

# *Faculty Center for Teaching Excellence*

## **Responses to Casey Hurley**

I agree with Casey Hurley that among the conditions which may contribute to low academic standards, the one we can do the most about is number (3), a faculty with low expectations of students. One way to look at this issue is to ask: what kind of standards would most benefit ourselves were we the students in our own courses?

*Mike Jones, Philosophy and Religion*

Rather than standing at the classroom door greeting students, beginning class with a cartoon, or shifting media after twenty minutes (from what? overhead projector? to what? Nintendo?), the WCU professor might begin class by calling upon a student to paraphrase a sentence from the assigned reading for that day. The professor, when fortunate enough to have selected a student who has actually done the readings, may find that the student has no earthly idea what the sentence means because he has no vocabulary or complex-sentence reading skills to bring to his college reading assignments. The shock of such a revelation may suggest that the professor face this widespread deficiency squarely before he finds himself lowering grading standards to the point at which he feels despair or delusion.

The professor might require that students work hard enough to comprehend the daily reading assignments by putting them on notice that they must keep a vocabulary log, that they be prepared to paraphrase orally at random from the reading assignment at the beginning of each day's class, that they may be asked to write a precis of a paragraph, that reading comprehension precedes writing competence (which does not occur in a vacuum). A student who fails to read his assignment is one thing; the student who does read it and cannot comprehend it is a tragedy. Cartoons, greetings, and multi-media, I believe, the WCU student can already understand.

*Molly Schwartz, English*

In response to Casey Hurley's timely article in the last issue of the **Faculty Forum**, I suggest that we examine the distribution of grades in the General Education courses for the last few years. When I served on the General Education Monitoring Committee some years ago, this data was available, and interesting comparisons could be made between the grades given in different sections of the same course taught in any department. Furthermore, there was at that time considerable variation in the grade distribution for courses taught by different departments in the Foundation 3 area course, "Thinking, Reasoning, and Expressing." I predict that analysis of this data would support Casey's proposal that the faculty needs to examine the academic and grading standards used across the curriculum.

*Henry Mainwaring, Biology*

I am delighted to learn of the program that Casey and his colleagues are planning, and I will take part in as much of it as I can. However, I have one caveat, based on some loose talk I have heard around campus about "standards." I for one will be greatly disappointed if discussions of standards are reduced to issues concerning grade inflation or a quest for more "F's" and fewer "A's." In fact, an ideal circumstance would be higher grades. Such an outcome could result as most students became more meaningfully engaged in learning as a response to the stimulation and challenge provided by the faculty. At the same time, marginal "students" might well decide to do something else for a while. The conceptualization and course of action Casey and his committee have presented shows every sign of providing a forum for constructive discussions. I hope that most of our faculty members will see their program as a challenge--to put their time where their mouths are.

*Bruce Henderson, Psychology*

---over for more---

# Responses to Casey Hurley

continued

Casey Hurley's September 1, 1991 Faculty Forum piece addresses a crucial problem that we, the faculty, have helped create and that only we, the faculty collectively and individually, can solve: the reality of a community of scholarship. The phrase "community of scholarship" consists of two complex and interlocking concepts, each related to academic standards. "Scholarship" implies a set of standards that would call to mind quality, knowledge, accuracy, critical ability, thoroughness, and erudition. From our educations we know that scholarship includes gathering and interpreting data, drawing conclusions, processing a variety and quantity of information, language skills, clarity, critical thinking, discipline, integrity, truth, logical argument, intuitive leaps, creativity, transferability, and hard intellectual work. In our graduate studies particularly, we all learned that there is a set of standards for the academic world embodied in scholarship. Why have we failed to transfer our gut level understanding of standards to our students?

One of the reasons is **lack of community**. We as a body of scholars do not reinforce in our daily interactions with students, faculty, staff, and administrators the inherent standards of scholarship. We have tolerated sloppy scholarship (an oxymoron) in teaching, service, research, and administrative processes and decision making to the point that we have destroyed our collective integrity. We do not live as scholars. We do not insist that members of the community live the standards of scholarship. We are not a community of scholarship. And since we as a community do not publicly reinforce the standards of scholarship, anyone who does so individually is at risk. She or he is deviating from the norm, and theory tells us communities punish deviants.

There is, however, a way back to a "community of scholarship." Hurley has broken the double bind. He has identified a problem. The problem is on an agenda, and we have a forum. The question remains, however, do we as a faculty have the courage to return to scholarship? Scholarship and community provide all the tools and processes we need. We have to provide the will and direction. See you there?

*Bill Kane, Management/Marketing*