

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

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