

Faculty Center for Excellence in Teaching & Learning

Responses to "Meaningful Change Begins With You," by Gordon Mercer, 4/1/96

As usual, Gordon is right on track about change. But then, he has always been a campus leader with good ideas and a lot of enthusiasm for the possible. One has only to look around at the faculty assemblies he has initiated to see who else is willing to be a risk-taker and think outside the box. I think we have enough of a critical mass among faculty and students to take up the challenge of the Bardo administration. There will, of course, be resistance from those who are encrusted by the status quo, and not every change will succeed (and some probably shouldn't), but we owe it to ourselves to try.

Sharon Jacques, Nursing

One thing that struck me as I reread Gordon Mercer's April Faculty Forum piece is that, unsurprisingly but sadly, he is "preaching to the choir." Just as on Easter Sunday--when many folks attended church for the first time in a year, or years, while others did not attend at all--there were also those few who took their customary places. In much the same fashion, the faculty who share Gordon's beliefs about what we need to do to break our bureaucratic shackles, to transform our teaching efforts into learning efforts, etc. read his piece, nodding in agreement as he made each of his points and referred to colleagues like Bruce and Jane who are--and have been--actively at work trying to transform WCU. Many of us are already on FCTE Project Teams, attended the open meetings on the formation of an Honors College, serve on the Faculty Senate, and the like. But are we a majority?

Don't a lot of our colleagues just "go through the motions," teaching as they were taught, usually just doing the minimum--in preparing for class, in research and publication, in discipline-based activities, in faculty governance and other service? For example, it was obvious to me in working the last two years on the SACS self-study that too many members and some nominal leaders of the numerous faculty committees did not take their responsibilities seriously; they seldom--if ever--attended meetings, provided little or no help in gathering information and drafting and revising reports. I am cynical enough to assume that these same persons will never read this commentary, for they also toss into the trash--without reading--the FCTE newsletters, the regular calls for volunteers for college and university committees, the calls for papers from their professional organizations, etc.

Chancellor Bardo has given the entire faculty and staff the opportunity to be bold, to be creative, to transform WCU into what it has had the potential to become ever since I first stepped on this campus in 1970. But if a mere handful respond to the challenge, will anything really change? I commend Gordon for speaking out and for his efforts at trying to get true dialogue--and subsequent action--started via the University Forums he has organized and led over the past two years. I wonder, though, how different we really will be next year, or five years from now, when so many are too much like the blinded draft animals of the past, plodding along the same old paths.

Jim Nicholl, English

Gordon, and I, have been premature. Between faculty members and the Chancellor, entrenched and powerful protectors of the status quo continue to chill open dialogue and stifle honest discourse. Until that climate changes, there can be no safe openness, only calculated risks with real consequences we may or may not be willing to suffer.

Anonymous

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continued

Gordon's references to Down's ideas are useful: the top-heavy administrative system IS easier on a whole bevy of folks, since it keeps the noise down and the machinery running smoothly. And yet the dynamic system, with faculty and administrators and students actively participating in mission assessment and implementation, is obviously right. How to make the change-over? A couple of quick suggestions:

(1) Many are doing exciting and innovative teaching, but most who aren't either haven't the time or inclination to learn how to switch to heuristic techniques (which, after all, include the risk of great expense in time for what may seem no increase in "class results.") Rather than organizing sporadic presentations by these "master teachers," perhaps what we need now are teaching cadres who share classes at times and who prepare course "missions" directed expressly toward giving hands-on experience to colleagues who would like to see the "better" techniques in action in their classes.

(2) Since part of this discussion centers on faculty involvement in the Senate, arrange the calendar so that Senate meetings fall on "open days," in which (even if we can't make "classless days") NO OTHER MEETINGS OF ANY SORT ARE SCHEDULED. Then encourage a collegial spirit of Senate involvement, from the department level up.

Steve Eberly, English