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The Importance of a Scholarly Debate



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The Importance of a Scholarly Debate

When was the last time you participated in a scholarly debate? I'm not referring to a bar room argument, but a real debate, where each opponent marshals together his or her sources and then fires away with salvos of what Helmreich said or Dismukes said or what some other giant in your field has said. The winner of the debate is the one who runs out of sources last. Although there is some tongue-in-cheek tomfoolery in my comments, I am quite serious about the idea of scholarly debate among aviation professionals.

During a recent University Aviation Association (UAA) publications committee meeting, we briefly discussed the need for scholarly debate. Dick Fanjoy, editor-in-chief of the *Collegiate Aviation Review*, said that the reason why he thinks aviation professionals and scholars do not debate is because we are all still new to the idea. Bill Kohlruss, editor-in-chief of the *Journal of Aviation/Aerospace Education and Research*, agreed and further stated that we needed to collaborate more, to encourage the scholarly [dialectic].

Both agree that the numbers of us who pursue scholarly research are still far fewer than those who do not engage in scholarly pursuits. The paucity of scholarly journals having

aerospace as their main theme suggests that we have not yet declared ourselves as a separate discipline. Perhaps we shall never be esteemed as a separate discipline, but one cannot rule out how each of the established disciplines is changed when aviation is intermingled.

As more and more instructors turn professor, and as more professors have need to publish, I believe scholarly debate is just around the corner. We can establish our own center of debate, a privilege that only defined and developed disciplines now enjoy.

Centers of Debate

So where is all the debate happening? Scholarly debate occurs most often in the established academic disciplines. Evidence of these debates can be seen in the literature, or sometimes on the front page of your local newspaper.

For example, before Einstein, there was Newton. The world was quite happy with physics as they were, until Einstein presented an alternative view. Since Einstein's theories of special and general relativity, there have been others who have chipped away at his findings through scholarly debate and continued research. The debate was

therefore both the result of and the beginning of research.

Voices from Within and Without

In the 1970s, during a time when the media focused on catastrophic airplane crashes that were the result of human error, the U.S. federal government looked to NASA and universities for answers to their questions. Since we had precious few pilot-turn-professors, those who spoke out on our behalf were psychologists, and more specifically, psychologists with a special knowledge of human factors.

Anyone who has taught or plans to teach Crew Resource Management will undoubtedly read articles by researchers from the NASA Ames Research Center, the San Jose State Foundation, or the University of Texas at Austin, because scholarly debate was already part of the fabric of their divisions and departments and it shaped and guided the methodology they used in their research.

Other disciplines have also influenced the debate. Scholars from Business schools and colleges have also shaped debates in economics, administration, and management. Scholars in law have helped us form our understanding of jurisprudence, as it applies to aviation. The list goes on.

Expanding the Usefulness of Journals

Pete Wolfe, Executive Director of the Professional Aviation Board of Certification, and I discussed how this journal could stimulate the debate. We agree on a method.

I encourage scholars to send me their manuscripts for peer review, but I also ask scholars who read our articles to open up a dialog, a debate, over the published research.

The rules for this debate are simple. First, read and contemplate the article. Second, jot down what you think is an important issue that is either not fully expressed or fails to appear but should appear in the literature, method, or discussion. Third, produce a scholarly paper that addresses this issue. Papers of this kind are generally brief in length and highly focused (5-7 pages).

These papers are scholarly, but not peer reviewed. Due to the sensitive nature of exposing oneself to public scrutiny, I will review the content, to filter out criticism that is aimed at the author(s) and not the content of the article. After this review, I will publish the paper as a Response or Comment. I stress here that I consider these papers scholarly and I hope they are of benefit to you as you accumulate publications.

If you would like to discuss this idea with me, contact me via e-mail at todd.hubbard@okstate.edu or by telephone at 405-744-8062.

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