

TRACES 21:
Modes of Academic Staff Stints at 21st-Century U.P.

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3 Inspirations, an Introduction

When I was Director of the Institute of Civil Engineering several years ago, I had the privilege to head a College-wide committee that drafted a version of proposed alternative tracks of faculty service at the College of Engineering. The conceptual proposal was eventually adopted by the Engineering Faculty Assembly, and was submitted to the Diliman central administration. However, further deliberations, approval and subsequent implementation have been delayed or deferred until this very day.

Subsequently in February 2013, as Diliman Vice-Chancellor for R&D, I had another chance at the U.P. System Faculty Conference Series 2, to present a more general concept of alternative workloads for faculty – by then already labeled as TRACES – that was likewise adopted in principle, provided that the concept would be brought back to each Constituent University and elaborated further. The Vice-President for Academic Affairs also endorsed the same. However, other matters had overtaken this concept for the past 2 years.

Now March 2015 is here, and here is another, yet bigger, U.P. System conference. I should try to refine or enhance or expand the TRACES concept, and humbly offer it for possible adoption by the U.P. System for its academic staff, both faculty and research, extension and professional staff (REPS). I will propose to label the latest concept as TRACES 21, for the 21st Century. And by the end of this essay, I will be speaking less about tracks that are rigid but more about adaptive traces.

In my mind, TRACES 21 is propelled by at least 3 inspirations. One inspiration is the realization that academic staff, just like our students, should long for lifelong learning. That also inspired me to write this haiku entitled “Lifelong Learning,” which according to my teenage daughter is more like “hay, naku:”

Mind the mighty pen
with roses, the more I learn
the less I und’stand.

Academic staff members are not only in the business of knowledge transmission, but also knowledge production, and knowledge assimilation.

Academic staff members are not to be regarded as permanent experts of our knowledge domains: academic staff members must teach or train, must research or restudy, must teach or train again differently, must restudy or research some more, and so on. In other words, academic staff need all kinds of opportunities for lifelong learning even while serving in the University at various capacities.

Another inspiration is the image of Edward de Bono’s 6 thinking hats, and the now-famous association with 6 colors: blue, black, red, green, white, and yellow. De Bono, renowned physician, psychologist and physiologist from Malta, pioneered the concept of lateral thinking or structured

I am reminded of last year's round of merit promotions for faculty and other personnel, when U.P. had perhaps an unprecedented discourse and debate on the proper way or ways of appreciating the accomplishments by faculty members in the various departments. If other universities especially abroad evaluated and promoted their faculty in a staggered manner, the fact that U.P. did or does its faculty promotions *en masse* indeed heightened or heightens the stark comparisons of roles and functions, and the corresponding valuations, for faculty members in varied situations.

The variety is wide: we note a whole constellation of 101 roles or functions of U.P. academic staff (including those in Figure 1) that, actually, complement each other.

Every faculty member or REPS of U.P. may identify with several roles that are diverse and far apart in that constellation. (Would you the reader spot and choose 2 of your own favorites? You need not tell right now.) There is no easy telling what, or who, is the biggest star in the University.

6 or Fewer Key Answers to the Question: What are We Here for Really?

Momentarily I propose to un-focus from such complex constellations; I propose to look first into 6 macro labels, 6 key letters: A, C, E, R, S, T (I shall explain why these particular letters); or these 6 letters with their respective colors: Blue A, Black C, Red E, Green R, White or Gray S, and Yellow T.

We may use the 6 letters to form the word "TRACES" and we may approximately match the 6 colors with the 6 thinking hats of Edward de Bono.

We can be inspired by de Bono in viewing – and structuring – our constellation of roles and functions in U.P. in terms of our 6 colored hats for thinking and acting. (For example, in [Figure 2.](#))

But before that, let us be inspired, too, by Gustave Eiffel.

Eiffel: a Side Story

Gustave Eiffel, engineer from France, created a temporary tower that evolved into virtual permanency, through the assumption of varied and changing roles and functions. The metallic tower, then the tallest in the world, was initially meant to stand for 20 years starting in the 1889 Exposition to celebrate the centennial of the French Revolution, then subsequently became a meteorological station, a laboratory for wind-resistance experiments, a radio broadcasting tower, a television tower, and, until now, every tourist's viewing deck to see much of Paris.

Eiffel's tower has since inspired not only engineers and scientists but artists and lovers.

Visualize the blue sky all over, the white or gray clouds around, the green trees beneath, the yellowish brown metal that comprises the tower, and the red-and-black fashion of Paris pedestrians.

What are the Paris visitors there for: to admire the metallic tower? Or, to imbibe the romantic ambiance?

6 Thinking and Acting Hats of Academic Staff in U.P.

Back in UP, what are we here for? What do we have in mind?

(Consider the mind map in Figure 2.) I suppose that the complex constellation of academic staff concerns in U.P. may be creatively structured by associating with de Bono's 6 colored hats: Blue

A, Black C, Red E, Green R, White or Gray S, and Yellow T. The association with de Bono's 6 colors may be approximate, but nevertheless may prove useful heuristically to untangle the complexity of our collective thoughts and actions in U.P. This approach may become U.P.'s way to structure its creativity in pursuing its varied roles and functions. This may become U.P.'s version of lateral thinking and what I will call "lateral action."

For example (Figure 3), I suppose that certain faculty members may concentrate for a little while on yellow T: teaching, training, mentoring, ...in ways logical, positive, developmental, nurturing.

By concentration we may mean at least 75% of the individual's workload or assignment. If that concentration be for 3 years, that is well and good. U.P. may well find a way to grant 3-year appointments or assignments to all faculty members on a staggered basis.

If 3 years be viewed as brief, then we can call it a stint.

(I do realize that the word stint when used as a verb – to use or give something in limited amounts; to be frugal or economical in providing something; to hold back – may often carry a negative connotation; yet I think the word is now used more often as a noun with neutral connotation – a person's fixed or allotted period of work; a period of time spent doing a particular job or activity.)

And if it be a stint as there as other stints, then we can let each stint be evaluated on its own highs and lows.

Still, all such stints may be eventually and normally compared through normalized scales, such as from 0 to 100%. (Figure 4)

5 Modes of Academic Staff Stints

Then it should be natural or normal to stitch stints together in one's own career with U.P. (Figure 5). That will look less than a track, and more of a trace. (The reader may please repeat: that will look less than a track, and more of a trace.)

What other stints may there be expected? It may be understood that in every stint, the concentrated roles and functions will take up at least 75% of the individual's workload or assignment in 3 years. The 75% may be reckoned for the 3-year period, or, more simply, 75% every year thereof, such as 18 units workload out of the annual 24.

I suppose also a so-called TRad or TRaditional stint, combining mostly teaching or training, and research or creative work (Figure 6). I may say that presently we have mini- or micro-TRad stints in the sense that many faculty members are granted Research Load Credits on a semestral basis, together with their teaching loads. On the other hand, in a full-pledged TRad stint, the assignment and commitment to combine teaching and research will be for 3 years each time. Wouldn't that be better for planning at the department level?

I suppose also a Research or Creative Work stint, a Green R stint in ways innovative, growth-oriented, idealistic (Figure 7). Again, I may say that presently we have a very small number of pseudo-R stints in the sense that a few faculty members are granted mostly Research Load Credits on a regular basis, together with little teaching loads.

On the other hand, real R stints need not be forever; the faculty members may switch to Teaching T stints for certain 3-year periods. Why would they do that? Perhaps to take a break from the studio or laboratory and breathe the young fresh air of the classrooms.

