

Martha Markings' Fall 2007 Faculty Assembly Speech:

Good morning and welcome! When I walked in the door this morning Dave Haney asked me if I was planning on discussing underwear and I told him I was not but since then two of you have volunteered what you were wearing today and as soon as I loose that memory I'll be able to begin.

I hope you all had a restful summer after the engaging, and somewhat exhausting, year we had last year. It seemed that we evaluated every portion of our beings as faculty members. Along with Dr. Aeschleman, I want to extend my personal thanks to those of you who participated in these crucial discussions. Each and every voice needed to be heard to make the recommendations viable for our campus community.

We continue to face many changes in the way we work and in the students we will be teaching. Just last week Dr. James Groccia delivered an address to many of us, new and veteran faculty alike, entitled: "The 21st Century Academic: Challenges and Opportunities". As you know if you were in attendance, he illustrated many of the challenges he felt that we, as educators would be facing in the next decade and beyond. He likened that the three-legged stool typically used to evaluate faculty; teaching, research and service could now be viewed as a five-legged sofa with teaching, research, service, outreach and continuous professional development as the supports.

Over the past year many of you expressed to me concerns over the changes that are being considered on our campus. Some of you questioned the validity of the changes while others of you seemed genuinely distressed at the prospect. As I was contemplating what to say to you today I decided to focus on these changes and what it means to change. I utilized several sources for inspiration. I looked at *Teach Like Your Hair's on Fire*, primarily because I was intrigued by the title but it didn't seem to fit with what I wanted to say. Being a good Wisconsinite, and knowing that many organizations have used this book to promote the discussion of facing changes in the workplace I read, *Who Moved My Cheese?* by Spencer Johnson and although it is an interesting book it seemed as if it would be a bit too difficult for me to synthesize it's meaning since it emphasizes personal change and growth and how each of us face this in distinctly different ways. I also went to a dictionary and the definition I found was: "The act of, or an instance of, making or becoming different, an alteration or modification, a new experience, variety, the substitution of one thing for another, to make different.

This summer I saw Richard Florida on *The Colbert Report*. Dr. Florida is a professor of Business and Creativity, at the Rotman School of Management at the University of Toronto. Dr. Florida does have his critics and I will not be debating his economic theories but rather exploring his characterization of the creative class since he places all of us in this category.

During the interview with Mr. Colbert Dr. Florida discussed his book, *The Rise of the Creative Class*. And although I was somewhat familiar with his work I had not yet read any of it. Dr. Florida has made his career by studying the group of people he calls "the creative class" and lest you think this doesn't apply to you he places university professors in this category, not only those of us that you might typically consider but all of us. As I started reading his work I felt that it did have something to say that would be appropriate in this venue. This new class Dr. Florida writes and I quote, "includes scientists and engineers, university professors, poets and novelists, artists, entertainers, actors, designers and architects, as well as the thought leadership of modern society: non-fiction writers, editors, cultural figures, think-tank researchers, analysts and other opinion makers. Whether they are software

programmers or engineers, architects or filmmakers, they fully engage in the creative process. The distinguishing characteristics of the creative class are that its members engage in work whose function is to create meaningful new forms". Isn't that what we have been engaged in during the past year?

Something else Dr. Florida wrote struck a chord with me and that is, and I paraphrase, "we need to develop a clearer picture of where the new creative society seems to be taking us-so we can decide if we want to go there" and that "new systems for harnessing creativity generally evolve from existing ones". He feels that new ideas and systems do not necessarily replace or triumph over the old, but they "always expand and alter the playing field". They tend to arise when the existing order has begun to reach certain limits-and as they emerge; they "produce periods of great advance combined with great turbulence. For it is well established that major new systems lead to profound changes". Florida believes that creativity involves the ability to synthesize. It is a matter of sifting through data, perceptions and materials to come up with combinations that are new and useful. Organizations and the people that work in them need to determine how to keep stoking the creative furnace inside each human being in order for the synthesis to fully take effect.

So, assuming that we are all a part of the "creative class" what do we value and what are our passions? Dr. Florida studied the results of the Salary Surveys collected by *Information Week*, a print/on-line magazine for people in the IT industry. He chose this group, and don't blame me but he said, "because they are paid well and are a fairly conventional subset of the creative class".

He found that beyond money most people value one or more of the following in varying degrees and that the mix varies from person to person because passion is individualized.

We, as members of the creative class, value challenge and responsibility. We like to be on the front lines, doing work that makes a difference. I know that this is true for me and from what I have heard from many of you it is true for you as well. Florida believes that we enjoy exciting projects and it's important for us to work on things that will see the light of day. One of the most frustrating things the creative class deals with is, and again I quote, "having a project dropped, pecked to death or strangled in red tape".

We value flexibility. Creative people want the freedom and flexibility to pursue side projects and outside interests-some of which are directly related to our work. Another key aspect of flexibility is having input in designing our workspace and our role in the organization.

We value a stable work environment and a relatively secure job-not lifetime security with mind numbing sameness but not a daily diet of chaos and uncertainty either. We want a place that's not done. We want exciting job content and the chance to work on projects and technologies that break new ground or pose challenging intellectual problems.

We want to be compensated for our work and this involves more than base salary. Dr. Florida indicates that tenured professors sacrifice short-term income for the long-term compensation that a secure lifetime position affords, that security or stability is a form of compensation itself. Other forms of compensation in order of importance in the survey are: job stability, base pay, vacation and time off, and benefits.

As a group we value professional development, as Dr. Groccia also suggested last week. We want the prospect to learn and grow, and to expand our knowledge base.

We desire peer recognition and the chance to win the esteem and recognition of others we feel are “in the know”.

We hope for stimulating colleagues and managers. Creative people like to be around other creative people, and we prefer leaders who neither micromanage nor ignore us.

We value an organizational culture in which the person feels valued and supported.

Location and community are also important. We desire an ongoing dynamic process involving the coming together of several different aspects of a community. Ideal interactions occur among those of us whose roles are different enough to give us diverse perspectives, but have enough common knowledge and common interest to know what would be mutually useful. One of the greatest benefits from the difficult work we have done in the past year has been exactly this.

So, how do we manage this creativity? We can do what Dr. Florida suggests that Microsoft has done by hiring smart people who think, expecting employees to fail, keeping repercussions small when employees make mistakes, reminding employees that their competition is other companies and not their colleagues, emphasizing the company’s goals but letting each individual figure out how to get there, developing a sense of urgency that the business must succeed, and making the office/community feel like home.

Florida identifies what he calls soft-control challenge to harness the talents of creative people. The aim is to provide the mix of security, flexibility and type of challenge that a valued person may be seeking. People respond to organizations that have solid values, clear rules, open communication, good working conditions and fair treatment. The Strategic Planning Council is working toward this end as we draft the Mission Statement for the University and the subsequent documents that will follow. As we all might know, creative people and most certainly university professors, tend to rebel at efforts to manage them overly systematically.

We are indeed facing new challenges and I have often times in the past year recalled one of my predecessors, Dr. Sally Atkins, former chair of the faculty senate as stating something to the effect that leading the faculty was in a sense trying to steer an elephant, indeed a slow and labor intensive process. Other times this year I have felt as if I were herding cats or as Dr. Florida puts it, “herding squirrels”. Harnessing us to do productive work can be very challenging and there is no shortage of theories on how to wrangle a diverse group of creative people into doing what the organization needs to have done to face the challenges of the 21st century. So let’s determine what we need to do and how we can accomplish it together.

Thank you.