



Faculty Forum

*from the Coulter Faculty Commons
for Excellence in Teaching and Learning*

**Volume 26, Number 4
March 2014**

Editor's Note

This Month

Inspired by a student comment, I look into the faculty role as leader in the classroom and across campus.

Care to Lead Mark Mattheis

There is always more to learn. I have reaffirmed that notion a good deal lately. At the beginning of each semester I announce to my class that the person in the room who will learn the most during the course will be me. Not that I won't impart what I know to my students, it is that they all have something unique about themselves from which I will learn. I like that about teaching.

Near the end of last semester a couple of things happened that put me on this topic. The first was receiving a complement from a student during a rather rough patch in class. I had taken aside the producer for that days show and I was explaining in rather direct terms that the production was not going well. This was because the student had not done the pre-production work needed to insure a successful outcome. I went on to explain, "in order to succeed in this business and in life you have to take the time to prepare for success. It does not just happen spontaneously. Television is not a magic box that instantly creates the programs when you turn it on. It takes a lot of work and dedication." The student took a moment, regrouped, and did what needed to be done. As the show progressed another student came up to me and said, "You actually care. That is rare at Western." This was a defining moment.

One definition of leadership is, "to organize a group of people to achieve a common goal." I believe as humans we want leadership in our lives. If not to unite for the good of us all, then at least to be able to judge for ourselves what is good or bad. We like common goals and the feeling of belonging to a group that can achieve larger tasks. Some folks need leadership so they can rebel against it. Others prefer taking sides. On a national level a small group of congressmen recently banded together and achieved the common goal of closing down the federal government. This action may not have been the goal of the full congress, but it is proof of effective leadership in a subgroup and ineffective leadership overall. It was this subgroups goal to stop everyone else and they succeeded. On the state level with one party rule, changes

affecting education have come fast and furious. Agendas are being acted upon. There is disagreement across the state on the possible outcomes. But, the common goals of state leaders have been achieved. Voters might need to organize.

So where are the lines drawn that define the group, goal, and who shall lead? On campus it is diagramed for us. In our classrooms faculty are to unite the students as a group to achieve the learning outcomes or goals of the course. Department heads unite their faculty to achieve set goals, while Deans unite department heads. The provost unites the campus while the chancellor is our voice to that which is beyond. The common goal just like in congress depends on who is in the group. We group students by majors and number of hours achieved. Faculty have ranking and tenured or not. Those in similar groups may come and go depending upon who leads. A leader wants to accomplish the goal. We will be welcoming a new leader soon and in theory we are all in the same group. However because our campus has been missing consistent leadership for so long, how many subgroups have been formed to fill the void?

Now try and define the word “care”. To me it is an emotion. Something that is within me that defines my purpose in life. It is a strong word used to both embrace and reject. “I don’t care!” or “Who Cares?” explains specifically that the person expressing their emotion does not believe in achieving that particular common goal. They are removing themselves from the group and therefore they will not lead nor be lead. To care is very individualistic. We see it every day in class. How can I “make” my students care about the subject or their future? The only way to have them care is by leadership. To insure they are in the group and the group has a common goal.

So why would a student believe faculty do not care? Possibly some don’t. Not that they don’t care about anything, like the small group of congressmen who cared to prove a point. We care about what affects our individual self interests and the groups with which we are aligned. To our students we are what we teach. I believe students see us as uncaring because we do not teach students how to care. The word “care” is not a stated learning outcome of our curriculum. We quantify care by service to students, the campus, and our community. We give lip service to QEP and the Boyer model while holding on to traditional ways. Take a look at our course catalog. Unless you are in the healthcare profession where “care” is a process or procedure, the word care shows up in only the one credit hour course

“PE 202 -Casting, spin, and fly casting; fundamentals and care of equipment.”

We are once again preparing to embrace, decline, or ignore new leadership on our campus. In my opinion we have a desperate need to have a common goal. One that provides us hope for the future and a realignment of groups that are organized for the betterment of all. To help achieve this goal I call on you to play an active part in this transition. Speak your mind and express your opinions. Take the leadership role in your classroom and show our students how you do care, by

teaching them how to do the same. Utilize this opportunity to unite our campus for the betterment of all. Care to lead.

Disclaimer

The opinions expressed here belong solely to the authors and do not necessarily represent the opinions of the editorial staff or of the Faculty Commons. If you would like to respond, you may input your comments directly through the wiki on the Faculty Forum webpage, or e-mail your comments to [FacultyFellow](#) and they will be posted.

For additional information about the Faculty Forum or to submit an article please contact:
Mark Mattheis - Faculty Fellow for Publications memattheis@wcu.edu