

ME304, Fall 2019
Reflection #1 – Words

One of the most important characteristic that employers are seeking in candidates is the ability to communicate effectively. Engineers communicate in many ways including CAD drawings, design reports, memos, text messages, phone calls, and even good old face-to-face discussions. Words and drawings are tools used to communicate ideas. Words matter. Confusion is the not the worst thing that can happen with communication. If you are confused, you can ask for clarification. The worst form of communication is when you think you understand but don't.

I propose the following statements are true:

- 1) The year is currently 2019 AD per the Gregorian calendar, and the world is rapidly changing – changing faster in many ways than ever before.
- 2) When you begin work after graduation, you will be working alongside four generations of people (if we define a generation as a group of individuals of about the same age with somewhat similar youth-experiences). In no previous time in history have people had to work alongside such generational diversity. This is a unique challenge present in the world today and it will likely become more of a challenge in the future. You will not always be part of the youngest generation.
- 3) We are often feel pressure to “take a stance” – but rarely are we asked to fully consider both sides in a thoughtful way before reaching an opinion. For example, we are told that it is important to vote, yet the message of spending time to become an educated voter seems to be mostly absent.

Communication

We think that because we speak English, we speak the same language, yet that is not completely true. The meaning of words can evolve within a single generation without our awareness. Someone raised during the Cold War era would likely have a different emotional reaction to the word “communist” than someone born after the fall of the Soviet Union. The phrase “terrorist attack” took on different meaning after “9-11” entered our lexicon. “Hilarious” use to mean something really really funny, yet whenever I watch a “hilarious” cat videos, it isn't.

For this reflection, I am asking you to consider two common simple words: *truth* and *freedom*. Since these are commonly used words, all English speakers should agree what they mean – right? When you read either of these words, you form some sort of understanding in your mind. Now let's consider the University of Portland's motto which appears on the University's seal. Of course, it is written in Latin to sound more smarter (sic): *Veritas vos Liberabit* which translates into English as **(the) Truth will set you Free**. This is borrowed from the Gospel of Saint John, chapter 8 verse 32.

Think about the motto for a bit. Does it make sense to you? Does it seem true, valid, meaningful, challenging, inspirational? Did the University “get it right” or is this a poor choice for a motto?

After thinking for a bit, read it again but this time try to read it through the eyes of the individuals who chose this for UP's motto. Assume they were pretty smart people with good intentions (a good thing to

always assume of others until proven otherwise) and wanting a meaningful motto for UP – one to challenge and inspire future students and faculty. Do a little “google searching” to see how *truth* and *freedom* can be interpreted differently than they might commonly be interpreted – perhaps less common meanings make more sense.

Writing Assignment: write from two different perspectives. Regardless of your own opinion about the motto, write a few sentences explaining that it is valid to consider this as a good motto explaining why or how it can challenge or inspire individuals at UP. Then write a few sentences explaining that it is valid to consider this as a poor motto explaining why or how it fails to challenge or inspire individuals at UP. Please avoid phrases such as “I think... I feel... I believe...”, rather use phrases such as “this is a good/poor motto because...” and explain how it is reasonable for someone to see this as a good (and poor) motto independent of your personal feelings.