

## **Sabbatical Report**

I am sure the reader has all been waiting anxiously all summer in anticipation of this exciting event: a professional development report submitted by an economist. Pretty sexy stuff. I will try to make this as painless as possible.

After spending more years than I care to count in the classroom, I was beginning to feel pretty isolated as an economist. Isolated technologically, isolated from the greater community outsider of LCC, from my fellow economics educators, from those that represent economics through the media, from non-academic economists and business professionals, and from other writers in my field. Here are some of the things I accomplished during my sabbatical leave that substantially improved this circumstance:

I met repeatedly the Business Editor of the Register Guard, a thoroughly gracious fellow named Christian Whitol. He introduced me to the business analysts and the reporters that work with him. I gave them several presentations and we had repeated frank discussions about the strengths and weakness of economics reporting in the print media as well as the

strengths and weaknesses of Lane economics students, a steady proportion of who consistently end up working in the journalism field.

I was given many constructive suggestions and unabashed criticisms for how I might most effectively help my economics students better utilize the media in order to comprehend “real world” economics. They also spoke at length with me about way I might help my students who were journalism majors be more effective in their field. Very useful and *fun*.

As part of my development leave, I also wrote extensive reviews of yet to be published economics manuscripts. That was enjoyable as well. I relished the opportunities to write and share sentiments such as: “Okay, here’s the deal, I have yet to meet an economics text that the students could not do without. I have been doing this for a couple of decades now, with a wide variety of texts, so you can’t really say I haven’t given it a fair shot. All protestations to the contrary, economics textbooks continue to be written by academics to impress other academics. Too often, nerds are writing for other nerds rather than for the typical student.” Not one of my most eloquent moments, true, but satisfying nonetheless. A great way to work out some of my “issues” regarding academia in the context of a broader audience with the opportunity form a continuing dialogue with like-minded educators.

As a means of hopefully putting more “real world” applications into my economics lectures, I wanted to interact with local business enterprises

that had strong multi-national connections with a hundred or more employees. I was successful. I interviewed and made presentations to middle and upper management at both Symantec (with the assistance of Nathan Shanks), at PSC (where Bruce Debysingh helped coordinate my talks), and at several other Willamette Valley based enterprises with international connections. All *very* interesting.

Among the many eye-openers these good folks presented me with: it's not necessarily (or even often) true that jumping from job to job is bad for your resume'; contrary to what I've been telling students for years. I learned that in high-tech fields related to these types of companies and their products, staying too long at one job/company (three years or more) could make you nearly *unemployable* elsewhere. The reason being, if you're not being wooed away by other firms, the de facto implication is that you must not be all that competent. Amazing!

In addition, as a part of my development leave, I prepared presentations and spoke before professional, business-oriented public service groups such as the Kiwanis and Lions clubs. I followed my presentations with extended question and answer sessions during which I invited frank comments and suggestions regarding adequate college preparation of Lane economics students. We had open and animated discussions on topics ranging from the liberal vs. conservative tones of classes at Lane to my thoughts on the effects of immigrants upon our

nation's wealth and well-being. Given that my parents are both immigrants, I was happy to respond with enthusiasm.

I must tell you, it was immensely satisfying being in a room filled with people that disagreed powerfully and passionately on some issues and yet treated one another with graciousness and respect and who genuinely liked each other in spite of their differences. Sadly, not a common occurrence in academia.

It was also a treat to run into past students during these presentations. Howard W., a past foreman of a high-rise steel crew, was recovering from a three-story fall onto a concrete slab when I first met him. He was told he'd never walk without leg braces and that college was not in his future. Mine was one of the first college courses he ever took. What a joy to learn that he has nearly completed his graduate degree while working as a stockbroker at Smith/Barney and that he finished among the top 100 in the Butte-to Butte race this past July 4<sup>th</sup>.

At another of these presentations, I spoke with Heidi. When I first encountered her as a student in one of my classes she was a bright, vivacious young woman who happened to be blind. I remember that as I would lecture and scribble furiously filling three blackboards with formulas and graphs, Heidi would sit peacefully with her head tilted, eyes close, facing the floor. A look of calm concentration on her face--very disarming.

I recall often sitting with her in my windowless office with the door closed and the lights off—potential grounds for dismissal these days—as she and I did our best to visualize with words alone, as many as fifteen separate microeconomic graphs and their complex relationships with one another in our minds’ eyes. She managed to master them and apparently a good deal more. At one of my presentations, I learned that she had since earned both an MBA and a law degree.

And finally, I developed an economics webpage. Believe me, this was no small task for a techno-dinosaur like me. And without help from a wonderful person named Melanie Wilson in the Design Resource Center I may have given up altogether. Included on the website are the usual links to syllabi and readings and practice exams. There are animated visuals, a winking Benjamin Franklin from the 100 dollar bill, and ticker-tape rhyming messages scrolling along the bottom pages. I also included links to over 100 economics-related websites, every one of which I individually visited, studied, and then rated as to usefulness and relevance to specific courses.

I also created whimsical (and I hope *fun*) sites with titles such as, “Economics Beach Blanket Bingo Party” with links to topics ranging from, the importance of driving a car with windshield wipers on the headlights to the economic value of a good sex-life to sensitive new age economics poetry and songs which I wrote as a sillier component of my leave. Here you will find economics songs such as an ode to Alan Greenspan to be sung to the tune of the old, “Beverly Hillbillies” theme song: “Come and listen to a story

'bout a man from FED, horned-rimmed glasses, not much hair on his head, Name's Al Greenspan from New York Cit-y, now he's servin' on the board in crazy D.C.--Washington that is, Senators, press releases" (I think you get the general idea).

In summary, my sabbatical leave was productive, relevant, and thoroughly enjoyable. I established cordial lines of communication with a wide array of businesspeople, economists, journalists, computer whizzes, ex-students turned professionals, and writers in my field. I am confident that I will be able to capitalize upon these relationships in a way that will benefit both these good people as well as my students in the years to come.

While still modest by the standards of a moderately clever 14-year-old, my computer skills as they relate to my ability to teach effectively have been dramatically improved. I look forward to applying and expanding my new found skills both in the classroom and online. I am even considering the possibility of teaching an online course, assuming the college continues to explore that teaching venue. An ambition unfelt and unconsidered before taking this professional development leave. I am sincerely appreciative to have had these and many other positive opportunities and experiences as a direct consequence of my sabbatical leave.