WEDNESDAY COMMUNIQUÉ

February 25, 2015

Experience & Judgment: Last week, I was a moderator of a panel discussion on data at the UNM Data-2-Knowledge (D2K) conference. The conversation veered into questions of data accuracy and agreement in judgments formed on the basis of those data. For instance, is providing correct and clean data sufficient to create consensus? The panel thought it was necessary to provide decision-makers and others with reliable data but that different groups – presented with the same data and facts – could reach vastly different, and at times contradicting, conclusions based on their own filters, background, and prejudices.

This is a modern version of a very old question, which is "how do you know what you know?" The issues are many. They include the reliability of sources of knowledge, and the variety of ways that bits and pieces of evidence and assertion can be arranged to form arguments and arrive at conclusions. Things are even less precise in some matters of opinion, or decisions about future action, especially in cases that rely more on experimentation than established social practice. In shared governance of the university, as elsewhere, data do not speak for themselves — we have to discuss our assumptions, filters, and prejudices in order to arrive at academically-driven decisions.

Our personal lenses and filters change our evaluations of others' performance, too. In a recent example, students rating professors with the same skills appear to rate them differently depending on the professor's gender. Many college students use the website Rate My Professors to review their teachers. According to a recent NPR story, a professor at Northeastern University, Benjamin Schmidt, turned 14 million student-submitted reviews into a searchable database. He concluded that students (of any gender) were more likely to rate male professors on their intelligence, while grading their female professors on their nurturing abilities.

Higher Education & Planning for Change: How should universities deal with their current challenges? Jim Collins, author of the book "Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap... And Others Don't," states that "change is accelerating, uncertainty is permanent, and chaos is common." In an interview with Trusteeship Magazine, Mr. Collins advised college and university leaders to "do new things as long as they're consistent with the values of the institution." When asked, "What do you see as coming next for higher education?" he answered, "Three things: First, there will never be a return to normality. There will only be a continuous series of not normal. History is chaotic and messy. We should assume there will be no new normal. Act accordingly. Second, get very good at asking not what should we do, but what should we stop doing? It's just as important to have as many things on your stop-doing list as your to-do list. Third, it's in the interest of higher [education] to make sure that every single kid is reading by the end of grade 3 and doing math by the end of grade 8." The lack of focus on long-term goals is evident in the national discourse on higher education, sometimes driven by those asserting that universities should be run like businesses. Ironically, a backlash against short-term thinking is beginning to appear in the business community, as described here and illustrated by the initiative here. It is rather unfortunate that as companies are reverting toward long-term planning, higher education is being pushed to focus on very short-term goals.

Well-Being in America & New Mexico: The "2014 State Well-Being Rankings" were just released. The Gallup-Healthways Well-Being Index attempts to examine the comparative well-being of the 50 U.S. states using self-reported data from individuals from around the world. The ratings include measurements of societies' progress on various dimensions – purpose, social, financial, community, and physical – that matter most for well-being. According to this ranking, New Mexico is ninth highest.

Our Faculty in the News: Congratulations to three of our own! Professor Jennifer Denetdale was recently featured in a front-page NY Times article. Professor Jane Lehr, the chair of the Department of Electrical & Computer Engineering, was awarded the IEEE Nuclear and Plasma Sciences Society's (NPSS) 2015 Richard F. Shea

Distinguished Member Award: "For outstanding contributions to the leadership of the IEEE Nuclear and Plasma Sciences Society and the IEEE NPSS Pulsed Power Science and Technology Committee." Last, [Professor Edl Schamiloglu won the Peter Haas NPSS Award](). "The award recognizes individuals whose efforts, over an extended period, have greatly benefited the pulsed power field through the development of important applications or areas of activity including research, education, and information exchange." There were doubtless many more achievements and awards by our faculty and students this past week!

Innovation Academy Director: I am also happy to highlight the [recent appointment]() of Dr. Robert DelCampo, professor in the Anderson School of Management, as the director of Innovation Academy. The academy is a new academic program, as well as a part of the citywide Innovate ABQ project, that will provide entrepreneurial training to UNM students who are interested in starting companies.

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