

Faculty Forum

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Faculty Forum

From the Faculty Center for Teaching Excellence

WESTERN CAROLINA UNIVERSITY

CULLOWHEE, NORTH CAROLINA

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Who is Valued in Our Teaching/Learning Community?

Whew! The rush is over! Operation Jumpstart (A Computer for Every Freshman) nearly wore the soles off our shoes. As part of the staff and faculty and administrative team that prepared for this fall's freshmen, I spent most of my time since January working with faculty and other staff on the Computer Implementation Jumpstart Manuals and helping to plan and then carry out the Computer Implementation Workshops for faculty, trainers, and students. Only the perspective of time will tell us how well we did and how amazing our feat might have been. But my participation in these activities has also brought a side effect that I had not expected. By the end of the first week of classes, I was feeling a new and euphoric sense that we, the staff, are very important and valued contributors to the teaching and learning community at WCU.

I am part of that amorphous group called "staff." We hold various roles at WCU, most of which run twelve months a year, forty hours a week. We are office support personnel who take care of daily office functions; we are the people who keep the computers operating; we research and prepare reports for General Administration; we keep the buildings clean and safe; we seek financial assistance for students; we see that housing and counseling needs are met; we help faculty; and we make sure that operations run as smoothly as possible. We are the people who like to think that we help faculty and students create an environment where excellence in teaching and learning is the norm.

But sometimes we wonder how faculty view our contributions. Some of us are not sure where we fit in to this educational community. Where do secretaries and Physical Plant workers fit? What about people working in the Faculty Center, in Student Services, in Hunter Library, or Continuing Education, to name only a few more? Faculty and administrators are clearly defined and clearly valued groups. But what about staff? To some extent, I think, staff members suffer from an identity crisis in this and probably every other university in America, perhaps because the term, "staff," covers so many people in so many diverse roles that it is difficult to think of staff members as a cohesive unit. In mulling over these thoughts, I came up with the following questions:

- Collegiality:** do faculty and administrators consider staff members to be colleagues?
- Governance:** as we investigate questions of faculty governance, do these governance procedures explicitly (or even implicitly) include staff as well as faculty?
- Emeritus Status:** we have Faculty and Chancellor Emeritus status. Is there a Staff Emeritus status? If not, should we have one?
- Communication Devices:** the Faculty Forum is a faculty publication. But how many staff members receive this publication? Are there in-house publications by, for, and about staff? Is it worth the trouble and expense to create a new publication, adding it to the huge list we already have?
- Advancement:** are there career paths for staff that lead to administrative jobs at WCU?

- The Reward System:** is it significant that some staff members are still required to use the "time card" method? What extrinsic incentives are there for staff to demonstrate that they are going beyond the basic "work plan"? Do staff members get recognition for publications and/or presentations at conferences?

But this summer's blitzkrieg to get ready for our new computer program was so exhilarating that some of these concerns now seem to have diminished in importance. Working alongside other staff members, faculty, administrators, and students, I came this summer to feel like a genuine colleague. Working in other buildings, with other departments, and with other people, I had such a strong sense that we were pulling a huge load together, and when we finally arrived successfully, every one of us felt part of a valued and respected team working side-by-side for an important common goal.

But some questions remain. How long will this euphoric feeling last? Furthermore, when I consider staff members in general, am I a special case because I just happen to work so closely with this extraordinary computer challenge? Do other staff members feel as I have in the past--that they might not be viewed as valued participants in the university's educational process? If this is so, what can be done to make staff members feel a stronger sense of cohesiveness and a more secure sense of pride in their contributions to the academic community? At WCU, I would like to see a more concerted effort to make staff more clearly defined, more visible, and more fully appreciated as contributors to the teaching and learning environment.

We in the Faculty Center have worked with faculty more closely than ever before, feeling a common cause that is easy to view. I am confident that our work from this summer has been appreciated by many and that what we did this summer has had and will continue to have a positive impact on our students. But what can we do to spread this feeling around even farther and make it last? For starters, I would propose:

- that a staff publication be created to give the group a clearer sense of identity
- that staff be actively recruited and encouraged to join the U-Club in greater numbers
- that the faculty governance document spell out explicitly the equity of staff and faculty in the governance process and make clear avenues for staff input in the governance process
- that a study be made of the channels by which members of the academic community enter the administrative ranks to ensure that staff members have appropriate access
- that starting with this publication, we make a more concerted effort to see staff as partners in the teaching and learning venture that defines WCU

It has been close to 20 years since I first stepped off the WCU campus as an undergraduate student. Since then, I have spent over 18 years working full-time as a staff member in the North Carolina community college system and at WCU. I see daily the positive effects that we, as staff, have on the educational process, and so far, 1998 has been a wonderful year. But what can we do to spread this feeling around even farther and make it last? For starters, perhaps everyone who reads this essay should consider sharing it with a staff member who might not be on the Faculty Forum mailing list, encouraging that person to e-mail Weedman to be included in next month's mailing. Let's find ways to highlight the contributions that staff members make to our academic community.

Beth Leftwich, Media Specialist--Coulter Faculty Center

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Faculty Center for Excellence in Teaching & Learning

Responses to "Who is Valued in Our Teaching/Learning Community?," by Beth Leftwich, 9/1/98

I agree with many of the points Beth makes and congratulate her on her willingness to pose such challenging questions. I also agree with many of her suggestions, though separate faculty and staff newsletters may in fact exacerbate the differences that already exist. Perhaps a combined newsletter would do much more to increase collaboration and respect and help to create the shared sense of community Beth discusses. I also pose a question for reflection: why is it that so many staff members address faculty as "Dr. so and so" when faculty typically address staff by their first names?

Rob Routhieaux, Management

I want to thank Beth Leftwich for writing such a thoughtful piece in the current issue of Faculty Forum. Her comments are poignant, philosophical, and practical. I have wondered at every school I've been just who is and isn't "staff," and I'm uncomfortable with the hierarchy among administrators, faculty, staff, and students (and it always goes in that order, doesn't it?). I have meant before now to publicly thank Beth and many other staff members of the university who gave the English department so much support (ideas, insight, energy, encouragement, expertise, lots of hours of work) during Operation Jumpstart. Last spring now seems like a long time ago as we met at the Riverhouse to plan aspects of what has become an exhausting but satisfying cooperative venture.

Marsha Holmes, English

Beth's opinion piece was excellent and thoughtful, raising good questions about how we operate (and sometimes don't) as a community. I agree with Beth that the significant and countless contributions of staff rarely get the recognition they merit.

The faculty-staff division has a long history in academia, for universities started with only faculty. Today at WCU, staff outnumber faculty more than 2 to 1. Clearly, if a governance system were founded on "one employee = one vote," staff would have the louder voice on this and most campuses across the country. And going a step further, students are by far the largest group and administrators the smallest; where do these voices fit into university governance?

I think we have an opportunity here at Western to do something RADICAL. We could design a model of governance that includes all these groups, celebrates all their contributions, and listens to all their voices. Would it challenge the hierarchical, top-down hold on power we have at WCU (and at most institutions of higher ed)? Yes. Would it mean that a few people's control of resources and power in decision making would decrease? Yes. Would it mean the "flattening" of the faculty? TQM restructuring? A Marxist redistribution of wealth and power? An end to life as we know it? No. Absolutely not.

The WCU Task Force on University Governance has been working diligently to "develop a university governing system that effectively engages students, faculty, staff and administrators in shared institutional decision making" (see <http://www.wcu.edu/UnivGov/>). The Task Force has been soliciting input, stimulating discussions, and studying models in the hope of creating a process that will "engender informed deliberation" on a playing field where "talent and expertise are more important than status and position." Sounds good? Yes, absolutely. Would WCU employees' levels of satisfaction, productivity, and sense of community increase? Would faculty feel more engaged and energized by their work with colleagues and

Responses to "Who is Valued in Our Teaching/Learning Community?," by Beth Leftwich, continued

students? Would students be empowered to become more active participants in the learning process? Would enrollment go up? "You betcha" to all four. Can it be done? I think so."

It will require effort, imagination, and courage. Effort to take "inclusion" and "pluralism" off the politically correct lingo list and put them into practice where we live and work. Imagination to see something rarely seen. Courage to go beyond the familiar status quo and speak out and, with any luck, courage to have our voices heard.

Chris Gunn, Counseling & Psychological Services

Needless to say, without "staff," "we" as the WCU community would not be able to perform our varied tasks. I for one greatly appreciate all that is done, even though those thanks are not noted on a daily basis. THANK YOU!

Jerry McKinney, Criminal Justice

Thank you, Beth, for mentioning some of the problems associated with being a staff member at WCU. I, too, find that faculty and students are mentioned in speeches while often staff are overlooked. I agree that this is probably at least partially due to our diverse positions and "behind-the-scene" jobs. However, the more we can let others know what we do, the more likely we will be recognized. I am excited about staff having a voice in governance. This should help make our needs/wishes more visible.

June Wytock, Counseling & Psychological Services

Ms. Leftwich raised the question of whether "Staff Emeritus status" exists, or should exist, as does emeritus status for chancellors and faculty. I'm not certain what the record now intact might show, but I assisted former WCU President Alex S. Pow in the late 1960s or early 1970s in writing statements with respect to three categories of recognition for retiring individuals, and Ms. Leftwich identified all three: Chancellor, Faculty, and Staff. The designation of a "President Emeritus" status was already in place, and Madison (in 1938), Bird (in 1957), and Reid (in 1968) had held the title. I am not certain what, if any criteria then existed, since in at least the case of President Emeritus the Board of Trustees took the action to confer the title. However, the Board of Trustees in May 1970 approved the faculty emeritus recommendation. I have not been able to find the official documentation, but to the best of my memory, Staff Emeritus status was also created at that time and was designated by the phrase "Retired Associate," a distinction to be conferred by the President (Chancellor) him or herself. And on August 20, 1971, President Pow conferred the "title of Retired Associate" on James E. Kirkpatrick, who had just retired as Business Manager (the position that later became a vice chancellorship). As some may know, Harriet Parker currently holds the title as well. During President Pow's abbreviated tenure and for some time thereafter some staff persons meeting the criteria were awarded the "Retired Associate" designation.

Doug Reed, retired Director of Public Information

I'm very proud to be one of the "team" that Beth speaks of in her Forum piece. In fact, what got this special academic year off the ground was a gargantuan effort on the part of a very exceptional group of talented and dedicated people. Those who climbed on the "computer implementation" train early on saw that there was no room for questioning anyone's status or rank--the thing was too darned big and moving too fast, and anyone able to contribute and

Responses to "Who is Valued in Our Teaching/Learning Community?," by Beth Leftwich, continued

willing to work hard was welcome aboard. As a result, one of the biggest joys of the past six months has been watching people who have not previously enjoyed status in the traditional academic hierarchy emerge as stars and leaders simply because of their know-how, their dedication, and their instinct for picking a winner. And, to all of those who stood back and looked askance at the mixing and mingling of the ranks and mumbled about the scope, inappropriateness, or impossibility of the computer implementation task--the joke was on you after all. Because, in spite of the long, working weekends, the late nights, the head-shaking of significant others (children, spouses, pets, whoever), and more fatigue than we knew what to do with, the very best part about the whole thing is that it was also the most fun that we've had in our professional lives in a long, long time. Nobody, anywhere, will ever get to do it "for the first time" again--golly I'm glad I was along for the ride!

Nory Prochaska, Math & Computer Science

If staff wishes to have equal social footing with the faculty, they should probably consider the example of the military (the last bastion of rank?), which has recently instituted equal social footing from Privates through Generals while on the base or post. Since the population of the services has dropped severely, it is no longer cost efficient to run more than one service club per location, and my son, the Army Major, tells me that the US government is now discontinuing all Officer's Clubs, which have been a mainstay of the services in anyone's memory, and are now supporting only one service club. All servicemen regardless of rank will now use a single service club on the post or base. Is this a trend? Is it going to work?

Carolyn Rauch, Communication and Theatre Arts

Expeditionary Learning

I stood at the rock base, re-checking the knot in my rope, re-tying my shoes--hesitating because I didn't want to climb quite yet. "Climbing?" I whispered. "Climb on," my partner shouted back. I reached nervously for the handhold in front of me on the granite rock. I squinted my eyes and shook my head in disbelief. "How do you do this?" I pleadingly asked my instructor as my voice quivered. "Up is always good. There's not always a right way. You just have to do the climb on your own." His well-tanned hand motioned me toward the rock face. I looked back as if to question, "Are you sure?" He nodded, and his gentle smile told me "Yes."

While this event remains a part of my memory from five years ago on an Outward Bound trip in Joshua Tree, California, it is a memory that I frequent often, especially now that I'm teaching. You see, although my English 101 classes might seem far from that wilderness experience, I've found that the idea of wilderness learning, or adventure education, if you will, is not far from the college setting. In fact, I believe that just as the outdoors adventure incorporates risk-taking, challenge, and community living as an integral element to learning, colleges naturally encourage similar experiences: we, too, ask our students to take risks, face challenges, and to work through the issues of community living.

While we may recognize that college life can be somewhat adventurous, what would be the outcome of harnessing that adventurous spirit and using it as a learning and teaching tool? What if we made our learning "expeditionary"? Here are three key principles taken from a national program called Expeditionary Learning Outward Bound that, while often applied in a wilderness setting, can be transferred to the college classroom as well:

- **The Primacy of Self-Discovery**--When we take off to the wilderness, we seek an adventure; we seek to get away from the normalcy of everyday life and to come back with memories that lead us to self-discovery. Wilderness memories are easy to access because they are memories from a world in which our learning really meant something. Many expeditionary groups harness this highly charged atmosphere as a way of helping participants learn powerful lessons about their lives. Perhaps climbing to the top of a rock can teach one about working through the fear of failure. Or maybe enduring a rigorous backpacking trip through the Tetons helps one learn about the capacity for endurance in other areas of life. In essence, the unique quality of an expedition helps the participants discover characteristics about themselves they wouldn't have discovered otherwise.

The college experience in its own way is also an experience out of the ordinary in a place with many new sights and sounds. While writing an English 101 essay might not seem to

us as monumental as scaling a 100 foot wall, it often can seem so to our students, and the outcome can often be similar. We can assist our students by creating memories not only of survival but of success in the face of fear. Our teaching can incorporate both cognitive and affective learning. And we must not only give challenging assignments to our students but also be willing to work with them, side-by-side, as a guide, encouraging them to find their own way up. Expeditionary learning requires that while students are learning about subject matter, they are also learning about themselves. Lessons, assignments, and the classroom environment, just like the wilderness setting, must be able to facilitate an attitude in students that helps them discover they "have more in them than they think."

•**The Having of Wonderful Ideas**--Often, adventure education calls for the members of an expedition to enter into a contract with each other that outlines the standards and norms that are elemental to living in the expedition community. Such a contract, as based on the ELOB Project Adventure Full Value Contract, creates an understanding between members that all voices will be heard, that all opinions will be respected, and that all participants are expected to contribute to the richness of the experience. In the classroom, such an agreement may take the form of a written contract that outlines the expectations and behaviors students have toward the instructor, their peers, the classroom environment, and the course materials. The contract is dynamic, changeable at any point, and to be revisited often to evaluate its effectiveness. Essentially, because the contract calls for students to "be here, be safe, be honest, and set goals," the agreement plays a crucial role in establishing expeditionary-like behavior in the classroom. In this kind of classroom we provide an atmosphere that stirs free inquiry and provides the safety necessary to take risks in the sharing and discovery of ideas through the process of failing and succeeding.

The atmosphere that permits each student to have wonderful ideas is not created spontaneously; it must be intentional and planned. We must take time to create the boundaries and expectations of our learning community before we delve into our subject matter. If our teaching does not consider the codes necessary for students interacting with one another, with the instructor, and even with the material, then our attempts to get the students interested in the subject matter might be in vain.

•**The Responsibility of Learning**--In the wilderness, each participant's responsibility is taken seriously because it is necessary for the survival of all. We must learn to purify water before drinking it and how to use topographical maps and a compass before attempting to find our way through the desert. Thus, learning becomes meaningful. If it does not seem crucial to learn the correct MLA form, who Sigmund Freud is, the economics of third-world countries, or how to read someone his Miranda rights, how can we expect students to take our courses seriously? In order to make learning expeditionary, the learning that students are asked to do must seem meaningful. Students must know that their efforts contribute to something larger than themselves; their learning must have personal consequences. Failure and success must be connected to something as important to their lives as survival is to the participants of an expedition. Are we assigning meaningful activities that have consequences in the real world, that affect the

community in which we live, and, thus, move students to see that their learning really does matter?

Expeditionary Learning Outward Bound focuses on a number of other principles, like Intimacy and Caring; Success and Failure; Collaboration and Competition; Diversity and Inclusivity; The Natural World; Reflection and Solitude; Service and Compassion. Had my instructor answered my question for me, I might have climbed the rock but my accomplishment would have been overshadowed by his knowledge; my expedition would have been a semblance of his answers. But because I chose the route, took the risk of failing, and made my own decisions, I answered my own questions and the expedition became my own.

April Lewandowski, English

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Faculty Center for Excellence in Teaching & Learning

Responses to "Expeditionary Learning," by April Lewandowski, 10/1/98

Kudos to April Lewandowski for reminding us of the metaphorical connection between outdoor adventure and learning. At WCU, however, the connection is more literal than at other universities, and it is related to our twin bugaboos of recruitment and retention. What makes WCU unique is not the pedagogical brilliance of the faculty or even our "most wired" status; it is our location. Now that ASU has all the charm of a suburban strip mall, WCU is alone among the colleges among the UNC system in offering students a mountain environment for work and play.

Please forgive the cliché, but it is simply true that our location is at once our strongest asset and our greatest liability. Some students will hate WCU no matter how great their teachers, how many books in the library, and how friendly the campus cops. They will always feel that they are out in the boondocks--and, let's face it--they are. These students will transfer or drop out at the first opportunity. On the other hand, there are ample numbers of high school seniors who would relish four years at a campus with a half dozen whitewater rivers and one of the best mountain biking trail systems in the East within a hour's drive, enough hiking trails to satisfy the most diehard hiker, and a stocked trout stream flowing in front of the administration building.

More importantly, students who are attracted to WCU because of our location rather than in spite of it will tend to stay. Students in our programs in parks and recreation and in natural resources management, for example, seldom transfer despite the fact that both programs have nearly 100 majors and only 2 full time faculty members. We have simply missed the boat by not targeting prospective students who are oriented toward outdoor recreational activities and environmental studies.

The university could also do considerably more to promote outdoor adventure experiences among students already here, making them more likely to stay at WCU. This message is not lost on our competitors; Appalachian State has mountain biking and paddling clubs, UNC-Charlotte built a high ropes course on campus and developed a special outdoor adventure program oriented specifically to new freshmen, UNC-A has weekly kayak rolling sessions in their pool throughout the academic year. The outdoor program committee at LMP does a terrific job with the limited resources available to them. But, the historic division between the Offices of Student Development and of Academic Affairs impedes sharing of resources and works against a philosophy in which the sort of education outdoor activities that April describes can become an integrated component of each student's overall college experience.

That we have not successfully capitalized on our surroundings as recruiting and retention tools may be due, in part, to the fact that few of our faculty members and administrators are from the region. Indeed, many seem oblivious to or even embarrassed by the rural Appalachian geographic and cultural resources staring us in the face. Are we missing the forest for the trees?

Hal Herzog, Psychology

April's use of expeditionary learning is a great example of how we can use our "sense of place" here at Western. The General Education Committee is using the term "sense of place" and it is probably a key in looking at the future success of WCU.

Let's capitalize on our "sense of place" as it will surely aid in retention efforts. The "Expeditionary Learning" title that April used exudes a sense of outdoors which could be a large part of the sense of place of Western. We are in the mountains here and truly in the woods, but instead of apologizing for that we should capitalize on it; being in the woods is not a bad thing for certain populations. Some prospective students would have it no other way--to be in a secluded place in the mountains far from the bustle of the urban environment and close to some of the best outdoor recreation in the world. Capitalizing on this sense of place requires marketing,

Responses to "Expeditionary Learning," by April Lewandowski, 10/1/98, continued

programming, and applying programs in ways that emphasize our sense of place, whether it be through outdoor recreation, scientific or artistic study of the Smokies, or the historical study of our heritage.

April's adaptation of Expeditionary Learning Outward Bound in her Freshman Composition course also happens to include another important issue for retention--the effective use of cooperative learning techniques. Having students work in groups is one thing; having them enjoy the experience and become highly functional is another. Succeeding in this kind of endeavor requires special tactics and techniques such as those used by April. With success, however, students then get to know each other in all courses and feel part of the class, department, and university. Then the students are less likely to leave for the less green pastures of the suburbs or the city. This kind of education needs to be established in Freshman Communities but then needs to be ongoing in the WCU community.

Real expeditions or experiences like ropes courses help develop group effectiveness, and we clearly have the terrain for such "expeditions," so let's catch up to App State and most other universities and build a ropes course to help the English Department and the rest of the university teach team work. Our sense of place should include wanting to work together in our unique environment. We might be high tech and we are in high country, but we must be high "touch" as well. A ropes course on campus would provide resources for developing the high touch and at the same time be clearly symbolic of a move in that direction.

So, let's look at that "sense of place" and if we can agree on what it is, let us capitalize on it with target marketing, appropriate programming, and creative teaching. April's use of the sense of place could be a catalyst for future developments that aid in retention.

Maurice Phipps, Health and Human Performance

April Lewandowski's creative application of "expeditionary" learning to composition seems an excellent model to accomplish what we want to do with learning communities and with the freshman seminar in the proposed general education revision. As a way of stretching one's capacities and yet becoming at home in the world, challenging one's assumptions and forming cooperative ties, having "wonderful ideas" and finding ways to make them reality, the Outward Bound model would seem to have many applications beyond the "ropes course" stereotype. It would seem to have the potential to ignite enthusiasm and commitment for the university, not to mention for the individuals involved. Where are the administrators who will take up this banner to make it happen? Do we have funds for vans and trainers? Is this the kind of thing FIPSE would like to fund--a joining of high tech, high touch, high country with a student-centered difference?

Elizabeth Addison, English

After spending three weeks this summer at the Alaska Institute of the Bread Loaf School of English, I believe in expeditionary learning. My class was called "Writing and the Sense of Place," and my professor, John Elder, believed in exploring a place. We traipsed through old growth forests, slogged through the muskeg, and waded through the intertidal zone. And wrote. And wrote more. At the end of the three weeks, my classmates and I polished our final portfolios, and I was struck by the overwhelming depth of the writing as well as the undercurrent of physicality holding the writing together. Sweat, mud, and mosquito bites combined with ink and paper simply created eloquent and powerful writing.

Granted, my class in Alaska focused on the landscape and our participation within it, but the underlying lesson is the need for a physical element to be brought to composition. And the beauty of April Lewandowski's "Expeditionary Learning" is her effort to add that physical element to the abstract tendencies of composition classrooms. After all, the writing process is inherent in all

Responses to "Expeditionary Learning," by April Lewandowski, 10/1/98, continued

students. Whether we decide to guzzle huge mugs of beer at Colima's, to hike the trail to Cold Mountain, or to ask someone on a date, we have gathered data, analyzed the data, and acted on the data. This is a rather abstract and boring definition of the writing process. However, we all know writing can be exciting, especially when we discover the nucleus of a poem hidden in a journal entry, create new thoughts about a work of literature or ourselves, or connect with our peers through common experiences scribbled on a page. Expeditionary learning adds a needed physical aspect to the mental tendencies of writers. Writers are encouraged to risk more when writing is compared to rock climbing, kayaking, or backpacking. And I firmly believe that writing is closely connected to physical activity. Expeditionary learning explores these connections and makes writing real.

Jimmy Guignard, English

Many thanks for "Expeditionary Learning." It was most interesting and an apparently meaningful learning experience for the students.

Myron Coulter, Chancellor Emeritus

Student Affairs, Academic Affairs, and You

In the last issue of notes & quotes, Hal Herzog asserted that "the historic division between the Offices of Student Development and of Academic Affairs impedes sharing of resources and works against a philosophy in which the sort of outdoor education activities that April describes can become an integrated component of each student's overall college experience."

As I begin my ninth month at WCU as the Vice-Chancellor for Student Affairs, I can see the importance of Hal's assertion. In fact, one of our major goals this year has been to repair this historic division, and I am delighted with the progress we have already made. I am especially enthusiastic about our collaboration with the Faculty Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning and with individual departments and faculty in designing and implementing programs for students. In our new vision statement, developed last summer, we assert that:

The Division of Student Affairs will be an integral partner in assuring a premiere student-centered and inclusive learning community at Western Carolina University. Such a community will offer diverse and dynamic opportunities for student learning which are designed to create educated, ethically and morally responsible, fully-functioning leaders who contribute to the global society.

Why should faculty be interested in this new and closer alliance of Student and Academic Affairs? I believe that Student Affairs plays a vital role in student learning, satisfaction, and retention. For example, with our new "enrollment support" focus and our collaboration with Academic Affairs we hope our role in both student recruitment and retention will be substantially strengthened. In the case of student retention, I believe that there are some compelling reasons why cooperation with academic affairs is so important. Among these are the following:

- Simply stated, high student retention rates help insure that faculty members have a steady stream of students to fill their classrooms and maintain the integrity of the teaching function.
- Collaboration presents a "united front" to students and their families, affirming the notion that retention is an institutional concern. Students must find meaning in both their academic and co-curricular experiences, and we must jointly support them as they continuously examine the "goodness of fit" between our institution and their professional and personal goals.
- Retention obviously has a direct impact on the fiscal stability of our institution and specific academic departments. It is important that departments have sufficient financial resources to

maintain current faculty, hire new faculty as needed, and offer courses at the "cutting" edge of their disciplines.

•Finally, I believe that good student retention contributes to the elevation of faculty morale and esprit de corps. Faculty members in departments with full classes, solid resources for professional development, research, and creative opportunities, and adequate salary increases will be those who flourish and contribute meaningfully to the academic mission of our institution.

In order to encourage this new partnership between Student and Academic Affairs we have instituted:

- Collaborative programming with the Faculty Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning on such topics as assessment, retention, and sexual assault
- A Task Force on Retention co-chaired by the Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs and the Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs
- A Drug and Alcohol Education Task Force co-chaired by the Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs and the Associate Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs
- A Student Leadership Development Team co-chaired by the Assistant Dean for Student Development and a faculty member from the College of Business
- Inclusion of the Chair of the Faculty Senate Council on Student Affairs in all Student Affairs staff meetings and the addition of the Dean of Student Development to the Deans Council
- Incorporation of specific academic departments--Interior Design, Art, Music, Health and Human Performance, for example--in the development of the Cyber Cafe Coffeehouse, forthcoming dance club, expansion of the University Center, and renovation of the Old Student Union
- Cooperation with the advisors to over 20 academic honorary organizations to support the development of an Academic Greek Council
- Collaboration with the College of Education and Allied Professions on a proposal for a new graduate program in College Student Personnel
- Commitment from several members of the staff (as well as all new staff members to be hired in the division) to teach USI 130 as part of a learning community or as an independent section

In addition, the division is using the General Education student learning outcomes as a framework for our strategic action plan. Our goal is to correlate the objectives of our activities with those academic skills and competencies which WCU hopes to develop in our students. As we continue our work, try to improve upon these seminal efforts, and expand into new territory, how can we continue to cultivate a "seamless" flow between the curriculum and co-curriculum? I welcome your responses to questions like these:

- How can we work on addressing student needs *holistically*, acknowledging that students do not necessarily divide us into the neat "organizational chunks" characteristic of our unit and division flow charts?
- Do we need to change our fundamental attitudes and beliefs about students and the nature of our relationships with them in any way to achieve improved retention?
- What *other* areas of coordination in activities for students are we missing?
- Where are the communication gaps?

I like to think of our division as a learning organization. As such, I welcome your responses to the questions I have raised. Clearly, these questions will help us to reflect on our work and improve what we do. Let the dialogue begin.

Robert Caruso, Vice-Chancellor for Student Affairs

The opinions printed here belong solely to the authors and do not necessarily represent the opinions of the editorial staff or of the Faculty Center. If you would like to respond, e-mail Nienhuis by the 8th of the month.

A Ropes Course for WCU

Many people realize that a wilderness experience like a high or low ropes course is an effective experiential learning tool. So why is WCU--a school which prides itself on commitment to teaching and a community of scholarship--lagging behind other schools like ASU, UNC-C, UNC-CH, and Western Piedmont Community College in using such powerful educational experiences for our students?

A ropes course is a carefully designed set of tasks (similar to a military obstacle course) that requires for completion a great deal of planning, cooperation, leadership, risk-taking, teamwork, trust, ingenuity, and perseverance. Unlike the military obstacle course, participants do not compete against each other but must cooperate to solve a set of experiential problems. For example, a low ropes course might resemble a giant spider's web made of rope suspended between a group of trees. To negotiate all the participants through the web, everyone must address specific communication issues similar to situations in the classroom or workplace. Lessons are learned experientially, which tends to have a greater impact than ordinary classroom sessions. Ropes courses are widely used by all kinds of organizations such as corporations, hospitals, schools, and universities.

At present, Western is engaged in a paradigm shift, a significant change in how we "educate" students and create a caring university environment. This shift is reflected in our efforts to create learning communities, restructure the admissions process, initiate a co-curricular transcript, develop a new system of university governance, collaborate with Sylva businesses, review General Ed and USI-130, increase service learning and volunteerism, and build a leadership training program. While no one piece of equipment can remedy all of our problems, retain all of our students, or redesign our curriculum, a ropes course could be a significant part of the "high-touch" hardware for this rapidly changing "hi-tech" educational community.

Top Ten Reasons For Committing Resources to the Development of a Ropes Course at WCU

- 10) **It is Part of Something Bigger than Self:** Many high ropes course graduates note their new or revived experience of a "higher power"--a spirit, a force, a god--while working through the many challenges.
- 9) **Healthy Challenges:** Our students tell us with words and actions that they need and

want to be challenged in ways that "push the envelope" of experience. Outward Bound has used experiential or expeditionary learning as a way to help young people combat drug, alcohol, and emotional problems and to become more responsible citizens. Why not offer our students an attractive and healthy alternative to challenge their bodies and minds?

- 8) **Collaboration:** As Student Affairs Vice Chancellor Bob Caruso acknowledged recently, the "historic division" between Student Affairs and Academic Affairs is being narrowed and collaborative efforts are on the rise. Here's another way to combine the skills and disciplines of faculty and staff to aid the personal and professional growth of our students.
- 7) **To Value Differences:** Ropes courses teach participants how to listen, value, and use each player's voice, opinion, and differing experiences and skills. Everyone is important. Success is dependent on everyone working together.
- 6) **Personal Investment and Consequences in One's Own Learning:** What better way to feel connected to what you are learning than to have obvious obstacles to overcome, personal and relationship risks to take, and clear markers to celebrate success?
- 5) **Leadership:** Currently, the Leadership Team is listening to students about their need and desire for a planned and professionally managed training in leadership. A ropes course could be a significant cornerstone of this leadership development experience.
- 4) **Team Building:** A traditional use of initiative courses is the building of group communication skills and trust. Caesar Hunt (formally of the Admissions Office) and Chris Gunn facilitated three meetings in Spring '97 between key student leaders representing white fraternities and black athletes to address inter-group tensions at that time. Though these "table talks" were reported to be quite successful and meaningful, having an action-oriented "classroom" to build trust and teamwork would have been even better. This tool for team building would be available to student groups, clubs, organizations, university departments, staffs, and even committees.
- 3) **Identity:** As has been recently argued by professors Herzog and Phipps, WCU has a prime location within a pristine geographic area that encourages an identity, a "sense of place," that integrates and synthesizes our natural environment and a WCU education. This identity could be successfully used to attract students (and faculty) who value a "community of scholarship" utilizing our outdoor environment as a classroom.
- 2) **Retention:** As the literature in student development has researched and argued for years, retention of students is related to students feeling a sense of belonging outside the classroom. Ropes courses connect students to each other and to staff and faculty in a way that is qualitatively different from any other pedagogical approach.
- 1) **Big Benefit for Dinky Dollars:** University Center Director, Tim Jacobs, estimates that

a high quality course could be built at Western (and using minimal space) for \$30,000 to \$42,000. Already this year since May, WCU has spent over \$7000 to take student groups off-campus to use such courses elsewhere. Obviously, compared to other capital projects currently underway here, this is a small price tag with a relatively quick payback period. (And compare this price tag to the rumored \$50,000 we are paying Bob Dole for his brief tour of Western!)

So, if we are concerned with teaching, learning, community, development, change, and using the resources unique to the region, instead of waiting for an administrative appointment of a committee, let's form one ourselves. Where are the people who are willing to look at the logistics of implementing a ropes course here, to develop a proposal, and to find the funds? If you are willing to help get this kind of course off the ground (so to speak), call or e-mail April Lewandowski (x7264; Lewandowski) or Chris Gunn (x7469; Gunn).

**Chris Gunn, Assistant Director, Counseling and Psychological Services, and
April Lewandowski, English**

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Faculty Center for Excellence in Teaching & Learning

**Responses to "A Ropes Course for WCU," by Chris Gunn and April Lewandowski,
12/1/98**

Chris Gunn and April Lewandowski make an excellent case for a ropes course at WCU. The funding could come from many sources, but I wonder if the SGA would be interested in a university-wide referendum to see whether or not students would want to allocate a portion of student fees to build and maintain the course. If such a vote is possible, we might get a sense of how interested students are in this project. And if they vote for it, students would have a direct investment in the course, a sense of ownership. I hope they go for it.

Brian Railsback, Acting Dean, Honors College

I endorse Chris' advocacy for a Ropes Course at WCU! It's about time we capitalized on our location and brought the outdoor experience to the classroom.

June Wytock, Counseling and Psychological Services

April Lewandowski and Chris Gunn's proposal for a high ropes course struck me at first as interesting but hardly something a four-year university like WCU should get excited about. After all, if students want such an experience, let them sign up for Outward Bound or go into ROTC: they can certainly get plenty of high ropes in both places.

But on rereading, I realized some telling figures: if WCU is presently spending \$7,000 to send students off-campus to get high-ropes experiences and if we could indeed build such a facility here for under \$43,000, it seems like in 6 years the project could pay for itself (even if we weren't charging others in our area to use it). The wild cards would include cost of maintenance and supervision as well as where to put it.

Apart from financial feasibility, however, I can appreciate the potential value of such an experience, having done an 8-week rock-climbing course at Colorado College when I was 17--an experience so challenging and so exhilarating that I'll benefit from it as long as I live. From what Gunn and Lewandowski tell us, the high-ropes facility at WCU could provide students with similarly exciting reasons to stay in Cullowhee some extra weekends (which just might increase that school identity and spirit which have been fostered by the computer initiative and recent sports victories--such as the football win over ASU).

I strongly favor starting an immediate feasibility study with the goal of setting up such a facility if money can be found and a location can be decided on. Congratulations to both Chris Gunn and April Lewandowski for presenting this proposal so clearly.

Steve Eberly, English

Salaries

Since the mid 1970s, inequitable salary increases at WCU have led to salary differentials that border on the ludicrous. In one department, for example, there is a salary differential of \$26,292 between the lowest paid associate professor and the highest paid full professor, and both teachers received their Ph.D. within one year of one another. Similar differentials can be found in nearly every department on campus and in every college. If you have the stomach for it, check the 1998-99 BD 119 for the salaries in your department and college.

And these differentials have been exacerbated by the extraordinary range in raises awarded in most years. In the College of Business, for example, this year's salary increases ranged from \$0 to \$5,821. For the College of Arts & Sciences, the range was from \$625 to \$2,325, and in the College of Applied Science the overall range was from \$625 to \$2,975. In the College of Education and Allied Professions, one individual received an increase of \$3,975 while another received \$375. These huge differences in raises are sometimes the result of working with a percentage system (only the College of Arts & Sciences has abandoned the percentage system to work with fixed dollar amounts), but nowhere do the raises seem to be part of any attempt to redress currently gross disparities. In fact, the range of salary increases seems to be widening these disparities, and there does not seem to be any overall plan for addressing inequities and bringing salaries into a more equitable pattern of distribution. In fact, there seems to be no overall plan for making rational salary adjustments in general. New faculty are often hired at salaries higher than existing faculty with the same or more experience, and every year the problems with salary get more serious and harder to solve.

One obvious problem is that there are too many categories of salary increase--too many fine distinctions that must end up seeming arbitrary to those who finish lower rather than higher on the merit ladder. Here is the breakdown of the number of faculty in the four undergraduate colleges, along with the number of categories used for salary increases. Part-time faculty (whose salaries are unconscionably low), visiting faculty, endowed chairs, faculty on phased retirement, faculty on short-term disability, new and vacant positions, and promotion monies and administrative supplements were excluded:

College of Business	48 faculty	36 categories
College of Education and Allied Professions	60 faculty	26 categories
College of Applied Sciences	50 faculty	24 categories
College of Arts and Sciences	131 faculty	27 categories

In the College of Business, the largest number of faculty in any one salary category was only 3. How can the people who make decisions on salary increases decide whether an individual is worth a \$1,200 increase or a \$1,250 increase? Or how about increases of \$1,253, \$1,267, and \$1,271, or 3.20% and 3.21%, if you prefer? What, on the other hand, is the effect on an individual's morale when s/he sees that s/he is ranked at the "bottom" of a scale of 10 for a department? Wouldn't it be easier and more effective to have fewer categories and make fewer fine distinctions?

Solutions

1. Salary Adjustments

- a. Develop "base line" data for each college to establish the expected salaries for faculty based on years of experience and the average percentage raises available for each year. Then establish a reasonable range of salary for each year of experience. As a suggestion, you might have a range of \$6,000 for faculty with 20 years of experience, from \$45,000 to \$51,000, the median being \$48,000. If an individual who has performed acceptably for 20 years was earning \$48,000, an individual who has consistently performed above average would be earning \$51,000, and an individual who has consistently performed below average would be earning \$45,000. Individuals with mixed records would be somewhere between these limits. When, after making these calculations, obvious inequities appear, make it a high priority over a period of years to fix them.
- b. If new faculty are hired at a salary higher than existing faculty with the same or more experience, adjustments must be made the following year to readdress the salary differential.
- c. Continually monitor salaries and make adjustments when appropriate.

Salary adjustment requires that a pot of money be set aside from the total monies available from the state for raises each year. Complete adjustment may take several years, and faculty should understand this.

2. Merit Raises

- a. Drastically revise the current system. Let's reduce the number of categories. I suggest three--better than average, average, and below average. I would expect most faculty to fall in the average category.
- b. Provide merit in dollar amounts rather than in percentage amounts in every college. Percentage increases simply compound the inequities that already exist. With raises in dollar amounts, young, exemplary faculty would get the same amount as old, exemplary faculty. Such a system would substantially decrease the widening differentials seen when comparing new and experienced faculty. I know that some experienced faculty support a merit system based on percentages, but this leads to the discrepancies we see in salaries today.

3. Informing the Faculty

The letter informing faculty of the salary increase each year should clearly state the dollar amount awarded for each category of merit for the year, the amount that the individual received, and the amount of any adjustment.

4. Who does the work?

Set up one committee for each college and an overview committee for the entire university. The university committee should report directly to the Faculty Senate. The College of Arts and Sciences has had such a committee for several years, and most of the solutions proposed above have been recommended to various deans over the years. I've been on this committee for several years, and, if a university committee is appointed, my hat is in the ring already.

Henry Mainwaring, Biology

Faculty Center for Excellence in Teaching & Learning

Responses to "Salaries," by Henry Mainwaring, 2/1/99

Many thanks to Henry Mainwaring for providing the comparative data on salaries and for bringing this issue to the fore. It's clear that there are inequities within and between colleges that need to be addressed. I followed Henry's advice and did look at salaries. I wish I hadn't. It truly was a depressing experience. It's demoralizing to know that there are assistant professors on this campus who have comparable experience and who work in comparable disciplines but their salaries range from the low 30s to the mid 60s (almost twice as much!). It's demoralizing to know that there are full professors with 25 years of teaching experience who are paid less than assistant professors with a few years of teaching experience. It's demoralizing to know that many of the faculty carrying the largest burden of the University's general education requirements are among the lowest paid on the campus. It's demoralizing to come to the conclusion that almost regardless of your performance, you'll get the same raise. Most people don't come into academe because of the money. But it's certainly a reason they leave. If Western wants to keep and attract first class faculty who are eager to take the University to the next level, it needs to address these inequities post haste.

Anonymous

Dr. Mainwaring's article precisely lays out a major problem facing WCU now and in coming years. We have had success (to some extent) in bringing young talented scholars into our ranks. However, due to the availability of superbly prepared and energetic candidates, we have insisted on standards clearly much higher than those by which older faculty such as myself were hired, tenured, and retained. The salaries of older faculty who have energetically developed and maintained their niches of expertise have (ought to have?) risen commensurately. They are not the issue here. Others, however--like myself--have become generalists, developing our talents in a variety of ways, not always particularly visible (i.e., extra department service, extra tutorial hours with students). I have not usually regretted my choice, and have in fact accepted that such a direction merits fewer raises and limited promotion. My primary concern was to benefit my students, my department, and the university as a whole. Yet I did find myself embarrassed in the last round of personnel considerations to be bringing new faculty into my department at a salary higher than I am presently making after 25 years here. Part of me says, "Well, time for me to go away. Clearly you are not competitive any more." Another part, however (and I hope the more rational) says, "You are serving a highly valuable role in the department. Why shouldn't you make at least slightly above what new hires are being offered?" The answer may be simply economic. Years ago I asked a new Chancellor why new Accounting positions were paying over twice those offered in my department. "They're worth it," I was told. "PhDs in your field are a dime a dozen." If market economics is the primary factor in salaries at WCU, I guess some of us older generalists SHOULD just go away.

An Older Perspective

Thanks to Henry Mainwaring for taking the time to expose the gross inequities which characterize the distribution of salaries and salary increases at WCU. Regardless of what we know about the allocation of budgets, positions and benefits, there is something seriously wrong with a reward system that allows a faculty member to receive a salary increase (\$5,825) that is one third the entire salary of a part-time lecturer. Part-time "positions" should begin receiving yearly salary increases and the expedient, one-time increase every ten years should be reconsidered. **Linda Kinnear, English**

I strongly agree with Henry on salaries at WCU. I would, however, go further to suggest that across-the-board increases should outweigh merit increases. Merit is much too subjective, arbitrary and subject to abuse, as most of us have seen. If a person receives little or no merit raise, it sends the message that he or she has little or no value to WCU.

Gary White, Geosciences and Natural Resource Management

Responses to "Salaries," by Henry Mainwaring, 2/1/99, continued

Henry's focus on salaries and merit raises was researched and bold. This is America, where open discussion of income is far more taboo than talking about sex or religion, so I appreciated his courage. If I go on to compare the inequities in merit raises in Academic Affairs to those in Student Affairs, I would likely detract from Henry's focused argument and his positively proposed solutions. However, I might spark some bonding between employees of the two divisions. If I go on to research this infamous BD119 by asking a librarian to help me interpret data, I might have to treat for depression after the librarian recovers from the shock of seeing these salaries in print for the first time. If I go on to note that SPA employees (which are the majority of positions here at Western) saw their first merit raise in about a decade as a 1% one-time merit "bonus" last year, I would not only detract from Henry's message but also possibly spark some EPA-SPA sparring. If I go on to note that we have countless hardworking, full-time employees in housekeeping, support staff, and physical plant positions who make an annual income of less than 3 times the raises that some of the faculty in the College of Business received last year, I might be fired on the grounds that I was starting a revolution. And if I conclude this response with the cliché that "inequities are part of life" or that "everybody always wants more money," then I am beyond cynicism and hope. And I'm not. We need to identify places where changes are possible and meaningful and then work for them. Open discussion is the start. Bravo, Henry.

Chris Gunn, Assistant Director, Counseling & Psychological Services

Henry, you old pinko trade unionist, don't you know those profs with the real high salaries are working a lot harder than the rest of us--and their students are learning a lot more too.

Bruce Henderson, Psychology

I was disappointed that Henry's article didn't include information about the faculty of the library. The librarians are regular faculty but the university community keeps forgetting to include us as such despite the fact that we go through the same promotion, tenure and even salary increase process that other faculty do.

Jill Ellern, Hunter Library

Henry Mainwaring's "Salaries" essay is a first step in a conversation that could bring to public attention an aspect of faculty life that has remained undercover. Rewards (and other dysfunctional aspects of Western) will not be attended to properly until this "conversation" becomes widespread and public. As it stands, most faculty do not believe that such a conversation is even possible; the norm has always been not to raise such matters publicly. Western is a place where, according to William Bergquist, influenced by Argyris and Schon, we ". . . never or rarely encourage the disclosure and discussion of discrepancies between espoused theories and theories-in-use." This is true of both faculty and members of the administration, although the private conversations among faculty are often passionate and rich in understanding. Until many of us are willing to admit publicly that the espoused rewards and rewards-in-use are not compatible, and those responsible for salary decisions are held accountable, not much can change. Work is underway regarding the measurement of teaching, but there is much evidence to support the conclusion that well developed, existing performance criteria are often ignored. A classic article in my discipline that addresses both organizational behavior and rewards is Steven Kerr's "On the Folly of Rewarding A, While Hoping for B." The title tells it all. As you can imagine, countless members of the faculty have approached me about Henry's essay, and virtually all of them have praised Henry for his initiative. I have yet to hear any arguments that support the salary disparities on our campus. As a result, a resolution concerning salary inequities will be presented to the Faculty Senate at its February 18 meeting. This resolution will enable us to examine where faculty salaries are at this point in time and to make recommendations where needed. Maybe Henry's article can facilitate a more public conversation among the faculty, department heads, deans, and others about justice and equity!

Terry L. Kinnear, Chair of the Faculty

Dr. NoNet and Dr. YesNet On the Internet

A student at the Hunter Library Reference Desk asks for help locating information for writing a report. Her professor, Dr. NoNet, told the class they could not use anything from "the Internet." Now, what does Dr. NoNet mean? If taken literally, this prohibition means:

- The student can use the paper set of Encyclopedia Britannica but cannot use Britannica Online available on the Internet.
- The student can only use the paper periodical indexes on the tables and shelves of the library but cannot use the online versions of these indexes available through the library on the Internet.
- The student can only use books and journals available on paper or microform in the library but not a full-text printout of an article from an online index on the Internet.
- The student can use paper reserve materials but cannot use any items put on electronic reserves by the professor because the library has put them on the Internet.
- The student can use books on the library Reference shelves but cannot use the library homepage and any of its Web links to access full-text dictionaries, biographies, almanacs, book reviews, directories, encyclopedias, style sheets, newspapers, journals, and other peer reviewed Web sites because these resources are on the Internet.
- The student cannot use any source on the Internet that was found using the Netscape search button or an Internet search engine, regardless of its source (even the Census Bureau, World Health Organization, the Louvre, PBS or Yale University).

In an attempt to sort out the meaning of NoNet's research parameters we might consider the professor's possible intent. Is he trying to introduce students to good reliable print materials? Is he trying to avoid unreliable Web references? Or perhaps he is trying to help limit the amount of information available to students so that their work is more manageable? Without explanation, students (as well as Reference Librarians) are stumped, and it affects the quality of their work.

Granted, in the changing and expanding computer world, everyone is trying to make information available on the Internet. However, it's not only Tom, Dick and Harry publishing on the Internet. Databases, journals, government agencies, libraries, and museums also appear there. Information

resources that were once only available in paper are now available in a variety of formats via the Web. Cutting Internet resources completely out of the research process eliminates the opportunity for students to use a "fun and easy" format to examine and critically evaluate information. No course of study, especially in higher education, is adequate unless it helps to develop the students' ability to deal with the burgeoning information in their fields. Educators in all disciplines need to work together to ensure that students become information literate. When they graduate, students must be able to recognize and solve information problems and learn from the most current, reliable information resources.

If your students use Yahoo, InfoSeek, Lycos, or Excite exclusively, they will certainly encounter lots of garbage and may use some of this as the basis of their papers. Students don't have the experience to recognize inaccurate or biased information. What are you doing to help them evaluate and limit this volume of information? Just telling them not to use the Internet is not enough! Teaching students how to limit and evaluate data is the answer.

Dr. NoNet's colleague, Dr. YesNet, talks in class about the importance of finding and using good information and discusses the evaluation of all information resources as she makes assignments. She knows students love to use Web sites so she uses the WWW to help them develop critical thinking skills. YesNet leads students to appropriate paper and electronic sources as a springboard and by the end of the course allows them to explore freely. She:

- Encourages students to use encyclopedias for an introduction to a subject. Britannica Online is on her list of appropriate encyclopedias, but so is The Encyclopedia of Religion and Encyclopedia of Bioethics, among others found in the Reference collection.
- Encourages students to find articles using both paper indexes and the databases available through the library's homepage (<http://www.wcu.edu/library>). She takes the class to the library to get advanced instruction and practice on the databases appropriate to upcoming assignments.
- Warns students not to be lazy, but to choose the BEST articles, not merely the full-text articles furnished by databases. She provides instruction on Boolean searching and other techniques for refining searches that have resulted in large numbers of citations.
- Provides electronic reserve readings for students, so that they can access them from their dorm rooms. Often these short stories and articles are the basis of assignments and she expects students to quote them in papers.
- Considers the Research Tools links on the library's home page, though currently limited in number, to be equal in quality to reference books. However, she also includes the library's Reference Desk phone number on her syllabus.
- Provides guidelines to evaluate web sites. John Henderson's "T is For Thinking" (<http://www.ithaca.edu/library/Training/hott.html>) is her current favorite web guide. Occasionally she requires that the students explain the search process they used to find their references and requires that students defend a Web site's credibility for their papers.

Before giving your students another research assignment, is it time to "go back to school" and learn more about what's on the Internet and how to manage it? Hunter librarians offer instruction to faculty groups and often work with individuals as well. Simply restricting students' use of the Internet as Dr. NoNet does has no practical or educational value. The criteria for evaluating Internet sites are similar to those for evaluating books and journals, and many writing and style guides provide excellent evaluation guidelines. For starters check out the Teaching Tip attached to this page and let us know how it works with your students.

Jill Ellern and Betsy Whitley, Hunter Library

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Faculty Center for Excellence in Teaching & Learning

**Responses to "Dr. NoNet and Dr. YesNet On the Internet," by Jill Ellern
and Betsy Whitley, 3/1/99**

Ellern and Whitley's "Dr. NoNet and Dr. YesNet On the Internet," with the accompanying teaching tip on "How to Help Students Use the Internet," accurately capture my attitude to the use of Internet sources in research. I am convinced that a blanket ban on the use of such sources amounts to short-circuiting knowledge. Moreover, for many students, surfing the Net is a fun way to learn! On the other hand, it is necessary to note that many of the sources on the Internet lack such scientifically necessary qualities as precision, detail, validity, and reliability. Therefore, I usually permit the use of Internet sources for research assignments except that I always offer the following three pieces of advice to my students. One, always make it a point to go beyond the conclusion contained on a site. Two, consider also the source of the conclusion and other relevant information. Three, evaluate the methods and procedures leading up to the information and conclusion presented.

Nonso Okereafoezeke, Criminal Justice

Don't forget "timeliness." The Internet often has the latest information available on a subject. Print media takes time to get into print and distributed.

Carolyn Rauch, Business Administration & Law

The TPR Process: Fight Together or Hang Separately

One of the mixed blessings associated with gaining academic tenure is the obligation/privilege/responsibility of serving on a tenure, promotion, and retention committee. As a "newbie" to the other side of the TPR process, I've been concerned and troubled about some things. I suspect I may not be alone. Some of my concerns are professional; some are personal.

First, what are the qualifications for TPR, who determines them, and who decides when they have been met? The University of North Carolina Board of Governors established basic TPR guidelines for our state universities. Those guidelines have been incorporated into The Faculty Handbook, which says that TPR criteria are to be developed by academic departments and incorporated into a departmental TPR document. If I understand the process, the departmental TPR document is then approved by the department's college and the university. Once approved, that departmental TPR document governs TPR decisions for departmental faculty. Right? Yeah, right!

It makes sense for departments to establish the criteria. Faculty sharing disciplines are grouped into departments. Those departments also allocate resources, determine teaching loads, perform Annual Faculty Evaluations, provide peer evaluations, and do outcomes assessments that impact on both learning and teaching. It is also the departments that provide reduced teaching loads and otherwise make provisions for research time. While the stated policy calls for the departmental TPR document to be the basis for TPR decisions, many of us have long suspected that actual decisions derive from other criteria. We have seen positive departmental TPR committee recommendations rejected higher up the food chain, despite the fact that our disciplinary peers are to be found at the departmental level. We have even seen positive recommendations by BOTH DEPARTMENTAL AND COLLEGE TPR committees rejected at the university level.

One wonders by what criteria a university-wide committee or administrator can more accurately evaluate a faculty member than departmental peers or college colleagues? Are they reading the same TPR document? Is there a secret, mystical, university TPR document that takes precedence over departmental documents? Are university-level rejections of positive recommendations from departments and colleges honest, if somewhat arrogant, attempts to evaluate faculty in accordance with written criteria relevant to individual disciplines? If so, what leads a faculty member serving on a university committee to think he or she is capable of

rendering a better evaluation of a colleague from another discipline than that colleague's disciplinary peers? Doesn't make much sense, does it?

Maybe it does. What if university-level TPR committees or administrators seek to "blackball" or punish, rather than genuinely evaluate on the basis of established departmental criteria? What if their function is to screen out "undesirables" or settle scores? Doesn't that make more sense? Or, what if the agenda is to save money by not promoting if possible. Think about it. The departmental committee says that, based on our departmental criteria, we recommend TPR. So do the department head, the college committee, and the college dean. No, says the university committee or administrator. All of you are mistaken.

Faculty decisions are supposed to be based on disciplinary-specific criteria drawn up by academic departments and published in departmental TPR documents, not on arbitrary standards, hunches, or feelings. Should those of us who serve on departmental and college TPR committees and struggle with the evaluations of our colleagues meekly submit to the rejection of our recommendations? Why have such committees if a university committee or administrator is going to make the decision anyway? Why did departments prepare TPR documents if they will not be used? Why doesn't the university simply issue a single, one-size-fits-all document that guarantees a faculty of "Stepford" Professors who don regalia and dutifully do as directed? Why the charade?

To fool us and those we recruit, of course. Much better to champion a sham system, pick us off one-by-one, and send chilling messages about expectations to those who follow us. I even heard one administrator tell an untenured faculty member in my department (which weights teaching as 60% of the total TPR criteria) that the faculty member would never get tenure unless the faculty member devoted less time to teaching and working with students and more time to preparing articles for tree-killing journals with minuscule audiences. I'll give odds the current TPR system at WCU is not what the Board of Governors intended in their TPR guidelines. I doubt it's what legislators or taxpayers want. I know it's not what students want. Anyone want the bet?

This year, how many faculty members, myself included, had their TPR applications rejected at the upper level, despite favorable recommendations from departments and colleges? How widespread is the problem? Who knows? Officials wrap themselves in a cloak of confidentiality they say is needed for personnel actions. They count on individual faculty members being too embarrassed at being rejected or too fearful of future decisions to make a public fuss about the system.

Let's put an end to that secrecy and shine some light on the process. I'll start with a personal "outing." This year, according to the Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs, my application for promotion from assistant professor to associate professor was rejected by a UNANIMOUS NEGATIVE vote of the university TPR committee, despite a UNANIMOUS POSITIVE vote by my departmental committee, a positive recommendation by my department head, an 11-1 POSITIVE vote by the Arts and Sciences TPR committee, and a positive recommendation by the Acting Dean. The promotion's no big deal, and the pay differential's meager. However, the slap in the face, rather than the expected pat on the back, stings.

Now that I serve on my department's TPR committee, I'm deeply troubled by inevitable conflicts that lie ahead. Sooner or later, the recommendation of my committee about one of my departmental colleagues will be rejected. What will I do then? I hope I will find the courage to protest that rejection as publicly as possible and to demand a public accounting by whoever has rejected our recommendations. I hope I will champion our departmental criteria and our assessment of peers within our discipline. Surely, I will challenge any administrator presumptuous enough to overturn the collective wisdom of the faculty.

I challenge you to join me in coming out and making your treatment public. Yes, I'll probably fight, even if alone, but fighting together would be so much more effective. If you are concerned about this issue, let me know. I will compile a list of names and start an email discussion list that might lead to Faculty Senate consideration or some other appropriate action. Let's bring everything out in the open and subject it to scrutiny. Let's stop submitting meekly to unfair treatment. We owe it to ourselves, as well as to those who follow us.

John Moore, Assistant Professor, Communications and Theatre Arts

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Faculty Center for Excellence in Teaching & Learning

Responses to "The TPR Process: Fight Together or Hang Separately," by John Moore, 4/1/99

As the country preacher said, "Let the church say amen!" This, of course, assumes that there are believers among the congregation. The congregation to which Professor Moore is speaking is not religious, but its members follow a calling, a mission, a purpose, a dream--with devotion, dedication and an almost mythical faith that what they are doing is important and honorable, worthy. They are teachers. Ahhh, teachers. So talented, so committed, so... gullible. And foremost among that number at WCU is... me. Like John Moore, I believed that systems were in place and working. I believed that TPR committees were serious business. I believed that WCU was a living, feeling entity. I believed that a unanimous decision made by a diverse group of teachers would be accepted as such. Regrettably, over the past few years, I have come to the sad realization that I was mistaken. There really are folks who will tell you that the pungent mist falling on your face on a cloudless day is rain. But, even now, after witnessing a series of actions and decisions worthy of a dastardly scalawag straight out of Dickens, I still believe that Western has a conscience--and it is us.

Alfred Wiggins, Associate Professor, Communication and Theatre Arts

I appreciate John's courage to speak out and his clarity on many of the issues facing TPR reform on this campus. I have heard about numerous cases over the past seven years of problems with TPR in all the colleges. These problems have continued to exist under three Chancellors, three Vice Chancellors, and changes in Deans. Unfortunately, changes in administration have not resulted in any changes in the internal problems facing faculty. It is time for something to finally change or we will lose the good people who are coming to WCU. Without maintaining a quality faculty we cannot have the quality University that we speak about in the public arena. Thank you, John, for initiating the dialogue on TPR and to Henry Mainwaring for raising the salary issues in an earlier issue of the Forum.

It is important to note, however, that the TPR problems do not just occur at the university level committee, but also exist with departments and colleges ignoring TPR documents and abusing power. The gross lack of clarity in many TPR departmental documents is an important contributing factor to this problem. Furthermore, the lack of accountability for the committees and their corresponding chairs--the Department Heads, Deans, and the Vice Chancellor--also contribute to this problem. There is, however, one solution to this problem that faculty can initiate quickly within their departments--they can revise their TPR documents.

A couple of years ago our department developed a detailed, transparent TPR document with the intention of removing any question as to what is required for TPR. This document was approved by the administration. The document's clarity allows for faculty to plan and it removes much of the potential for capriciousness from the committees and their chairs. It also provides some evidence for accountability (whether in the grievance process or in the courts) for the administrators responsible for this process. Our departmental TPR document specifically defines what is required to achieve excellent performance in teaching, research, and service. It literally has lists from which we can check boxes to determine our qualification for TPR. Given our annual approval system for TPR documents, our document can change over time. Therefore there is no need to be concerned about inflexibility. Too much flexibility is one of the problems with the TPR system. Although creating clear documents will not solve all the problems we currently face with our TPR system, it is something faculty, both tenured and untenured, can do to remove some of the absurdity that currently exists. Furthermore, the clarity will strengthen a faculty member's case in a grievance process or court case.

Susan Kask, Economics, Finance, and International Business

Responses to "TPR," by John Moore, 4/1/99, continued

I appreciate John's speaking out on what seems to be a flaw in our tenure, promotion, and reappointment process. The overturning at the university level of departmental and college TPR votes should be a very rare occurrence. And even when done with the clear purpose of redressing earlier errors in the process, such a reversal demands clear and open explanation--if the purpose is to improve faculty performance rather than to permit behind-the-scenes manipulation.

If indeed, as Dr. Moore's letter implies, no clear communication was sent to the department and college committees to explain where and why their recommendations went astray, such action should be seen as a contravention of Western Carolina University's faculty governance system. If a majority recommendation of my department's TPR committee--arrived at through careful and lengthy effort and considered judgment on our part--were treated so cavalierly, I would be incensed.

What say the rest of you? Is there, in fact, a legitimate explanation somewhere in all of this? If not, the situation smells, and we should exert whatever efforts we can through the Faculty Senate to see that this sort of action does not recur. Not to do so would suggest things about our university which would make any serious educator despair.

R. Steve Eberly, English

John Moore pointed out one of many problems which are very common here at WCU. These injustices are nothing new to those of us who have been around for a while. Sometimes injustices occur at the university level and sometimes they occur at other levels. It all boils down to administrators not doing their jobs. Administrators should be fighting for fair treatment of their faculty instead of turning a blind eye to the situation whenever it would require the guts to say "This is wrong and I am going to fix it."

Name withheld because I have been punished too many times for "speaking out of turn."

It seems to me from an unsystematic sample of cases over the last thirty years that the University TPR Committee has always been inclined to turn down candidates, especially for promotion, who came to them with good credentials and strong support from their departments and schools/colleges. They rarely reverse negative decisions by these bodies. I haven't served on the University TPR Committee so I don't know what criteria they apply and "personnel matters" cloaks their criteria and policies in mystery, but the committee always seems to see its mission as limiting the numbers in the hallowed ranks, rejecting candidates for any reason or none.

In the current administrative atmosphere of cheese-paring economies in staffing, it is no wonder that the TPR Committee is pursuing this mission with zeal. It is consistent with the Administration's unwillingness to support popular and successful but pitifully-understaffed newer programs or to replace retiring faculty with critical specialties in long-established successful programs. It's a kinder and gentler but no less wrong-headed version of a policy begun by the English Department in the '70's, initiated by firing three of its tenure-track professors. The reasoning then was that part-time and term appointees with no benefits were cheaper per class hour and per FTE and that the then-current tenure-hostile cheese-paring administration would approve.

The current situation looks like another case of a faculty body pandering to an administrative priority that solves a current problem but which saps the morale of the faculty, undermining its quality in the long run. The solution cannot be limited to the TPR Committee; the Administration needs to renew its commitment to a quality faculty in a number of tangible ways.

Allen Moore, Biology

Responses to "TPR," by John Moore, 4/1/99, continued

Kudos to John Moore for going public with yet another instance that illustrates the decades of abuse involving WCU's reward system. Given that the data John presents are accurate, how can such a disparity between department / college votes and the University TPR Committee be explained if, as required, TPR committees at all levels are evaluating against the same criteria? Such discrepancies create and reinforce the common perception that WCU's reward system is more of a political system than it is a merit system. Colleagues suggest to me that the University TPR Committee is a rogue committee, out of control, that it does not base its decisions on official criteria. What to do?

During the next academic year the faculty will begin rewriting faculty governance documents. The following are suggestions on how to start changing the TPR process. First, abolish the University TPR Committee. Given that departments and colleges do not always make fair and just decisions either, perhaps this is not the wisest move. Second, put boundaries on what the University TPR Committee can do. For example, the Committee cannot overturn recommendations from colleges unless there is clear evidence of egregious violation of procedure, violation of legitimate TPR criteria, or uneven application of the criteria. University TPR is to be viewed primarily as a review committee, not a recommendation making committee. Third, educate faculty that different departments have a legitimate right, under our governance documents, to have different criteria and that university level personnel decisions must be made around departmental criteria, not personal preferences. Fourth, hold department heads and deans accountable for the quality of departmental TPR criteria and of the personnel decision making process. Fifth, provide faculty candidates with more information, both positive and negative, earlier in the process, so surprises do not occur.

The above does not, of course, resolve John's frustration, the violation of fairness, or the emotional stress. Having been there and done that, and realizing that there is no resolution because the system on paper is not the system in action, the only resolution is to prevent future occurrences by changing the process and then insuring that the new process is applied even handedly. Wishful thinking?

Bill Kane, Management

John Moore has raised important questions about the procedures for tenure and promotion that are at the heart of the academic community and self-governance. I applied for both tenure and promotion and was initially approved for tenure but not for promotion. I was dismayed and frankly terribly discouraged to the point of questioning whether to continue my career at Western. Like Moore, I had received unanimous support for promotion from the department TPR committee, an 11-1 positive support from the school TPR committee, and positive support from both my department chair and the dean, only to be rejected initially at the University level. I requested and received an administrative review and was allowed to make a presentation to the committee in person. They reversed their decision, and I have been recommended for promotion.

What concerns me is the role of the University committee and the Vice Chancellor in evaluating candidates. The committee and the Vice Chancellor treated me graciously and professionally. I was convinced that they were serious about their commitment to the institution and the quality of its faculty. But I should never have had to go before that committee to explain the value and the quality of research involved in preparing a scholarly edition of a novel, or to explain how such publications are reviewed by peers, or to justify the value of preparing published manuals for computer users if one teaches technical writing. I say that because none of these are issues in the departmental TPR document by which I was supposed to be evaluated. To quote Moore, one wonders by what criteria a university-wide committee or administrator can more accurately evaluate a faculty member than departmental peers or college colleagues?

I believe it is time that we examined the issue of tenure and promotion in the Faculty Senate. Nothing is more central to self-governance. We must develop clear, written criteria within our departments and evaluate our peers by those criteria and no other. As it stands now, we are divided against one another, and rumors and personalities play too great a role. I believe the University level

Responses to "TPR," by John Moore, 4/1/99, continued

TPR function should be to review procedures, making sure that the department and the college committees properly apply the written criteria. The University committee and the Vice Chancellor's office are too far removed from the discipline to make fair and informed evaluations about quality, even with the best of intentions.

The senate needs to determine whether our role as faculty on these committees has authority or is merely advisory. Finally, I believe we need to create an honest mentoring system and get our story straight. I heard over and over, "teaching is important, but really the only thing the university level looks at is your publications." Tenure and promotion is our business because these are our peers, and we are affecting their lives and our futures together.

Newt Smith, English

Faculty Center for Excellence in Teaching & Learning

Response to the Responses:

"The TPR Process: Fight Together or Hang Separately," 4/1/99

Hi, my name is Gary Pool. I am one of the notorious "gang of 11" otherwise known as the University Tenure and Promotion Committee for 1999. Our other descriptions gleaned from the recently published reviews of our work are: "top of the food chain," "arrogant," "blackballers" (J. Moore); "abusers of power" (Kask); "dastardly scalawag" (Wiggins); "flawed," "cavalier" (Eberly); "cheese-parers," "panderers" (A. Moore); and "political," "violators of fairness" (Kane). Whereas there were a plethora of anti-TPR responses and a paucity of pro-TPR please allow me to attempt to balance the ledger. First, forget the administration, keep this a faculty to faculty issue, it is too easy to divert attention away from faculty responsibilities by invoking the administration. Second, any observations that I offer are generalities on due process and are absolutely unrelated to the specifics of any particular TPR committee deliberations that I have participated in over the past 29 years.

I have served on many TPR committees at all levels covering generations of different faculty and different philosophies. I have generally found these committees to be serious, fair, professional and committed to decisions that are in the best interest of Western Carolina University's future and students. I have heard allegations of selective blackballing before. Sure it has happened; where is it more likely to happen? Maybe closer to home in the department or college. At the University level? How arrogant of someone to think that they are so important, so much the focus of attention, that eleven faculty from diverse disciplines and philosophies from the far corners of this university (most do not know each other before) could or would single out and conspire to blackball an individual who most committee members don't know! Get real!

If there have been conspiracies I believe they more likely have been faculty conspiring to be lenient, the good-old-boys or everybody-gets-a-blue ribbon syndromes, at department and college levels. Overturning prior decisions by other committees is rare, but I have seen it happen as often to prior negative votes as to positive votes. Departmental TPR documents are full of subjective criteria and thus are open to interpretation and application based on the judgements of fair minded committee members. I was intrigued by previous responders' variety of suggestions for improving the process. The suggestions all seemed to advocate more objective TPR documents with less dependence on faculty judgement. To best accomplish their goals seems to require that each department develop a TPR op-scan checklist. The candidate would mark the appropriate boxes with a number 2 lead pencil and submit the completed checklist by e-mail to the VAX to be op-scanned. The computer would score it, type and mail the letter of congratulations and we academicians would not have to serve on those committees. Talk about generating "Stepford Professors". . . .

By the way, according to one department's TPR criteria this response would allow me to check one box under Professional Development.

SIGNED ANONYMOUS!

Our TPR System--Comments Toward a Meaningful Dialogue

John Moore's piece on tenure provides an excellent catalyst for a discussion that we, as a university community, need to engage. I believe, however, that focusing on the "arbitrary standards, hunches, or feelings" (that may in fact be too pervasive in tenure decisions) will accomplish little but to exacerbate existing tensions and negative perceptions. A suggested focus to help steer the discussion in meaningful and constructive directions is to ask:

To what extent does the current tenure system add to or detract from our purpose and mission, and in what ways should the tenure system be improved to help us better serve our students (and other constituents)?

Is the term tenure "system" designed to encompass all processes and procedures before, during, and after tenure--much more than just the process of tenure review and actual tenure decisions?

Perhaps the fundamental root cause of distress, and the underlying limitations of the tenure system, is the incongruence between the levels involved in the tenure process. As John stated, tenure guidelines are set at the departmental level. While this may be appropriate to an extent, tenure itself is really granted at the university level. The courts have interpreted tenure as, in essence, a "property interest" in the university that cannot be taken away without due process. Thus, tenure grants a professor university level rights and protections, though tenure decisions are supposed to be based on departmentally set criteria. Such "differences" in levels of review, decision, rights, and protections predispose the process to gamesmanship and politics, leading to highly dysfunctional conflicts that become personal.

It would be hard to refute the underlying premise of tenure--protection of academic freedom. We should all be free to express our ideas, beliefs, knowledge, and opinions without fear of retribution. Unfortunately, it appears that over time the tenure process and system has degenerated into an entitlement program that, in part, reduces overall accountability for action and results.

Since my arrival at WCU four years ago, I have been both amazed and disheartened by two very common behaviors surrounding the tenure system. First, I have repeatedly heard comments like "you shouldn't do that because you are not tenured." While most of these comments appear to originate from sincere concern for my well being (and I do appreciate the concern), the

underlying message was baffling. In discussing this issue with others, particularly other non-tenured faculty, the conclusion to be drawn is "until you get tenure, stick your head in a hole, do your research (and lots of it), and be careful in voicing your opinions." Such behaviors lead to stagnation, isolation, and insulation--invariably leading to the second baffling behavior.

This second behavior, which I have witnessed enough to believe that perhaps tenure should be eliminated altogether, is the almost total withdraw and detachment that some faculty demonstrate after being tenured. Unfortunately, such behavior is understandable given the messages sent prior to being tenured. When achieving tenure is viewed as a political battle to be "won," the natural result of such victory is the adoption of feelings of entitlement--"I've been through the wringer and have earned the right to pursue other interests." Such behaviors, and the accompanying cynicism, hinder the educational process and the overall effectiveness of our university. They also serve to undermine the merits of the tenure system.

So, what are the answers? I do not pretend to have any grand solutions (though I do have some ideas). I do, however, have a few suggestions for questions that may guide our discussion in meaningful and constructive directions:

1. Why are tenure discussions "private." Do we not teach our students that they should be able to offer constructive criticisms to others and be able to accept such criticisms themselves? It's too bad we can't look each other in the eye and communicate our frustrations with each other. To me, it's kind of like posting grades and skipping town to avoid students. Such behaviors are both hypocritical and anti-learning. If someone does not deserve tenure, shouldn't we be willing to tell him / her face to face instead of passing blame onto a "committee" or "the administration"?
2. How can we overcome the inherent biases involved in having your closest colleagues vote on your tenure and then having others who are only marginally (if at all) familiar with your work and/or contributions make the "final" decisions? Our close colleagues, given their proximity, are often least willing to pose the challenges and provide the criticism necessary for improvement and good decision making. Conversely, those who have limited knowledge of an individual cannot take into consideration the little "extras" that, while hard to put on paper, make candidates for tenure and promotion extremely valuable colleagues.
3. What, clearly, are the criteria on which tenure should be granted / denied, and how should they be assessed? Relying on departmental criteria creates a system whereby some are held to very strict standards while others are held to very lenient standards, all in pursuit of the same reward. Such a system is inherently unfair and prone to conflict, politics, and gamesmanship. We should not just accept "UNC system bylaws" as justification for departmentally based criteria. Doing so only creates more tension as we try to pass off the limitations of the tenure system on others.
4. What can we do to help reduce or eliminate the pervasive cynicism and negativity surrounding the tenure system? Such cynicism and negativity get passed on to our

students and ultimately undermine the quality of everything we do as an institution of "higher" learning.

As most who know me would attest, I am never shy to voice my opinions and concerns and would welcome the opportunity to engage in broader, face-to-face discussions of these issues. I have talked to many people with many different lengths of service at WCU. It seems that, for the most part, the University-level tenure system is more likely to tenure those who may not be deserving than to not tenure those who are. However, I do recognize that we have much room for improvement, and am willing to put effort into making these improvements.

If these discussions degenerate into gripe sessions, name calling, or blaming games--or start down the road of creating unenforceable, watered down policy--I will politely dismiss myself from the discussions. That energy will be much better spent towards the development of our students.

Rob Routhieux

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