

Faculty Forum

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Let's Break the Communication Bottleneck: Go Right to the Top

In most bureaucracies, information gets progressively diluted--if not distorted--as it passes from the rank and file workers through the channels up to the top executive. Now that we have a new CEO, we may have an opportunity to break the communication bottleneck. It is clearly a time of change, and Chancellor Bardo brings a fresh perspective to the challenges and problems that confront our institution. But to take advantage of this opportunity, I think we must be honest about our problems with communication. At the risk of being labeled a whiner, I would suggest that aside from our faculty senate (which is widely perceived to be ineffective) there is no established forum for our Chancellor to directly hear the concerns of the faculty. Dr. Bardo will receive ample input from vice-chancellors, deans, trustees, alumni, and the myriad administrative luminaries that populate the White House. He will receive, however, much less information about the concerns of the rank and file--the students, faculty, cafeteria workers, janitors, grounds-keepers, campus cops, etc.

Here is my solution. For a few weeks we simply ignore the proverbial chain of command. If you have suggestions that might improve the teaching/learning/living environment at WCU, bypass the bureaucracy and send them directly to the Chancellor. (Rumor has it that Dr. Bardo likes e-mail.) He can sift through our ideas at his leisure--if he has any over the next couple of months--and pursue those that he believes to have merit. (Editor's note: Chancellor Bardo suggests that faculty use WPOffice mail, which he checks daily, rather than VAX mail, which he checks less frequently.) To prime the pump, and with apologies to David Letterman, here is my

Top Ten List of Ways to Improve Teaching/Learning/Living at WCU

- 10. Faculty Governance:** Get the vice chancellors off the faculty senate. They have enough input already. Nor should administrators have a vote on the university TPR committee.
- 9. Newspapers:** Include a good newspaper and magazine stand in the renovated student center. The bookstore is too peripheral to the center of campus, and it does not carry any newspapers. The Atlanta Journal, the New York Times, and the Wall Street Journal are available at corner groceries in Highlands and Cashiers. Why not at the regional university?
- 8. Faculty Travel Allowances:** While we are expected to make presentations at national and regional meetings, travel funds are severely limited. The microgrants help but they are not intended to cover attendance at standard academic conferences. My department is probably typical; we are each allotted \$200 annually for travel. The good news is that this will get me

two days at the Holiday Inn in Murphy. The bad news is that the American Psychological Association rarely meets there.

- 7. Bookstore Discount:** This is the only university I know of where the bookstore does not offer the staff a discount (I suspect that it is also one of the few college bookstores that, according to my students and verified by the staff, hides Playboy and magazines of similar ilk in the back room, away from the customers).
- 6. Appalachian Studies:** Many of our faculty have research interests related to aspects of the region. We also have the Mountain Heritage Center, the Center for the Improvement of Mountain Living, and a small presence in Cherokee. But we do not have any way to put together all the faculty with interests in regional studies. What about an Appalachian studies minor coupled with a faculty task force to address cultural and economic regional issues, perhaps in terms of our tripartite mission of teaching/research/service?
- 5. Summer School:** Our summer school languishes. There are not enough offerings to attract students, in large measure because faculty will not teach courses for the woefully inadequate salaries. At Appalachian State or East Carolina University, an associate professor making \$44,000 a year would be paid \$7,040 for teaching two three-hour courses in the summer. Here, he or she would make \$3,852. The result is a disservice to the students in need of courses and faculty in need of cash.
- 4. Artists and Lecture Series:** The cavernous Ramsey Regional Activity Center is well-suited for basketball games, tractor pulls, rock concerts, and, of course, rodeos. Its airplane-hanger ambiance, however, makes it a lousy venue for the jazz combos, chamber music ensembles, and theatrical productions that make up the bulk of our cultural events calendar. The inevitable mismatch between auditorium and audience size embarrasses both entertainers and audience. These events should be moved to a more size-appropriate setting, such as one of the campus theaters.
- 3. Student Transportation:** For students without cars, WCU can be a pretty isolated place. The UC has a shuttle that goes to Sylva on a regular basis. We should extend this service; have the shuttle bus make a trip or two to Asheville each week. Riders could be charged a nominal fee to cover expenses.
- 2. The Great Outdoors:** It is our stunning location rather than the pedagogical skills or research brilliance of the faculty that really makes WCU unique. We should make better use of it. For example, students could be exposed to an outdoor experience such as white water rafting, rock climbing, or a camping trip as part of freshman orientation or even the general education program. Put more resources into the outdoor programs at the University Center. Establish a graduate degree in experiential education.
- 1. Music:** Please, please, someone change the songs that peal from the carillon in the campus bell tower. "Home on the Range" is getting on my nerves. My suggested play list would include "It Wasn't God Who Made Honky Tonk Angels," "I Heard It Through the Grapevine," and "Surfin' USA."

Certainly, many of my colleagues will not agree with all or perhaps any of the items on this list. That is not the point. You have your own notions of how we can improve our university. But it's important that we communicate better with one another, from top to bottom and from bottom to top. We have a window of opportunity. Change is in the air, and the faculty should be part of it. Send your own list--right to the top.

Hal Herzog, Psychology

Comments or Questions?

If you would like to respond to Hal's **Forum** piece with comments or questions of your own, please send them to the Faculty Center by the 8th of the month. Your response will be published in **notes & quotes** on the 15th.

Faculty Center for Teaching Excellence

Responses to "Let's Break the Communication Bottleneck: Go Right to the Top," by Hal Herzog, 9/1/95

"The time has come," the Walrus said, "to talk of many things." Kudos to Hal! Yes, change is in the air and it is time to have our voices heard! I wholeheartedly agree: Speak up--up to the top. I know first hand that the new Chancellor reads his e-mail and snail-mail (if you don't have access to WPOffice). And Hal's list of ways to improve Western Living was superb. Though Hal referred to it, he didn't include in his "ten ways" what I consider to be the most important issue: communication. Our current revolution in technology claims to be about information and we at WCU need to be actively involved in communication with each other--with students, staff, faculty, administrators, community members, neighbors, as well as county, state, national, and global communities. We need to communicate about what we know, think, like, and hope for. We need to communicate not only to make concrete changes in our environment but also to be connected with one another, to hear and be heard, to understand and be understood, to value and be valued. Only through communication can our fears of the unknown and the different be significantly reduced. So, yes, speak up and speak out! (Listening is helpful, too.)

Chris Gunn, Counseling & Psychological Services

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I was particularly pleased with Hal's suggestion that we better emphasize our outdoor opportunities. I would like to see extensive bike trails that lead to and along the river and other sites out from campus (get the bikers off the four-lane). I think it would be a springboard for further regional economic development.

Bob Houghton, Elementary Ed and Reading

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Thanks to Hal Herzog for starting a badly needed dialogue. Here are a few ideas I've been kicking around with students over the years:

1. WCU students, faculty, and staff should have a club--on campus--where they can listen to music, dance, and drink alcoholic beverages (if of age). They should also be able to buy their beer and wine on campus, at facilities operated by WCU, with profits going to WCU. To do so, it may be necessary for Western to initiate and lead efforts to make Cullowhee a unit of local government with its own officials and home-rule powers.
2. The creative works displayed on the campus should be those of students (first priority), faculty/staff (second priority), or alumni. Western should encourage, recognize, and reward members of its own family whenever possible.
3. Native plants should be used for landscaping as much as possible, especially those species in need of preservation and propagation.
4. Western should consult with students and staff BEFORE bringing in new technology or equipment (or replacing or altering existing resources). For example, before "fixing" the existing telephone system (PLEASE), it would be a good idea to find out what the system's users want and need. Such consultation is absolutely mandatory for computer and telecommunications technology if our money is to be well spent. Why not start all future deliberations over capital improvements or equipment acquisition with needs assessments?

Responses to "Let's Break the Communication Bottleneck: Go Right to the Top," by Hal Herzog, 9/1/95, continued

5. Western student organizations and media should be allowed to compete in the marketplace, to the extent they are able, without the constraints of "sweetheart" arrangements between the school and area businesses.
6. Western contracts should be awarded on the basis of competitive bidding, and on-going contracts should be re-bid periodically (rather than automatically renewing them) to keep vendors honest (even those important to WCU) and give others the chance to compete.
7. All campus departments and allied organizations (CIML, NCCAT, etc.) should be encouraged or required to create and publicize internship positions with at least modest compensation for WCU students.
8. Students should be asked how they want their student fees used and if they are willing to have those fees increased and for what purposes.
9. Faculty and staff should not have to pay for parking on campus. Or, if they must, they should get assigned, reserved spaces that allow them to come and go without the hassle of finding a parking spot.
10. Someone should turn off the irritating Bell Tower music during normal class hours. Why not use music written by our students and staff or create a playlist of student/staff requests. Anything but the "same old-same old."

John Moore, Communications and Theatre Arts

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Right on, Hal! I would make these suggestions: **campus maps** should either use larger print or provide magnifying glasses so students and visitors can tell what is where. We need safe **pedestrian passages** between HFR and the Ramsey Center and up the Hill from Moore to the commuter parking by the water tower. Off campus we need a sidewalk from the pedestrian bridge to the Post Office. The **Summer School Calendar** inconveniences students needing courses at regional community colleges, who find that their summer quarters aren't over until the end of the week that our fall semester starts. And look what happens to our summer school scheduling when first session starts before the public schools let out. To solve **the parking problem**, we should invest in some Denver Boots and attach them to illegally parked cars after the second ticket. Some people on this campus don't seem to be able to learn under our present system. **What's good at WCU?**

The new signs,
traffic police at critical corners at rush hours,
the flowers (especially the day lily garden across from Dodson),
most of the public sculpture,
the hard workers from Housekeeping who got us moved to and from Camp Lab in jig time,
air-conditioning in Belk and Moore at last,
and the sense of excitement that having a new Chancellor generates.

Sharon Jacques, Nursing

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KUDOS to Hal! Congratulations on a great Top Ten! Unfortunately, I do not feel as free as Hal to respond with my name. I am tenured, but I have learned over the years that administrators hold grudges even though we are supposed to work in an environment of academic freedom. However, freedom of speech seems to mean that one can state only what the powers to be wish to hear. If you

Responses to "Let's Break the Communication Bottleneck: Go Right to the Top," by Hal Herzog, 9/1/95, continued

do not agree with them or perhaps step on their territory, it is very much remembered. This situation is even worse if you are a female, as the good old boy network is alive and well in Cullowhee. No, colleagues, I am not a female, but I have even seen sexism at work and that's sad!!

I would like to add my own top ten:

- 10 Towel service at the new Wellness Center.
- 9 An invitation to faculty to offer their expertise when administrative decisions are being made about certain things; we just might save the university some money and prevent costly mistakes. Perhaps the administration doesn't know what our areas of expertise are!
- 8 This is a public institution. Put the budgets on the table for all to see in every department! ! !
- 7 Get rid of the fee charged to departments if a faculty member needs a VCR or TV delivered to teach a class in a building in which their office is not housed.
- 6 More money for resources for teaching at the departmental level.
- 5 More travel money! Are administrators limited to \$200 per year? \$500 per year? Does the limitation of travel placed on faculty mean that the knowledge garnered at professional conferences and brought back to students is less important than the meetings and conferences administrators attend to run the university? Aren't we here for the students and not the administration? For one year, limit all administrators, except for those in admissions and development, to \$200 travel money and distribute the rest to the faculty. Perhaps the meaning of \$200 will be understood. Maybe the administrators should write grants to get travel money!!
- 4 A university account which pays for everyone to have a computer and be hooked up to Word Perfect Office, the Internet, and to the fiber optic cable. We will save money by being more productive, using less paper, and making fewer long distance calls.
- 3 Reduce teaching loads so those who wish to conduct meaningful research can do so within a 40 hour work week; please, no chastisement from faculty who do not care about research as we all have something valuable to contribute to the learning environment.
- 2 Help make faculty productive; spread the secretarial and part-time help around! It's ludicrous to have individuals with doctorates running errands, making secretarial phone calls, Xeroxing, picking up and delivering TV's and VCR's from the media center, and answering the phone. Maybe we could get research done in a 40 hour work week. This is not an egotistical statement! It's a fact of life. We are in the business of educating students and businesses would not operate in this manner.
- 1 Empowerment, not hierarchy, is the management style of the future! An empowered manager is made to look better by empowered employees because often more gets accomplished. But it means letting go of one's own power.

Anonymous

The "Great Conversation": Direct and Indirect Communication

The university has been defined as “the Great Conversation” and, to a large measure, that’s what it is. Our work is accomplished largely in conversation with others, our institutional direction emerges from conversation, and specific plans and priorities are set through conversation. Communication is at the heart of our enterprise.

As many of you are aware, I have been encouraging people to communicate directly with me. My e-mail number has been published (Jbardo@wpoff.wcu.edu), and I have been attempting to meet and talk with as many people as possible.

This direct level of communication is important for several reasons. First, since I am new to Western, about the only way that I have of getting a sense of the campus is through communication. Direct communication with as many constituencies as possible is by far the best way for me to develop an immediate understanding of issues and needs. Second, over the longer run, direct communication is critical as a “monitoring” device to enable me (and others) to judge when we are straying off course and when there are major problems developing. Third, there are some issues that just truly need to go to the Chancellor. Direct communication provides the fastest mechanism for those issues to be dealt with. All of these are important reasons to foster direct communication.

To encourage direct communication, I see several new routes that could encourage a free exchange of opinions and ideas. For example, I consider E-mail immediate and efficient (traditional mail is slower but still effective). Additionally, I have instituted and/or planned various face-to-face meetings (“teas,” departmental visits, informal conversations, retreats, etc.) that will allow an exchange of ideas. I also envision regular “updates from the Chancellor” on issues of interest to the campus.

As important as direct communication is, I also strongly believe in the value of indirect communication. This university has distributed significant responsibilities to deans and vice chancellors. We are also working to continue distributing authority to the departmental level. Many issues within the University need to be dealt with by these other University officers, and I encourage you to communicate with them as well as with me.

In our society, it is axiomatic that “information is power.” But information has a unique property in the collegiate environment that it might not have in any other: the more you share information with others, the more power you have. On a University campus, power comes not

from possessing information but from sharing it. This year, especially, I would encourage us to think about the following communications issues:

- We are in an environment and time when we can promote meaningful communication. What is standing in our way? How can we minimize barriers to real communication?
- How do we communicate with each other and with other groups? Do we have styles of communication that keep us from hearing the other person? I am a strong believer in the statement that many people on a campus share a common interest in an issue though their positions may differ. To what extent can we improve our communications by looking at our interests rather than our positions?
- Do we minimize the value of communication by personalizing the conversation? To what extent are our campus communications hurt by personalization rather than arguing interests?
- Do we listen to all components of our campus community? What are our students really telling us about their experiences here? Are they finding the campus and their experiences at WCU to be satisfying both intellectually and affectively? What about the other key players on the campus; do we have mechanisms to hear them?
- To what extent do preconceived notions of the other person limit our willingness to communicate? Are these notions based on our personal experience or on a generalized reputation?
- How are we preparing ourselves to communicate with diverse populations? If our diversity plans are productively implemented, we will be dealing increasingly with people who do not necessarily communicate in the same styles that we do. Are we ready for this change and how do we accommodate their need to state their positions? How do we come to understand their interests?

We are beginning a very important debate and discussion on this campus concerning our future direction and approaches. Effective communication with all constituencies is going to be critical for that debate. I invite you to join this "great conversation."

John Bardo, Chancellor

Comments or Questions?

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Faculty Center for Teaching Excellence

**Response to "The 'Great Conversation': Direct and Indirect Communication," by
Chancellor Bardo, 10/1/95**

Many of us watching from the sidelines have been "benched" or kept off the starting team by an organizational climate that deterred or prevented genuine attempts to communicate, especially from those of us at the bottom of the food chain. Real or imagined, we learned the "rules" about communicating within the WCU jungle. We learned or we suffered consequences.

Hopefully, Chancellor Bardo will forgive us if we are a mite slow to crawl out of the figurative bunkers where we hunkered down before he told us "It's safe to come out now." Some of us are still waiting to see if his actions signal real organizational change or yet another devious device to get us out of our foxholes.

I've come out of mine, partly because he seems genuine, partly because I'm sick of living underground, and partly because an outstanding group of 1994-95 WCU students such as Blake Frizzell, Virginia Sexton, Dave Williams, Dawn Cook, Todd Midgett, and Scott Swift (to list only those safely off campus) who spoke out and demanded that their world respond to abuses around them. Last year they forced me and other faculty members to act in ways we already knew we should but might not have. Their actions prepared us for accepting a new campus climate, in that we couldn't go back in our holes again. Other students may emerge, but don't expect a stampede right away.

All of us need to install and maintain a system of "safe" communications that starts with students as the clients/buyers of our services, recognizes that classroom teachers are the primary contact points for most of our students, and accepts the fact that administrators are support personnel, not rulers. It really doesn't much matter whether communications are direct, indirect, or up the chain-of-command. What does matter is that communications are SAFE!

Here are some **MUSTS** that a safe and effective communications system **MUST** have:

1. Students and staff **MUST** feel encouraged to communicate.
2. Our input **MUST** be sought at the outset of the decision making process, not just when it's time to vote on one of the options handed to us by others.
3. We **MUST** feel our suggestions and ideas will be considered on the merits of the suggestions and ideas, not on how well we write or speak, and certainly not on the basis of who we are and how we look.
4. We **MUST** be given easily used and understood means to communicate in an approved manner, but we **MUST** be forgiven if our honest attempts to communicate don't fit in someone's preconceived little boxes or follow a preferred format (sometimes formats cause interference).
5. We **MUST** be given feedback that says what was decided and why. The feedback **MUST** also say our participation was valued and that our ideas were considered.
6. **MOST OF ALL**, however, we **MUST** be guaranteed protection from retribution of any kind from any sources when we communicate.

Build it; some will come. Some of us will help. Others will cautiously and wisely wait to see if it's gonna work--if it's safe.

John Moore, Communications and Theatre Arts.

Measuring Student Learning By Measuring Behavioral Changes

Recently at WCU we have begun to talk about excellence in student learning as well as excellence in teaching, understanding that great teaching is not worth much if there is no great learning in response. But how can we measure learning? Is it enough if students give the "right" answers on a test? Or should changes in behavior also be used as criteria?

We teach our nursing majors how to teach clients better health behaviors, and I think we can use the same model to think about student learning in our classrooms. Whenever a client's lack of knowledge is adversely affecting his or her health status, the nurse identifies the behavior that must be changed and brings the necessity of this change to the client's attention. Health problems such as hypertension can be treated with medications, of course, but also essential are changes in behavior like eating less sodium, managing stress, and losing weight. We teach the client about the antihypertensive medications and how to take them for the most therapeutic effect and the least side effects. But if we then cheerfully sign off on our teaching plan, confident that the client has the requisite knowledge, we have not validated that a change in behavior will follow. The client might not take the pills. Maybe the pills cost too much. Maybe other expenses are more important this month. Maybe the client feels "fine" and sees no reason to continue the medication regimen. Maybe the side effects of a particular medication are just too unpleasant. Or maybe the client does take the pills as prescribed but doesn't make the other changes in behavior, continuing to eat excessive amounts of salt, letting stress build up, gaining weight, etc. Those pills are fighting an uphill battle.

So for our teaching plan to work with nursing clients, we may have to reemphasize the need for behavioral changes, helping the client work out how to accomplish them. We teach the client about the sodium values of foods, management techniques for stress, how to count calories, how to get more exercise, etc. We show videos and give out pamphlets at the client's reading level to reinforce our teaching. Perhaps the client indicates a basic understanding of this content. Is our task now completed? Maybe. How many people do you know who are willing to give up fatback and potato chips, can stop screaming at other drivers, and are willing to park their cars at the far end of the lot instead of right beside the front door?

The ultimate outcome that we really wanted was for the client's blood pressure to remain within normal limits, which we can easily measure. But if the blood pressure stays high, what do we do? We usually go over the medical facts again, maybe adding a lesson on how uncontrolled hypertension can lead to a stroke. Scare tactics sometimes work. But unless the client makes a

change in behavior, taking personal accountability for the ultimate outcome of health care, all our teaching is so much hot air.

Now, what should be the ultimate outcome of a college education? You probably have your own ideas, but I believe that as a result of our teaching all of our students should at least become responsible citizens with leadership skills and a concern for someone besides themselves. Too many students seem to think that the outcomes of a college education are 1) to get a job and 2) to make lots of money. Some students see no value in General Education or any course work outside of their majors, and a few of them can't even see any value to course work in their majors. Students read popular books that say people can learn everything they need to know in kindergarten and come naturally to the idea that practical experience is more important than theoretical speculation. If students do not value what we have to teach, why should they bother to learn new facts, much less change their behaviors?

Surely there is more to a college education than getting a job and making lots of money. Should WCU graduates learn not only about the world but also how to behave in it? I'll never forget the freshman I once had in a class who said the job and money he gained after college would enable him to devote volunteer time to his community. How wonderful that he had this perspective. How sad that he was so unique.

But students are perhaps not the only members of our community with a limited view of what a college education means. Too many faculty in universities around the country seem to think that a college education should focus on 1) knowing facts, 2) reciting formulas, or 3) mastering the content of a specific discipline. If all we do is teach facts, how will students learn new behaviors? If students don't learn new behaviors, how will anybody know they have been to college?

Let me give more nursing examples. In 1893 Lillian Wald founded the Henry Street Settlement in New York City and used the practice there to develop a model for community health nursing. I don't care if the student knows the date. I want the student to understand why Miss Wald thought her nurses should live in the community where they worked and what implications that concept of immediacy has for nursing practice today. In a more concrete area, I test for dosage calculations competency in our juniors. More than math anxiety is going on when students tell me that the client will take 14,732 capsules of a given drug in one week. I don't want the students to get hung up on formulas when they should be demonstrating common sense. In other words, the dates and formulas and other content-related tools are merely the foundation for behaviors in the practice of a discipline. The nursing faculty has a mandate to produce responsible citizens who are eligible for licensure. Student nurses must demonstrate by their behaviors that they can provide client care safely, or we don't let them graduate.

Is there not some way that every discipline we teach can test changes in behavior appropriate to that discipline? Should not every syllabus include at least one measurable objective of future societal or personal behavior to help every student become a more responsible citizen? When you are making your syllabus for next semester, what concrete behavior could you include as a goal for the students in your class? How would you teach that behavior? How would you measure it? Are there behaviors you think should be common to your department? Your

school? The university? If so, how could they become part of the curriculum? What would you have to do today to raise the consensus among your colleagues and students to make this behavior a reachable goal?

Remember the parable of the Good Samaritan? Jesus ends with a quiz: Who was neighbor to the man who fell among thieves? And when the lawyer answers correctly, he is told "Go, and do thou likewise." Everything we teach should lead to some application for the betterment of the individual, the community, or the world. Unless the student makes a change in behavior, taking personal accountability for the ultimate outcome of a college education, all our teaching is so much hot air.

Sharon Jacques, Nursing

*Send responses to the Faculty Center by the 8th of the month. Your responses will be published in **notes & quotes** on the 15th.*

Faculty Center for Teaching Excellence

Response to "Measuring Student Learning By Measuring Behavioral Changes," by Sharon Jacques, 11/1/95

Sharon Jacques's Faculty Forum piece is well thought out. Like her, I would hope students would become community oriented. However, sometimes I wonder if it is not a good thing that there are limits to measurement.

While Sharon argues for behavioral measurement of things like public service, I think we must use measurements of cognitive as well as behavioral change and remain skeptical of them at the same time. In educating for creativity and even encouraging the student to be a rebel, I am reminded that Albert Einstein was very divergent in his thinking and could not get a job in academia until his theories received some verification and he had received the Nobel Prize.

Too often we test for convergent thinking rather than encouraging divergent thinking. Even in science the gradual change theory of the universe was conventional wisdom until quite recently. Suddenly thinking has shifted. William Faulkner could not manage in academic classes at the University of Mississippi and, failing to graduate, took a job at the Post Office. I am not sure if Faulkner thought about public service in the traditional sense, but he became a genius in literature and by doing what he did best ultimately served the public interest.

Diversity protects us from agreeing on all matters in academia and pluralism sometimes protects us from all faculty measuring the same behavioral elements. We must measure behavioral cognitive changes, we must evaluate, and we are even stuck with outcomes assessment (which likewise has its merits), but something must protect divergent thinking at universities. What is politically correct today may not be politically correct tomorrow, and the young rebel today who defies public service conventions may in the final analysis serve us best in the long run by marching to a different drummer. In the movie, The Shawshank Redemption, we see the rebel in prison, who gives us all a moment of redemption by playing classical music for the inmates. While universities and prisons are totally different and not even comparable, even the worst institutions can only be redeemed by rebels; likewise it is my belief that universities and societies are only redeemed by the rebel thinker.

At universities we value the divergent thinker and rebel student, but we must evaluate them by conventional standards even though their cognitive behavior does not fit the norm. One wonders how they will go about serving the public or even if they will. So I for one am glad there are limits to measurement and limits to consensus. I am not disagreeing with Sharon but stressing a different dimension to academic measurement. Since there are few platonic philosopher Kings or Queens, we need to retain a certain skepticism toward measurement, recognize its limits and possibly realizing that if the intellectual giants had been measured by very exacting standards of conventional knowledge they might not have prospered, especially if they had been measured by conventional definitions of public service. Measure twice and cut once is an often repeated adage. We must be cautious in measuring lest we make the wrong decision.

Gordon Mercer, Political Science and Public Affairs

Am I Prepared For the Real World? A Student's View

As the completion of my college career approaches, I am beginning to wonder if my education at WCU has sufficiently prepared me for the real world of work. It is a question any senior in any major could ask herself. But my conclusion scares the hell out of me. I fear that I am nowhere near being prepared for the future. The business world I am entering is not like the neat system described in the lectures and textbooks I have encountered. It is full of constant changes and uncertainty, an environment full of disorganization, eternal ambiguity, recurring problems, and stress levels so high that Prozac becomes a necessity in the daily diet.

The first and most evident problem in my preparation is the teacher-centered approach that has influenced our education for so many years. It is based on the idea of teaching as telling:

The primary goal [in traditional schooling] is the transfer of information from an expert (the teacher) to novices (the students), with the expert controlling such critical elements of the process as the syllabus, pace and sequencing, and mode of expression. In practice, this usually means that the expert lectures and the novices record and absorb. Interchanges between teacher and student are limited to brief question and answer sessions, and there is little or no interaction among students. (Garvin)

On my first job, will I have people lecturing me or telling me what to do every step of the way? I think not. My employers will expect me to be an active learner, figuring out lots of things for myself. But in traditional schooling, students do not develop the skills they need to question, research, and work independently through their own creativity and originality. They follow the same process throughout their educational careers--listen, record, read, memorize, regurgitate, forget--and this process does not help them become effective business people. Having little experience with active learning in school, students come to the work force without the ingenuity, drive, and flexibility that is needed to work effectively in any demanding job.

But some teachers are skeptical of active learning because it entails a level of ambiguity which threatens their position as the controlling center of attention. A program of active learning decentralizes authority, giving students an equal voice in the classroom decision making. When the balance of power shifts from the autocratic to the democratic in the classroom the primary concern is no longer with the course material delivered from teacher to student. Pupils must understand classroom processes and the climate of learning. Feedback and open discussion must allow students to learn from other students as well as from textbook or teacher.

With active learning, actual experience and interaction leads students to a point where they genuinely care for their education and invest a personal interest in its structure and value.

Gavin observes that "students today are distressingly disaffected with formal education. Class time is more or a chore than a delight." Students view traditional education methods as drudgery, as monotonous and unresponsive to creativity and change. Contrary to popular belief, students do value and enjoy learning. They have, however, been dissatisfied and bored with the substance and methods of misdirected teaching. Gavin quotes John Dewey, who saw even early in this century that "teaching can be compared to selling commodities. No one can sell unless someone buys, [yet] there are teachers who think they have done a good day's teaching irrespective of what pupils have learned." Students need to be given more responsibility within the classroom in order to have an involved interest and to retain more than the teacher's words. Teachers and students should work as partners so that, in Gavin's words, the "true ends of education--the ability to use knowledge, to think creatively, and to continue learning on one's own--be achieved."

But there is another problem in addition to teaching methods. The content of our courses often fails to recognize that the world is always changing, that people cannot know what is to come with each passing day. The future is not a glass window through which we can see the struggles and complications of tomorrow. But teachers and textbooks have led us to believe that we hold a magnifying glass that enables us to see tomorrow and know what to do when it comes. Teachers and textbooks have portrayed the business world as a fantasy land, a clearly organized environment where everything is easily understood. Howard Schwartz describes this illusion:

The organization is like a clockwork: everyone knows what the organization is all about and all are solely concerned with carrying out its mission; people are basically happy at their work, the level of anxiety is low, people interact with each other in frictionless, mutually supportive cooperation; and if there are any managerial problems at all, these are basically technical problems, easily solved by someone who has the proper skills and knows the correct techniques of management.

These lessons are a farce, false precepts that cause naive hopes and eventual disillusion in students who must eventually face the ultimate "messiness" of the actual business world.

In truth, organizations are a snake pit and students need to be exposed to the facts about the reality of tomorrow. It is humiliating to realize that the time and effort I have spent learning and practicing traditional education is going to be the core of my difficulty in stepping into tomorrow's business world. These realities cause me anxiety and discomfort. I would rather have been exposed to these facts long ago so that I could change, adjust, and prepare myself to deal with them.

Professors need to leave their desire for control and their theories of fantasy at home. They should enter the school building to talk but also to listen to their students. Allowing active participation could generate new attitudes in their students. Teaching false positivity does not mean that teachers are performing well. Yes, the truth hurts, but side-stepping the truth is more dangerous and more damaging. Teachers need to realize the needs of the students. Active learning methods should be implemented into classroom strategy along with the delivery of facts about the organizational snake pits that students will face in the "real world."

Valerie Jeffords, BSBA, Management, Spring, 1995

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*Send responses to the Faculty Center by the 8th of the month. Your responses will be published in **notes & quotes** on the 15th.*

Plus/Minus Grading

There are a lot of "hot" issues on campus these days and if you have been following Faculty Senate activities you will recognize "plus/minus" or "12-point" grading as one of them. Some of us believe that teaching and learning at WCU would be significantly enhanced if the university were to adopt an expanded grading system that included plusses and minuses in addition to the traditional A's, B's, C's, and D's that we now employ. Thus, for example, a student could receive a final grade of B, B+, or B- rather than simply a B. Some faculty resist this suggested change, convinced that it is a bad idea. We believe that it is a good idea. We are publishing our opinion in the Faculty Forum because we believe a thorough debate will lead the university community to choose the better wisdom. Here are some of our arguments:

1. The plus/minus, 12-point scale would be more precise. Under the present system, a student with a high "B" who barely falls short of an "A" receives the same grade as a student with a low "B" who barely misses a "C," although the former student clearly learned more than the latter. There is more difference between a high "B" and a low "B" than there is between a low "B" and a high "C," yet the present system does not allow this and similar distinctions to be recorded.
2. The plus/minus, 12-point scale would also be more accurate. The grade recorded for a student would more closely match the level of learning reached by the student. Assuming that 90% to 100% = "A," 80% to 89% = "B," etc., a student whose numerical grade was about 89 would receive a "B+" instead of a "B" and a student whose numerical grade was about 81 would receive a "B-" instead of a "B." And a student with a numerical grade of about 79 would receive a "C+" instead of a "C."
3. The plus/minus, 12-point scale would be more fair to students. Under the proposed system, a student who just misses an "A" would receive 3.4 quality points for a "B+" (or even 3.7 points for an "A-") instead of the 3 points awarded for a "B." The plus/minus assignments show students more accurately how they are doing in their courses. A plus/minus grade informs students of the borderline nature of their work, and thus may inspire them to put out extra effort in the future.
4. The plus/minus, 12-point scale would give more significance to final exams. Many faculty have remarked on the tendency of students to "blow

off" final exams since students often assume they already have an immovable "B" or "C" in the course. This attitude implies that they do not believe their final exam performance will raise or lower, in a significant way, their course grade. With the plus/minus, 12-point scale the final exam should have a more meaningful effect on their final grade for the course. Since the difference between a "B" and a "B+" (or a "C" and a "C+") is .3 of a quality point, students might study more and do better on final exams and rightly receive a higher grade.

5. The plus/minus, 12-point scale should help reduce grade inflation. Many have objected to the grade inflation occurring at WCU and nationwide. Some grade inflation is perhaps an inevitable problem. Faculty are inclined to boost borderline "A/B" (or "B/C") students into the "A" (or "B") range because the students' work is better than that of others in the lower grade levels. However, this is inaccurate insofar as those in the "A" (or "B") range receive the same grade as those in the borderline area. Although inflation would likely continue to some extent under the new system, it would be less pronounced. Under the plus/minus system, students' grades would likely be raised only one third of a letter grade rather than a whole letter grade as allowed under the current system.

6. The plus/minus, 12-point scale preserves faculty freedom in assigning grades. Under the present system, some faculty seldom or never record "F's" for students whereas others seldom assign "A's." This freedom would continue. Those faculty who believe that the plus/minus, 12-point scale is too fine in some circumstances could continue recording grades as "A," "B," "C," etc. The proposal for the plus/minus scale is charitable in that it allows faculty not to add pluses and minuses to their grade evaluations when they believe it is not justified. However, for other faculty who often need finer distinctions than the present system offers, the plus/minus system provides a more precise and accurate reporting of students' levels of learning.

We are expected to be professionals on whose judgment others in society rely. We assume it is obvious that we need competent and well-educated members of the professions: business and industry, education, medicine, law, and the fine and performing arts. The university was established primarily for the purpose of educating people to enter these professions. We, the faculty, are obligated to provide the best possible opportunities for learning to students and to give our best possible judgment about the levels of learning attained by the students. Business and industry and professional and graduate schools depend on our judgment about the educational achievement of our students. None of us would disagree about our obligation to motivate and guide the students' learning; the disagreement here concerns our obligation to render our best judgment about the students' levels of learning, that is, grades.

Some of the debate we have heard suggests that the purpose of grades is to make students feel good about themselves. How many of us would be satisfied with a physician's deceiving us about our health because "The truth would make you feel bad." How many of us would be

satisfied with a physician's diagnosis as: "It's some sort of pneumonia. I don't know exactly what kind, but it doesn't matter." We expect better of physicians, lawyers, and engineers, and they and the rest of society expect better of us. The plus/minus grading system would enable us to record our judgments more precisely and accurately than the present system. It would also be more fair to students, would give more significance to final exams, should help reduce grade inflation, and would preserve faculty freedom in assigning grades.

This is what we believe and why. Do you agree? Do you disagree? What's your opinion?

Daryl Hale, Philosophy & Religion

Mike Jones, Philosophy & Religion

Jim McLachlan, Philosophy & Religion

Henry Mainwaring, Biology □

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Faculty Center for Teaching Excellence

Responses to "Plus/Minus Grading," by Hale, Jones, McLachlan, & Mainwaring
2/1/96

I heartily concur that we should move to a plus/minus grading system. Other schools in the UNC system use it; it might make students more diligent in preparing for tests; it certainly moves in the direction of deflating grade inflation.

Nancy Joyner, English

People attached to the limited A,B,C,D,F scale tend to act like do-it-yourselfers who use chain saws for delicate carpentry cuts requiring a band saw. The attitude is that the lumber gets cut, don't worry that the blueprint requires a finished cut. For the diverse population we serve, I believe we can find finishing tools that more accurately reflect student achievement. Having used a similar 12 point scale for evaluation, I have watched students respond to the finer gradations, moving through levels of "C" and "B" as their improving work and skills are reflected in the end of the course evaluation. I support moving Western Carolina to an evaluation tool of greater refinement.

Lawrence J. Hill, Communication & Theatre Arts

I think the +/- or 12-point grading system makes much better sense than the present 5-point one. At times I have entertained the idea that the whole percentage point scores would be even more accurate, such as some I have seen in Chinese transcripts.

J. Dan Pittillo, Biology

While I think there is much merit to the suggestion that we adopt a plus/minus grading system, I do have one concern, and that is the system's contribution to grade inflation. Although the authors have suggested the plus/minus system would curb grade inflation, I don't agree. For instance, I think most faculty believe a student who has earned an A deserves 4 grade points under the current system. They may be reluctant to give an A- if they realized the student would receive fewer than 4 grade points. Faculty who give a B+ to students who would normally have received a B will see their grades inflated as the student would now receive 3.4 grade points. The only way to know the new system's effect on grade inflation is to do a careful study of the number of +'s and -'s and compare grades after the implementation of the new system to the grades before its implementation.

David Claxton, Health, PE, & Recreation

The February Faculty Forum presents the best argument for plus-minus grading that I've seen. This proposal was defeated in the late '80s because--I believe--a majority of those in the Senate at that time felt that (1) the old system worked well enough ("if it ain't broke...") and that (2) the change would necessitate undue effort for the minimal benefits it might offer. Drs. Hale, Jones, McLachlan, and Mainwaring have shown clearly that the old system is

not fair and that the change is easily done from the professor's point of view and well worth the effort from the students'. I was especially impressed by the arguments concerning the inherent unfairness of the old system and the way the traditional system encourages students to believe that finals "aren't worth the time" unless the student is "on the line."

Steve Eberly, English

Surely the best way to assess student performance is to provide a written evaluation of each student's strengths and weaknesses in the course. Since there are compelling reasons that militate against written evaluations, I think we should therefore adopt a grading system that summarizes and retains as much information as possible about the student's performance. The plus/minus system is preferable to the current whole-letter system, just as the whole-letter system is preferable to one that simply records pass-fail.

John Slater, Communication & Theatre Arts

I don't think it ranks with identifying types of pneumonia, but I have no objection to a grading system that allows plus and minus grades. In fact my undergraduate education at Davidson College was under a similar system.

Ralph Triplette, Geosciences & Anthropology

I support the 12-point grading system. The 12-point system would provide more validity and accuracy to the assessment processes. This system would also help to eliminate the bias and subjectivity that can enter into the assignment of grades when the situation is borderline. With the current system, the student who earns an 89 average on a numerical scale (001-100) has received a "B". More accurately the student's performance resides at a point between "A" and "B". I want to be able to make the finer distinctions in assessment for the purposes of informing and inspiring students.

Darlene Thurston, Administration, Curriculum, & Instruction

I would like to respond to the question in the Faculty Forum concerning the 12 point grading scale. I wholeheartedly agree that it is a much needed change. The gradation would more accurately reflect student achievement. There is a wide variation of competence between a student receiving a 90% A and one earning a 99% A. The new system would involve a bit more "bookkeeping" on the part of the faculty and registrar, but computers would be able to accommodate the new "spread sheets." Other state universities in North Carolina have adopted this new concept. After the initial "start-up trial period," the system is working very productively.

Judy King, Human Environmental Sciences

Faculty Center for Teaching Excellence

Responses to "Plus/Minus Grading," by Hale, Jones, McLachlan, & Mainwaring
2/1/96, continued

I agree with Professors Hale, Jones, McLachlan, and Mainwaring on the issue of Plus/Minus Grading because of what is done with the grades after we turn them in at the end of the term. **THEY ARE AVERAGED.** Letter grades coming from many different professors and many different courses make up data which is at the ordinal level of measurement and therefore should not be averaged. It is statistically invalid to do so. It is unscientific and downright unfair to compare students through the use of grade point averages. How can we treat our students this way? Not only do we compare students through grade point averages, we use these averages to kick some out of school and to graduate others with honors. If we really want to be a national leader in teaching and learning, then we should get rid of grade point averages. Student performance within a class should be judged superior, acceptable, or not acceptable. Such things as failing out of school, graduating, and graduating with honors should be determined by percentages of the total course hours taken that result in these three categories. There are clearly more details to be worked out with this system, but I will not begin to try to discuss them here. Before you make up your mind about the proposed Plus/Minus Grading system, you should read Making Sense Of College Grades: Why the Grading System Does Not Work and What Can Be Done About It, by Milton, Pollio, and Eison. The Faculty Center has a copy of this book. Before you say, "nobody else uses the system that Stephens is proposing," think about this. Once upon a time, nobody used grade point averages. Some one must be the first. In conclusion, if we are not going to scrap grade point averages, the Plus/Minus System at least moves our grade reporting a little closer to the level of measurement required for data to be averaged (interval or ratio level). **Richard Stephens, Mathematics & Computer Science**

Of the arguments I've heard regarding the grading systems, I find those favoring the 12-pt system to be more compelling, at least in an ideal world. However, I must share with you the gut feeling I have when I sit down to calculate final grades: that the letter grade system is crude and that the final grade which a student "earns" may or may not reflect his/her grasp of a subject. Is there a danger that a 12-pt system would simply lend a false impression of accuracy in what is at best an imprecise business? I hope we do not delude ourselves here.

Gary White, Geosciences and Anthropology

Before coming to Western, I was at a university which used the 12 point system. Assigning grades was a lot less stressful under this system. At one time or another, all of us have agonized over whether or not a student should get the higher letter grade if the student lacks one half a point or less. It does make more of a difference when the ultimate discriminating spread is between a 3.0 and a 4.0. In one of my classes, due to the number of assignments, the difference between an 89 and a 90 final percentage is two ten-point summaries. Do I say, "Oh, it's OK, they didn't turn in two summaries, but I'll give them the 'A' anyway because they came to all of the classes?" I think not. Along the same line of reasoning, why should someone who barely squeaked by with an 80 overall course average and probably received at least two letter grades lower on one exam receive the same 3.0? The 12 point scale rewards those who chose to study diligently for a test over one who opted to spend the evening watching a favorite movie. If we are to increase our standards at the university and decrease grade inflation, this is a great place to start.

**Susan C. Brown,
Sport Management**

I am aware of Richard Stephens' response to the latest Faculty Forum article and agree with most of his points. I would even like to think I influenced his thinking by calling Making Sense of College Grades to his attention. The first two chapters of this book should be required reading for anyone interested in this issue.

**Lee Minor, Mathematics &
Computer Science**

The "12-point" grading system is not the solution to the problem of grades. Consider Paul Dressel's description of a grade: "An inadequate report of an inaccurate judgment by a biased and variable judge of the extent to which a student has attained an undefined level of mastery of an unknown proportion of an indefinite material." The claims that a 12-point grading system would be more precise and more accurate than a less differentiated system assume that grades are more precise and accurate than the techniques used to measure them. Who among us can attest to the accuracy and precision of the techniques we use to measure student performance in our courses? If we adopt the 12-point system, I fear that grades will become all the more important as devices for ranking students for personnel selection for graduate and professional school and for business and industry. Any value that grades have as motivators for learning may well be eclipsed by this ranking function. We should use a less, rather than a more, differentiated grading system and we should abolish the GPA.

John Habel, Psychology

Classroom Research and Its Role in Raising Academic Standards

In his address to the faculty a few weeks ago, Chancellor Bardo suggested that we can improve student learning at WCU by raising academic standards. I believe this is basically a good strategy, long overdue. But I can also see a potential misinterpretation that may damage academic standards more than raise them, and I want to wave a red flag before some of us make such a mistake.

As the Chancellor himself mentioned, demanding more does not simply mean flunking more students. But in our enthusiasm for his words, did we all hear his admonition? It is far too easy for faculty to simply demand more without examining the justification for raising the work load or the standards--too easy to demand more and not examine the results of such actions. What happens if we simply make the reading assignments longer and the examinations more difficult? Will this magically lead to more learning? I think not. Our goal is not to see how demanding we can become--anyone can make unreasonable demands. Our goal should be to make reasonable demands. But how will we know when our demands are reasonable? I think the answer is this: we must systematically and institutionally embrace the theory and practice of Classroom Research.

Classroom Research is defined and described in Classroom Assessment Techniques: A Handbook for College Teachers, (Angelo and Cross 1993, 2nd ed). Angelo and Cross suggest that teachers don't have to go any farther than their own classrooms to do highly sophisticated, professional, and useful research:

Through close observation of students in the process of learning, the collection of frequent feedback on students' learning and the design of modest classroom experiments, classroom teachers can learn much about how students learn and, more specifically, how students respond to particular teaching approaches. Faculty can use this information to refocus their teaching to help students make their learning more efficient and effective.

Before we "raise the bar," we need to find out what is going on in the minds of our students as they attempt the bar where we have it now, and when we start raising the bar we need to constantly monitor how our students are handling the increased demands.

Angelo and Cross emphasize that the students themselves join in this monitoring process, and in our scenario the students would therefore become our partners in the raising of the bar. This partnership entails an image of cooperative interaction that probably goes a long way by itself to describe what we mean by excellence in teaching and learning. What will we discover when we begin to observe our students and their learning process more closely? What will happen when we collect frequent feedback on what we are asking our students to learn? What

will happen when we start asking students more questions about their learning process and really begin to listen to what they say? I believe that we will discover just how much we can reasonably raise academic standards, what the limits might be, and why. We will not be working in the dark simply making more demands. At the same time, we will be establishing a rapport with students that is probably essential to their learning process. Students who become part of Classroom Research activities learn to trust their teachers and to feel some ownership of the classroom, some responsibility for their academic goals. This is very different from the image of the demanding taskmaster, the stern disciplinarian who marks a line in the sand and rewards with high grades the students who are able to "reach the mark." When the faculty stood in Forsyth Auditorium to applaud the Chancellor's speech, how many of us only had that image of the demanding taskmaster in our minds?

As Bruce Henderson has counseled us in former Faculty Forum pieces, effective teachers constantly seek that delicate balance between challenge and support. When students feel overwhelmed by academic challenges, they will frequently become frustrated and simply give up, as many of us do in the face of the challenges that frustrate us. Faculty must challenge students in order to energize them, but faculty must also support students on their high wire and convince students that it is safe to try, that there will be a net to catch them if they fall. Too much challenge without sufficient support will simply defeat learning where it might have been quite possible. It will be too easy to respond to the Chancellor's suggestion by simply requiring more from students and grading them more stringently. The key to solving the problem of our students' poor learning habits is to know what those habits are and how to fix them.

In the typical classroom, where the teacher does most of the talking and the students simply listen, respond to questions, or engage in discussions, it is too easy for us to miss the real issues and problems that underlie our students' success or failure. Students will not reveal their ignorance, confusion, or even their apathy if they don't have to. When we ask questions, we often receive silence. What does that silence mean? How can we find out? I think that some form of Classroom Research is the only answer. But how do we usually respond to the silence? Too often we are unnerved and go back to talking ourselves, which is just what the student wants who seeks to hide. I believe that to teach well we must try to constantly monitor what is going on in the minds of our students--how much they are understanding, what they are confused by and why, when they are apathetic and why, how they feel and why. I believe that frequently collecting that information in the classroom setting is the secret to quality education and an absolute necessity if we even entertain the idea of "raising standards." At the risk of "not covering the material" we need to stop often and find out where the students are; we must study them--the way we study anything in our area of academic specialization--to find out when they are learning poorly, when they are learning well, and why. Angelo and Cross's book describes dozens of procedures that faculty and students can use in their classrooms to monitor the learning process. But these techniques only serve as models for faculty and students to design procedures of their own that fit their precise needs.

What must we do before we decide to "raise the bar. Can WCU be a national leader as a teaching institution? Yes. Can it raise academic standards and make quality education rather than a marketing blitz that simply makes self-congratulating claims? Yes. But we need actions and results, not just more words. We need to accept our responsibility for fixing the problem of poor student learning habits and find a solution that really works. Focusing on Classroom Research will work if we pursue it assiduously because Classroom Research is not a marketing trick. I think we must dedicate ourselves as a faculty to read and study this book. It is

responsible scholarship--more important for WCU, I think, than discoveries in our areas of content specialization.

What can you do, then, to make higher academic standards and excellence in education a reality at WCU? Start a discussion group on classroom research in your department. Create classroom research exercises of your own. Publish them. Value this kind of work highly and reflect that value explicitly in your department's TPR document. Give tenure and promotion to faculty who are involved in forms of classroom research. And when you recruit new faculty, make it clear to them that this form of scholarship is highly valued at WCU. It will take courage to dedicate ourselves to something so prosaic and simple, something so difficult to market as a "great plan" for improving teaching and learning. But we must have the courage to dedicate ourselves to something that really has a chance to work.

Terry Nienhuis, English

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Faculty Center for Excellence in Teaching & Learning

**Responses to "Classroom Research and Its Role in Raising Academic Standards," by
Terry Nienhuis, 3/1/96**

The piece on classroom research is directly on target: monitoring what students are learning should be our primary goal. However, I felt a sense of terror in reading this: sure, this sounds easy as you describe it, but how much of a chasm is there between my comfortable, traditional way of teaching--which seems to work in its way--and the amorphous and chaotic-sounding pulse-taking of this new approach. I'm trained in my field, but my field is NOT teaching: my field is represented in my department's mix of lower division courses and my own specialties for upper division and graduates. Obviously I need to read the book you have recommended--though I suspect you've recommended it before and I've not managed to shift it very high up on my list of priorities yet. Thanks for the reminder. Perhaps I can add my voice to department discussions of classroom research.

Anonymous

Thanks for the opportunity to respond to your call for Classroom Research as an essential component in "raising the bar" on campus. During the fall semester, Maurice Phipps, Cindy Phipps, Susan Kask and myself conducted a cross-disciplinary study on "how students in our classes perceive the value of the cooperative learning activities utilized by the faculty to enhance their learning." We are still in the process of analyzing the data but the preliminary findings indicate some meaningful differences in what the faculty and the students perceive as effective and important strategies in learning. For example, many students do not like to work in teams with other students although they indicate they value teamwork in the workplace. How do we overcome the resistance of students working with each other in order to have them practice real-life skills that the student knows are important. Each of us is doing our own disciplinary research but we realized we must do classroom research, as well, in order to effectively teach our discipline. Both types of research endeavors are important if you are going to "raise the bar."

Scott Higgins--Health Sciences

I agree. One of the common ways of improving a sense of community and scholarship among K-12 faculties is to share the reading of a thought provoking book. This is what Fairview Elementary School has done for the last few years. So, I agree with the idea of having faculty read this book. Having said this, let me add a caution. Another way of thinking about higher standards is that we ought to strive to close the gap between our highest and lowest achieving students. Of course we should do this by working to boost the achievement of our lowest achievers. Unfortunately, these are usually not the students we want to work with, and this lack of desire may be more at the heart of our standards issue than are the ideas in Angelo & Cross's book. You see, if we frame the standards question differently, we get different suggestions. I believe we need an extensive debate before we identify too narrow a plan. The Faculty Senate Subcommittee on Instruction is suggesting that such a discussion begin in the Faculty Council on Instruction and Curriculum. We feel that this is such an important issue that we need as many people as possible participating in finding a way to improve our students' learning. We also see this as the perfect issue to be debated and acted upon through the faculty governance structure. For all faculty interested, this is the scheduled topic for discussion at the Instruction and Curriculum Council meeting at 3:30 on April 1, in Stillwell 102.

Casey Hurley--Administration, Curriculum, and Instruction

Faculty Center for Excellence in Teaching & Learning

**Responses to "Classroom Research and Its Role in Raising Academic Standards," by
Terry Nienhuis, 3/1/96, continued**

One only needs to review the content of Terry Nienhuis's essay on "Classroom Research and Its Role in Raising Academic Standards," to see the widely divergent areas and roles into which faculty members are moving to accommodate higher standards and excellence in education. It goes without saying that the influence of research extends far beyond the suggested arenas of the classroom situation proposed by Terry. Indeed, it appears that there is virtually no area of college life in which those appropriately trained in research methodology could not make a valuable contribution to the practice of teaching and learning. But given the number of variables in the classroom setting to control, to say nothing about the innumerable pedagogical objectives that the faculty member must meet, is the classroom the best situation to gather data "for fixing the problem of poor student learning habits and find a solution that really works"? Or, given the heterogeneous character of our students--that is, nontraditional students, "special learners", transfer students, and, too, the liberal policies regarding the entering cognitive behavior of freshman--is not the construing of a research design a formidable task? When, then, do faculty members act on "drawing the line," beyond which they cannot do classroom research? I'll say it bluntly: don't do it when the classroom situation is comprised of a large number of students and/or the group of students in the classroom is a heterogeneous one. In brief, it will be a rare occurrence in which productive research can be conducted in the classroom. One must look, therefore, for other situations on the WCU campus to conduct research, "to find out what is going on in the minds of our students."

William Chovan--Psychology

Meaningful Change Begins With You

In recent months we have heard so much about "change" at Western that anyone who now talks seriously about transformation and the opportunities it presents risks talking in clichés. "We are in a period of transition." "This is a time of great change at WCU." "We are on the brink of a naissance at Western." We have heard such words and phrases so often this year that we are in danger of not taking them seriously any more. But the public articulation and repetition of this sentiment is a necessary and powerful force in creating a unified and dynamic academic community. And it has already worked! Several graduate students have spoken with me about how excited they are with this period of great and meaningful change at WCU. We have to say these words often and risk making them a cliché in order to get everyone "on the same page." Even in a period of transition, change doesn't happen automatically. We still have a responsibility to take initiative and make things happen.

In his book, Inside Bureaucracy, Anthony Downs examines the process of organizational development and finds that creativity and growth can often stagnate in a process of bureaucratization. Organizations that initially flourish can as easily decline or fossilize when bureaucratic rules and regulations become self-serving ends in themselves--stifling creativity, change, and vitality. When academic bureaucracies fossilize they become what Downs calls "administrative cultures," where the reward structure overwhelmingly favors the administrative staff, where administrators make all the important decisions, and the further growth of the bureaucracy is valued above all else. Downs characterizes the "dynamic" institution as one that clearly identifies its mission and spends most of its creative energies making that mission prevail. He characterizes the overly bureaucratized institution as one that loses sight of its mission and takes as its tacit goal the enforcement of ever-increasing rules and regulations and the continued growth of bureaucracy. In such an institutional structure, protecting one's bureaucratic turf and position in the hierarchy becomes more important than serving any clientele or sense of mission.

When Chancellor Bardo arrived at WCU last year he invited the faculty to lead. He gave out his e-mail address and made it clear we all had free access to the "top of the hierarchy." He asked us to rethink our mission, and he challenged us to implement our vision. Thus, we all began to talk about "change." . The opportunity for change is real. Our organization is at a crossroads. We can take up Dr. Bardo's challenges or permit the university to drift back toward increasing bureaucratization. The ball is now in our court. We must advance beyond the words into implementation and action. Perhaps as someone suggested at our recent Forum/Assembly on our 21st Century Mission, we must engage in a continual process of change.

What does this mean in concrete terms? For one thing, it means that each of us needs to take a hard look at what we do to create a rich learning environment for our students. Jane Hall reminded me recently that most learning for students occurs outside the classroom. Students pursue most of their learning in libraries, in readings and assignments outside of class, in field work, and among their peers in the dormitories. The classroom is important but only as the bridge to the world of learning outside the classroom. Obviously, teaching is much more than presenting information. We need to be about the business of designing learning experiences that are challenging, creative, and at least interesting, if not always exciting. If all faculty would engage in a searching self-assessment of their effectiveness in creating vibrant learning experiences, prospects for making our mission statement a reality would be greater. Change begins in each of our own classrooms.

How else might we take initiative? For starters, how about joining the many Faculty Project Teams that are studying and implementing the principles of collaborative learning? Or maybe more of us need to actively support the Chancellor's proposal of an Honors College where student residential living will be a systematic part of the learning environment. What did you do when the Chancellor's memo on the Honors College crossed your desk? Did you file it in the recycling bin? Or did you read it carefully and arrange to attend the open meeting for interested and supportive faculty on Monday, March 25th at the Mountain Heritage Center Auditorium? Chancellor Bardo called that meeting "to gain a sense of the faculty with regard to the college." We all have to pick and choose what we attend, but this is a unique opportunity to influence our direction as a university. What did you do the last time there was a request to encourage a student to submit a proposal for the undergraduate research conference? Did you contribute to that part of the "learning environment" or did you toss the memo and decide that it was somebody else's job? Our undergraduate research paper sessions are not as fully supported as they need to be. There are not enough faculty sponsors and not enough faculty simply serving as an audience. I was once advised by an administrator that undergraduate research was not "part of our mission." Was that the voice of the future or the voice of the past? Participation in the next undergraduate research conference will be supportive of a more active learning environment.

Finally, if we are serious about faculty governance, we will make the Faculty Senate a genuinely deliberative body that shapes the most important policies of the university. But it won't happen without your involvement, your willingness to serve, your active participation on subcommittees. All our colleges need more full-time faculty serving in the Senate. Without them, we risk drifting back into a bureaucratically top-heavy environment where administrators are forced to dominate because the faculty refuses to take the opportunity given to it. Faculty are always encouraged to attend Senate meetings and to participate in debate.

The opportunities for active involvement are unlimited. If WCU seeks to become nationally renowned as a teaching and learning institution, everyone here must play an active role. Staff offices need to think about how they support the learning environment and take pride in the role they play. Librarians must be given the credit they deserve for helping students learn. The computer center would set up even more extensive World Wide Web access to faculty and students alike. Faculty would spend more time with honor societies to enhance the learning

environment and the image of the university. Teaching and learning would be valued over administrative power. We would extend our learning environment farther into the community. We would investigate ways for each student to have a personal, community, or faculty mentor throughout four years of undergraduate life. We would develop programs for students to come into close contact with professionals in the vocational field they hope to pursue through community mentors. We might pursue Bruce Henderson's idea that every student needs work experience before graduation. In short, we would take our mission seriously and propose programs that would implement that mission. We are in a period when everyone's ideas are needed.

We have a Chancellor who is inviting us to take an active role in making WCU whatever kind of institution we think it ought to and can become. But change won't happen without your active involvement.

Gordon Mercer, Political Science & Public Affairs

*Send responses to the Faculty Center by the 8th of the month.
Your responses will be published in **notes & quotes** on the 15th.*

Faculty Center for Excellence in Teaching & Learning

Responses to "Meaningful Change Begins With You," by Gordon Mercer, 4/1/96

As usual, Gordon is right on track about change. But then, he has always been a campus leader with good ideas and a lot of enthusiasm for the possible. One has only to look around at the faculty assemblies he has initiated to see who else is willing to be a risk-taker and think outside the box. I think we have enough of a critical mass among faculty and students to take up the challenge of the Bardo administration. There will, of course, be resistance from those who are encrusted by the status quo, and not every change will succeed (and some probably shouldn't), but we owe it to ourselves to try.

Sharon Jacques, Nursing

One thing that struck me as I reread Gordon Mercer's April Faculty Forum piece is that, unsurprisingly but sadly, he is "preaching to the choir." Just as on Easter Sunday--when many folks attended church for the first time in a year, or years, while others did not attend at all--there were also those few who took their customary places. In much the same fashion, the faculty who share Gordon's beliefs about what we need to do to break our bureaucratic shackles, to transform our teaching efforts into learning efforts, etc. read his piece, nodding in agreement as he made each of his points and referred to colleagues like Bruce and Jane who are--and have been--actively at work trying to transform WCU. Many of us are already on FCTE Project Teams, attended the open meetings on the formation of an Honors College, serve on the Faculty Senate, and the like. But are we a majority?

Don't a lot of our colleagues just "go through the motions," teaching as they were taught, usually just doing the minimum--in preparing for class, in research and publication, in discipline-based activities, in faculty governance and other service? For example, it was obvious to me in working the last two years on the SACS self-study that too many members and some nominal leaders of the numerous faculty committees did not take their responsibilities seriously; they seldom--if ever--attended meetings, provided little or no help in gathering information and drafting and revising reports. I am cynical enough to assume that these same persons will never read this commentary, for they also toss into the trash--without reading--the FCTE newsletters, the regular calls for volunteers for college and university committees, the calls for papers from their professional organizations, etc.

Chancellor Bardo has given the entire faculty and staff the opportunity to be bold, to be creative, to transform WCU into what it has had the potential to become ever since I first stepped on this campus in 1970. But if a mere handful respond to the challenge, will anything really change? I commend Gordon for speaking out and for his efforts at trying to get true dialogue--and subsequent action--started via the University Forums he has organized and led over the past two years. I wonder, though, how different we really will be next year, or five years from now, when so many are too much like the blinded draft animals of the past, plodding along the same old paths.

Jim Nicholl, English

Gordon, and I, have been premature. Between faculty members and the Chancellor, entrenched and powerful protectors of the status quo continue to chill open dialogue and stifle honest discourse. Until that climate changes, there can be no safe openness, only calculated risks with real consequences we may or may not be willing to suffer.

Anonymous

Faculty Center for Excellence in Teaching & Learning

**Responses to "Meaningful Change Begins With You," by Gordon Mercer, 4/1/96,
continued**

Gordon's references to Down's ideas are useful: the top-heavy administrative system IS easier on a whole bevy of folks, since it keeps the noise down and the machinery running smoothly. And yet the dynamic system, with faculty and administrators and students actively participating in mission assessment and implementation, is obviously right. How to make the change-over? A couple of quick suggestions:

(1) Many are doing exciting and innovative teaching, but most who aren't either haven't the time or inclination to learn how to switch to heuristic techniques (which, after all, include the risk of great expense in time for what may seem no increase in "class results.") Rather than organizing sporadic presentations by these "master teachers," perhaps what we need now are teaching cadres who share classes at times and who prepare course "missions" directed expressly toward giving hands-on experience to colleagues who would like to see the "better" techniques in action in their classes.

(2) Since part of this discussion centers on faculty involvement in the Senate, arrange the calendar so that Senate meetings fall on "open days," in which (even if we can't make "classless days") NO OTHER MEETINGS OF ANY SORT ARE SCHEDULED. Then encourage a collegial spirit of Senate involvement, from the department level up.

Steve Eberly, English

Recapturing the Essence of the M.A. Degree

If we are seriously planning for the next century at WCU, we might consider re-examining some of our programs which are likely to stay in place and not likely to change radically due to various constraints like money. One of these I suggest we re-consider is our master's program. I am not familiar with a wide range of master's programs even at WCU much less across the country, but it seems to me that it has become the fashion elsewhere--unfortunately at many of the schools from which our faculty have received doctorates--to treat the master's degree as a consolation prize for those who for any reason cannot complete a doctorate. The result has been to denigrate the value of the master's degree even though historically it has had a special value (implied in the name) as a reward for the completion of a comprehensive degree program. At the beginning of our century the master's degree really suggested that someone was indeed a master of his or her special field of study. Maybe realistically it would be presumptuous for anyone to suggest that these days, but the ideal might still be worth shooting for and might provide goals that could give not just direction but even distinction to our own M.A. programs. I am not suggesting our programs all need change but that we might consider a renewed commitment to keeping our degrees truly comprehensive and not modeling them narrowly on the research-oriented PhD.

Writing in 1911, Paul Elmer More addressed the issue of the "grueling process" of obtaining a "doctor's degree," which seemed "to be specially designed to eliminate all who have any imagination or ideas." More was primarily concerned with the study of English but his advice seems generally applicable to any program of graduate study. He acknowledged that the usual form of research--"the relentless pursuit of some Anglo-Saxon word or the wild chase of some folk-tale through five medieval languages--has its own place and honor." But he attacked the "tyranny of the German doctorate" with arguments we all might profitably reconsider:

It may be that for many men the preparation of a thesis is the best training, as it apparently is for the teacher the easiest method of testing a student's proficiency. But the system is subject at least to grave abuses. Even supposing the student has advanced far enough to devote to the special research needed for a thesis a year or two years of time without heavy sacrifices in other directions, the emphasis laid on this kind of work tends to confuse the meaning of productive and creative scholarship and to establish wrong standards of excellence. It tends also to foster the particular sin of German scholarship which Professor Shorey brands as inaccuracy, but which we should prefer to call lack of mental integrity--the habit, that is, of erecting vast theories on a slender basis of fact, and so clogging the paths of truth. Only a huge illusion can hold that a student who by a satisfactory, even an admirable, thesis has added some small

amount to the sum of knowledge is in any true sense of the word a more creative mind than one who has thoroughly assimilated a wide range of ideas and prepared himself to hand on the judgments of time. At least along with the doctorate, we need to strengthen and raise the master's degree as a symbol of large assimilative study. Indeed, some of our universities have seen the value of this course, and are gradually lifting the MA into a sign of real distinction. One serious impediment now in the way of this reform is the belated ignorance of those presidents and trustees of colleges who insist on a PhD after the name of a candidate to their faculties, and so attach to the degree a fictitious commercial value. ("Scholarship of Ideas" in Education and History, 259-60)

There is much to consider in More's words, but I should like to emphasize for us here at Western, as we try to define our programs for the beginning of a new century, that we take seriously More's advocacy of the master's degree as "a symbol of large assimilative study." Realistically, we must recognize that for those students wishing to go on for a doctorate elsewhere the master's degree will be just a stepping stone and we must prepare such students for the programs they will enter. That, however, need not deter us from defining our own goals for our degrees--and for the number of students who will not seek the doctorate.

Our principal goal, I would argue, should be to help our students "thoroughly assimilate" that "wide range of ideas" of which More speaks. The master's degree need not be merely a small-time version of the "real thing," a petty imitation of the German doctorate. It can be a means of giving extensive breadth and depth of knowledge to graduate students whose undergraduate work is increasingly fragmented, undirected, and eccentric, if not downright quixotic. Our emphasis could be on giving the widest and deepest possible base to our students' understanding.

That means--among many things we might keep in mind--that in matters of curriculum we need not indulge every faculty member's whimsical "specialization" with more and more "boutique" courses; that courses which attempt to give broad surveys of the field of study be at the core of every students' program; that course requirements not be reduced in favor of more thesis hours; that students be encouraged to take courses in related fields to further broaden their understanding; that since most programs laudably call for "comprehensive" exams, we strive to keep them comprehensive--and not merely reexaminations of course work over which students have already been examined, or watered-down formalities which the faculty themselves do not take seriously; that, in general, we keep a healthy balance between research goals and the effort to try to "cover" a field with truly comprehensive guidance in coursework and in comprehensive exams that may well necessitate independent study on the students' part to fill in his or her personal holes.

My impression is that none of this is heresy, that most faculty might be in general agreement; but I offer these ideas to shore up our own agenda in the face of quite real pressures from outside to fall into line with programs at PhD-granting institutions. Each of our own programs may face special pitfalls and have unique constraints, but there can be no harm in insisting that an M.A. from Western be awarded only to those who have indeed mastered a subject and can demonstrate a broad range of knowledge--and not just the ability to jump over a few hurdles.

Harold Farwell, English

