processing text—not number crunching. The hardware filled the entire stage of the small auditorium where the event was held. It did not work. We had to return a week later to see it perform. Wang and other manufacturers thrived on word processing hardware as governments, businesses, and institutions developed centralized word processing centers.

Microcomputer popularity in the early 1980s convinced me that survival to retirement as a

business educator would require serious involvement with computers. After all, people at professional conferences were predicting that very soon even “ordinary folks” would have computers in their homes. My first computer was an Osborn with a 64K memory, a CPM operating system, a four-inch monitor, and, of course, no hard drive. This very progressive “portable” computer had two disk drives—one for the operating system and one for storage 5.25-inch storage diskettes. I taught myself to use it—no small feat, considering the fact that I erased the operating system diskette while attempting to make a back-up copy. That computer and WordStar saw me through two books—one of them was the first edition of *Office Automation: A Systems Approach*.

The word, *systems*, was important then, and it remains important today. My coauthor, Janet Palmer, and I saw “office automation” as an ingredient of business systems—not as a process to be studied independently of other business processes. Our work with Amy Wohl solidified that concept. As OSRA has evolved, so has the field. Jack Stallard’s discussion points out some of the changes in terminology. Data processing to management information systems and information technology. Office automation to office systems to end-user computing support. We have struggled with semantics and defining the field, and that will continue; however, we must not lose sight of the fact that the work force, and even the consumer, uses information technology within systems. At work, information technology users function within business systems. They use computers and software as valuable tools for communicating, processing information, making decisions, and solving problems. Upon graduation, our students support those technology users. As they do so, they distinguish themselves because they understand organizations and business processes.

They visualize enterprises and worldwide collaboration. They can communicate, and they can THINK. Because of their exposure to technology, case studies, team projects, and easily available information, they can accept responsibility and carry projects to fruition. They feel compassion for users who may have limited technical skills. I wholeheartedly agree with Jack’s admonition about the need for critical thinking, problem solving, communication, and interpersonal skills.

For the past ten years I have taught and researched in the areas of computer applications and business communication—a marvelous combination because in today’s world neither is complete without the other. My corporate training experiences have exposed me to employees hungry to learn about both areas and receptive to my guidance and nurturing. I hope to continue that work into retirement. My research has revealed to me that much of our technical education is on the wrong track. Even though the education of end-user computing support personnel is on track, our preparation of end users leaves much to be desired. Only the very basic instruction should dwell on the step-by-step, descriptive procedures for using technology. The need for new approaches to learning about technology is significant. Pedagogy and learning materials must involve the learner in using technology to solve problems and make business decisions.

The profession is in good hands; colleges and universities around the country are now staffed with professionals who are quite capable of the challenges we have presented here. OSRA supports their efforts in grand fashion. *Bon Voyage*.

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