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Why Clusters: A Holistic and Integrative Education that Links Research, Education, and Service in a Way that Builds a New PSU Culture and Creates a Lasting Legacy for Our Children

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Office of the President

Why Clusters: A Holistic and Integrative Education that Links Research, Education, and Service in a Way that Builds a New PSU Culture and Creates a Lasting Legacy for our Children

August 17th, 2016 by Don Birx

This last “why” of clusters pulls all the previous elements together. Most of us went into education because we wanted to equip students with the knowledge and skills to create a better world, to be life-long learners, to constantly re-invent themselves, to experience the thrill of discovery and to live lives of innovation and impact. Along the way, as it invariably happens, we ran into things that led us to concentrate on our own little worlds. We, whether faculty or staff, had our areas of expertise and comfort and we learned to stay out of others “business” because of the frustrations of the larger tasks, those tasks that cut across disciplines, that fought the bureaucracy, of those that dealt with uncomfortable change. We narrowed our focus and ultimately our impact. I know, many would disagree with that last statement and in fact think the opposite is true. I know I did. But I had the misfortune over the years to fall into situations where what I could do didn’t solve the challenges I faced no matter how much of an expert I thought I was; where I was responsible for a whole system and I didn’t have all the ideas to make it the best it could be.

Clusters allow us to go back to that time when we really did believe we could change the world and create a holistic educational environment that links together research, education and service into engaged scholarship at a university level, where we all play a role and all roles are valued – a foundational form that really did create positive change. Interestingly the brightest minds and the most forward thinking agencies are starting to see the same thing. It is a cultural change in thinking that brings us together and makes each of us; faculty, staff, student, community a part of something larger than ourselves and in which we can see and value the roles each of us play in this much greater endeavor. Part of seeing things beyond our selves is recognizing our interconnection with each other. When we do that we start to see a whole person and that brings a whole new energy to the workplace. It also pushes us to greater levels of transparency and trust. Trust is further developed when we also move away from the traditional top down hierarchical decision making processes of the past to a more natural self, cluster, and group managed structure – one where the people closest to needing to take action are empowered to do what needs to be done for the betterment of our institution.

So I hope that as we move forward, you will all contribute in any way you can and be patient with yourself and each other. This is an adventure; it is exciting, and it matters. We are pioneers, not traveling a well-worn path but opening new territory for ourselves, our community and most of all, our students. The alternatives for our student, our country and ourselves are really unappealing.

Please understand these posts are mine- I present things as I see it. Others I am sure will see things differently, but by the time I am through with my series of posts, I hope you will find at least one rationale for integrated clusters that resonates with you.

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Current Weather in Plymouth

Mostly Cloudy. Temperature: 43;
Wind: WNW at 3; Conditions as of Wed Feb 08 at 04:00 PM EST courtesy of The PSU Weather Center

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