

# *Faculty Center for Excellence in Teaching & Learning*

Responses to "Playing WCU's Ace Card: Stronger Ties to the Region?," by Oak Winters, 12/1/97

Oak Winters has some good points. Certainly if we are allowed to expand our regional course offerings to off-campus sites, we may be able to attract more students. There is a problem involved: we are not allowed to offer our regular classes without approval of colleges located in Jackson or adjacent counties (for example, I attempted to offer the lower-level Natural History of the Southern Appalachians course in Hendersonville but was denied the request by Blue Ridge Community College). Additionally, some of our course offerings really do not fit a television or Internet format. One learns, for example, to identify plants by close interaction with instructors, not in some remote ethereal mode. But, the problems may be not be insurmountable. It behooves us to consider that we occupy a position in the center of the Southern Blue Ridge Province and do not yet have an Appalachian Studies program established! Surely something along this line would be of interest to many of the new regional residents.

*Dan Pittillo, Biology*

Oak has laid out clearly how WCU can more fully realize its potential as a regional university. In addition to his detailed examples of how George Mason and East Carolina have benefited from careful integration of their local communities into their plans, I particularly like Oak's suggestions of what Western can do to enhance its use of the area and to increase local support. For instance, stressing our "3-campus" nature (Cullowhee, Asheville, and the Cherokee Reservation) will let us pull together a clearer picture for our regional public of the excellent services we offer. In keeping with this, I suggest we resurrect the Cherokee language program: it never got much attention or support because (I believe) we as a campus did not see it as truly important to our region. Now, in the light of Oak's points, I submit that it might become a powerful focal point in Cherokee Studies on the "Cherokee Campus." While much that we now do makes us a good regional institution, Oak's suggestions can help produce a more widely recognized and publicly understood view of Western Carolina University as a valuable and unique institution. We can capitalize immediately by emphasizing our current programs, but we must also develop a clearer sense of ourselves as a university deeply integrated with our region. I salute Oak Winters for these timely questions, suggestions, and challenges.

*Steve Eberly, English*

Oak is right on target. Western is perfectly positioned to provide a wide variety of outreach services and programs which will enhance the area and benefit the faculty, staff, and students. I recently had the opportunity to work with the MRC and am embarrassed that I had not done so earlier--they are a great resource for the region, and the university community can (and should) leverage their skills and resources to mutually serve the university and the region.

*Jim Pearce, Management*

My only reply would be an old song. Has no one considered the possibility that we may be at a good size? That big is not necessarily better? Hasn't a single administrator ever read Thoreau?

*Harold Farwell, English*

Let me begin by strongly supporting Dean Winters' basic point. The active support of local and regional business and political groups provides the cornerstone for stimulating the growth of both the student body and the academic programs for all but the largest and most internationally recognized of academic institutions. Further, as the institution serves its region (and thus its support base) the

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support base tends to enlarge beyond its original local and regional foundations. We might look for examples even closer to home and cite Appalachian State and UNC Greensboro, both of whom have grown remarkably in the last few years and are now looking toward "our" Asheville market, along with the private schools that have recently established degree programs in that city. The fact is that if we are to learn from these examples, we must work significantly harder than these other schools to become the "institution of choice" for some constituencies and thus generate the political and business support we so desperately need. There are at least two reasons for this: (1) we are very late starting down this road, and the competition is certainly not slowing down or relaxing; and (2) the business and political groups associated with our "defined region" (the 20-some counties of Western North Carolina) are both small and weak, relatively speaking, compared with those located elsewhere in the state. Because of these two circumstances, our university may well have to "stretch" our concept of "region" and become both willing and anxious to recognize and develop working and support relationships with organizations that extend well beyond the geographical boundaries we generally assume to define the limits of "our region."

*John R. Adams, Management*

I believe Dr. Winters is "on target" with his piece about the region. I especially think the Cherokee campus needs more emphasis.

*Davia Allen, Human Environmental Sciences*

Oak Winters has written a challenging opinion piece on the importance of regional mission. One area he raises is the need for interdisciplinary majors that respond to the region. This is just about impossible to do at Western Carolina University. It took us about seven years to put together the major in International Business because of its interdisciplinary focus. While I have heard the Vice Chancellor and others discuss needed interdisciplinary majors, nothing is being done and who is providing any leadership in this direction? With our current departmental structure, a group of faculty that met to design an interdisciplinary major would get no support. Who are we kidding? Could we see some leadership in this area? Congratulations on an interesting opinion piece but could we see some "action" on some of these ideas after more meaningful discussion? For example a task force on how interdisciplinary majors might be established might be in order. While we do need to realize the best way to serve our region is quality education and what faculty do in the classroom, I did not see anything in Oak Winters' opinion piece that would take us away from our primary mission at Western Carolina university.

*Gordon Mercer, Political Science and Public Affairs*

I believe wholeheartedly with Oak Winters' assessment and his suggestions. One reason I remain in Asheville is because I am still considered a "dignitary" there; I was in the lead car at the recent All American City Dignitary parade. Yes, I think we should develop strong regional ties first, then worry about attracting more kids from NYC, etc. I am hoping my ongoing novel Buck Gentry--which deals with the mountain people of these counties--will further enhance this mode of thinking. I guess this idea, or collection of ideas, could be summed up by saying we have a gold mine here, right under our feet. It's time we realized it and acted accordingly.

*Rick Boyer, English*