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MISSION *Matters*

UNIVERSITY of
INDIANAPOLIS

This semester we are exploring segments of the UIndy mission statement.

"Using Our Intellects in the Discovery & Synthesis of Knowledge"

by Michael G. Cartwright

Vice President for University Mission and Associate Professor of Philosophy & Religion

One of the things that I have noticed over the years is that most university statements of mission and purpose include at least one clause that has a different register than all the others. In this case, the University of Indianapolis faculty concluded the mission statement with a line that extends the discussion in the direction of the spiral of learning.

"The University equips its students . . . to use the intellect in the process of discovery and the synthesis of knowledge."

There is always something more to be discovered. And sooner or later whatever new information we learn must be integrated or at least "placed" in relation to all that we already think we know. This process of synthesizing rarely takes place all at once. Indeed, it can require decades to register the implications of a new discovery in various fields of inquiry. And there are also times when what we come to know brings about change in the critical paradigms we use to organize knowledge.

George William Draper was an Anglo-American scientist who is not as well known today as he was in the 19th century. Draper was responsible for several advances in the study of physiology, including arguing against spurious concepts in the field of biological systems. He once wrote: *"to explore the path to truth implies many wanderings, many inquiries, many mistakes."* As tempting as it is to want to think that the path of human discovery is linear, over and over again we demonstrate our capacity for fallibility.

Synthesizing discoveries is not always straightforward. We human beings are capable of holding on to truth claims long after they have ceased to be useful. Until the early years of the 19th century, geographical maps of North America still included references to what was believed to be "the Northwest Passage," a supposed body of water that would connect the Pacific Northwest to the Great Lakes region.

As early as 1792, some explorers concluded that this long anticipated transportation route did not exist, but for many Americans the report on the Lewis and Clark expedition (1806) constituted the final "proof" of the nonexistence of such a waterway. Meanwhile, more

than two centuries of history had elapsed since Sir Walter Raleigh's initial 1585 "map" of North America.

This is the last "Mission Matters" reflection for this academic year. I hope faculty and staff colleagues have found this set of seven commentaries on all segments of the UIndy mission statement to be helpful. Next fall, I will begin a new series, which will focus on the ways that different figures associated with UIndy's institutional culture have displayed excellence.

If you have suggestions of persons whom you think are paragons of the UIndy mission, please feel free to send suggestions to me at mcartwright@uindy.edu or contact me by phone.

In the meantime, thanks for taking the time to reflect with me.

Remember: UIndy's mission matters!