FRANKLY SPEAKING

Do Something with Frankly Speaking

Kelsey Breseman
Editor-in-Chief

Frankly Speaking is important. It is extremely valuable to communication within the Olin community as a forum for people to bring issues to discussion. I'm worried, because as important as the paper is, Frankly Speaking doesn't seem sustainable.

Most of Olin's written communication takes place over email. Important issues are brought up and discussed on ThinkTank, Radical Notion, even Therapy and Sexuality. But there are two major problems with these email lists as public forums: they are self-selecting, and they are not fully developed as pieces of writing.

Frankly Speaking reaches a broad audience. It's not just students who read our paper, but faculty and staff, administrators, some of the general public, and even students from other colleges. I know they read it up in OSL, because they sent me corrections from last month's issue (see the Errata). And that's just the paper version. If you're looking for reach, the newspaper will get there.

Discussions such as the value of the scholarship, gender issues, and course requirements have all been discussed on mailing lists. And it's good that discussion happens there; information is shared and opinions are formed.

But list discussions are transient, and the outcomes of long and involved discussions, more often than not, recede to the backs of people's minds and list archives rather than being acted upon. Publication in the newspaper is the final step: if you reason out an argument, it's time to get the broader community in on the discussion. And that's what this newspaper is for.

The other benefit to a published medium is that you must think your argument out and figure out how to communicate the idea to other people. You have to think hard to write. And if you get it, as roughly as necessary, out of email or out of your head, send it to us. We'll help you think about how to phrase your thoughts so that you are writing good, clear English and expressing yourself.

I don't know why the newspaper is dying. Perhaps people are afraid that their thoughts aren't important enough to publish, or that their writing isn't good enough. But if you've spent enough time thinking about it to write it out, it's important. And if your writing is terrible, we'll help you fix it until it's worth publishing.

Maybe people think the newspaper is great, in theory, but somehow can't make the time to write five hundred words about something they really care about. I know that there are a lot more articles proposed than actually written every month. And maybe people it just falls by the wayside. It's not necessarily a conscious choice to prioritize Reddit over the future of Olin's curriculum or political discourse. But that's how it ends up, at the end of the month.

This scares me, the degree to which people let important issues slide just because they're busy now. And piled together, the non-participation is so great that I'm afraid Frankly Speaking will die.

Do you disagree- is a published newspaper a waste? Can we make it easier for people to get involved? Send me your thoughts, your comments and suggestions, to Kelsey.breseman@students.olin.edu. I'd love to hear from you.

Violent Response to Syrian Uprising

Kevin Simon
Guest Contributor

February 2011 shook the world with the popular uprising known as "the Arab Spring." The Arab Spring began with a Tunisian street vendor who lit himself on fire in protest of government corruption.

The Tunisian regime peacefully gave over power, but the spirit of revolution spread into Tahrir Square in Cairo, and then to the rest of the Arab world. Mubarak of Egypt was forced give over power because the military refused to break up protests. Bahrain's revolution failed because the government had a strong hold over the military and media. In Libya and Syria, some military members defected to the protestors' side in light of violent responses to protests.

The situation in Libya turned into a full-scale civil war, and Syria is in a state of "civil unrest."

Although Syria became a major topic in the Western news only recently, unrest began in March of 2011 when the government detained and allegedly tortured 14 schoolchildren in Deraa for writing revolutionary slogans on a wall. Protestors were shot by security forces.

Without any legal way to peacefully congregate, the opposition cleverly used the funerals of those killed to organize and continue their protests. At those funerals, the Syrian military fired on the crowds. Protests quickly spread across Syria in response to the military violence. What had begun with calls for democracy had turned into demands for President Bashar al-Assad to step down from power.

Continued violent crackdowns prompted the formation of the Free Syrian Army on July 29th 2011. The anti-regime militia's stronghold is in the city of Homs, and is composed of over 40,000 military defectors as of the beginning of 2012.

The fighting in Syria was happening with similar levels of violence as in Libya, at around the same time. However, the difference in the level of international attention was drastic. Libyan coverage was extensive while the Syrian conflict was downplayed.

Explanations for this disparity cover a wide range of possibilities. In Libya, more power is distributed among tribes and other ethnic divisions, which left Ghaddafi less control over information.

Syria, on the other hand, was supported by the Arab league, and lacked Libya's ethnic divisions. China and Russia also refuse to permit any UN-sanctions against Syria in light of the civil war which escalated in Libya after international intervention.

This discouraged international intervention and made media coverage less popular. President Assad's abuses grew until the Arab League revoked their support in November 2011..

More than 8,000 civilians have been killed, and reports of children being detained and tortured are beginning to leak out. On April 11th, 2011, Assad ended 40 years of 'emergency rule.' On February 26th a new constitution limiting his power and setting term limits was voted into place. On March 14th, Assad promised elections to occur on May 7th.

However, most Syrians do not believe that Assad will stand by the new constitution or his promises as long as he continues to command the military to kill Syrian civilians.

[Ed. note: citations can be provided upon request]

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Please note the following corrections for the March 2012 issue of Frankly Speaking:

The article "Take a Leave of Absence" includes the statement, "Your scholarship is valid for eight semesters in five years." It is correct that Olin's merit scholarships are valid for eight semesters, but there is no requirement to finish in five years.

The article "Olin's Endowment: A Guide" states that "Until 2006, this scholarship included room, board, and full tuition…" The scholarship did not include board during that period.

Popping the Olin Bubble: April Edition

3/1 Rush Limbaugh called Sandra Fluke, a third-year law student at Georgetown, "slut" on his radio show.

3/2 Maryland legalized same-sex marriage--the 8th state to do so.

3/3 The Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race began in Anchorage, Alaska.

3/4 Vladamir Putin re-elected as Prime Minister of Russia in disputed election.

3/5 A 19-year-old Tibetan student, Tsering Kyi, died from self-immolation in protest of China's treatment of Tibet--the 25th to do so.

3/6 Seven alleged hackers from the US, UK, and Ireland charged with computer-related crimes.

3/7 An avalanche in Afghanistan killed 42 during harshest winter in 15 years.

3/8 KONY 2012 video went viral.

3/9 China announced that they had a $31.5 billion trade deficit last month.

3/10 The state of California ruled one of the flavorings used in Coca-Cola and Pepsi a carcinogen. Both companies to change secret recipes to avoid displaying warning.

3/11 American solider stationed in Afghanistan killed 16 civilians, 9 of them children.

3/12 16-year-old Moroccan girl Amina Filali committed suicide after a harsh beating from her husband whom she was forced to marry after he raped her.

3/13 28 people, including 22 school children, from Belgium were killed in a bus crash in Switzerland. Another 24 children were injured.

3/14 The case of Trayvon Martin was placed in the hands of the state attorney. Trayvon Martin was an unarmed 17-year-old shot dead by a neighborhood watch captain in a gated community in Florida on Feb 26th.

3/15 Encyclopedia Brittanica announced that they will no longer be printing physical editions.

3/16 The Archbishop of Canterbury declared that he will step down at the end of this year.

3/17 Egypt's Coptic Pope Shenouda III died from cancer. Coptic Christians make up 10% of Egypt's population of 80 million.

3/18 Evidence came to light that Bin Laden was plotting to assassinate Obama. Note that he didn't ever want to assassinate Bush.

3/19 A gunman shot and killed a teacher and three children at a Jewish school in Toulouse, France.

3/20 A 7.6 magnitude earthquake hits 108 miles southeast of Acapulco, Mexico.

3/21 The lawyer representing Staff Sgt Robert Bales, the American soldier who allegedly killed 16 Afghani civilians on the 11th, claims that there is "no forensic evidence" against Bales.

3/22 The gunman responsible for the Toulouse killings killed by police sniper after a 32-hour siege. Also cat named Sugar survived 19-story fall in Boston with no injuries.

3/23 British government officials proposed minimum price per unit of alcohol in England and Wales to 'turn the tide' against binge drinking.

3/24 The African Union set up military force to hunt down Joseph Kony.

3/25 The Afghan families who lost relatives in the March 11 Kandahar massacre paid compensation by the US military.

3/26 The Supreme court ruled human genes cannot be patented.

3/27 A JetBlue plane diverted when veteral pilot became inhcoherent, panicking about potential terrorists.

3/28 Google's self-driving car takes blind man to Taco Bell.

3/29 MBTA proposes 23% increase in fares to solve budget issues.

3/30 DOW Jones rose 8%.

Jackie Rose
Guest Contributor

Team 2.0: The Sleeping Phoenix

Arjun Iyer
Guest Contributor

At Olin, we are encouraged to "do-learn". Through our courses, we demonstrate our understanding in a concrete manner, through grades, demo-days, papers, etc. Another area where we are encouraged to "do-learn" is teamwork. Teamwork is one of the most practical aspects of the Olin education; understanding teamwork is very important in the real world. However, Olin does not provide explicit feedback methods for teamwork.

The effectiveness of a team has an implicit impact on the grade the individuals receive on a project, but grades do not measure group understanding. As a result, most Oliners view teamwork from a highly individualistic perspective, leading to inequalities in individual effort and individual benefit from any particular project.

Teamwork at Olin is far from ideal, because we are not directly addressing and learning about being a part of an effective team. This is one issue which Team 2.0 is trying to address.

Oliners enjoy pursuing many interests simultaneously, and developing real results in those interests. As a result, we search for ways to do as much as we can, by surpassing our limitations (lack of time, energy, etc). However, in moments of self-doubt, one might ask: How much can I really accomplish? This thought arises because we know that we as individuals are limited; there is a limit to the amount of effort that any individual can spend, for biological, physical, and psychological reasons. Some of us deny this and push even harder, which often results in "burn out". Some of us accept this and settle in the few things we know we can accomplish, rationalizing our other desires into oblivion.

Team 2.0 is a pursuit of a third perspective. What if our goals were shared with others, and other people were spending their efforts on the same things we were? Could we overcome the limitations of the individual?

This is where teamwork comes into play. Over history this has occurred naturally during periods of great progress. One example is the Renaissance. In 14th century Italy, a community of expert artists poured out masterpieces more consistently, and over a shorter period of time, than at any other period of time in the history of western civilization.

Team 2.0 is an attempt to achieve such collaboration, a place where "the whole is greater than the sum of the parts".

In Spring 2011, the first iteration of Team 2.0 was attempted. A group attempted a novel engineering project, fueled by intrinsic motivation, but lacked the resources to complete the project. From this, a key insight was that resources are paramount in any group effort.

In Fall 2011, the second iteration of Team 2.0 was attempted. From our experiences earlier, we determined that it would be appropriate to start a club in order to have greater access to resources (primarily money).

The club would also have a "procedure" for producing insight relative to our goals: using group ideation, develop ideas for non-engineering projects, rapidly complete the projects, and iterate. The goal was to gain insight having completed many projects over a short period of time, and so begin to understand the necessary conditions for the existence of the "ideal team". This method was limited because it depended heavily on individuals' intrinsic motivation.

Ultimately, individuals gained insight proportional to their motivation. This resembles the typical degeneration of teams at Olin. This method had as many flaws as the natural progression.

Now is the time to discuss a new approach to Team 2.0, and reawaken our "phoenix". We will be meeting on Sunday, April 8th to discuss thoughts, ideas, and actions, in relation to this pursuit. Please join us. Hopefully we can combine our individual perspectives to make an idea which is greater than any of our thoughts alone, and move closer to an ideal experience, for ourselves and for the Olin community.

Choosing a Home Away from Home

Aaron Greenberg
Foreign Correspondent

I picked Asia as my study abroad destination because I was looking for a completely different perspective on what it means to live. I imagined that living in such a foreign country would culture shock me into this shift in perspective, but instead, it's come mostly from the other exchange students I've met.

I actually don't think I've experienced any significant culture shock. But I'm not disappointed; my experience has so far surpassed all my expectations. When I first decided to study abroad, the opportunity to meet other exchange students was an afterthought. Now that I'm here, I've found that it's these exchange students, not the new culture, that have changed my outlook.

I'm currently living and studying in Hong Kong. It's true that Hong Kong is a very "Westernized" city, which might account for the lack of culture shock, but I've traveled to Malaysia and Indonesia as well, and felt the same way. I can see the differences that distinguish my culture from these foreign ones, but they don't evoke any surprise or shift in perspective. It feels to me like I've already seen it all before, even though it's my first time visiting.

I think the reason that I'm not getting this new perspective from experiencing a different culture is that I'm not fully experiencing it.

Living in a dorm with students is great, but only allows a superficial appreciation of what life is really like in a foreign country. To really understand and get the experience firsthand, it's necessary to spend time at home with the locals.

A dorm room is a blank slate—you move in and temporarily change it to reflect yourself. However, if you're looking to experience someone else's home, the best way to get that experience is to spend time there.

An obvious way to do this is a homestay. Hong Kong PolyU didn't directly give me that option, and arranging for an alternative would have taken organization. Time time was short and I had other planning to do. By doing a homestay, you are forced to assimilate yourself, and will get an immersive experience of the lives and culture of the people whose country you are visiting.

Of course, there are downsides to homestays. If you aren't living in the student dorms, it's harder to meet other students, local or exchange. One of the greatest values of studying abroad for me has been the opportunity to meet students from all over the world, not just Hong Kong. It would require much more effort on my part to befriend the other exchange students if I was not living with them.

The best way to choose, I think, is to weigh the pros and cons that you determine, and make a decision based on what you're looking to get out of the experience. If you're looking to make friends and meet new people, living with other exchange students might be a good idea. If you're hoping more for a new experience of living, a homestay could prove a better choice.

Before coming to Hong Kong, I would have chosen a homestay, if the option were available. Now that I'm here, however, I'm glad I'm living with the other students in dormitory housing. It's true that I wanted to get a different perspective on life. I still got that. It's just that instead of getting it from living like the locals, I got it through meeting a group of new friends from all around the world.

I'll have opportunities later on to gain new experiences living abroad with locals, through CouchSurfing or volunteership, maybe. But I won't have many more opportunities to hang out at a university with the exchange students.

SCOPE: to Infinity and Beyond!

Harold Jaffe
Staff Writer

The SCOPE administration team has put out a call for applicants to a highly secretive new project for the 2012-2013 school year. Among those present for the announcement were Professor Stephen S. Holt and former Olin parent Dr. Daniel Barry.

Although the project's sponsor has not been officially disclosed, inside sources indicate involvement in administering exploration of and experimentation in the atmosphere and beyond on a national level.

Project parameters remain vague as well, though it has been hinted that significant travel will be required, both terrestrial and otherwise. Based on preliminary descriptions obtained from a well-connected source who wishes to remain anonymous, applicants should have a strong interest and preferably experience in physics, thermodynamics, aerodynamics, and working in zero-gravity environments. Being able to supply your own spacesuit a plus.

Relay for Life: Hope and Community

Jordyn Burger
Guest Contributor

Community is a sense of being a part of something larger than you, being surrounded by individuals with passion for change. I participate in Relay for Life for the sense of community that grows in such a short period of time. We become linked by our connections to cancer as we join to fight against it.

On March 10th, 45 Olin students participated in the Wellesley-MIT Relay for Life, and the strong sense of community was most definitely present.

As the luminaria ceremony began, we sat in the middle of an indoor running track surrounded by hundreds of other college students from Wellesley, MIT, and Simmons. Each of us held a single un-cracked glow stick.

An inspirational speech from a survivor of thyroid cancer, a senior at Wellesley College, left us thinking about the journey endured by so many with cancer.

The room went pitch black, and silence spread like wildfire. The event chairs, two students from MIT, gave careful instructions as on how to proceed.

"Please crack your glow stick when you hear the person you are honoring."

"If you are here honoring your mother or father, please crack your stick and step on to the track." They proceeded through the list.

"If you are here honoring your brother or sister, please crack your stick and step on to the track." As each statement was read, the only sound heard was a sea of cracks, sounds representing more than a glow.

These glow sticks brought everyone together, their sound echoing like a whip, hitting everyone with the emotions, the pain, the pieces of everything endured by this group of Relayers.

As we walked a lap in silence, I thought to myself, "This is what it's all about." We unite against a disease that divides many, and puts us on emotional, mental, and physical rollercoasters.

Some parts of the night are intense, such as the luminaria ceremony [described above] and the survivor lap which opens the event. These are the reasons we fight together: to show we are one against this disease.

At the end of the lap, everyone dropped their glow sticks into one large 'luminaria' bag. This symbolized our togetherness. The event may be just a few short hours, but the community lasts much longer.

We are united by our desire to change the way cancer affects lives. Together, we can create a world with less cancer and more birthdays.

UX means Love at First Run

Chris Gallello
Guest Contributor

My girlfriend, a Peace and Justice major at Wellesley, knows the basics of coding and piloting an aircraft, though her course of study does not teach the procedural skills for either.

Not only did she pick up coding and flying quickly, she was captivated by them. This was thanks to the great First Run Experiences of Codecademy.com and Microsoft Flight, which both serve the purpose of teaching regular people very technical skills.

Great First Run Experiences help users get started and engaged in software by following several fundamental principles:
1. Give users a clear path forward
2. Instill confidence
3. Delight the user
4. Less thinking, more doing
5. Teach users how to learn

Codecademy.com is a site where anybody can learn how to code. Their designers nailed the First Run Experience. It captivates the user for a short while, then shows them the path forward. To get users started quickly, the designer put a console right on the homepage that allows users to follow some easy instructions and immediately start coding. When the short 30-second lesson is over, the user is shown a new page with a breadcrumb navigation of lessons to complete. There is no ambiguity; the path forward is clear. The user can guess what is to come, and there is less hesitation to continue using the website.

Microsoft Flight is a free game that brings the experience of flying to everybody. Their First Run Experience is a great example of instilling confidence: it puts the user before a line of hot air balloons over Hawaii. Without any prior instruction, the flight instructor shows how weave left and right around the balloons with a controlled ascent, descent, and finally a sharp turn directly over Hilo International for your first landing.

Although the flight instructor walks you through everything, this first lesson stretches a new user beyond their comfort levels. In the subsequent lesson teaching how to land more precisely, the user already has confidence from the first lesson.

Keeping a user's interest isn't easy if they're not enjoying themselves. Microsoft Flight nails this with gorgeous visuals in the First Run—it's almost magical to watch your surroundings pass by. Throughout the lesson, the instructor encourages the user even when they do poorly, and successful runs are awarded with points and a badge.

The first lesson on Codecademy is easy; the console gives step-by-step instructions on what to type. There is very little thinking involved, which is good. The user is already preoccupied with how fascinating (or not fascinating) the act of talking to a computer is, so overload them? The user isn't challenged until later lessons, where they are presented with problems that require the collective learning of the previous tasks.

After the user's first lesson in Flight, they are finally brought to the main menu for the first time. Here, the instructor walks you through the different game modes and activities. Lessons teach the core concepts of flying (even aerobatics). Free Flight is great for experimenting with different maneuvers. Hunting for Aerocaches (like geocaches) throughout the islands of Hawaii is a great way to learn how to navigate.

The principles I described are by no means the final word on what a First Run Experience should look like, but they embody many of the considerations that are made. If you're interested, I suggest that you try out Highlight, Twitter, Chrome, or Zune as examples of products with excellent First Run Experiences.

Whether it's for UOCD or for your internship/job, always be sure to have a list of criteria with which to evaluate your software's First Run Experience. And feel free to take my list for a spin.

Have any thoughts on this? Let me know! chris@students.olin.edu

DOCTOR·LIU

Dear Dr. Liu,

I sometimes worry that as I learn more about engineering, I become clumsier and worse at writing. Am I doomed to be awkward and inarticulate if I continue to pursue engineering?

Safe in the Bubble

Dear Bubble Boy,

I hate to say it, but it's probably true that you're getting worse at writing; I'm sure almost everyone at Olin has experienced the same sort of thing.

As a bioengineer, I actually find myself writing a host of technical papers, so becoming a bioengineer (or taking a Bio-E class) would be one way to practice writing (yes, yes, come to the dark side…we have cookies >:D)

But for the 100% of people who aren't going to switch over to Bio-E, take heart: if your classes aren't providing you with the opportunity to increase your literary prowess, it probably isn't going to be that important for your actual profession. I bet companies like Microsoft and Google hire people based off of their coding or PM abilities, and not whether they happen to know the definitions of the words ablutomania, napellus, or galanty.

So basically: yeah, you're doomed, but it's OK. And hey, at least you still have some social skills, (right?) which is more than many engineers can brag about.

[Editor's plug: Write for the newspaper! We'll help!]

Dear Dr. Liu

I fear that my boyfriend may be cheating on me with another girl. I thought My Little Pony was special to us but now he's being my little pony friends with some other girl! I've asked him to stop multiple times but he says that bronies are forever. =(

What should I do?
Sincerely,
Troubled in Ponyville

Dear Troubled,

I don't think you have to worry about this. After all, if they're watching My Little Pony, this other girl is clearly actually a dude. But have you considered if you have ever been so far even as decided to use go want to look more like?

[Editor's note: um…. what?]

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