

## Passion Talk Discussion Session

Wendy Quay Honeycutt

Graduate Faculty Ministry US IVCF Seminar at Mundelein  
Thursday morning 9:00-10:00 am March 17, 2016

**Wendy:** Just before we start the Q&A, one more idea that came up in our world cafe yesterday. I was sitting in on a table, apparently there is something called 'three minute thesis', which is an Aussie thing.

It has kind of gone viral, where PhD. people will just have 3 minutes to talk about their thesis. Somebody had this great idea, I thought, what about doing a 5 minute thing? Where you do your three minute thesis, but you add the faith component, integration piece to it. I thought that was clever.

**Question from the floor:** *Do you have any kind of follow-up? Mentorships, are they coming out of this? Are students connecting with some of these faculty?*

**Wendy:** Because this has been a student initiative, it is only really in this last conference that faculty have started to come. And interestingly, like I said the first faculty to give one, Diane Lee, she is actually a Stanford graduate and she is up at Sacramento State. So not so much mentoring has come out from the student- faculty side. However, relationally it has been really interesting. Students have discovered each other. So we had one Stanford student who does environmental science, environmental engineering, connected with a Berkeley student. They discovered through passion talks that they essentially work in the same areas of research. So they wanted to connect and I am assuming that they have kind of gone on to kind of cross pollinate ideas a little bit more. So we are seeing a fair bit of that kind of thing happening.

I guess the other type of mentorship is (to be seen in peer interaction). I thought it was really interesting how this year they are so excited about the talks that they are doing things like prepping together. It has also opened up the way for me to offer more training. They weren't so amenable to before. When I was at Oxford, we were involved in *Developing a Christian Mind Conference*, and a lot of the theological lectures are on Vimeo video. And I have actually been able to have a *Developing a Christian Mind Saturday* and 18 students came. That would not have happened pre passion talks.

**Question:** *It sounds like it is mostly PhD. students in your context, how will this work with law, business, medicine people speaking in this context? It sounds like it didn't work as well, was not a good mix, with the Google people who came.*

**Wendy:** So the question is about the disciplines and different programs and who is giving a passion talk. It just so happens that the Bay Area chapters that come to the conference are mostly PhD's and engineering / math masters. So that has been the majority of the speakers. But interestingly this last year we had a law student and she is actually the president of the law fellowship, but she comes to IV-Grad. She gave a passion talk. We haven't had any med's . We would love to have a bigger mix. I think the format, passion talks is just an idea of work and faith, right. So really anybody can do them and it can cross industries. The Google people liked the idea, they just didn't want to be in the same conference as the academics. So Cheryl is off now in the workforce, so she can do Google passion talks. So it is just more who wants to listen to whom.

**Question:** *How about in terms of the PhD's, does it break down into the humanities, social sciences, sciences?*

**Wendy:** It follows the chapter. So it is representative of the chapters. We are mostly STEM, but we have a classics gal and a political science girl and they both gave talks.

**Question:** *For speaker prep have you just mostly turned to the students themselves, or are there resources within the university?*

**Wendy:** They asked me in the second year, Berkeley actually asked in the second year for some ways to help them prep. The first question for them is: 'What's my topic?' and 'What do I even have to say?' And so I just made up a list of about eight questions. Essentially reflection questions on what do you do, where do you see God in your work? You know those types of questions. I kind of just made them up on the spot, but the students really liked them. The rest has been more organic and student led. My ideal, what I would love to see happen is to be able to do something like *Developing a Christian Mind* weekend, where they get like lots of theology input, but all the while they are thinking: 'How could I write a passion talk?' And then actually the last day, or spend the last half-day, where they are expected to write a short, maybe five minute passion talk and present it as a part of the program. That would be my ideal. But they don't want to do that yet.

**Terry:** Could I just add on to that. We had a Mid-West colloquium at Northwestern with a number of universities from the Midwest. We didn't exactly do passion talks, but we asked people from disciplinary areas to go off for twenty minutes and then to come back with a presentation as to what their field, what are big issues in their field and what Christian issues they sort of link in with them. And we were astounded at the quality of presentations that these people could produce with online access in twenty minutes preparation. They came back with

slide presentations, PowerPoint, video, and so on. So great things are possible in a very short time with very smart people.

**Floor comment:** *Business schools often give courses, brief courses, on how to make a good presentation.*

**Wendy:** They all know how to give a presentation because they have to. They are doing them in lab groups kind of from the start. So actually the quality of the speakers has not been bad.

**Question:** *I was wondering what the contents of the conference looks like, as regards to schedule, who plans it?*

**Wendy:** The students plan it. When you get your... You know how they are going to circulate all the readings for the world cafe? I did a little piece for our world cafe and there is a web-address on there. I think it is PT15.org or something. If you look on there you will see the program for the last conference. If you go into the schedule and click on the titles of the topics that have links to them, there is an audio of the talk itself. We have some videos from PT14, the conference at Berkeley as well. So if you go to that first website you can link to website for PT14. That will give you an idea of the programming. They had a debate about do we go discipline stream or not, because part of the fun of them is being able to listen to the different talks about the different fields.

**Terry:** Could I just ask you to expand on the half dozen or so questions that you were giving people as a prompt as to what topic to come up with?

**Wendy:** I thought about that, but I cannot remember them. They are on my computer so I can email them to somebody. I can work that out.

**Floor comment:** We started doing this Veritas Riff locally, a small riff within the triangle are in North Carolina. We have a lot of faculty and so part of the element of that was training in giving good and clear talks. So this is just for faculty, but they get some training on how to present their material to a non-disciplinary audience. They found that really helpful even if they give a lot of talks. I am excited about this because we have done at Duke something we called CRUX, where it is a small intensive thing where you have 10 people gather. Somebody sends a paper out with a question about faith in connect with a particular issue within that paper. We gather for breakfast, there is a note-taker, and then the person who sent the paper gets to run a conversation, getting ideas of integration of faith within this particular area. So there is a density to it. But I think a passion talk, we are looking for outlets, or next steps...passion talks would get people into those type of deeper conversations about real particular things. So that is really exciting. I think you could spin out a number of smaller conversations like that, that take an idea and really develop it more deeply.

**Wendy:** Yea, I really like that. So Veritas Riff resources. I don't know if we can get to them? Are they accessible?

Comment 1: *They are accessible relationally. I think especially where you have a density of faculty like where you are.*

Comment 2: *We have actually partnered with Veritas in our faculty conference to do training. So they will share. (Boston Faculty Fellowship)*

**Wendy:** I think for faculty, maybe it is nice to start them privately. Because ours started from the student end it is a little harder to get a faculty member then to give their first talk in front of a whole bunch of students.

**Question:** *My question is about invitations to this thing. Do students invite their advisors or their lab-mates, their cohort and is there a general invite that goes out to the graduate school of arts and sciences or whatever? How does that work?*

**Wendy:** That has also been a bit of a debate amongst the various committee members, because you find that you find that people tend to divided into sort of the more outward / inclusive and then the more 'careful' groups of people. The evangelists among our students will invariably invite their friends. So Tammy, the one who does cell-phone signaling, she always comes with four or five people. We are always saying to the people: 'look, this is the easiest thing to invite your non-Christian friends too. It is just a shoo-in right. Even if they just come for your talk' I would love to see more of that happen. We haven't thought of spamming the department lists and that kind of thing yet. We are not entirely sure how they would be received, so we are still feeling our way on that front. To me it is just this gift of an outreach opportunity. So it is just a matter of encouraging our students to take them up.

**Question:** *Talk about advertising. You talked about a person from MIT who came to the first passion talks. He was somehow the first person to submit an abstract. How did he hear about it? How do you guys advertise?*

**Wendy:** I don't know how he found out about it. But we ... how did we do this? We had websites. How they find the websites, I don't know, but we have had inquiries from a distance. Last summer we had a speaker from Ohio, I don't know how he found out about it. But we have our websites and people are finding them, we are getting hits. We are obviously spamming our fellowship lists and they are always bigger that who turns up, right? And then this last summer we had really nice posters and flyers put up. We haven't worked terribly hard to advertise them, but people are finding them. Actually there was another speaker last year from Berkeley, who must be on the fellowship list, but nobody knew who he was. He gave this great talk. He is a pastor who is doing PhD. on the philosophy of science. He did a fantastic passion

talk on the philosophy of science. None of us had ever met him before. So I don't know how people are find it.

**Question:** *I am going to back up a little bit. Are there any helpful steps or tools that you have used in prepping the students before, let's say if you would like to engage in doing a passion talk? What are some of the things that have been helpful to get the students to wrap their minds even around and thinking about these issues of the integration and faith?*

**Wendy:** You know one thing that surprised me was they just did them. So, they didn't ask me for help. They just all started signing up and doing the abstracts. That could be a Stanford thing.

**Floor:** *I hear you, especially about that girl who initiated it. But if you were to tell somebody to share with another group. What would you do?*

**Wendy:** I have a few students who have come to me. I did come up with that list of reflection questions. What I did with a few of them, those who were interested, would be like get together for an hour and give them some reflection time then have people share with each other what their ideas are and then people could bounce back off of each other. Essentially what I have shared with you is what we have done in prep. Like I said, I would like to do more, but they haven't asked for it and they haven't necessarily been open to it. I would actually be really curious to hear as different fellowships are doing them, what kind of prep and training is happening. I did have the advantage of sitting down with our economist student, the one who does math and apologetics, because he actually said: 'Can you help me with my talk?' That was great because then I was able to have a one on one with him, go through what he had done, work through the different transitions in his arguments, and that kind of stuff. He gave a superb talk. But very few of them actually ask for it. They are kind of independent.

**Floor comment:** *Our group has just started. So we like to share what we are doing our research. So when they are sitting together they are going to take 10 or 15 minutes sharing individually within their fellowship.*

**Wendy:** I think it is good to do that. That is probably the best prep. Have someone share. Bob Trube is doing this in his fellowship as I understand it. You have someone share for 15 minutes: 'What is my research?' and then if you wanted to extend it to an integration kind of thing then 'What are some of the issues / faith issues that I see coming up in it?' If you want to branch it out into discussion, there is no reason that you could not say to the group: 'Hey, what do you guys thing?' 'What are some of the theological issues that are arising here?' And have a conversation. I think that what Bob does is that one person shares about their research, maybe some of the faith aspects and then they pray for that person. They kind of like take turns each week. I think that that would be perfect actually.

**Question:** *How has this been received by the departments, the faculty in departments?*

**Wendy:** We haven't really told them in a blanket way, other than like our students are in their departments, they are giving passion talks, to the extent that they are telling their friends. People know to the extent that we put up flyers. We haven't kind of gone out or our way.

**Floor:** *So you are not really on their radar?*

**Wendy:** Not really yet, not yet. I think I would like to be just where we are at Stanford. Probably the place we would need to begin is with the office of religious life and we have a new dean so we are still just getting to know each other and thinking those issues through.

**Floor comment:** *What we are doing is bringing in high level academics and then pairing them up with non-Christians in academics, with folks in one department. So a philosopher will come in. We just had Dorothy Boorse from Gordon College. They talked about climate change, faith - hope - love and climate change. What that has done for us, is opened up relationships with that department and we have been able in the prep we talk about their spiritual journey and all that kind of stuff. And for our students, this has given them access to high level Christian thinkers and dissertation topics come out of it sometimes. It is an 8th model. It has been pretty exciting.*

**Wendy:** That would be awesome. I think if you had that relational capital, especially if faculty can reach out to faculty, that would just be superb. I don't have quite the connections to tap into that type of thing yet, but it would be awesome.

**Terry:** A thought that is so striking in this discussion and Wendy's presentation is the bottom up character of this. This is not staff driven. This is not alumni driven. This is not outsider driven. This is hearing the desires of students and letting them go, with a bit of guidance along the way. I find that tremendously exciting Wendy, because after all these are immensely talented people. And many of them are leaders in one way or another, in their churches in their departments and so on. So giving them their head is kind of emancipating in a way isn't it? It seems as if your posture has been a posture of 'look I am here to help if you want it, but if you don't need it, go for it.

**Wendy:** Or if they don't ask, they don't always want it, but yea it is very much their idea and doing it their way. I wouldn't have dreamt it up on my own. I think they understand the demands of their fields, they understand the academic scene, they understand academic conferences. So I think a lot, even their processes are just what they go through when they go to a conference. I would like to open it up to passion posters. Do poster sessions. Accept certain abstracts and then have a poster session. But posters are harder to do than a talk, because you have to do them ahead.

**Question:** *Do you charge? Like you provide food at these events. How is that funded?*

**Wendy:** The first two were by donation and the last one we charged. I think it was like twenty bucks a head to cover the food and the venue. We sold tickets on Eventbrite on that. And that was really great by the way if you go the conference route and you use Eventbrite, because then you have your attendance list and all their email addresses. So you have your contacts. You can use it and it is even free. Actually, Stanford made us use it.

**Floor comment:** *InterVarsity may have restrictions on that, so check with them first.*

**Question:** *Have you had any instances of an advisor coming to hear someone speak? An advisor who was not a Christian, but came anyway, which opened up a dialog within that kind of relationship.*

**Wendy:** Not yet to my knowledge, but I think there is certainly potential for that. I don't see why it could not happen.

**Wendy -closing prayer:** Lord Jesus, we thank you for the students who dream, we thank you for the dreams and what's on their hearts, the ears to hear them and then give us wisdom in how to nudge them forward. I just lift up every campus represented in this room. Our heart's desire is to see our students and faculty grow up into you in every aspect of their lives. And so give us wisdom and Holy Spirit move on our campuses. In Jesus name, Amen.

**Author:** Wendy Quay Honeycutt

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