



Faculty Forum

From the Faculty Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning

WESTERN CAROLINA UNIVERSITY

CULLOWHEE, NORTH CAROLINA

Vol. 16, No. 7

April 1, 2004

What Role Will You Play in the Selection of the New Provost?

The search process is well underway for a Provost, our new chief academic officer, and I urge each of you to get involved in the selection process. This person will have the potential to impact faculty lives in significant ways—on a day-to-day basis even more than the Chancellor. We have the right to participate and the responsibility to do so. I know that a number of faculty and staff have become disengaged and that some have even chosen disenfranchisement, but most still hold on to their dreams for what they would like to see in the future for this institution. The newer faculty, I am convinced, have high hopes for both Western Carolina and their particular programs. Many have full careers ahead and have already invested much in the choice to come to Cullowhee.

Surely, we must all realize the Provost will have responsibilities beyond those of the previous Vice Chancellors for Academic Affairs and will likely be the second most influential person on this campus. As usual, the Provost will oversee activities and oversee staff whose duties are not directly tied to our classroom work. However, the greatest number of people, other than students, that the Provost will impact will be the teaching faculty. It is imperative, therefore, that this Provost be faculty friendly and have the best interest of our academic pursuits in mind. I have learned in the past quarter century in higher education and through more than three decades of studying organizations that nothing is sacred. A chief academic officer "can giveth, and a chief academic officer can taketh away." We have seen this at Western and many have experienced it firsthand.

So, how does the faculty collectively present its views and be heard? First, we must get ourselves mobilized to read about and meet the candidates. Next, we must make damn sure we are heard. One opportunity to exercise our right to influence the selection is behind us. Several weeks ago the faculty had an opportunity to meet with Ted Marchese of Academic Search Consultation Service, the firm WCU is paying to provide recruiting assistance. The faculty turnout was pitiful. I was able to count on one hand the number of faculty in attendance and didn't even get to my thumb! Members of the search committee outnumbered us! So did the staff! Say what you will, this was a sincere effort on the part of the recruiting firm to listen to faculty, and I am convinced what was said *will* play into the search process. One opportunity to exercise a right is behind us.

However, there will be more chances to influence the process. Candidates will eventually visit campus and I am confident we, the teaching faculty, will have opportunities to meet them and have our say through the search committee. Okay, some faculty believe that the search

committee is a sham: the Provost will affect hundreds of faculty and there are only five "regular" faculty members on the committee of seventeen, one from each of the undergraduate colleges and the library. Newt Smith, Chair of the Faculty will also serve. I know all of the committee members except the students, however, and I have worked alongside virtually every committee member on at least one important activity. All care deeply about the University, do exceptional work, and are people of character.

The eight university offices represented on the committee are crucial to the campus and should have a say in the selection process, but so should the Honors College, the Coulter Faculty Center, the Graduate School, and other Academic Affairs constituents. Many other offices have a perspective that faculty do not, but there are ways for them to be heard other than representation on the search committee. I certainly do not advocate a larger committee, so the faculty voice is at risk of being diluted.

If the current search committee is to work to its potential, it must engage in dialogue of the truest sense and each and every faculty member must attempt to influence this rich process. How can hundreds of us from the classroom be heard? I am not convinced that it will be easy with the minimal faculty representation on the search committee, but I am convinced we can certainly try. I know for a fact that Newt Smith, Tim Carstens, Jerry Miller, Aaron Ball, Jerry Kinard, and Beth Tyson will carefully listen to whatever we say. We must speak out, but we cannot say anything unless we get out of our offices, examine the candidates' credentials, meet them, and consider their talents alongside our dreams for Western and our day-to-day needs. We must inundate the search committee with input.

I am also concerned with the impression we make on the candidates and especially that individual who is ultimately offered the position, serves as chief academic officer, and joins us as a member of the faculty and a tenured member of an academic department. Who knows, that individual might someday be teaching alongside you. Furthermore, it is in the best interest of the new Provost to learn firsthand during the course of the selection process about Western's faculty.

We all have a significant investment in this search. If you do have dreams, take advantage of your right to be heard and fulfill your responsibility to influence the Provost selection. If you don't have dreams, you must admit that as a faculty member you have rights. With rights, too, come responsibilities, and, as Amitai Etzioni said, "Claiming rights without assuming responsibilities is unethical and illogical." It won't be long before a decision will be made that will unquestionably impact what it is like to be a faculty member at Western Carolina University. I hope to see you when the candidates come to Cullowhee. Why not?

Terry L. Kinnear, Management and International Business

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.