

# CULTURE, CHANGE, AND KALE:

## SAVING TIME, ENERGY, AND TIME

I ended last term with a report on enrollment, and I began January with overviews of the budget. On enrollment we are doing well, perhaps too well since the state effectively penalizes us for granting access to qualified students above target. For this excess access, we receive student fees, but we do not receive general fund support. That is one reason why the Master Plan is a relic. The state either cannot or will not live up to its promise of access with or without tuition. Either the promise or the support behind the promise must change.

Change on that scale is beyond my scope here. I will focus on four seemingly unrelated problems: relying on the state budget, organizing a university effectively, assessing meaningfully, and affording academic technology. These problems, which preoccupy us in meetings, develop out of a common source: We are so entwined in the *status quo* that we will put up with debt, waste, and despair rather than change. Ironically, our dedication and sense of obligation to understand how bureaucracy works betray us; they trap us in sapping routines.

### PROBLEM 1: BUDGING ASIDE OLD BUDGETING



If you doubt that old ways trap us, look at how we respond to the CSU budget. We know that the financial model is broken. Nearly every year, we wait anxiously, like spectators returning to a magician's parlor, for the miraculous trick. The CSU's needs lie on the left, available funds on the right. The curtain descends. We hear scraping, cursing, and muffled epithets from behind it, in Sacramento. Will Compact and Contract be knit as one or remain apart?

Alas, this is not a master magician's show. No maiden leaps to the front of the stage, made whole. The trick disappoints, but next year we are back in our seats.

Who does not know why the act falls short? Mired in state politics and muddled by collective bargaining that has become Talmudic in its enumeration of contradictory obligations, the CSU system has not thought collectively about other ways of yoking needs to funding. The state's political elite, who know well the limits of the general fund, nonetheless submarine the CSU's efforts to regularize fee increases. Haphazardly, these leaders replace fee increases with temporary state funds, postponing a day of reckoning in order to gain favor now. So, the mired blame the muddled, and the muddled blame the mired. Exhausted, we settle on compromises that are nearly unintelligible and barely supportable. We are left with torturous processes that perplex the people on the campuses who must apply them.

But we cannot blame just political pandering for the resistance to change. If we on the campuses abandon hope that the state should make us whole, then we threaten two of our core beliefs. First, as a "good" in itself, higher education should not be subjected to the market and the forum like material goods. Second, faculty—tenured, self-governing, and free—should not be subjected to the same forces that impinge on merchants, bureaucrats, builders, etc.

These beliefs have slowed change, exacting a toll. The CSU began fund-raising, stepped up extension, and increased lobbying reluctantly, later than other university systems. The Master Plan enchanted subsequent generations to incant its core refrain—access without tuition— even after tax revolts, sentencing guidelines, and K-12 propositions changed the fiscal landscape. Fortunately, a few skeptics

tired of the annual show—the wait for the miracle. They became pragmatists. They admitted international students who pay non-resident rates. They encouraged ExL to generate off-site degrees. They increased advancement and both grants and contracts by tapping into the hitherto sacred general fund.

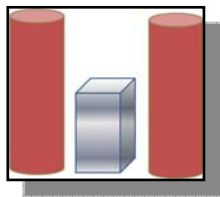
They walked out on the miracle show. They imagined a partly self-supporting university. It would run like a hybrid motor, using traditional resources to generate a supplementary charge. This new model changes our roles and institution. No longer spectators to support, we become versatile at juggling the “good” that higher education portends with the “goods” that it exchanges for non-state support.



## PROBLEM 2: BABEL-BUSTING—LEVELING SILOS, INTEGRATING WORK

The dream of total state support immobilizes us. The bureaucracy of silos divides us. A university, dedicated to advancing knowledge, regresses into tribes. Tribes fight change; they see collaboration as undermining from without.

Silo organization is not all bad, of course. It stabilizes supervision, and it concentrates expertise. Specializations though have perverse effects when we forget that specialists gaze one way; they lack peripheral vision. Frequently we must resolve anomalies that cut across several silos. An advising problem can branch into counseling, financial aid, and health.



When members of a silo unilaterally fix a big problem, often they inadvertently damage the processes of another division. For example, imagine that EPC requires that grades be recorded in prerequisites before enrolling for the next course. Admissions and Records would have to re-conceive registration, financial aid would have to delay awards, department chairs would have to change faculty assignments well into the term, and students would not know what to do.

Fixing without cross-talking is a recipe for crisis. When the office or committee that imposed the fix responds defensively, tempers flare. Shared processes rupture because communications stops or offends. Customers, students, and co-workers down-stream cannot complete tasks. If leaders do not mend matters, they lose authority because they exhibit ineffectiveness. Solving the problem technically—say, by assembling an *ad hoc* fire team—without starting to change the culture is not enough. It allows the organization to relapse into tribalism.

Today, accountancy and security overwhelm us; changing specifications in business systems baffle us. We tense and batten down the hatches. It is enough, we each feel, to parry the changes. However, technology links processes instantaneously, and it inevitably imposes business practices that do not map exactly onto an organization. To disentangle this mismatch, to re-arrange work and/or software appropriately, and to keep up with rapid transactions, we must be flexible and communicative. The walled off sinecure ultimately is less secure than the open, robust network. Re-organization just reconstitutes organization. Change requires that we think differently, no matter how we are organized. We must be skeptical about our own competencies and capable of glimpsing, if not fully grasping, another division’s perspectives. If we do not do this, we abandon the task of integrating several perspectives to the student or user.

## PROBLEM 3: ASSAYING ASSESSMENT



Many faculty still perceive assessment as an add-on; it must be mandated, they think, by people who fail to see that teaching is assessment. Resentfully or perhaps with resignation, departments go through the paces. They create learning objectives for programs and align syllabi with them. Departments evaluate students' performance against these objectives. However, methodological flaws undermine the results and arm the skeptics. The focus on majors limits our treatments to small Ns. Faculty assess inconsistently, because those of us in leadership do not clarify how to achieve reliability.

So, we assess. But have we changed fundamentally? No, we have accommodated it as we do most external mandates. With few exceptions we go through the motions; we appear to conform. We assume that soon enough critics will be distracted by something else; so why change?

Assessment techniques (embedded questions, capstones, summative tests) differ across departments. Nonetheless, we are mapping the same journey many times. Do students learn in the major as we intended in the learning objectives? Such duplication wastes the faculty's intellectual capital. If we would sample the effectiveness of specialization in just a few majors, instead of exhausting the subject, what would we lose? Consider that departments and pedagogies are similar. The knowledge that is derived from assessing several majors/program, probably applies to many others.

As faculty and administrators, we have not owned assessment collectively. We suffer its imposition; we allow it to follow the path of least resistance—to the departments. But when we gather for coffee or lunch, we lament writing skills; we despair about students' inability to make or break an argument, to evaluate evidence. We “blame” K-12, the Math Department, English, etc., for failing to develop skills, knowledge, and attitude that, we believe, enable a higher education and are the most discernible products of it.

We can change our approach to assessment to investigate these inadequacies. For example, EPC can review evidence of how well students are meeting learning objectives in general education. Their review can include a discussion of the Collegiate Learning Assessment, which we give to freshmen and seniors to measure the value that we add, especially in writing and critical thinking. We then could discuss what constitutes effective writing and characterizes critical thinking about arguments and evidence. Suppose that we free faculty from local assessment. Campus experts primarily in qualitative methodologies could advise several cross-disciplinary teams on how to study entry skills of students across majors. The Ns would be sufficient to justify generalizations. Teams could observe whether we provide reliability and consistency across sections. We could expand—and assess—the indices of learning to behaviors other than writing. We could cross-talk seriously: what is critical thinking? How is it related to academic thinking, to analysis in the “world?” Is critical thinking “logical,” is it experiential? What is its link to information competency? Do speaking, writing, imaging, etc., affect what it is or does? We know it when we see it, and we see it rarely in students. But what is it, how do we all teach it?

This general approach requires that we give up the illusion of totalizing assessment (assess every major). We would commit, instead, to a number of partial views of learning. Faculty and staff, thinking outside habitual silos, would generate the themes. No longer “mere” service, assessment would become collaborative research.

## PROBLEM 4: THE SYSTEM IS NOT THE SOLUTION; WHAT IS?



Technology is not a silo that we can exit and remain in the modern world. It increasingly is that world. Still, if we do not control our desire for this, that, and the other thing, it will sap us like an addiction. Craving for the newest, most potent fix will draw resources out of the university. Ironically the craving will impoverish human interactions so much that we will yearn for the circus of circuitry even more.

Each of us is a Trojan horse, secreting cells phone, iPods, and wireless services into the academy. We demand accommodation, layering networks and heaping up expenses. What works for the market as a whole can bankrupt a university. Can we afford 24/7 over all devices without charges to the users or subsidies from someone? Purchasing, patching, and patrolling technology threaten to supplant the purpose of education. Fads will drive us, until we clarify principles that govern how we should change. We have mistaken the central issue because we have been captured by the ideological debate about proprietary standards, open source, or open code. The central issues are these: do we establish standards for the performance of devices and then insure consistency by footing the bill for incessant hardware and software changes? Or do we divest expense by concentrating on network robustness and the capacity to plug and play with devices that meet expectations that we specify? Or, must we do six of one, a half dozen of the other?



Here is an example of how divesting expense can drive change. We agree that our priority is to teach. We transform teaching material for the web, when appropriate. But we have limited resources—in dollars and technical people. Should we give up being an information service provider for students, faculty, and staff? That duplicates commercial services. We can contract services like email to ISP's; we'd have to tolerate their ads. Or we could reflect—that is, detour—messages outwards to service providers that students and staff contract with individually. Dispersion of messaging worries the security-minded. However, our student numbers should be sufficient to entice a provider to conform to reasonable standards of security and accessibility, if we elect a single source.

Like email, learning management systems have become a necessary asset—and a compounding expense. Features accrete year after year. As with email, we should explore whether it pays to disinvest. Which features do we really need? Which features have migrated from commercial to stable freeware? Obviously, we must insure access and compatibility for users. “Free” is never wholly “free.” But money that we do not spend on smart ware we can spend on smart people. Similarly, the ubiquity and affordability of mobile storage and virtualized services should reduce our need to stock labs with CPU's; thin clients should suffice. Again money saved here is money available to smart people to develop content, provided networks become more robust and their costs do not offset other savings.

What do the strategies of self-support, cross-talk, collective assessment, and disinvesting from systems in order to invest in academic transformation have in common? They require that we change, that we act pragmatically. Too often we scan the political, social, and economic forces and conclude that we need a revolution. But that is so overwhelming that we relapse into resignation. Change, however, begins locally in small ways. Self-support empowers it, and cross-talk informs it. Assessment distills its essential agency; it helps us to plot our path. Tactical investment in technology reflects our determination to master things, not be mastered by them. To change culture, we cannot submit to dreams of persecution or salvation.