Thought Vectors and Nuggets

The Overpatch: Learning in a Cohort by Tony Tilly

*However, a more central reason for our approach is that we are very focused on what a career requires and what a grad must be able to do.  This line of thinking generates program outcomes.  In turn we are quite prescriptive about curriculum and do not leave very much to chance and choice.*

*Now all of this is sounding a bit rigid, uniform – even glum.  Yet it is anything but that.  There is a hidden value in how we do this.  I say that not from daily observation as I can’t do that the same way that faculty and staff can.  But each year I get reminders of the hidden value, particularly at awards ceremonies and convocation.*

*In some respects, the college class involves the whole being more than the sum of the parts.  At convocation, when I look out at the grads I am first aware of the individuals who are reflecting on what they have done, thinking about what’s next, thanking the family who supported them.  But I also see the class – that somewhat tribal group – which involves pride in each other and an intangible but unmistakable identity.*

This patch really spoke to me because of the nature of this past year at Post-Secondary institutions. My discipline is the School of Nursing, which has a fairly set curriculum, and a definite cohort of students. As all the Fall and Winter Theory courses were offered strictly on-line the cohort of first year students did not get the opportunity to meet and greet and bond like they have in previous cohorts. The one class offered minimally in a f2f format was limited to a small group of students at a time.

My first instructional experience with this group was in a clinical situation in December. I quickly came to realize, that not only did I not know these students, but they didn’t know each other either. There was no feeling of camaraderie that arises from shared experiences and knowledge. There was no feeling of trust or bonding. They didn’t know each other’s strengths or weaknesses or even personalities. Who was an extrovert, who was an introvert? Fortunately, over the period of the clinical experiences bonds began to form.

In the winter semester, I also taught a lab skills group. There were 9 students allowed in the lab at a time (COVID safety restrictions) and the students had been in a clinical group together in December (not the one I instructed). But, I could see that they had started to form bonds and become a cohort. The second clinical experience this spring consisted of most of that group, and it was reassuring to see that the bonds were getting stronger and they were invested in their peer’s successes as well as their individual success.

I am looking forward to this fall, when face-to-face instruction will again take place in post-secondary and the students can really bond and become that *“tribal group – which involves pride in each other and an intangible but unmistakable identity”.*