

Faculty Center for Excellence in Teaching & Learning

Responses to "Who is Valued in Our Teaching/Learning Community?," by Beth Leftwich, 9/1/98

I agree with many of the points Beth makes and congratulate her on her willingness to pose such challenging questions. I also agree with many of her suggestions, though separate faculty and staff newsletters may in fact exacerbate the differences that already exist. Perhaps a combined newsletter would do much more to increase collaboration and respect and help to create the shared sense of community Beth discusses. I also pose a question for reflection: why is it that so many staff members address faculty as "Dr. so and so" when faculty typically address staff by their first names?

Rob Routhieaux, Management

I want to thank Beth Leftwich for writing such a thoughtful piece in the current issue of Faculty Forum. Her comments are poignant, philosophical, and practical. I have wondered at every school I've been just who is and isn't "staff," and I'm uncomfortable with the hierarchy among administrators, faculty, staff, and students (and it always goes in that order, doesn't it?). I have meant before now to publicly thank Beth and many other staff members of the university who gave the English department so much support (ideas, insight, energy, encouragement, expertise, lots of hours of work) during Operation Jumpstart. Last spring now seems like a long time ago as we met at the Riverhouse to plan aspects of what has become an exhausting but satisfying cooperative venture.

Marsha Holmes, English

Beth's opinion piece was excellent and thoughtful, raising good questions about how we operate (and sometimes don't) as a community. I agree with Beth that the significant and countless contributions of staff rarely get the recognition they merit.

The faculty-staff division has a long history in academia, for universities started with only faculty. Today at WCU, staff outnumber faculty more than 2 to 1. Clearly, if a governance system were founded on "one employee = one vote," staff would have the louder voice on this and most campuses across the country. And going a step further, students are by far the largest group and administrators the smallest; where do these voices fit into university governance?

I think we have an opportunity here at Western to do something RADICAL. We could design a model of governance that includes all these groups, celebrates all their contributions, and listens to all their voices. Would it challenge the hierarchical, top-down hold on power we have at WCU (and at most institutions of higher ed)? Yes. Would it mean that a few people's control of resources and power in decision making would decrease? Yes. Would it mean the "flattening" of the faculty? TQM restructuring? A Marxist redistribution of wealth and power? An end to life as we know it? No. Absolutely not.

The WCU Task Force on University Governance has been working diligently to "develop a university governing system that effectively engages students, faculty, staff and administrators in shared institutional decision making" (see <http://www.wcu.edu/UnivGov/>). The Task Force has been soliciting input, stimulating discussions, and studying models in the hope of creating a process that will "engender informed deliberation" on a playing field where "talent and expertise are more important than status and position." Sounds good? Yes, absolutely. Would WCU employees' levels of satisfaction, productivity, and sense of community increase? Would faculty feel more engaged and energized by their work with colleagues and

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students? Would students be empowered to become more active participants in the learning process? Would enrollment go up? "You betcha" to all four. Can it be done? I think so."

It will require effort, imagination, and courage. Effort to take "inclusion" and "pluralism" off the politically correct lingo list and put them into practice where we live and work. Imagination to see something rarely seen. Courage to go beyond the familiar status quo and speak out and, with any luck, courage to have our voices heard.

Chris Gunn, Counseling & Psychological Services

Needless to say, without "staff," "we" as the WCU community would not be able to perform our varied tasks. I for one greatly appreciate all that is done, even though those thanks are not noted on a daily basis. THANK YOU!

Jerry McKinney, Criminal Justice

Thank you, Beth, for mentioning some of the problems associated with being a staff member at WCU. I, too, find that faculty and students are mentioned in speeches while often staff are overlooked. I agree that this is probably at least partially due to our diverse positions and "behind-the-scene" jobs. However, the more we can let others know what we do, the more likely we will be recognized. I am excited about staff having a voice in governance. This should help make our needs/wishes more visible.

June Wytock, Counseling & Psychological Services

Ms. Leftwich raised the question of whether "Staff Emeritus status" exists, or should exist, as does emeritus status for chancellors and faculty. I'm not certain what the record now intact might show, but I assisted former WCU President Alex S. Pow in the late 1960s or early 1970s in writing statements with respect to three categories of recognition for retiring individuals, and Ms. Leftwich identified all three: Chancellor, Faculty, and Staff. The designation of a "President Emeritus" status was already in place, and Madison (in 1938), Bird (in 1957), and Reid (in 1968) had held the title. I am not certain what, if any criteria then existed, since in at least the case of President Emeritus the Board of Trustees took the action to confer the title. However, the Board of Trustees in May 1970 approved the faculty emeritus recommendation. I have not been able to find the official documentation, but to the best of my memory, Staff Emeritus status was also created at that time and was designated by the phrase "Retired Associate," a distinction to be conferred by the President (Chancellor) him or herself. And on August 20, 1971, President Pow conferred the "title of Retired Associate" on James E. Kirkpatrick, who had just retired as Business Manager (the position that later became a vice chancellorship). As some may know, Harriet Parker currently holds the title as well. During President Pow's abbreviated tenure and for some time thereafter some staff persons meeting the criteria were awarded the "Retired Associate" designation.

Doug Reed, retired Director of Public Information

I'm very proud to be one of the "team" that Beth speaks of in her Forum piece. In fact, what got this special academic year off the ground was a gargantuan effort on the part of a very exceptional group of talented and dedicated people. Those who climbed on the "computer implementation" train early on saw that there was no room for questioning anyone's status or rank--the thing was too darned big and moving too fast, and anyone able to contribute and

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willing to work hard was welcome aboard. As a result, one of the biggest joys of the past six months has been watching people who have not previously enjoyed status in the traditional academic hierarchy emerge as stars and leaders simply because of their know-how, their dedication, and their instinct for picking a winner. And, to all of those who stood back and looked askance at the mixing and mingling of the ranks and mumbled about the scope, inappropriateness, or impossibility of the computer implementation task--the joke was on you after all. Because, in spite of the long, working weekends, the late nights, the head-shaking of significant others (children, spouses, pets, whoever), and more fatigue than we knew what to do with, the very best part about the whole thing is that it was also the most fun that we've had in our professional lives in a long, long time. Nobody, anywhere, will ever get to do it "for the first time" again--golly I'm glad I was along for the ride!

Nory Prochaska, Math & Computer Science

If staff wishes to have equal social footing with the faculty, they should probably consider the example of the military (the last bastion of rank?), which has recently instituted equal social footing from Privates through Generals while on the base or post. Since the population of the services has dropped severely, it is no longer cost efficient to run more than one service club per location, and my son, the Army Major, tells me that the US government is now discontinuing all Officer's Clubs, which have been a mainstay of the services in anyone's memory, and are now supporting only one service club. All servicemen regardless of rank will now use a single service club on the post or base. Is this a trend? Is it going to work?

Carolyn Rauch, Communication and Theatre Arts