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The Compass: A Shifting Paradigm

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"Change is the law of life and those who look only to the past or present are certain to miss the future." -John F. Kennedy

The Compass: A Shifting Paradigm

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Sometimes, I feel like a first timer at an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting, when I get up and say, "Hello. My name is Larry and I'm a technology Neanderthal!" I suppose the statement is only partially true because I do use a computer, but only for e-mailing, preparing PowerPoint presentations, and as a typewriter, to produce items like this editorial. I refuse to have a cell phone or a Kindle, I don't tweet, I'm not on Facebook, and when I receive something to read that is more than a page in length, I print it out. Recently, I was asked to be the chair of a faculty search committee. It was only after I accepted the position that I learned paper applications would not be available for evaluation; everything would have to be reviewed on-line. I suppose I could print everything, but it will be hundreds of pages. I'm frustrated at having to read the files on the computer.

When our Instructional Technology department upgrades to a new software program, I piss and moan for weeks; my wife would say years. Since I was first shown how to prepare a PowerPoint presentation, there have been at least three upgrades, and I am still upset about that first change. While I have adjusted to the modifications, I have backed off my use of PowerPoint. While technology changes to PowerPoint are a part of the reason for not doing so many 'techno' lectures, it largely comes down to the fact that, not so deep down, I am still just a chalk board lecturer at heart and I think students get overwhelmed by too much information, often exacerbated by PowerPoint presentations.

A year ago, I hesitantly applied for the position of Editor of *The Compass*. There were a number of reasons for my hesitancy, but near the top of the list was the rumor Sigma Gamma Epsilon was considering switching from a paper journal to an e-journal. Before I submitted my application, I talked with people at my school's press and gathered information about how to set up pages for paper publishing, and I felt I was ready to accept the task of editor, if offered, and pushed the thought of e-journals out of my mind. Well, the offer came, along with a directive to investigate switching to an e-journal, and my first thought was, "Crickey, I hate e-journals!"

The Swiss naturalist (botanist) Conrad Gessner was probably the first person to raise an alarm about information overload. Gessner felt people in the modern world would find the abundance of data “confusing and harmful”, which seems to echo my concerns about “always being digitally connected”. Like me, Gessner didn’t use a cell phone, wasn’t on Facebook, and never sent a tweet. In fact, he never used a computer, at all! His reasons weren’t because he was a luddite like me but, rather, that he died in 1565. So, I suppose it is time to follow the wisdom of the Jedi Master – Yoda.

Learn to let go you must, from things you fear to lose.

Notwithstanding my compulsion to read articles printed on paper, publication of *The Compass* as an e-journal has a great deal to offer and will solve a number of publication problems, which *The Compass* has faced in recent years. Not the least of these will be a much quicker manuscript turn-around time. My goal is to publish a reviewed manuscript in less than 12-months following initial receipt of an author’s manuscript. As an e-journal, *The Compass* can now include color images, large data sets, and even digital video clips – an exciting possibility. Steven Jobs, one of the pioneers of the personal computer revolution, once stated,

I think it's [computers] brought the world a lot closer together, and will continue to do that. There are downsides to everything; there are unintended consequences to everything. The most corrosive piece of technology that I've ever seen is called television - but then, again, television, at its best, is magnificent.

I recently received a copy of volume 1, numbers 1 and 2 of *Sigma Gamma Epsilon Compass*, dated May 15, 1920. These were the first official issues of *The Compass* and each were only 4-pages long! As you can see from the originals provided in this current issue of *The Compass*, both the title and the focus have changed. Originally, *The Compass* focused on mining, geology, and metallurgy. Today, *The Compass* is directed at serving the much broader field of Earth Sciences – Geology and its major sub-disciplines (mineralogy, petrology, paleontology, sedimentology, stratigraphy, and structural geology), Physical Geography, Geophysics, Soil Science, Oceanography and Hydrology, Glaciology, Environmental Science and Atmospheric Science and its major sub-disciplines (meteorology, climatology, atmospheric chemistry, and atmospheric physics). In part, these changes are due to the fact ‘geology’ has changed considerably in the past 100 years and today’s Earth scientists employ physics, chemistry, biology, and mathematics to understand the interrelationships between the Earth’s lithosphere, hydrosphere, cryosphere, atmosphere and biosphere, and Earth’s evolution. The first two issues of volume 1 only contained information about Sigma Gamma Epsilon and newly established chapters. For a journal such as *The Compass*, this historical information is important and I anticipate each issue will continue to contain chapter and conference information, as well as articles of historical significance. At heart, however, *The Compass* is a scientific journal and it will contain articles which add to our knowledge and data base under the umbrella of Earth

Science. I encourage the membership of Sigma Gamma Epsilon to submit articles in our new digital format.

Transforming *The Compass* from a paper journal to an e-journal represents a new milestone in the history of Sigma Gamma Epsilon. This transition can only be successful if the membership supports *The Compass* by submitting articles for publication. To that end, I would direct your attention to a new feature in *The Compass* – “On the Outcrop”. Beginning with this issue *The Compass* will highlight an outcrop of geological significance. See the Sigma Gamma Epsilon web site for more information.

<http://www.sigmagammaepsilon.com/ontheoutcrop.pdf>

I look forward to hearing from the readers and your suggestions on how to improve *The Compass* in its new format, and how to better serve the Society of Sigma Gamma Epsilon.