Storytelling and the Deanship
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Once upon a time, in a land far, far away, when I was in graduate school, my roommate, Lorayne, and I were watching a television program at the end of a long day of classes and library work. Midway, after a commercial break, the story line made a leap that didn't quite make sense. However, the two of us took the opportunity to apply our expertise in narratology to explicate how this lack of continuity worked with the plot line and then continued to watch. But, after the next commercial break, the storyline seemed to recapture the pieces we had identified as missing, although the plot line was still disjointed. So again, we developed quite a sophisticated theory about how the plot was working—something about "in medias res" and non-linear thinking—and returned to watching the program. Finally, after the third commercial break, the segment that had confused us, the first one we watched, began replaying. We started to laugh, realizing that there had been a disruption in the sequencing (instead of seeing 1 then 2 then 3 and so on, we had seen 1, then 3, then 2, then 3, then so on) and, in fact, the event we had missed actually was a mistake in the transmission. Our interpretation of the quirky storyline, which I am sure was erudite and post-modern in the extreme (for after all, we were high-powered graduate students well-trained in literary theory), was a fabrication made out of nothing and had no meaning related to the television storyline at all.

However, that does not mean that it lacked validity. I tell this story because Lorayne and I were only doing what human beings do all the time—making meaning—and in this particular instance, after we realized what had happened, we each had a heightened awareness that we had just engaged in this very human cognitive practice. We had several pieces of data that seemed unrelated and we arranged them in such a way that there was a coherent whole. This whole

ultimately was unrelated to the source, but it wasn't necessarily "untrue." The story line we created had coherence and integrity, based on the facts that had been presented to us. As a literary scholar, I value this experience. As a dean, I recognize that this is a key element of any success I have in my job.

As deans, we are all aware of how important it is to tell compelling stories about our colleges: we look at budget numbers in order to tell a story to our Provost or to our donors about college needs and college successes; we recount student anecdotes to demonstrate the efficacious power of our curriculum and of our talented faculty; we look at past events in our colleges to craft an historical continuum that imagines an even more persuasive and progressive future. As storytellers, we critically examine the data before us, select those pieces that will work in our vision, order them appropriately, and create the correct vehicle for delivery: white paper, email message, case statement, elevator speech, prezi, cocktail party give-and-take, etc. And we do this without thinking, for the most part. We learned this skill as scholars and teachers in our various fields, and adapted it for our administrative work.

In this talk, I will argue that storytelling, as it transpires in colleges of liberal arts and sciences, is at the heart of both what we do as deans and the enterprise of liberal education itself. In its intentionality, in its practice, and in its hoped-for outcome, liberal storytelling—to coin a phrase—is fundamental. It is imagination, invention, collaboration, and revolution. It is the most powerful weapon we have in our arsenal; in fact, it is our arsenal. We must replicate its power in our students in order for it to be effective, and in so doing, its power becomes even more wide-ranging.

My argument will move forward in five stages:

I. Definition of story

II. Purpose and power of story

III. Storytelling as a paradigm of a liberal education

IV. Organizational storytelling

V. The revolutionary character of story

I. Definition of Story

"Story" has three structural elements: a narrative, a storyteller, and an audience.

Narrative is a sequence of events ordered as a result of some kind of cognitive connection: "it is a cerebral action occurring universally in human cultures, and only in human cultures," as anthropologists tell us (Mark Turner in Pink,101). Storytelling can be described as both a science and an art, an apt duality given this audience. The *science* of storytelling emanates from our understanding of a multidisciplinary set of discussions around the evolution of the brain, in conjunction with anthropological theories regarding human adaptation to environmental exigencies: storytelling, from an anthropological point of view, is understood to be an innate human cognitive ability. The *art* of storytelling is the making of meaning, "cognitive play with pattern," as Brian Boyd, a scholar of narrative, tells us (p. 15), or "connecting the dots." As an art, meaning is only made when it is exchanged—that is, the storyteller works to inspire the listener and the listener embraces the story and takes it into the world.

In his *Poetics*—a work to which I will return shortly--Aristotle states that a story should have a beginning, middle, and an end. One way of mapping this is to use Freytag's pyramid, first constructed in the nineteenth century. In this diagram, we see that the initiating action changes the status quo. This change in the status quo is described as a rising action that ends in complication or a problem that needs to be solved. The story turns as the problem, which seems

to have been intractable, is solved; the falling action results in a new status quo. Many, many stories are about journeys or change—whether they focus on physical movement or moral or sometimes religious development. So, an essential part of story is that an existing conflict or tension is resolved. A storyline is neither static nor monochromatic. It is dynamic and vivid; there is dash and tumult. The end describes a world that has been transmuted in some way from its beginning.

The narrative line is a thread that connects the storyteller and the audience, each of whom has a human consciousness that plays with the narrative, and each of whom is changed by the end of the storytelling process. The storyteller either has the audience in front of her so she can act and react in real time, or imagines the audience as she develops a narrative line. In any case, the storyteller imagines audience receptivity as she shapes the pieces of the narrative. The audience too is an active agent who "makes" the story as it is told (as Lorayne and I did), bringing to the narrative its previous experiences, values, and intellectual understanding. To quote Brian Boyd again, this "feedback of action, attention, reaction, and the refinement of action to shape further attention and reaction provides an exclusively human basis for art" (7). This feedback loop is a dynamic continuum, actively creating and recreating meaning collaboratively, with teller and audience, as each responds to the other. This interactive energy is central to the role of storytelling, the reason for which becomes evident when we examine storytelling's purpose. I will take a bit of time to get at the purpose of storytelling because it is this purpose that marks storytelling as a unique element in liberal education.

II. Power and Purpose of Story

Ever since the Greeks—and possibly even earlier—humans have argued about the power and use of storytelling, or as it was termed for hundreds of years, "poetry" or "poesy." Plato, who lived in the fourth century BCE, very famously banished poets from his Republic. Classicists have been arguing for centuries about exactly how to understand what Plato thought about poetry, and I do not intend to join this discussion today, but I want to call attention specifically to two of his observations: first, poetry as imitation, is a fiction, not actually a depiction of the real; and second, it has great emotive power, and emotive power is a threat to reason, and therefore a threat to happiness and virtue. These two aspects of poetry—its fictionality and its appeal to the emotions—have engendered a myriad of disputes by great thinkers for centuries, and the debate continues.

Aristotle, a younger contemporary of Plato, also argues in the *Poetics* that poetry is an imitation of an action, but he thinks about "imitation" in a more positive, even optimistic, way: whereas Plato distrusts imitation because it is several stages removed from reality, and therefore suspect, Aristotle, examining the function and purpose that imitation plays in human behavior, values it because of its innately human attribute. He says,

> "[T]he process of imitation is natural to mankind from childhood on: Man is differentiated from other animals because he is the most imitative of them, and he learns his first lessons through imitation, and we observe that all men find pleasure in imitations. . . . Thus men find pleasure in viewing representations because it turns out that they learn and infer what each thing is" (7).

In other words, poetic imitation is a variation on natural human activity. The learning we experience in poetic imitation is that we see the universal in the individual, and thus we learn more about the world and especially about human nature. This is pleasurable. Whereas Plato distrusts the emotive power of storytelling, Aristotle values this power and recognizes in it, poetry's potential for cognitive growth.

Jumping nearly two thousand years later, relying on the Greeks, as well as various Roman writers, the English writer, Sir Philip Sidney expanded the thinking about storytelling—again, termed poetry—in his *Defence of Poetry*, written about 1580. Sidney relies on Aristotle, saying, "poesy . . . is an art of imitation . . . that is to say, a representation, a counterfeiting or figuring forth—with this end, to teach and delight" (25). Poets are like God, says Sidney, for through the creative process, they "make" things out of nothing. They are not subject to the rules of nature: "lifted up with the vigor of [their] own invention, [they] doth grow in effect another nature" (23). And what is the purpose of this creativity? He says, "[Poets] do merely make to imitate, and imitate both to delight and teach, and delight to move men to take that goodness in hand, which without delight they would fly as from a stranger, and teach to make them know that goodness whereunto they are moved." In other words, delighting leads to learning and learning is a powerful incentive to virtuous action—"taking goodness in hand." Thus Sidney recognizes that the human pleasure resulting from poesy is not poesy's ultimate objective, but a requisite catalyst to a larger purpose, virtuous action.

Sidney goes on to explain how the poet's work causes virtuous action most effectively by comparing the poet to the historian and the philosopher. (Spoiler alert [and apology]: philosophers and historians in the audience may feel insulted by Sidney's descriptions, but remember he is describing your disciplines as they looked to him 434 years ago):

> "The Philosopher therefore, and the historian, are they which would win the goal *[the goal of being the most noble]*, the one by PRECEPT, the other by EXAMPLE: but both, not having both, do both halt. For the Philosopher setting downe with thornie arguments, the bare rule, is . . . hard of utterance, and . . . mistie to be conceived. . . . For his knowledge standeth upon the abstract and the general. On the other side, the Historian wanting the precept, is so tied, not to what should be, but to what is, to the particular truth of things, that his example draweth no necessary consequence, and therefore a lesse fruitfull doctrine" (31-32).

In other words, the Philosopher works with the abstract and theoretical and the Historian is concerned only with the concrete. The poet is skilled in both areas, and thus, as Sidney says: "Now doth the peerlesse Poet performe both: . . . . He coupleth the general notion with the particular example" (32).

So to summarize, poetry—or fiction or storytelling—imitates nature (that is, it reflects the world we see around us) with the purpose of delighting us (giving us pleasure) and in so doing, we learn—and most important—we are impelled to virtuous or moral action, to living a purposeful life. We can appropriate Sidney's description of the power and purpose of poesy, I would argue, to describe the expansive power of liberal education. Let me explain.

III. Storytelling as a paradigm of a liberal education

Only a very few of us are "poets" as we today understand this term—although many of our faculty probably would not be surprised by the "god complex" that is suggested if we adopt Sidney's description of a poet. However, our intellectual work, whatever our discipline, can be understood as a kind of storytelling. The stories each of us tell emanate from our individual disciplinary knowledge areas, each of which has its own language and grammar, its own strategies, its own parameters and boundaries. Taking the broad view, we can map our disciplinary storytelling onto the Freitag model: we identify a disturbance in the status quo; we chart its movement, collecting information along the way; and we then, making a turn, hypothesize a solution. Whether we tell the story about how a text works, how the pieces of a social issue are given new clarity, how the stages of a molecular process unfold, how we arrive at an elegant mathematical solution; whether we craft a piece of art, compose a symphony, choreograph a dance or write a screenplay—by doing our scholarly work, each of us constructs

our own individual vision of the world—we create a new world. This dramatic arc teaches us about the world and is pleasurable—or, to use our own lexicon—it provides a convincing and credible response to a problem or question we have posed. Our storytelling, of course, does not stop with our invention: we tell our story, make this argument, and build a piece of art, to actively engage an audience. We perform for our professional colleagues and for our students—and with our professional colleagues and with our students--so that we can change the world with our story. Such a world is neither solipsistic nor of the ivory tower. We expect our audiences to be engaged with the narrative and respond. In a very real sense, we are always making the world, in tandem with our audiences. Again, quoting Sidney, "grow[ing] in effect another nature." This is liberal learning.

This dialogic aspect of our work is critical. Liberal education challenges students to put aside the paraphernalia of their world—rituals, dress, language, geography, history, values—and recreate a different universe, to look into another world and to empathize. A liberal education assumes an environment of interaction and collaboration, in which the human mind is expanded, again as Sidney says, "lifted up with the vigor of . . . invention." The human mind is able to go out of itself and imagine another reality—for example, an extraterrestrial civilization of the future, the internal world of a 9-month old baby, the dynamics of a community within a federal prison, or even the inner workings of a cell, the network of a beehive, or the brain of my golden retriever, Otis. Liberal education is at work when individuals escape their own unique reality to conceive of a world not their own. In this kind of learning, as a direct result of this leap of imagination, those engaged in the enterprise are each inspired to levels of creative and purposeful action. Storytelling, then, as both praxis and outcome, is the essence of liberal learning.

IV. Organizational storytelling

One way of understanding this definition of story and its importance to liberal learning is to compare it with "organizational storytelling," another kind of storytelling that has become a lucrative management strategy in the business world. One need only to go to the web to find blogs, articles, and even TED talks, by Stephen Denning, Yiannis Gabriel, Peter Guber, Daniel Pink, Paul Smith and others, all of which attest to the power of stories as a leadership tool. Further, these experts found their theories on just the writers I have just referenced: for example, Alexander Mackenzie, Programme Director of Storytelling at the Praxis Centre at Cranfield School of Management in the UK, identifies three goals of storytelling: "Inform, engage, and inspire." He could just as easily have used Sidney's language, "Teach, delight, and move." However, while these purposes are similar, the interrelationship of storyteller, audience, and narrative in organizational storytelling works in a qualitatively different way in a business setting, than the liberal storytelling experience I have just described. Organizational storytelling is "transactional"; its purpose is to reach a precise and measurable endpoint. Liberal storytelling is its opposite. While there are close parallels, the difference is unmistakable. Let me summarize the basic philosophy around this business strategy.

First, as I have said, the similarities between the two are obvious. Organizational stories are narratives, designed to connect to the audience, and designed to persuade the audience of an idea or to motivate the audience to action. The connection that is made, say its practitioners, should be emotive, not analytical: "Analysis might excite the mind, but it hardly offers a route to the heart," says Steve Denning, recalling both Plato's and Aristotle's cognizance of poetry's emotive power and Sidney's argument about the philosopher's shortcomings. (Denny, "Leader's

Guide, 1). Data cannot be understood unless it is put into a context which addresses our emotions. The textbook accounts about organizational storytelling make it very clear that the action that should result from effective storytelling is action that leads to change. Storytelling, or narrative, helps to make sense of a dynamic world, where change is endemic. It helps to cope with the unknown, to be able to weather the unpredictable. To quote Denny again, "Storytelling is part of the creative struggle to generate a new future, as opposed to conventional management approaches that search for virtual certainties anchored in the illusive security of yesterday" (Denning, Forbes 06/08/11).

Storytelling is a leader's tool to persuade employees to embark in a different direction, or to clients to embrace a new product or process. And in this case, the storyteller, i.e. the business leader, understands his employees or her clients as other human beings, not simply as cogs in a machine, not simply as utilitarian objects. The term for this kind of leadership is interactive (Denning's term), and is considered a somewhat radical kind of administrative practice, for it abandons top-down management, for general collaboration. (Raise your hand if you think it odd that understanding that people are human beings is a radical point of view).

Thus, on the face of it, organizational storytelling seems to be liberal learning under a different name. On the one hand, this is quite satisfying, as "imitation" is the sincerest form of flattery. On the other hand, given the persistent and unambiguous attacks on what we do, I can't help but feel that our territory is being poached: liberal education is no longer needed or relevant, if it is being sucked out of one college, dressed up in new clothes, and offered in another as a pioneering new pedagogy. It is important, therefore, to see the endgame: while organizational storytelling certainly adapts the framework of liberal education, it only is an approximation, for its ultimate purpose is focused on a unidirectional outcome—the success of a

business—rather than on a broader and more complicated understanding of the self and world. While the managerial leadership may be described as interactive, there is only one conclusion to the story—to move the audience to a particular kind of action that results in a profitable conclusion: to buy the product, to follow the leader, to work harder, etc. Certainly, counter-narratives can emerge in the process of organizational storytelling, but these counter-narratives still are focused on the explicit end of corporate success.

In the liberal arts and sciences model, alternatively, instructor and student, or colleague and colleague, work together to discover the narrative—whether it is an historical interpretation, a math theorem, a philosophical construct, a set design, or a scientific theory—and the narrative can be questioned, expanded, revised, or rejected. It is not a stopping point. Further, the narrative is not really the point—the student is the point. We want our students to develop an awareness, a habit of mind, rather than rote technique, because rote technique can only lead to a foreordained conclusion. Students must develop the capacity to embrace heterogeneity, not to fear it. They must synthesize divergent points of view and construct a narrative that is truthful to this set of information. Storytelling is an exercise in empowerment, for in making meaning, one actually creates the world. Again, liberal storytelling is both praxis and outcome.

V. The revolutionary character of story

At the beginning of this talk, I said that storytelling was imagination, collaboration, invention, and revolution. I now come to the last of these, revolution, the most indispensable of these aspects, and this is the precise point at which we, as deans of liberal arts and sciences colleges, enter the picture. Making a new world with a different value system is revolutionary and subversive. In his *The Satanic Verses*—a courageous book that caused the author, Salman Rushdie, to fear for his life, he says, with language recalling that of Sir Philip Sidney, "A poet's

work is to name the unnameable, to point at frauds, to take sides, start arguments, shape the world, and stop it going to sleep." This may be a language to define our work as deans as well.

While each of us has a local context in which we work, we also are players in the long-running drama of liberal education in the US, which from its very beginnings in the eighteenth century as a democratizing tool, was identified as a disruptive force. Michael Roth's book, *Beyond the University: Why Liberal Education Matters*, published earlier this year, reminds us that, throughout American history, "calls for practicality have really been calls for conformity—for conventional thinking" (18), and he also reminds us that "the American tradition of humanistic education"—(and I would read here, "liberal education")—"has been integral to our success as a nation" (3). What is revelatory about his discussion is how liberal learning has remained a consistent force in education throughout more than 200 years of history, in spite of its own messy path and in spite of the American impulse for utilitarianism, most probably because of its capacity for flexibility and adaptation. In his vision, for example, Thomas Jefferson restricts access to liberal learning only to free white males; Frederick Douglass demonstrates the hypocrisy of this ideal and expands access to all peoples; Ralph Waldo Emerson deliberately conjoins liberal learning and democracy; and 20th-century pragmatists embrace and extend this tenet, "link[ing] inquiry, innovation, and self-discovery" (10). Church-affiliated schools, land-grant universities, normal schools, HBCU's, community colleges and more—in all of these, liberal education played and plays a significant role. In these days of hearing about how technology is a disruptive force in the model of higher education, this history reminds us that, in fact, liberal learning itself has often been viewed as destabilizing and disruptive.

As deans of colleges of liberal arts and sciences, we oversee revolutions daily, for the intellectual activity that is the work of students and faculty is to challenge the status quo in order

to remake it. But even more revolutionary and disturbing than our narratives that challenge convention is our goal of student transformation. We want our students to understand that, to be in the world, it is necessary to embrace many stories, even contradictory stories, and not simply one story. Sometimes they must leave the past behind to make the future, and sometimes they must realize the past should be resurrected. A persistent attack on higher education is that university faculty indoctrinate susceptible students to accept their political beliefs. None of us would say that this never happens. However, this accusation more often reflects something even more subversive and disturbing: that students come to our classrooms and realize that the story in which they are the hero is not the only story that can be told. They come to realize that there are many stories, that the world is complicated and cannot be explained categorically. If many stories can be told, then the one story that a student might hear from a parent, an employer, or a pastor may be challenged. The status quo is not necessarily the story that the student will continue to embrace.

It is easy to see that this revolutionary trait of liberal learning is one reason it threatens certain individuals in our society. So if colleges of liberal arts and sciences are the foci of revolution, let's ask ourselves what it means that we are the leaders of these institutions that are fomenting revolution. (Perhaps this is the time to recall that CCAS was born in protest, when, in 1965, fifty deans walked out of the meeting of the National Association of State Universities and Land Grant Colleges to include Engineering and Agriculture deans, but not Arts and Sciences deans, in its Office of Education programs for legislative advocacy.) Whatever knowledge area we bring to the deanship, we bring the art of storytelling. We can employ this art as deans, not to quell this revolution and reject our detractors' arguments, but to own the revolution--to raise its visibility, to continue to foment and shift the paradigm. It is our job to embrace the existential

difference between schools of liberal arts and sciences and professional schools, rather than erase it.

So let us recall our roots and let us be bold. Let us be revolutionary. If business schools can coopt storytelling to better realize their mission, let us re-appropriate this signature function of our schools, storytelling, and claim it as our own.

Too often liberal learning has been criticized because it is not immediately useful, because we do not train our students for their first job, because schools of liberal arts and sciences are not vocational institutions. Our common response to this charge is often an admission that this is indeed the case and that the lack of vocationalism is our strength. The problem with this response is that it substantiates the narrative of our detractors and gives it validity. I suggest we overturn this argument and dispute our lack of vocationalism. A more cogent response is to redefine this term for our own purposes: colleges of liberal arts and sciences are indeed vocational institutions; and in fact, unlike professional schools, we prepare our students to be successful in all the roles they play—parent and child, friend and neighbor, employer and employee, citizen and leader.

The vocation we embrace is the vocation of storytelling.

While I am imagining what my campus's lobbyist would say to this assertion—and it is not a pretty picture—this statement is not nearly as whimsical as it might sound. As I have demonstrated, we model storytelling for our students in each of our knowledge areas—from the natural sciences and mathematics, to the social and behavioral sciences, to the humanities and arts. While we often talk about critical thinking and problem solving as the marks of a liberal arts education, our colleagues in professional schools rightly say that these skills are taught in their colleges as well. But the liberal definition of storytelling, as both praxis and outcome, is

solely the purview of our colleges, while the more limited functional aspect of storytelling lives in these other schools. In a different way, we challenge our students to find a story in the content areas of our disciplines, to engage with us and with others, and to continue to test the story as new information appears. And the outcome we are looking for is the student as storyteller. The better students get at storytelling, the more able they will be to grow as human beings, to become engaged citizens, and to be productive members of their community.

The word, "vocation," comes from the Latin word, *vocare*, "to call." The meaning of the word has an interesting dualism, given the topic of this talk. On the one hand, it can simply mean a specific occupation or profession which one follows. However, it also has a religious or non-utilitarian connotation, as it can mean a function or station in life to which one is called by a deity or by some higher sense of purpose. The first definition is transactional; the second, because it infers that the vocation has a meaning beyond the doing of it, more fittingly corresponds to what I have been alluding to as "liberal."

If storytelling is the vocational aspect of our colleges, then we not only embrace it as our advocacy of the liberal arts and sciences, but also in the practice of our own positions as deans. In his 1992 book, *How Academic Leadership Works*, a book that focuses on the college presidency (although much of it is transferable to our work as deans), Robert Birnbaum offers a view of academic administration that advances storytelling as the leader's most vital talent. He describes two different kinds of leadership, "instrumental" leadership and "interpretive" leadership, both of which are necessary. Effective academic leaders provide instrumental leadership through "their technical competence, experience, and judgment," he says. They have had careers that prepare them to collaborate with faculty, work with budgets, manage planning, and interact with the community, so that they can make good decisions and take the institution

forward. This kind of leadership—which recalls the transactional nature of organizational storytelling—is critical to the success of the academic leader and the health of the institution.

Interpretive leadership, on the other hand, is the "management of meaning." It differs markedly from instrumental leadership and is suggestive of what I have been calling liberal storytelling. Birnbaum describes it as "moral," as "clarifying and explaining the connection between leader behavior, institutional beliefs, and transcendent values." If instrumental leadership is reactive, addressing matters that demand immediate attention, interpretive leadership in action is proactive and future-oriented: it is, says Birnbaum, the "highlighting [of] some aspects of the institution and environment while muting others, by relating new ideas to existing values and symbols, and by articulating a vision of the college in idealized form that captures what others believe but have been unable to express" (154). In other words, using Sidney's language, the leader, "lifted up with the vigor of his own invention, doth grow in effect another nature." The leader examines a large data set, discerns that a select group of items can be connected in a heretofore innovative and meaningful way, and constructs a new narrative about the institution that his audience can embrace. Recall Brian Boyd's insight, which I quoted earlier, that the "feedback of action, attention, reaction, and the refinement of action to shape further attention and reaction provides an exclusively human basis for art." As the academic leader makes an imaginative leap and invents the future, his story propels his institution forward and sets the stage for further transformation of individuals and of the institution.

At the beginning of this talk, I argued that the definition of "story" includes the storyteller, the audience, and the narrative. I indicated that the narrative begins with a description of the status quo, described as a rising action that ends in complication or a problem that needs to be solved. The story turns as the problem, which seems to have been unsolvable, is unraveled;

the falling action results in a new status quo. I also indicated that the dialogic aspect of story is critical, as both storyteller and audience make and remake the narrative as it continues.

For the last 30 minutes or so, I have been telling a story. You are the audience for my story of "Storytelling and the Deanship." After defining my major term of "story," I described how story is the heart of our work because teaching and research in the liberal arts and sciences requires imagination, invention, and collaboration; I then identified the complication, that liberal storytelling is being redefined and its power discounted or overlooked; and finally, I offered the solution of remembering the revolutionary character of the liberal arts and sciences, and embracing it by redefining our jobs as vocation, both in our advocacy and in our leadership.

As I wrote this story, I imagined your reaction and response, and made certain adjustments:

- First of all, remembering that each of you come to your role as dean as a successful scholar, who has the highest expectations in research processes protocols, I checked the accuracy and sources of my quotations;
- Second, understanding that "poesy" might be a word that is atypical in the normal discussions of administrative work, I reconsidered my use of it in this talk, but ultimately decided to take the risk: you are certainly an educated audience and, I believed, would take the word in your stride;
- And the most important adjustment of all, although I was quite concerned that my argument be methodical and thorough and spent pages and pages unpacking my arguments, I nevertheless, in the end, trimmed the paper down from over 30 pages to 15 (well, 18).

However, even with my imaginative envisioning of audience reaction and my counter responses, the story remained incomplete until I delivered it today. Each of you are remaking this narrative even as I speak, given your local situations, your individual intellectual histories and expertise, and frankly, whether or not you got enough sleep last night and how well this lunch is sitting. And I am remaking it, as well, as in this presentation, I, of course, have a more immediate and heightened awareness about how some of my arguments either work or do not work, about how a few of my word choices need to be sharpened, and whether or not I have brought enough evidence to bear in arguing that storytelling is our vocation. I may even, in the end, put back those fifteen pages I cut.

At the end, of course, I am hopeful that my story is a successful model of liberal storytelling, in that it impels my audience, in a more intentional way, to virtuous action, or in its secular redefinition—to the subversive action of liberal leadership. I frankly cannot think of a more worthwhile and consequential job—rather, a more worthwhile and consequential vocation—than to accept Salman Rushdie's assessment that a poet's work, that my work, is to shape the world and stop it from going to sleep.

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