

Theodora Ko Thompson

2014 UO Senate Classified Staff Leadership Award: Acceptance Speech

October 8, 2014

Thank you, Dr. Kyr, members of the University Senate, and guests. I am honored, and humbled, to accept this award that embodies principles within our mission statement. It is a privilege to serve and find inspiration within the body of the University Senate - and in our shared governance, to be working on policies that matter to the campus community.

Thank you Carla, Jane, Diana, Nathan, Surendra, Johnny, Lois, Kurt, John, Jimmy, Richard, Mandy, Nicole, and Kathy - all who have inspired and worked with me, supported my endeavors, and made my efforts matter and meaningful. This award belongs too to all classified employees - past and present - who stepped forward to serve in leadership roles, in the Senate, on the Classified Staff Training and Development Advisory Committee (CSTDAC) and in committees. My thanks also to all who continue to support classified employees, and work to bring about a campus climate of respect, and inclusiveness.

When I joined the University of Oregon in 1994, I brought with me a unique set of knowledge, professional work and travel experiences. I am a *Nonya*, a Straits-born Chinese, proud of my *peranakan* heritage, a unique blended heritage rich in Chinese tradition with elements of the Malay culture of the immigrant Chinese who settled in the Straits Settlements of Malacca, Penang and Singapore. I was raised multi-lingual speaking English, Malay and my mother tongue, Hokkien - and I am relatively comfortable in speaking French, and know enough German and some Swedish to get around.

Coming from Singapore where education is highly valued, it was heartening when I joined the Office of Admissions in 1995, to receive the assurance from the Head of the department, and the support of my supervisor, that the University - being an educational institution - encouraged staff's personal and professional development.

“Of course, this is a higher education institution”

These were the inspiring words from the Department Head that made the difference when I expressed that I had a personal goal to pursue my education. These inspiring words made meaningful my worth as a valued employee. I was the non-traditional student returning to school twenty years out from a secondary education in Singapore - a new alien to the American workplace, and to the American educational environment.

I am here today largely because of the education I received at the University. I am a proud Duck with my undergraduate degree in Advertising from the School of Journalism and my masters in Educational Leadership on Policy, Management and Organization, from the College of Education. Every class impacted my consciousness. Reviewing the Supreme

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Court decisions on constitutional issues in J-school's "Info Hell" class, was the kindling that ignited my curiosity to understand the democratic processes of an informed citizenry. I was in Ad-Team representing J-school for the National College Student Advertising Competition. My essay, "*Paradox Between Worlds*," an autobiographical excerpt of the immigrant identity, was one of seven essays selected for publication in *Nomad*, a Collection of Undergraduate Essays in Courses in Comparative Literature. In March 2012, it made a difference to have the support of managers who understood the significance of my educational journey when I sought leave to participate in the 47th anniversary march of the Selma to Montgomery Civil Rights route in Alabama for the right to vote.

Mens Agitat Molem

"*Mind move matter*" or "*Minds move mountains.*" Who does our mission speak to, "*for lifelong learning that leads to productive careers and to the enduring joy of inquiry?*" It should speak of a campus climate and culture that speaks true for classified employees in our learning environment. Classified employees who desire to serve, take on leadership roles, aspire to learn, receive training, earn a degree - should not be denied these opportunities to be engaged in the learning environment at the University. For too many of us, access to training, taking classes and serving on committees remains elusive. For too many of us, the abusive and hostile workplace experience is real. For too many of us, the inflexible manager or workplace environment prompts the transfer to another department, or leaving the university.

Universities aspire to be recognized as global campuses. As uncomfortable as some of our conversations are - on race, ethnicity, religion, culture, gender or class - silence is not always a positive. Not when we have the capacity, ability and opportunity to learn; to root ourselves in the rich soil we have - here at the University - where **our** business is to educate, to inspire, and to nurture the "*enduring joy of inquiry.*" We are not perfect beings in our humanity, nor can we easily program ourselves to not err with our actions, or be saying words that are ugly, or hurtful that we'd later regret. But how do we learn to respect, understand and connect with each other?

In 1999, CSTDAC produced a comprehensive activities report that included the recommendation that UO courses from all disciplines be considered for classified employees release time. Imagine what kind of a rich campus we would have - today - highlighting a campus climate that nurtured lifelong learning for employees, if CSTDAC's

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recommendation had been adopted. And imagine what kind of a narrative of a campus workplace we'd have if "*See a Bully, Stop A Bully, Make A Difference*" did not stop at the doorsteps of Higher Ed? Imagine what kind of leadership and society it would be if each and every one of us committed to endeavor to step out of our comfort zone, to learn about another person's history, traditions and culture? And imagine what kind of a meaningful Global Campus University Day it would be, with activities across campus, to celebrate all that is rich in diversity amongst us in our campus community.

"Go, Go Yonder. Further. Farther" is my signature motto. It reminds me to be bold, to step beyond what I do not know, to continue to seek new knowledge. "*Further*" tells me to keep an open mind, to listen and learn, to understand deeper and further the knowledge, beyond that I already have or know. "*Farther*" is a distance – while at the outset it implies a physical distance – it speaks yet of another distance – that journey of learning, going the distance to understanding and appreciating that which is new beyond one's immediate world, one's comfort zone.

We can all be active participants in inclusive learning and leadership, and in scholarship – respecting and connecting with each other - sharing our learning experiences. We should challenge ourselves to learn what we do not yet know, from the diversity of rich knowledge we have amongst us in our learning environment, and be a respectful and inclusive community of learners. See ourselves transform to become the universally educated person in a knowledge society, and change agents.

Finally, a special note of thanks to my parents and family who are with me in spirit, and to Ron, my partner and spouse, for his love and support in all I do.

Kamsiah, Terima Kasih, Merci, Tack, Danke. Thank you - to all who work to make a difference, to be an agent of change.