

## University Faculty Council Chair's Reflection February 2022

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### Intersections

What is an intersection? Without resorting to a more scientific approach of a dictionary search, but using the intuitive, common-knowledge description: it is a place where two or more paths, pathways or roads cross or overlap.

No matter if you are walking, running, biking or driving along a road, the intersection signals a potential meeting with someone else, a change, a surprise, a new set of rules. Irrespective if we like it or not, we have to jump out of the inertia of navigating without stopping, at a (likely) limited speed and to approach the new entity, the change, the intersection with care. We have to honor a new set of rules, laws or regulations, in a changing environment – be fully aware of the space, do a full stop or yield, use the right to pass, respect new speed rules, etc.

For some, this may be a nuisance, an annoyance, feeling slowed down. How many times have we found ourselves snapping (almost reflexively) into the inertial back-track: if we could only go back to the straight, non-winding road from before? For example, can we go back to the 'good old days' of the times before COVID? Well, my boss keeps reminding me and my Division colleagues: the only good thing about the 'good old days' is that we were younger, everything else is likely better now, even though we may not currently appreciate it this way.

For some, the intersection is the 'fork in the road', the uncertainty of starting a new journey. And for some, an intersection may represent a risk, a danger, a higher propensity for collision, crash or damage (and this represents the risk side of the concept).

Indeed, risk, in traditional terms, is viewed as 'negative'. Webster dictionary, for instance, defines risk as 'exposing to danger or hazard'.

But for some, intersection is an opportunity.

And because the Chinese New Year of the Tiger has just started, or because the winter Olympics 2022 were launched earlier this month in Beijing, I am going to use a few Eastern concepts and considerations.

For example, the Chinese symbol for risk, shown here, gives a wonderful graphic representation of the concept:

危機



The first symbol encodes 'danger', while the second part is the character for 'opportunity', making risk a mix of danger and opportunity. Well, any stock trader will tell you that volatility is their friend! We have all heard the dictum that says: a crisis may be an opportunity, and that we only need to be prepared for it.

We know how valuable are the collaborative efforts in multidisciplinary teams, we have all witnessed how uniqueness (in fact the building block of diversity) has often inputs from different fields, expertise coming from distinct areas, using new or re-purposed tools, methods and innovative approaches.

The reality is that intersections could make us more adaptable, more receptive, more likely to learn, force us to pause and reconsider, to re-evaluate, hopefully to innovate, to interact with other people whom we meet at the crossroads, and ultimately to create together new value. At a macro level: becoming a learning organization, a flexible institution, a highly reliable organization, acting with agility and, last but not least, a place where arts and sciences intersect and create new, explosive value.

The description of the Chinese Year of the Tiger brings together attributes of bravery, confidence and strong will. New, explosive value through research and innovation in a diverse environment, bravery, confidence and strong will - did anybody say Emory?

Thank you.