

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.