

A Reflection on The Life of the Mind by Irma Becerra-Fernandez

First of all I would like to thank the convocation committee for organizing the events of convocation week. Also thanks to the school of music for a wonderful concert – which for me felt like a mental spa, hope more of you will attend next year, it was really a treat. And congratulations to all the awardees on your impressive accomplishments.

I would like to reflect on our President's comments and specifically on his call of action as he defines our job for us faculty members as “guardians of the life of the mind”.

I think one of the great qualities that Mark brings to his new position is his corporate memory of our own history at FIU. I think that when you live in a young institution like FIU we tend to think there's no corporate culture. But there's certainly one emerging here, one of commitment to our mission to make a difference in the lives of our students in spite of how difficult that may be, due for example to lack of adequate resources.

There's no doubt that our job - guardians of the life of the mine – it's getting harder. As Mark observed “Rapid change already affects the life of the mind. We must understand how these changes will impact our ability to survive and thrive in the new environment.”

The pace of change around us requires that we stay running on top of a 'knowledge treadmill' just to keep up with how our own disciplines change each day. The You-Tube video “Shift Happens” with more than 4.8M views summarizes it well:

- Today's learner will have between 10-14 jobs by age of 38
- 1 out of 4 workers has been at the company less than one year
- The top 10 jobs in demand in 2010 didn't exist in 2004

In summary, we're preparing students for jobs that don't yet exist, using technology that hasn't been invented in order to solve problems we don't even know we have. And we're trying to situate this learning in a pedagogical context that may have not existed five years ago, as one of our awardees described using blogs, you-tube, Facebook and perhaps even Twitter!

In addition, there's the fact that new disciplines are emerging every day. My own area of research Knowledge Management, has only been around for about ten years. I recently participated on a research project this past spring while I was a visiting scholar at MIT on the topic of the information explosion at the enterprise. In that project we interviewed IT leaders at 25 firms¹ and found that the annual increases in data storage requirements at organizations today range from 10% to 1800%. Some of this explosion is due to the fact that in recent years, information and communications technologies have created opportunities for firms to collect, store, and analyze vastly increasing amounts of data. Some technologies provide greater granularity about critical operational data, like products and customers (e.g. RFID, ERP, business intelligence tools). Other technologies collect and store unstructured data (e.g. social networking tools, video, enhanced imaging tools). As a result, business leaders are eagerly accessing and saving that data. But one of the interesting findings from this research is that this information explosion at the enterprise is not necessarily turning into business value. Which begs the question, **when** do we process all the information that we are collecting?

I think that this is one of the difficult questions we will be asking of ourselves – managing this tension between the pace of change and trying to find time, as we are this week of convocation, to reflect on our responsibilities as guardians of the life of the mind.

¹ Identify interviewers and cite HMI study