



FACULTY FORUM

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**Note From the Editor
Chris Cooper, Political Science and Public Affairs**

Welcome to another issue of the Faculty Forum. As part of our initiative to bring more content to each Faculty Forum, this issue includes three important sections. We begin with Carmen Huffman's thoughtful piece on our new QEP, DegreePlus. Unless you've been living under a large rock with particularly good sound protection, you know that this is the year that we are up for reaffirmation by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC). As part of this process, we are required to create a new Quality Enhancement Plan (or QEP, to keep the litany of abbreviations going). Carmen Huffman of the Department of Chemistry and Physics has taken on the weighty job of leading us through the adoption of the new QEP (known as Degree Plus). In her excellent essay for the Faculty Forum, she gives us a run-down on the new QEP and answers many questions about what it is and how you can get involved. No matter your role at WCU, Carmen's essay is worth reading and considering.

The second section includes a stand-alone piece from Jayme McGhan. Jayme is the Director of the School of Stage and Screen, but more importantly for the purposes of his essay, he's a relatively recent member of the WCU faculty. Jayme penned a thoughtful essay about what it's like to move from a small university in a big-city (Concordia University in Chicago) to a mid-sized university in a rural area. Jayme's insights should be helpful for anyone who wants to understand how to improve faculty and staff transition to our campus community.

The third section continues our book symposium tradition. If you've been at WCU (or in higher education) for more than a few minutes, you've probably noticed that you're spending more time than you expected in meetings. And, if you've been in those meetings at Western, you've probably seen Andrew Adams and Erin McNelis—two of our most service-oriented faculty members—~~suffering~~ contributing beside you. Andrew and Erin weighed in on Kathleen Parker Boudett and Elizabeth A. City's *Meeting Wise: Making the Most of Collaborative Time for Educators*. Whether you dread meetings, or merely tolerate them, you'll find something useful in Andrew and Erin's thoughtful consideration of the book and what it means for faculty at Western.

As always, the opinions expressed here are those of the authors. The Faculty Commons and the university supports this publication as a place for open dialogue among faculty, but does not necessarily agree with or condone the content or opinions expressed here.

Happy Spring Break,

-Chris

DegreePlus: Furthering Student Development Through Intentional Extracurricular Involvement: Western Carolina University's 2017 Quality Enhancement Plan

By Carmen Huffman, QEP Coordinator and Associate Professor of Chemistry and Physics

What is DegreePlus?

DegreePlus is a complementary view of student learning that incorporates transferable skills acquired through participation in extracurricular activities. The program, which is voluntary, will provide students with experience in cultural responsiveness, leadership, professionalism, and teamwork skills, which will prepare them for their post-graduation success.

What are the goals of DegreePlus?

1. Increase students' participation in extracurricular activities that promote transferable skill development.
2. Enhance students' cultural responsiveness, leadership, professionalism, and teamwork skills.

What are extracurricular activities?

Events and activities for *DegreePlus* should be extracurricular in nature, meaning the event or activity is not tied directly to a course for a grade or credit. In some cases, credit could be offered if the activity is open to others outside the class. (e.g. extra credit for going to a "One Book" event). Examples might include a seminar series, a career workshop, a trip or activity open to anyone in your major (or campus at large), etc.

How does DegreePlus work?

Students will move through different levels associated with each skill. Each progressive level aims to teach students' transferable skills with higher level learning outcomes.

Level 1: Experience & Exposure – Students attend extracurricular events or activities related to the four targeted skill areas. After attending at least five events associated with a particular skill, the student has achieved Level 1 for that particular skill and is invited to celebrate his/her learning at *DegreePlus Day*. Students can continue to earn Level 1 achievement in the remaining skill areas. Participation is tracked and reported to students in an *Experiential Transcript*.

Level 2: Reflection & Articulation – At *DegreePlus Day*, students reflect on their experiences and how the intended learning outcomes relate to their classroom learning and career plans. A mentor guides small group discussions to enhance the reflection process. Reflections related to the skill area achieved in Level 1 are submitted and graded by mentors using a rubric that ties the reflection to the learning outcomes of the targeted skill. After successful completion of the reflection, students earn a "*DegreePlus Participant*" designation which will be reflected on their academic transcript. Additional reflections for other skill areas can be submitted as well.

Level 3: Integration & Application – Students are encouraged to incorporate their developed skills into other areas of their life, such as capstone projects in advanced coursework, a work experience, or a service activity. They are invited back to *DegreePlus Day* to share how their

DegreePlus skills played a role in their experience. Mentors engage with presenting students and judge their integration based on a rubric tied to the learning outcomes of the targeted skill(s). A “pass” signals the completion of Level 3 and the *DegreePlus* program. Students will be issued with graduation cords to celebrate their success.

When does DegreePlus start?

Students in the Honors College, the 2017 Academic Success Program (ASP), and the 2017 Leadership Living/Learning Community will be the first students to experience the opportunities provided by *DegreePlus*. To start, the program will be centered on the professionalism skill. The ASP students will experience some activities associated with professionalism as early as Summer 2017, and the rest of the pilot group students will begin participating in professionalism activities in the fall. In Fall 2018, *DegreePlus* will open up to more students, and additional skill area programming will be incorporated.

How will DegreePlus be managed?

Housed in the Center for Career and Professional Development, *DegreePlus* will have the support of one full-time associate director, a student worker, a reduced load faculty member, and an advisory committee for the first-year pilot. In subsequent years, the faculty member will be released, but additional help in the form of at least one full-time staff member will be provided.

How can faculty and staff be involved?

There are several ways faculty and staff can support *DegreePlus*. In faculty’s roles as academic advisors, open discussions with students will not only encourage students to get involved, but will also help students to reflect on their experiences and relate them to coursework and future goals. A review of a students’ Experiential Transcript will enhance those conversations, and can help students with post-graduation preparations, such as writing resumes or goal statements. Faculty and staff can also sign up to be a mentor at *DegreePlus Day*. Training and a small stipend will be provided for those individuals. Lastly, faculty and staff should consider any extracurricular programming they offer for students. If it is aligned with any of the *DegreePlus* skills, let the implementation committee know. Or if there is potential for alignment, consider modifying the activity or event to incorporate a *DegreePlus* skill.

What’s in it for us?

Clearly, participation in *DegreePlus* will be intrinsically valuable to students. And students’ success is valuable to us all. However, more tangible rewards include increased attendance at events and activities and help with the assessment of those activities. Resources can potentially be allocated to support the development of activities, as well. Most importantly, *DegreePlus* provides a complementary approach to education that encourages faculty, staff and students to work together to shape student success.

How can faculty and staff learn more?

I hope this article sparked your curiosity, and I strongly urge you to engage in discussion with our committee to learn more. A list of our committee members and more information is available at the *DegreePlus* website: <https://DegreePlus.wcu.edu>. Also, members of our committee are currently planning visits to individual units on campus. If you’d like to be included, please speak to your Department Head, and have him or her contact me. Or simply,

email me personally! I'd be delighted to have a conversation with you to provide a more in-depth overview.

From Chicago to Cullowhee

By Jayme McGhan, Associate Professor and Director of Stage and Screen

I began my work as the Director of the School of Stage and Screen at Western Carolina University on July 1st, 2015 after having spent six years as the head of theatre at Concordia University, Chicago and three years previous to that as the head of theatre at Ridgewater College in Minnesota. Moving from a smaller (5,000 students), private institution in a large metropolitan area to a mid-sized public institution in an un-incorporated mountain town was a welcomed breath of fresh air. Mountains don't close in on me, but sprawling buildings do. My wife and I had a plan to give Chicago ten years and then move to whatever mountains beckoned us. We were in year six of the plan when the position at WCU opened. It was such a perfect fit for both my particular skillset and our family's desires that I had to throw my name in the mix.

Moving from the position of Artistic Director and program builder to the Director of an entire school has been a marvelous challenge. I've found there to be three specific areas of significant change from one position to the next, which really encompass a whole slew of academic shifts: breadth of focus, procedure, and culture.

Whereas I was focused on one specific program with tracks at CUC, I'm now focused on five programs at WCU. Attached to these programs is a number of annual productions that tend to be a massive amount of work and are high stress by nature. Finding the correct equilibrium in attention paid to each program is a perpetual pursuit. The seemingly correct answer to this is that all need equal attention, but that's simply not possible on any given day. As such, I am constantly revising my process in how I work with the faculty to achieve the needs and goals of each program, ultimately creating the best possible learning experience for our students.

I've also found the difference in academic processes between private institutions and public institutions to be fairly massive. Whereas there might be two to three approvals for any given task at a private institution, there might be six or seven in a public institution. This has been both a blessing and a curse; a blessing because the sheer number of approvals gives ample time to catch mistakes or allow for adjustments, and a curse because it can often take quite a bit longer to execute any given task. After fifteen months on the job I'm just now starting to get used to the checks and balances.

Finally, I've found WCU's overall culture to be exceedingly supportive, caring, and organically built. This might be attributed to the fact that the majority of folks who work here also live here. I take my son to the park and I run in to three or four professors and their kids. I walk in to Jack the Dipper and there's a member of the facilities team having a scoop of ice cream with their family. I might have run in to a faculty or staff member in Chicago that I knew from CUC once every few months. I see someone I know here in Sylva and Cullowhee every day. It's really quite wonderful. I've heard a great deal of harping on the geography of WCU, but I believe it to be one of the University's best draws. The mountains keep us all close. My wife and I have found it to be a culture of committed community that is healthy for both the mind and spirit. And we're exceedingly happy to call Cullowhee our home.

**Book Symposium on MeetingWise: Making the Most of Collaborative Time for Educators
by Kathryn Parker Boudett, and Elizabeth A. City**

Andrew Adams, Associate Dean, College of Fine and Performing Arts

In September 1894 Reuben Gold Thwaites—Secretary of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin and a noted historian in his own right—travelled to Lake Placid, New York, to attend the annual conference of the American Library Association. The report he made to his colleagues in Madison later that December spoke glowingly of his time there. He wrote: “To these meetings the members bring the fruits of experience, their best thoughts, their ripest judgments, and in the week of earnest deliberation receive new ideas and become freshly imbued with enthusiasm in the common cause.”

Thwaites describes meetings as enriching communal experiences, gatherings that participants both “bring” to and “receive” from. And though it may go unnoticed upon first reading, he flavors his description with the evocative language of food: “fruits,” “ripest,” and “fresh.”

But are his observations naïve relics of a forgotten past? In our of age GoToMeetings and Skype, Power Point presentations and Drop Box documents, is it realistic to think that a meeting can “freshly imbue” us with anything—much less with enthusiasm?

In the title of their little book, Kathryn Parker Boudett and Elizabeth A. City equate “meeting” with “collaborative time.” That meetings are a time for people to work together serves as both the philosophical and practical foundation of the book. But before grabbing my highlighter and diving into *Meeting Wise*, I took a few moments to reflect on my own life as an organizer of meetings. During the last two years in my work on the Faculty Activity Database I’ve been a rabid meeting planner. And as an associate dean I’ve attended enough meetings to earn frequent flyer miles.

What can I do better? I know that my agendas can be clearer and my outcomes more concrete. Above all, I regret the small forest of trees I’ve destroyed with handouts. Even after discovering the joys of double-siding and the cost-saving wonders of an eleven-point font, I’m still an arboreal assassin on an industrial scale. (Look up to those sickening patches of scarred, treeless earth on our beautiful mountains. That was me.)

Boudett and City carry the Thwaitian ideal into the twenty-first century in the opening of their first chapter: “Imagine that you are looking forward to every meeting on your calendar for the next week. When you get to each meeting, you engage deeply with colleagues as you make meaningful progress toward a shared goal. You leave energized and purposeful, thinking or acting differently.” Although this language is eerily similar to the soft hypnotic phrases of a self-help tape spoken with the dulcet accompaniment of synthesized strings, these goals are as worthy now as they were in the fall of 1894.

The authors also touch upon the human aspect of meetings by encouraging facilitators to “build in the little things that help make a group feel like a community.” No matter what the activity, such as singing “Happy Birthday” to someone or going around the table to touch base with every participant, we should set aside moments in our meetings that enable people to “feel appreciated and connected to others.” I second the motion.

These observations are solid (Reuben) Gold, but as much as I was hoping for ripe ideas to freshly imbue my enthusiasm for the lost art of meetings, I was largely disappointed. At the beginning of just the second of seven chapters we find the following disconcerting statement: “...you probably know many of the big and little things you can do when planning a meeting to

increase the chances that it will be successful.” If I already know “many things” why read on? Scholars rarely if ever discover an unknown planet or a lost land of living dinosaurs frolicking in the middle of the earth. We all reinvent the invented: the challenge is to sing old songs with a new voice as if the tunes have never been heard before. Above all, never belittle your own thesis.

Although great swaths of the book competently articulate the glaringly obvious, it seems as if Kathryn and Elizabeth have been watching me through the little camera on my computer: “Avoid giving people lengthy documents to read during a meeting,” they write. They’ve heard the mills of Canton churn for me. Perhaps you’ll find in their volume tidbits to help you in your personal journey to clearer agendas and laser-focused outcomes. However, I fear that you’ll discover, like me, that being introduced to *Meeting Wise* won’t be such a wise meeting after all.

By way of closing I’d like to propose a new honorific at Western: The Reuben Gold Thwaites Memorial Award for Best Meeting Organizer of the Year. To save paper, there will be no certificate. The gold plaque—it has to be Gold—will feature the Latin motto “Occurro ergo sum”—“I meet therefore I am.”

The committee will have representatives from all colleges and from the staff. Let’s also bring in, via Skype, Kathryn Parker Boudett and Elizabeth A. City. We’ll provide them with a clear, eco-friendly agenda and concrete outcomes that imbue the attendees with enthusiasm in the common cause.

I ask but one thing, dear colleagues: you organize the meeting.

Erin McNelis, Associate Professor, Mathematics

At times, the mere mention of “meetings” draws my stomach into knots. It brings back visions of tense moments from Faculty Senate meetings of my past as well the dread of losing time being talked-at or listening to circular discussion without coming making progress or decisions. Though we all may have similar memories or thoughts, hopefully we have also participated in or led meetings that were truly productive, made a difference, and left people feeling empowered or invigorated. The majority of the meetings that can fill our schedules fall somewhere between these two extremes, and are very much a part of our work as faculty.

Kathy Boudett and Liz City, faculty at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, have developed suggestions, check lists, and processes for improving educator meetings based on their work and research supporting schools, school districts, and school leadership. Though some of their advise struck me as more appropriate for working with middle schoolers, their key themes of meeting purpose, process, preparation, and pacing were meaningful at any level of academia or industry. Their focus on the role and responsibilities of both the facilitator and the participant in successful meetings helped remind me that the success of a group does not rest on the shoulders of its leadership. Each person shares in the responsibility of keeping the meeting on task, supporting full engagement, managing conflict, and maintaining awareness of the role he or she plays.

Though many of Boudett and City's suggestions seemed fairly evident, reading Meeting Wise did lead me to think more deeply about a couple of bigger-picture aspects of meetings and committee work that usually get lost as we struggle to keep up with the minutia and daily, weekly, or monthly tasks associated with our meetings. Perhaps these brief statements will stir thoughts, or better yet, actions that will help us improve our meeting lives (a subset of our work lives).

- The ultimate purpose of meetings: Boudett and City stress that an effective meeting “helps a group of people make progress on objectives that are in explicit service of the broader goal of improving the core work of the education enterprise: learning and teaching.(page 16)” Too many times the connection between the purpose of a committee and the goal of improving teaching and learning are tenuous. If we cannot articulate how the work of a committee directly or indirectly impacts our mission as a university, then the committee and its charge need to be reevaluated.

- Assessing a committee and its work: Though Boudett and City repeatedly stress the importance of assessing the format and success of a meeting, I believe it is much more important to regularly assess the work and functionality of the committee. If meetings are to help improve teaching, learning, and scholarly activity, we must first identify meaningful goals and measurable outcomes. Does it ever seem to you that the goals or outcomes of one of your committees is to produce a report that meets overly-specified requirements yet may never be read or used in a productive manner? We must take the time to articulate the purpose of our committees and regularly assess our effectiveness. Defining and sharing committee goals can also help us streamline our committees, avoiding the duplication we have across the colleges and divisions of the university.

What do you think? Is this reasonable? Is it an effective use of our time or would it just add more work to the increasing list of obligations we already have? Something to think about, I hope. Cheers!