

# ***Faculty Center for Excellence in Teaching & Learning***

**Response to "Building a Sense of Community at WCU," by Randi Neff, 2/1/98**

While there were some large ideas in Randi Neff's piece on "Community Building," I have other thoughts about the subject:

1. Formal, structured, planned, scheduled activities, especially those created and run by faculty do little community building. Rather, a sense of community is built by continual, ongoing, informal interaction among faculty and students. Some interactions must be student generated, with faculty responding to and following student initiatives.
2. Faculty must "hang out" with students at least as much as they do with each other or discussions about community building are fruitless. This means more time at the UC and cafeterias and less time at the University Club.
3. Faculty and students must work together on projects, some of which should not be directed by faculty. We must have the courage and patience to work alongside students, or even to work for them. We must let them see us face problems and allow them to watch us seek solutions. This implies faculty are willing for students to see us make mistakes, that we can handle working with students smarter/quicker than we are at times. Community means we learn from each other.
4. The current faculty evaluation/reward/promotion climate makes spending a lot of time with students a risky proposition at best and foolhardy at worst.
5. WCU newsgroups are a classic example of how NOT to build faculty-student community. Instead of allowing students and faculty access to all existing newsgroups, someone decided to drastically censor newsgroup access. That decision left a handful of irrelevant, boring, little-read wastes of bandwidth. Our faculty and students must interact within a "real world" environment, not a sanitized, "best of all possible worlds" illusion that inhibits meaningful communication.
6. To build community, we must begin acknowledging our students as ADULTS, not children. Adults decide what to read for themselves and discuss what they choose to discuss, even if it may not always be what parents, faculty, administrators, trustees, taxpayers, and legislators would choose.
7. Faculty must never penalize students for their participation in the "community" by censoring their thoughts or punishing them for unpopular, or even dumb, ideas.
8. Faculty must be willing to share honest thoughts with students, not textbook extracts or politically correct dogma. Do we have the courage to open up with students? Dare we allow our students to see our tears and anger?

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