



Faculty Forum

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The Vital Role of Faculty in Student Recruitment

Since October, I have helped train our Admissions recruiters, and I've served as a member of our Enrollment Marketing Committee. I've learned so much about WCU this last year, and I've come to appreciate the challenges our admissions and marketing people experience on a daily basis. I've also come to the realization that the job of recruiting students is not just the job of our admissions and marketing folks. Faculty play a vital role in the student recruitment process. The keynote speaker at a national conference on marketing and higher education recently identified students' interaction with faculty as one of the key factors in recruitment. Meeting a faculty member can be **the** thing that convinces a student considering other schools to choose WCU. As one new entering Freshman put it, "Once I met Dr. Smith, I knew Western was the place for me."

While I believe the relationship between admissions and faculty overall is good, the following comment from a recruiter regarding the role of faculty in recruitment gave me pause: "We work hard to get students interested in Western. It's really frustrating when we refer a student to a department and the department doesn't show much interest." When asked how often that occurred, the recruiter responded: "Let's just say I have greater confidence in what some departments will do with a prospect than what others will do." Recently, I've pondered why some departments would be more eager to respond to student leads than others. In this essay, I explore three reasons faculty might have for not being more active in recruitment, and I offer ideas for addressing these barriers.

Reason 1: We don't need any more students! Let's start with the vision for growth. We all know that increasing enrollment is a top priority. We also know that employees are more likely to "buy into" an organizational goal if they feel they have helped to determine that goal. This leads me to ask, then, do faculty feel they have had ample input into our goal to grow? Are faculty aware of the advantages of growth? Do they anticipate disadvantages that outweigh the advantages? Have they had the opportunity to articulate those worries and to receive answers to assuage those fears? If faculty members do not agree with the general focus of the University to grow at the macro level, it logically follows that they will be unwilling to get involved at the departmental level. It also is possible that some faculty members who support the overall goal of growth feel that they have too many students and too few faculty, especially tenured/tenure-track faculty, and too few resources at the departmental level. One wonders, then, why departments that already have more students than they believe they can effectively serve would want to

recruit more students? If there is a limited number of tenure or tenure track faculty in a department, more students means heavier teaching and advising loads for those faculty. What would motivate faculty, then, to participate in the very activity that would make their jobs more difficult? Do departments feel confident that, if they grow, they will be given resources to manage the growth? If these sentiments are present, have they been discussed and satisfactorily addressed? If not, I hope such dialogue will occur.

Reason 2: That's not my job! Prior to my work with Admissions, I have to admit that I felt a lot like I suspect many faculty members feel: recruiting students is not my job! I recall a colleague not too long ago saying, "Don't they pay people over in Admissions to do this?" The answer, of course, is yes, they do. However, when prospective students and parents visit campus, they've already met Admissions representatives. They now want to meet the people who will be most important in their lives in the future: the faculty. This is part of our job. We are the experts in our fields, and no matter how much training we provide our Admissions recruiters they will never be able to present our programs as well as we can. I hope we will have our very best faculty recruiting students. Moreover, I hope these faculty will be valued, which brings me to...

Reason 3: It doesn't count. Student recruitment is service. That's problematic because some would say we pay lip service to the value of service. It's a good thing to do, but when the votes are counted around the TPR table, service won't get you tenure. Or promoted. Or a pay raise. And, maybe, sigh, not even the esteem of your colleagues. For some, then, student recruitment is one of those things that we do in order to get along but not because we think it is valued. We can change this. We can reward faculty members for being involved in student recruitment during the AFE and TPR processes. The recent announcement of the Chancellor's Meritorious Service to Students Award is an indicator that the administration does, indeed, value work related to recruitment and retention. This \$1,000 award will be added to the faculty member's base pay. Hey, wait a minute! Student recruitment activities can get us a pay raise! A new effort to increase faculty involvement in the recruitment process has been initiated. Each department now has a faculty member designated as an Admissions liaison. This will be more work for these faculty. In the absence of release time or other compensation, I sincerely hope that departmental AFE and TPR committees will value this service and recognize that time spent helping the University reach larger goals means there will be less time for those faculty members to pursue their own professional development goals. It should count.

We have an exciting challenge ahead of us. If you have concerns or other reasons that prevent you from being involved, I hope you will share them. If you have suggestions for ways faculty can become more involved or examples of recruitment activities that have been successful for your program, I hope you will share those, too. Faculty are vital players in the student recruitment game. I hope you'll join and/or support the team.

Dr. Betty Farmer, Communication, Theatre & Dance

The opinions printed here belong solely to the authors and do not necessarily represent the opinions of the editorial staff or of the Faculty Center. If you would like to respond, e-mail Nienhuis by the 8th of the month.

Faculty Center for Excellence in Teaching & Learning

Responses to "The Vital Role of Faculty in Student Recruitment," by Betty Farmer, 10/1/06

After 33 years of helping recruit and retain students at WCU, I would like to put my slant on Betty's comments.

1. We don't need any more students! I agree with Betty that faculty need to buy into growth and be assured that future resources will appear. However, if we don't "build it" now, then nobody "will come." There is a leap of faith involved here. If we have no confidence that growth in a given major is desirable and possible, then maybe we need to reinvent the major—look at what Philosophy and Religion has accomplished. Only a few students enter WCU knowing what major they really want, so we need to be helping them explore their individual possibilities and build on their strengths. Tenured professors supposedly know not only their own disciplines and the career options open to their majors but also have circulated sufficiently so that they can refer students to faculty in other majors for further guidance. Maybe one major "doesn't need any more students," but let's at least bring them into WCU and help them find a satisfying career path.
2. That's not my job! I remember the days before our professional Admissions staff was large enough to do recruitment activities on their own, and faculty were invited to join the show. Since the potluck didn't always draw potential students for our own majors, we had to be flexible enough to talk with almost anybody who showed up. We became **very** familiar with the WCU catalog. Now we sit at our computers or phones or in our offices and respond only to students interested in our majors. Helping to sell our programs is indeed our job.
3. It doesn't count. Why do we limit our perspective on recruitment to being "just service" (even if it carries monetary rewards)? I think that engaged faculty are doing applied scholarship in career science. We are alert to cues from students, especially in the presence of parents who focus on the major **they** want for their children. We discover what students really enjoy (or don't enjoy) in and out of class and help them turn those preferences into a practical course of study. We help them test the realities of their decisions and point them to needed resources. We don't pretend to know everything, but we know where to find out about everything, and that is scholarly activity.

Dr. Sharon Jacques, Nursing

Make WCU's Slum a Field of Dreams

Recruitment and retention are problems that have been plaguing us for years, and Betty Farmer's Faculty Forum makes a good case for faculty involvement in recruiting students. One recruitment obstacle that University leaders should revisit is the "college town" problem. Cool college towns appeal to students. Old Cullowhee Road, which winds through the back of Cullowhee could be very cool. However, it's now an embarrassment and an eyesore that gets worse every year. Many of the establishments on the old road look like they are about to fall down. The dirt mine is like a billboard announcing, "Tear down the mountain." The other day, I heard an administrator say that people being recruited to WCU should be kept away from the back of campus during their visit. I would like to see

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our administration tackle this problem, recruit people to renovate and replace the ugly buildings, and rebuild a town that takes advantage of the river and access to campus. It would take commitment, vision and know how. A cool downtown Cullowhee could have a very positive effect on recruitment and retention. It could be beautiful. Right now, it's a slum.

Mary Jean Ronan Herzog, Educational Leadership & Foundations

I'm in my twenty-eighth year in the music department at WCU. During the first few years, there were several of us who made personal contacts (visits to schools, phone calls, letters) with prospective students. Over the years, this activity has increased greatly to the point that now, virtually every music faculty member makes these contacts. We would get very few students in the music field if we simply waited until they showed up on campus. The result of this consistent effort is manifest in the growth of our department.

Bob Holquist, Music

After reading Dr. Farmer's cogent Faculty Forum piece, I was immediately reminded of my own experience as a sixteen-year-old high school student attending Legislator's School at Western eight years ago. During my three-week stay on campus I enjoyed the scenic beauty and contemplative atmosphere of Western, but it was not until I was noticed by a faculty member that I thought of Western as a place for me.

While volunteering on an erosion control service project on the Blue Ridge Parkway, I serendipitously encountered a new history professor, Dr. Scott Philyaw, who overheard me talking about history with my fellow teenagers. He not only augmented my reflections on Thomas Jefferson and the Civil War but also encouraged me to come by his office to discuss majoring in history. A week later, I had a half-hour conversation about Western and the history department with my future department head, Dr. James Lewis.

Both of these experiences were so formidable that I never gave serious thought to attending another school. I attended, in April 1999, however, an Open House, during which I explored another major interest—political science. Though I only walked by the political science table casually at first, Dr. C. Don Livingston approached me and invited me to visit his department after the information fair; I did so, and spent two hours in the Chan Carpenter Library talking with him and his graduate students about politics and our favorite books. Dr. Livingston's intense interest in helping me succeed remains vivid in my memory today. Although I did not major in political science, I did take Dr. Livingston's upper-level course on the American Presidency as a freshman and benefited immensely from his teaching and counsel.

One of the first things I did upon returning home from that Open House was to discard my application to UNC-Charlotte; Western Carolina University was the only school I applied to, and I do not regret the decision. Only years later did I realize what a powerful effect these three individuals had on my education, my life, and my future. A few kind words, friendly gestures, and encouraging conversations can make the *entire* difference in a young person's life.

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As Dr. Farmer lucidly reminds us, faculty should not underestimate their recruiting power; my personal example is but one of hundreds. Faculty can, and should, have a role in recruiting students at their most impressionable stage, especially when young Americans are so eager for affirmation and votes of confidence.

Brandon A. Robinson, Hunter Library

Faculty Center for Excellence in Teaching & Learning

This is a response to Mary Jean Ronan Herzog's, "WCU's Slum a Field of Dreams," (10/15/06), which was itself a response to Betty Farmer's "The Vital Role of Faculty in Student Recruitment," (10/1/06).

Revitalizing Old Cullowhee

I am surprised that no one has followed up on Mary Jean's article about the sorry state of the old Cullowhee "village" area. Surely, a "vibrant village" just off campus that is walking distance from the residence halls would make a big difference for recruiting and retention. I am convinced that a well-planned development with walking and bike trails, coffee houses, student hang-outs, and shops would make THE big difference for both marketing and for retention. The "village" location is perfect for student access as it is walking distance with no four-lane to cross.

With all of the university's resources and connections, couldn't we change what is an embarrassment to something that we could be proud of, at the same time improving everyone's quality of life? I can imagine just about everyone on campus getting behind such a venture.

Could this be a showcase project for the Institute for the Economy and the Future? Looking at the dilapidation right now doesn't put WCU in a good light economically, and unless we do something significant the future looks grim for our back yard. Realistically, though, this would be a major project to give it the ambiance of the University of Minnesota's "Dinkytown," or downtown Sylva—more the reason that we should think big and do it.

Such a project would demonstrate our ability to achieve a significant goal in economic development while actually helping the university. It could be used as a marketing piece while removing a marketing problem for WCU. Currently it has to be difficult to convince people that we are the economic engine of Western North Carolina while strolling through Cullowhee. It also has to be difficult to explain to parents and prospective students why the area is so run down.

It could be very different.

Maurice Phipps, Health and Human Performance