

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.