



## Faculty Lunches with the Dean (No. 4)

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I recently blogged about what Whitney Afonso and Chuck Szypszak shared about their work during the most recent session of Faculty Lunches with the Dean. I had just returned from the State Fair, and so it is entirely possible that my memory of that session was clouded by the mix of sugar and fried dough that was coursing through my veins. Meredith Smith and Dale Roenigk were the other faculty members who shared something about their work—this post summarizes the information they shared. When I decided to host these lunch conversations, I was optimistic about the value of sharing information and learning about one another. The conversations have been rich and rewarding, and I hope that the faculty members who have been involved would agree.





Dale Roenigk

Dale Roenigk. Dale leads the School's 20-year-old benchmarking project, which collects and analyzes data about a range of municipal services and displays it so that the units can compare their performance with their peers. The project is paid for completely by fees collected from the participating cities and towns. Dale talked about how the units have tended to use the data more passively as a way to hold themselves accountable for past performance. I know from anecdotes over the years that some jurisdictions have used the comparison data to save money by changing how they provide certain services. If City X collects garbage at a much lower per-unit cost than City Y, and if their circumstances otherwise are similar, City Y may modify its garbage collection process to more closely match City X. Dale offers sessions on best practices for the cities in the benchmarking project, and yet it has been difficult to get them to move from performance measurement to performance management.

Dale is focused on helping local governments—not just those participating in the benchmarking project—use a number of techniques to improve government processes. Performance management in the past hasn't focused much on the skills needed to make improvements. Dale has added process improvement tools to a course for public officials on Practical Analytics that he has taken over from David Ammons. The quality improvement field has been used in private manufacturing for almost 90 years, ranging from Total Quality Management (TQM) to its current iteration as Lean Six Sigma. My understanding is that the Lean Six Sigma process is complicated and time-consuming, which makes it a daunting proposition for most local governments. Most often they do nothing.

Dale is developing a new course for public officials on process improvement analytic techniques, and he also will be incorporating them into his MPA class on decision making. Dale is encouraged that Fayetteville and New Hanover County have invested in this kind of analysis, and it has been used by other public agencies over the years. His plan is to develop a model that makes it easier for officials to work on process improvement projects—he even is considering a third course that would bring them to the School to work on real projects using the skills learned in the earlier courses. Dale's work on this seems like a really useful next step in helping local governments improve their services.



Meredith Smith

Meredith Smith. Meredith talked about several interesting projects involving the common theme of adult guardianship. She works with clerks of court, who preside as judges in incompetency and guardianship proceedings.

Meredith is part of a “Rethinking Guardianship” work group created by grant funding from the North Carolina Council on Developmental Disabilities. She also has been participating in ten listening sessions about adult protective services and guardianship that are being held by the Division of Aging and Adult Services. It was interesting to learn from Meredith that guardianship has been growing among younger adults for reasons related to substance abuse, mental health, and disabilities. There also is a national trend of looking at less restrictive forms of guardianship, which includes supported decision making.

Meredith is partnering with Mark Botts on a third guardianship project that is supported with money from the last round of Innovation Fund grants. They are conducting meetings in each of the seven regions served by North Carolina’s mental health local management entity/managed care organizations (LME/MCO). Each meeting brings together the LME/MCO staff, clerks of court, and providers to meet one another and enhance working relationships. The impetus for this project was a problem with something called multi-disciplinary evaluations (MDEs). Clerks of court need MDEs in order to make informed decisions about guardianship, and Meredith learned through a Judicial College course for clerks that the LME/MCO in many areas was not conducting them as required by law. Clerks of court are not mental health professionals and the lack of an MDE makes it difficult for them to make a decision about whether a person needs a guardian.



Before each regional meeting, Meredith circulates a legal bulletin that summarizes the law so that the conversation can focus on the current practice in a region and possible improvements. The good news is that overall the meetings have been well received across the state, and positive things have been coming out of them. The Division of Mental Health, the agency that contracts with and supervises the LME/MCOs, is now including language in their contracts that requires them to provide clerks with MDEs. After each meeting, Meredith also circulates report that summarizes areas of agreement among the participants and identifies opportunities to build on the work going forward. This is an important project that cuts across our traditional buckets of teaching, advising, and writing. One clerk of court told Meredith that public officials look to the School for this the kind of work—convening different government actors to improve their relationships and processes for the benefit of the public. It also raises the challenge of promoting public values in some cases when government services are being provided (or not) by a private contractor. Kudos to Meredith and Mark for doing this important work.