

President's Update - September 10, 2015

Those of us lucky enough to live in the central Upper Peninsula know that we're experiencing a tremendous blackberry season. We also know that good berries mean good pie and good pie is meant to be shared.

This month I struggled with what to write about. Please indulge me as I share a story about pie. Or maybe it's about building relationships with the library's community and how a simple idea became the symbol of my leadership style. I'll leave it to you to decide.

First, two fundamental truths:

Truth #1. Pie is good. Lots of pie is better.

Truth #2. Engaging with the campus community is good. Engaging in a way that is interdisciplinary, fun and filled with pie is amazing.

A little over a year I attended a dedication for a new pavilion on campus. As I sat with colleagues from across campus that fateful day, we started to talk about the pie we were served for dessert. Eventually, after much poetic conversation about the joys of pie, we hit upon an idea — the campus needed a pie social!

When I got back to my office, I checked my calendar and sent invitations into the wild. No RSVP, no invitation needed, no rules — just a date, encouragement to bring a friend, and a request to bring a pie or pie-related item (whipped cream, for example). For some participants, this was an exercise in trust and uncertainty. We didn't know who would be there or whether there would be any pies at all until it happened.

We have now hosted three pie socials in less than 15 months. Different people (and different pies) showed up each time. At the December social, I counted people from at least eight

campus office buildings, representing all collective bargaining units and all types of administrators. My staff and I met new people, built relationships and ate pie. We also got to play a role in helping other areas of campus connect with each other. It's a beautiful thing.

Several months ago I experimented with a leadership audit. I asked the library staff and others who report to me to help me by identifying five of my leadership strengths, one area I need to work on and one piece of advice for me. Of all the supportive things they said, I am most pleased that two people listed "pie" as one of my leadership strengths.

I know that every library has a story of a simple idea that has great impact. At the MLA Annual Conference next month, please share your pie social story with me. What symbolizes your leadership?

You're also welcome to share your favorite pie recipe. I'm a huge fan of the Foolproof Pie Dough recipe from Cook's Illustrated. It's really that easy and that good. What do you like?

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