

## What Unites and Divides This Community?

By

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When I first started thinking about this topic, I imagined the four groups, faculty, administrators, students and support staff, were members of a family - a uniquely interesting, not always fully functioning family. I imagined the faculty and administrators as the highly educated, concerned parents, who had very different views on what was best for the child (student). The students represented the child, who had its own ideas of what was best and how best to provide it. In my fantasy family, the support staff became the live in grandparent or nanny or gardener - quietly and dependably getting all the things done that are necessary to keep the dysfunctional family functioning. As my mind took this idea and ran, the support staff-er became the obvious hero of the day. Without support staff the institution/family would surely fall apart!

But then I read Dr. Mullin's paper and I got serious about analyzing what I perceive unites and divides this community.

US-THEM or checks and balances?

Are divisions of faculty, administration, student and staff necessarily a bad thing? I like to think of it as rather division of power - four factions working each in their own way toward the common goal of educating people.

If students were left to decide for themselves what courses they need, what kind of well-rounded curriculum would they devise? Would the English major take any math classes? Would any of them attend classes before noon?

If faculty weren't pushing so hard to have the proper equipment and facilities and staff to educate the students, would the administration work so hard to find ways to provide it?

And if the support staff weren't handling all the routine, copying, typing, scheduling, cleaning, maintaining & cooking chores each day, how much time would faculty, administrator or student have to devote to the task at hand?

**What might allow these constituencies to bridge their differences and allow them to converse in the same language?**

I feel that, for the most part, Augustana is a community in which the different constituencies do communicate - do try to see things from the other's point of view and speak the same language. I have worked in places where the overwhelming sentiments are 'it's not my job' or 'what's in it for me', or the always popular, 'we've never done it that way before.' Only on rare occasions have I encountered these attitudes at Augie. More prevalent here is the position, 'because it's the right thing to do'. That's what keeps me committed to working here.

**What divides our community currently is the level of commitment to intellectual discovery.**

In defense of the students - they got here because of their GPA, class rank and ACT/SAT scores - all numbers that had to be provided to the Admission office. To my knowledge, no one interviewed them to find out if they are moral people, and no one asked them to speak to their level of commitment to intellectual discovery. Can you blame them for having the mind set that

grades are more important than what they've learned?

Intellectual discovery for staff - in the context of learning new things to be more efficient at one's job, I feel ample opportunities are given and willingly taken. In the context of intellectual discovery for broadening one's horizons - pursuing knowledge for knowledge's sake, support staff members do have a tougher time, simply due to time constraints. Our intellectual discovery must happen exclusively on our own time - not from 8 to 5 when the desk must be staffed, the phones answered, the mail delivered, etc.

Last fall Augustana added Amy Meyers as Employee Health Educator. What a great idea! Our own resource person to answer questions on prescriptions and other health related issues. Even though one of the main motivations for creating this position was economic - namely to save money on insurance claims, I believe the benefits have been even greater. How many of us got "On the Move" last fall, walking around the campus and community to pick up prizes. Spending a lunch hour walking outside on a beautiful fall day was easy and fun and many of us saw face to face for the first time the people we've been e-mailing and calling for years . Taking advantage of the yoga, aerobics, circuit training and water aerobics classes demands a much greater level of commitment, and time away from home and family in the evening. Programs like On the Move are great unifiers.