

# Faculty Forum

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# Faculty Forum

*From the Faculty Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning*

WESTERN CAROLINA UNIVERSITY

Vol. 15, No. 1

CULLOWHEE, NORTH CAROLINA

September 1, 2002

## Catamount Syndrome

Western has a problem that many believe is real: we aren't good at attracting and keeping students or faculty. Let's call it the Catamount Syndrome. A syndrome differs from an illness in that illnesses have clear causes and cures. A syndrome--chronic fatigue syndrome, for example--is a condition that experts cannot blame on a single cause. Until recently, few believed chronic fatigue was real. People with its symptoms were ignored, patronized as hypochondriacs, or sent to specialists who treated isolated symptoms. Only when doctors guessed that the condition might have several distinct causes--thyroid disorders, yeast growth, and malnutrition, to name a few--did they make headway. However, to think like the patient, a doctor requires these leaps of faith:

- Assuming, for the moment, that the patient is not the problem
- Listening carefully to all symptoms instead of recording only those that fit the diagnosis
- Asking the patients themselves instead of consulting specialists
- Attacking all the symptoms at once without necessarily linking them to a single cause
- Trusting, when possible, the body's ability to heal itself and giving it tools to heal itself

I use a syndrome analogy to suggest how we should think about our retention problems and what we should do about them. First, I'll perfect my analogy, in which we (faculty, staff, and students) are the body, administrators are doctors, and consultants are specialists.

- We've been told that we, the faculty, are the problem. Ignoring evidence from student surveys, administrators blamed poor retention on "bad grading." Their remedy: curtailing academic freedom by regulating grading practices.
- Our "doctors" began with a diagnosis and selected symptoms to fit. Hoping to de-emphasize our rural location, this university looked for ways to heighten its urban profile by publicizing "wired" classes, investing in jazz instead of bluegrass, discouraging "green" themes, and using terms like "informatics." Rather than building programs that attract good students who like it here--faculty offspring, older students, and outdoor enthusiasts--they tried to pave paradise, spinning this hamlet as the next Avenue of the Americas.
- Specialists and consultants arrived to explain our woes while we ignored our own experts. Though Western asks students why they leave, we don't believe their answers or we just don't like them. My technical writing students periodically send proposals to administrators examining everything from climbing walls and bar shuttles to dual enrollment programs. To my knowledge, no administrator has tried to act on any of these proposals.
- Though our problems are connected, we've treated them separately. We defer to authority when we ought to listen to each other, spending hours on task forces that attack part of the problem. While a college committee labored to correct salary inequities, a gold-chip senate task force announced that none exist. While Program Review struggled to free positions by cutting programs, no one counted long-vacant positions, administrative "upgrades," or phased retirement vacancies we could easily combine. (Vacant positions provide a huge source of

flexible revenue, and part-time faculty come cheap, so since 1995 the ratio of untenured to tenurable faculty in lower division courses has doubled.) And it's obvious we didn't consult art faculty about the bat-winged stationery.

- No one trusts our opinions or experience. Our task forces and committees are structured not to foster dialog but to enforce consensus. A huge administrative presence sways some committees. For example, recent "capital construction" plans solicited our input and then ignored it (though the 22-person Master Planning Task Force did include three faculty and three students). Other committees' tasks are scripted in advance. I spent my only day on a salary equity task force hearing why market and merit inequities were "beyond our scope." Another task force was "already studying" percentage raises and merit definitions, so we couldn't discuss those either. Before the meeting ended, some had already reached the only conclusion in our power: inequities are both inevitable and imaginary.

If I'm right, faculty are depressed because we feel helpless. Our mouths move but no sound comes out. I don't think our administrators conspire to silence us. If we are manipulated, it's because, to continue with my syndrome analogy, we defer to anyone wearing a lab coat.

People of goodwill disagree. In hierarchical models, doctors decide which solution is correct. The cure for a syndrome, however, combines many partial answers that *work their way up from below*. To find what ails Western, we should ask those who know, including custodians who know how we live and secretaries who know how we work. We should assume debate is healthy, though consensus is pretty. And we should let qualified people—not just the *same old people*--try out their ideas. Since it's my article, here are some of mine:

- Employ fewer administrators. Too many "men in black" mire us in red tape when we need to act creatively, and they can't always afford dissent.
- Make Western faculty-friendly. Create jobs for faculty spouses so our stationery doesn't have to say, "Power your mind or save your marriage." Give *all* our employees benefits and a living wage.
- Make Western student-friendly. Hire far more student support. Solicit and use student ideas.
- Create a real service learning program tied to majors. Our community is long on need and short on services. Our multi-talented students could write grants, tutor ESL students, or design business plans. Useful work might keep students here while building their resumes.
- Do something, anything, to get people arguing--even if it means using every scrap of Western's purple stationery to construct a giant penis.

PMS sufferers were once as credible as alien abductees. Medical schools taught doctors they knew better, until believing in PMS grew less important than making it go away. Until we hear new ideas, we won't hear useful ones, and if we start by saying what we can't do, we won't hear anything at all. Good teaching is a tightrope between lecturing and listening, and we walk it our whole lives. Administrators are teachers too. They can get the hang of it.

**Mary Adams, English**

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# Faculty Forum

*From the Faculty Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning*

WESTERN CAROLINA UNIVERSITY

CULLOWHEE, NORTH CAROLINA

Vol. 15, No. 2

October 1, 2002

## A New Renaissance of Teaching & Learning

I participated in a discussion about teaching at WCU where most of the participants were senior faculty, and comments were made about faculty morale and the role of teaching excellence. Still fairly new here, I would like to give my perspective, prompted by that discussion, upon the role of professional development at the present time.

My discipline is religious studies and I believe that spiritual traditions began from some sort of "white-hot" experience that became the heart of mythopoetic stories and their periodic ritual enactment. Then, those stories became the soul of the people and the impetus and goal of their vision quest. It has been said, "the cosmos is composed not primarily of atoms, but of stories." Stories talk deeply about a people's sense of itself as a community, often through paradox and a necessary ambiguity. Great wisdom exists in many of these stories and faculty have their own stories to tell.

Faculty know that good teaching is difficult and requires a kind of educational vision quest, a seeking and a struggle for what one knows is elusive and sometimes ambiguous. Faculty understand that good teaching is no accident, that it is hard but wonderful work ("*There is no joy in life without joy in work,*" Aquinas). Faculty know that teaching, while requiring competence in one's discipline, requires much, much more than that competence. Gandhi talked about "*experiments with truth.*" Could we re-interpret the present time to be *kairos*, the fertile moment, the opportune moment, to be THE new time for a teaching & learning renaissance, an experiment with the truths of teaching & learning? As Gandhi also said, "*Be the change you want to see in the world.*"

Dogen said, "*If you can't find the truth right where you are, where else do you think you will find it?*" What if faculty and whole departments were to articulate a vision for a teaching & learning renaissance, a convincing assertion that teaching & learning are the foundation, guts, and spirit of this university, that becoming an ever better teacher is and will be the most significant, appreciated and rewarded goal for any faculty member? Can faculty lead the whole university back to its origins, to help it have a "memory of its future"? Sometimes one can find what one seeks by going no-where, by contemplating the vision that already is but which may have become faded, jaded, or overlaid with too much other "stuff."

We have the story that we need to remember, conserve, preserve, transform and tell. We can risk being reborn to our original vision / story of why we teach, why we learn, why we want to help create a story of personal, cultural, and universal learning with students. "*We must receive new seeds from an old harvest, old truths out of a time newborn,*" (Thomas Merton). The Faculty Center's staff and resources shall fully support such a faculty-led renaissance, a new burst of teaching's spirit that can only originate from faculty feeding the fire from each other and with their students.

As a young Bob Dylan sang, "*he who isn't busy being born, is busy dyin'.*" By seeking a renewed focus upon teaching & learning, senior, junior, new and part-time faculty can begin to

create what they seek. Faculty may be busy but hopefully not too busy to participate in a collegial renewal of teaching at a university whose present and future spirit resides with excellence in teaching & learning because the heart of the university is its students and faculty.

During that same discussion with faculty, I thought back to my belated entrance into professional academic life after all my different jobs. Back in those days, the idea of being a busy faculty member working with students at a university (especially one in a region of rare, ancient, and nearly mystical beauty) would have seemed like a dream job (not a utopian illusion) for many reasons. And it is. . . or can be, if the dream is allowed to live and we remember the white-hot fire that was our Call-to-teaching story, a Call alive within us as we allow ourselves to be aware of and remember it and gather with colleagues doing the same. I have met many WCU faculty who are living blazes of passion for teaching and the time may be right for a renaissance with all the labor, birth pangs, and joy that are part of a new birth.

If teaching & learning excellence is to be genuinely considered the epitome of what being a faculty member at WCU means, faculty with strong administrative support can manifest that value individually and collegially in an authentic community of scholarly teaching and the scholarship of teaching & learning. But the faculty's great collective wisdom about teaching cannot continue to be kept so much in private enclaves, unavailable and lost to other faculty. In the future we plan on initiating the "Wisdom Project" to preserve through video and writings the teaching experience and wisdom of retiring faculty, the elders of our teaching tribe. Risk is needed for a breakthrough and for a new community to be born. As Virgil says to Dante in Dante's *Divine Comedy* as the arduous ascent through the rocks of Mount Purgatory begins, "Here we shall need some ingenuity." But if the vision quest were easy, it would be a trivial vision to seek. Captain Jean Luc Picard of the starship *Enterprise* might say about this possibility, even if arduous: "*Make it so!*"

Some active steps are to participate in the following CFC initiatives and resources that are explained on our new web site (<http://facctr.wcu.edu/>):

- Open Classroom Project
- Departmental Assistance and Department Head Development
- Faculty Learning Opportunities (workshops)
- Discussion List on Teaching and Learning
- Mentoring Program
- CFC Library on Teaching & Learning (HL 240)
- Faculty Sandbox
- Renaissance of Teaching and Learning Booklet Series*
- MountainRise* eJournal on the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning
- Faculty Teams (Aliteracy, Qualitative Research, Talk About Teaching, Untenured Faculty, Writing Across the Curriculum, Interdisciplinary Collaboration, Web-enhanced Teaching and Learning, Diversity, Student Learning)
- Consultation on course development, teaching methods, active learning, etc.

Teaching is about transformation and ingenuity. "Be the change you want to see. . ." Thank you.

**Alan Altany, Professor & Director, Coulter Faculty Center for Excellence in Teaching & Learning**

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# Faculty Forum

*From the Faculty Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning*

WESTERN CAROLINA UNIVERSITY

CULLOWHEE, NORTH CAROLINA

Vol. 15, No. 3

November 1, 2002

## **The Appalachian Theme is Just Right for Western**

In his speech at the fall General Faculty Meeting, Chancellor Bardo called for faculty to consider themes or directions that would be "germane" and "appropriate" for Western Carolina University in the coming years. He mentioned five suggestions that had been brought to him "through the course of the summer" and three of the five involved our regional character. Over the summer, faculty suggested emphases on Appalachian culture, on our mountain environment, and on regional economic diversification; these all imply that Western ought to adopt an Appalachian theme to help focus its educational mission within the UNC system (the other two suggestions were teacher education and gerontology). These three Appalachian emphases, part of an overall Appalachian theme, would inspire and energize our whole curriculum--from the humanities, social sciences, and arts to hard sciences, environmental science, health science, economics, business, and technology. Chancellor Bardo warned us that the theme we choose should not be too broad or too narrow. I like to think that the Appalachian theme is just right for WCU.

With the Appalachian focus, we can distinguish WCU from all the other universities in the UNC system. This focus could be the special way that WCU is known and recognized not only in North Carolina but throughout the Southeast and even the nation at large. The importance of distinguishing ourselves in some area was raised in the Paulien Report a few years ago, and Russ Lea from General Administration spoke to the same issue in a meeting on our campus this summer. Last year Brian Railsback and Gordon Mercer generated considerable campus discussion along these lines by suggesting that WCU become known as "the green campus." The question of how WCU will distinguish or "position" itself is a crucial one because our choice of theme will probably have significant ramifications on how the university will grow in the years to come.

The new Hunter Library Web site has already adopted an Appalachian theme. The revolving graphics on the right side of the library web page feature photos of Horace Kephart, George Masa, Quill Rose, Nimrod Jarrett Smith, Josefina Niggli, and Sue Ellen Bridgers. However, the annual student recruitment tour from the Admissions Office has not gone Appalachian. The imitation CD cover that advertises the eight-stop, 2002 recruitment tour features a flying catmount mascot in a Superman shirt, holding a WCU flag as he charges through the purple background. The title of the "CD" and the epithet for the tour is "Power Charged" and this tour is apparently "back by popular demand." The prospective students are invited to "Experience the Power that one evening can have on your future." It may be unreasonable to expect the Appalachian theme to serve as a high-powered marketing tool, but what do we gain by identifying Western with popular entertainment?

Some have suggested that WCU has a potential "gold mine" with our Cherokee Studies program, but my impression is that the program does not have the visibility that it deserves. The newly-established Parris Distinguished Professorship in Appalachian Cultural Studies would be good for WCU even on its own merit, but let's do more than simply establish the professorship; let's use the gift of the Parris estate as a pivotal moment for WCU. Western Carolina has one of the richest musical heritages in the United States, and it has one of the most beautiful physical locations in the world. While high school students might not care about the banjo styles of Jackson

County, many of them would be attracted to the aesthetic and recreational opportunities that our location affords. There are a lot of 18 year olds sweating in featureless Charlotte suburbs who would be very attracted to a university in which they can expect great teachers, state of the art technology, AND cool mountain air and world-class mountain biking 10 minutes from their residence hall. Now is the time to redefine WCU as more than just a generic regional comprehensive university or "party school."

How might a Southern Appalachian theme at WCU be implemented? We already have an Appalachian Studies Minor. It is listed in the catalog as an "Arts and Sciences Interdisciplinary Program." A few years ago this program was created with great enthusiasm and energy, but the program seems to have lost its momentum. We already have the organizational structure in place to accommodate this theme; all we need to do is reenergize our enthusiasm for it.

There is a retention angle to this proposal. Some of our current students come to WCU and leave after a year because they simply don't "connect" with the region. These are the students who are likely to complain that "there's nothing to do in Cullowhee." An aggressive marketing campaign could attract students to WCU who specifically want to study some aspect of the southern Appalachian heritage. Majors such as Natural Resources Management and Parks and Recreation Management attract students who are already attached to the region, and I have heard that these programs have high retention rates. We should try to attract more students who have a natural affinity for the area and who would more likely want to stay in Cullowhee for four years. Students who come to WCU because of our location are much more likely to stay than those who come in spite of it.

Perhaps the campus community will not agree that an emphasis on Southern Appalachia is the best way to distinguish WCU, but I say give Doc Watson an honorary Doctorate and see how it plays. That would be a real statement about our distinctive values.

**Charles Wallis, Mathematics and Computer Science, with thanks to other faculty who contributed significantly to this piece**

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# Faculty Forum

*From the Faculty Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning*

WESTERN CAROLINA UNIVERSITY

Vol. 15, No. 4

CULLOWHEE, NORTH CAROLINA

December 1, 2002

## Lessons Learned, Part 1

I realized some time this fall that I have been teaching at Western for 25 years. I didn't feel too bad about that because I started teaching here when I was 14, but it did make me a little more reflective than usual. I started to think about what I had learned about teaching at a university like Western over that quarter of a century. The results are not very insightful or exciting; in fact almost every idea that has come to mind is something that has been discussed in Faculty Forum by me or someone else. Maybe the fact that these ideas keep coming up is a sign of some sort.

**Textbooks are a problem.** In my first Faculty Forum article in 1988, I wrote about the tyranny of the textbook. I argued that textbooks had way too much influence on the way courses were taught and on the way students tried to learn. I think I argued that the person who wrote the textbook was the one who really got to learn (but those who write such books were not happy that I said that). I still think textbooks are a problem, but in my undergraduate courses I have made something of a truce with using a textbook. I have decided never to use the term "read" in association with a textbook. Instead I tell students to analyze the book. I tell them that they have to take a very active approach to the text in which they take on very small portions of a chapter at a time. I tell them to use the structure of the chapter the author provided in the headings to provide context, to circle and connect ideas in the text, to generate their own examples and write them in the margins, and to note questions they want to ask in class. They tell me they would write in the books but that they don't own them.

**The book rental system is bad for student scholarship.** I have been grinding this axe since my children were very small. Chancellors have told me that if I were a parent paying college bills I would appreciate the book rental system. At times when my first two children were attending schools where books were costing up to \$600 per semester I wondered. Now I have a child at WCU and I still don't like what the system does to our students' attitudes about books and learning from them. Not only are our students not free to write in their books or able to build a personal library, they come to see books as minor players in their education. I also fear that faculty members hesitate to have students read as much as they should because of the system, thus not challenging our students as much as they could.

**We still are not sufficiently challenging our students.** Despite all the talk of raising bars and new curricula, students at WCU often are not intellectually challenged. Eleven years ago in the Faculty Forum I pointed out that students were getting high grades with minimal effort, carrying heavy course loads and heavy off-campus employment loads while easily passing courses and watching hours of TV. From what I hear, things have not changed significantly. As there was a decade ago there are courses that are demanding in every college of the university. Yet too many holes remain to make the generalization that challenge is the norm at WCU. As has been said before in these pages there often seems to be an unspoken conspiracy between students and faculty members to keep the demands on each other to a minimum.

**The consumers in education want to be cheated.** I often tell my students that we are in the only business in the world in which the consumers repeatedly cry "Cheat me, cheat me, please, please cheat me." And we often oblige them. We start classes late, let classes out early, fail to meet classes, skip the last 2 1/2 hours of the semester, or cancel the last class before breaks. We make it clear that it would be politically incorrect to call to task a colleague on any of these behaviors. As we shorten semesters for our convenience and decrease the number of credit hours required for graduation for bureaucratic convenience, let us not fool ourselves into thinking that we have enhanced the education of our students. But, after all, maybe the amount of time a student spends in class really doesn't matter that much.

**The real action in teaching and learning occurs outside the classroom.** Perhaps the most important thing I have learned so far is that what I do as a classroom teacher pales in comparison to the importance of what I get my students to do when they are not in class and I am not around. An unusually good lecture or a particularly apt demonstration may inspire my students. An effective classroom exercise or discussion may clarify an important point. However, it is what happens in the 100-140 hours my students spend on my course outside of class not the 47 inside that is really going to determine how much they learn. I have to design each course and its assignments so that students will have to read, write, and think when I am not with them. I have to be willing to spend the time outside of the classroom to give them the feedback on their assignments they need. I have to design exams that will not only assess degrees of knowledge but also motivate students to study in effective ways. While it is important that I find ways to challenge and support my students inside the classroom, it is essential that I find ways to challenge and support them outside the classroom. I really achieve success when I can get students to become independent producers of their own learning experiences. When I pique my students' curiosity, help my students turn intellectual work into intellectual play, and get my students to actively engage important ideas outside the classroom, I have earned my pay.

In Part 2, I will focus on what I learn over the next 25 years.

### **Bruce Henderson, Psychology**

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# Faculty Forum

*From the Faculty Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning*

WESTERN CAROLINA UNIVERSITY

Vol. 15, No. 6

CULLOWHEE, NORTH CAROLINA  
March 1, 2003

## **Everyone Can Help Teach Writing**

Imagine a semester where you assign an essay to your students every month or even every other week. Allowing time at the beginning and ending of the semester for getting started and pulling everything together, this might mean 3 or 6 essays from each student each semester. Now imagine enjoying this. Imagine that reading these essays is exciting and interesting, something you look forward to rather than something you dread. Imagine, furthermore, that it is easy to read all of these essays. This can happen to you. This can happen to everyone who teaches at WCU.

Most faculty outside of the English Department might shudder at such a regimen. Many might say, "I have too many students to teach; I don't have the time for grading that much student writing." Others might say, "I don't know how to teach writing; I wouldn't know how to justify the grade; I wouldn't know what to mark as wrong; I wouldn't know what to suggest for improvement." I believe that all of these fears are groundless. Everyone can help teach writing, and reading more student writing can be fun and easy.

Most everyone would probably agree that learning would improve if students wrote more. Writing is a great way to clarify what we know, and writing is also the ultimate test of knowing. When a writer thinks, argues, and explains on a page, the reader can really test the thoroughness and specificity of the writer's understanding. In writing, there is no guessing.

"But what about subjectivity?" some might rejoinder. "I prefer objective testing." Certainly the evaluation of writing is subjective, but so is all evaluation. In true/false and multiple choice testing, for example, the subjectivity is simply buried in the test design. "But the student writing is so bad" others might say. "It is so painful to read." At first it is. But as student writing improves, reading it becomes a joy rather than a chore, and if everyone in the university is helping to teach writing the student writing will improve very quickly. Individual student writing can even improve significantly within the 15 weeks of your course. "But I have too many students," the initial voice still insists. "I would be grading papers all the time. I would have to work 18-hour days." Here are 2 secrets to making the evaluation of student writing easier:

**Don't "edit" student writing (don't rewrite each paper as if it were your own)**  
**Use a "grading standard" that explains each grade**

Imagine reading student papers and not making a mark on them. You simply read each essay and assign the appropriate grade. The "grading standard" is the key. You can create a generic grading standard for all student writing, with a paragraph that describes the qualities that earn an "A," "B," "C," "D," or "F." When the students receive their papers, they find the paragraph that corresponds to their grade and understand why they received that particular grade. Or, you can create a specific grading standard for each assignment (this is a little more time consuming). Better yet, you can ask your students to help create these grading standards, a process that gives them ownership in their own evaluation process. If everyone understands what describes an "A" paper, all you have to do is assign grades according to those descriptions. Keep the grading standard as simple as possible and talk about it with your students. Make sure they understand how to make an

"A" and they will teach themselves the qualities of good writing. To see examples of such general grading standards, you can access my personal web site at <http://www3.wcu.edu/~nienhuis>. To see grading standards designed for specific assignments, you can find examples on my course newsgroups (access newsgroups through the Computer Center home page). These examples are not meant to be authoritative. Though I have been using grading standards for many years, they are, as with everything else in our teaching, work in progress; they can always be improved.

If formal essays still seem too daunting, here's **secret # 3**: you can help teach writing and make your job even easier and more fun by asking students to do a lot of **"informal writing."** This is writing usually done in class. It can be called "discovery writing" because it is writing that helps students articulate what they know or what they have questions about. For example, you can begin a class with informal writing, asking students to summarize their out-of-class reading for the day. Or you can end a class with informal writing, asking students to summarize your lecture, adding any questions they might have. You can use informal writing in the middle of a class period, asking students to write about their personal experience in regard to course issues, for example. You should read this informal writing because it will give you genuine and immediate feedback on student learning, but you don't have to grade it. The students will take this writing more seriously if you give them some kind of credit for it, but just read it, learn what is going on in the minds of your students, and hand the writing back to them. Not all learning has to be graded, supervised, or mediated. The mind is a natural learner and we can learn to write the way we learned how to speak our first language. All of us continue to learn new skills through unmediated exploration, refining those skills through private practice. Students doing a lot of informal writing is infinitely better than students not writing at all. If the students are writing in any way, you are helping to teach writing.

There are, of course, a number of other issues. "What about plagiarism?" some might say. Personally, I feel that plagiarism is a very manageable problem, but I will leave this issue to another Forum article. "What do you do when the writing is full of grotesque errors?" another asks. My feeling is that we have to tolerate some sloppiness in writing with in-class assignments, where students have much less time to prepare and little or no time to edit and proofread, but out-of-class writing is different. Students usually write out-of-class essays the night before, and if the paper in your hands looks extremely careless, simply turn it back unread and demand a more careful resubmission. We can insist that anything written outside of class is carefully revised, edited, and proofread. If we all demand this kind of quality, the students will respond with better work. Anyone who accepts less than the students' best writing on out-of-class assignments encourages all students to see how little they can do to get by.

Finally, remember the Composition Conditional grade at the end of the semester and the Writing Center. The Writing Center is very well equipped to handle students who need extra help. Go the Writing Center homepage at <http://www.wcu.edu/writing center> and you will find a number of teaching aids, including a link called Everyone Can Help Teach Writing.

Demand good writing in every class and the students will respond. It might take a few years to build a tradition, but imagine how much better the student learning will be and how much more fun we will have as teachers.

**Terry Nienhuis, English**

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# Faculty Forum

*From the Faculty Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning*

WESTERN CAROLINA UNIVERSITY

CULLOWHEE, NORTH CAROLINA

Vol. 15, No. 7

April 1, 2003

## A Call for a Forum on the Faculty Forum

Once upon a time in these mountains in October, 1988, the first issue of the *Faculty Forum*, as a publication of the then newly created Coulter Faculty Center, was written and published by Faculty Fellow, Terry Nienhuis, who said that the main goal of the *Forum* would be "to spark a lively dialogue about college teaching" through a faculty opinion piece each month and subsequent faculty responses to it published in *Notes & Quotes*.

After fifteen years of monthly publication during the academic year, the *Forum* and its mid-month cousin, *Notes & Quotes*, continue to be published and distributed to faculty and are available on the Center's web site. Recently, additional Faculty Center publications have started that include the *Renaissance of Teaching & Learning Booklet Series* (by WCU faculty), *MountainRise* (an ejournal on the scholarship of teaching & learning with articles by WCU faculty) and *The Buzzard's Roost Road Review* (quarterly newsletter of the Faculty Center). The purpose of this configuration of publications is for faculty to engage with colleagues about teaching and learning.

Through the years the *Faculty Forum* has been a main stimulus for campus-wide discussions and debates. The topics have been varied and have sometimes evoked many passionate responses. That fulfilled the original purpose of the *Forum*.

However, in recent years fewer responses are being made to the *Forum* pieces. There have been two peak periods when *Forum* essays stimulated responses: the initial period from 1989 to 1991 and 1996 to 1999. Since 1999 there have been only a few *Forum* pieces that have generated many responses. And some submissions have addressed topics that may not have the direct connection with teaching and learning that was part of the original mandate in 1988. The 15<sup>th</sup> year mark may be a propitious time to ask for your help in rethinking the purpose of the *Faculty Forum*.

"Forum" means an open area or public square in a town or location where important issues can be discussed freely. To call the publication the *Faculty Forum* says that it is for open discussion by and for faculty. Topics in the *Forum* can be controversial and that can help stir conversation. The only constraints are that the discussions be civil and that the topics focus directly upon some aspect of college teaching and learning. As the work of the Faculty Center is in the process of being reexamined and sometimes transformed, this re-examination of the *Forum* fits into that process. **We want to hear what you think the purpose of the *Forum* should be.** Some basic questions come to mind:

- Should the *Forum* continue? Why or why not?
- What about topics not directly related to teaching and learning but that concern faculty? Should there be a separate publication produced by faculty for such issues that lie outside the teaching and learning mission of the Faculty Center?
- Do you read the *Forum* when it comes to your mailbox? Why or why not?

- What topics would you like to see in the *Forum*? Would you consider writing a piece for the *Forum* about one such topic that is important for you?
- Do you read *Notes & Quotes*? Why or why not?

The *Forum* has been around so long now that its appearance is a campus ritual and it has developed its own history marked by certain benchmark pieces. In a way, the *Forum* has become part of the *mythos* of WCU, but like any good and living story, it can not be fossilized, or ignored, and still retain its vision. The *Forum* can be a dynamic medium.

- Does grade inflation exist at WCU?
- Lecturing is still dominant, but is it outdated or does it retain value?
- Can educational technologies actually improve learning or not?
- What is "good" teaching and how can it be evaluated? What is "good" learning and how can it be assessed?
- Are numerical student evaluations valid or not?
- Is one's teaching a private matter, a community event, or both?
- Is there fear for students and faculty in changing approaches to teaching and learning, even if the change is for the better?
- How can departments become centers of teaching and learning excellence?
- What should the Faculty Center be and what should it be doing?
- Do faculty have an ethical obligation to professional development as teachers?
- What are the reasons for and results of having a profession (college teaching) where most faculty are not actually trained to teach nor have they researched human learning?
- What would have to happen for a full renaissance of teaching and learning to occur?

In the last *Forum* of that first year, 1988-1989, Terry said that "One of William Blake's proverbs says, 'you never know what is enough unless you know what is more than enough.' Is it possible to have too much dialogue? Is it possible to have too much community spirit? Is it possible to care too much about teaching excellence? Write us today. If the *Forum* hasn't voiced your concern, it must be because we haven't heard from you. Give us an opinion about some aspect of the teaching life at WCU. Tell us what works in your classroom. Tell us what you see as the problems confronting us as teachers. The campus community is waiting to hear from you."

The *Forum* is about faculty wanting to discover, express, apply, and question truths about teaching and learning. Some might call that sacred work. A Russian proverb says "one word of truth outweighs the whole world." If so, the goal of the *Forum* has been a heavy one.

As its 16<sup>th</sup> year approaches, tell us your vision for the future of the *Faculty Forum*. **Send your responses to this issue to *Forum* editor, Terry Nienhuis, by April 7th** so he can include them in the mid-April issue of *Notes & Quotes*. Not to respond at all does not help us all.

**Alan Altany, Director, Coulter Faculty Center**

*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 Forum

*From the Faculty Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning*

WESTERN CAROLINA UNIVERSITY

CULLOWHEE, NORTH CAROLINA

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## Service Learning: What's In It For Me?

You're probably thinking, "Here they come again with another teaching gimmick and they expect me to use it." Well, Service Learning is not a gimmick. It is a time-tested and exciting method for enhancing the learning experience for students and faculty as it connects active classroom learning with community service. Any instructor in any course can ask students to complete a short-term community service project that is directly related to a chapter in the course text. Students perform the service, reflect on the experience, and you assign a grade--with the help of information gathered for you by the office of Service Learning. It is fun, easy, and extremely useful to students, faculty, and community.

Service Learning transforms abstract concepts on the printed page of textbooks into real, life-long learning experiences for students. It also assists faculty by offering them additional teaching, learning, and even researching opportunities. Finally, Service Learning provides countless hours of valuable service to community agencies while the university benefits through a strengthened cooperative relationship with the local community.

### Service Learning includes three aspects of service:

1. **Direct Service:** Projects where students provide service directly to a client at a community-based agency, such as in mentoring or tutoring children or assisting at food banks, nursing homes, or homeless shelters.
2. **Indirect Service:** Students serve at a community-based agency on behalf of a specific population by developing fundraising programs, creating marketing strategies, or participating in painting, construction, and clean-up projects.
3. **Social Action Research:** Students conduct research designed to address the informational needs of an agency using applied classroom theory.

Service Learning provides hands-on experiential knowledge to students about community issues and populations, fosters a sense of civic responsibility, integrates and enhances the academic curriculum, and helps to clarify a student's career objectives. It has to be time consuming, right? No. All you have to do is make the assignment and let the Service Learning director know the goals of the assignment and the number of hours students are expected to log. The Service Learning office will do the rest, unless you want to help. You can give the Service Learning director the name of a specific agency to assign your students to or he will do it for you. The Service Learning office will provide a list of agencies willing to accept student volunteers. You can make an assignment related to any class topic and specify an agency to which students are to log hours. Your students come to the Service Learning Department where they will complete all the necessary forms before contacting the non-profit agency. The Service Learning director will be responsible for verifying that your students have completed the number of hours and activities specified and for forwarding a copy of the student's timesheet, signed by the agency representative, to you. The final step is for you to assign a grade to the student for the project. Easy, isn't it? Additionally, the Service Learning director will provide resources about Service

Learning and consult with you as needed to conceptualize, plan, implement, and assess a Service-Learning experience.

There are some disciplines that lend themselves more to Service Learning than others. For example, the Social Sciences, Humanities, Liberal Studies, and First-Year Seminar courses are easily suited to the concept. The Natural Sciences can infuse Service Learning into the curriculum with a little creativity. New faculty might find the Service Learning concept particularly effective because it allows for interpersonal interaction with students who are dealing with course materials while exposing the instructor to a community that may still be unfamiliar.

So what do you have to gain if you incorporate Service Learning into your course in the fall semester? Sorry, we can't promise an increase in salary. Recognition of the value of Service Learning in tenure, promotion, and salary decisions lies initially in the hands of you, the faculty, who serve on the appropriate committees. But there are other things that are of immediate benefit and almost as good as more money. You can conduct research on Service Learning and submit it to MountainRise, the Faculty Center e-journal, or to other journals like Change, About Campus, or The Journal of Experiential Education. Ultimately, you always have the satisfaction of knowing that you have significantly increased the value of the student's learning experience while strengthening the university's role in the local community.

The Service Learning Department plans to have all forms placed on the Service Learning web site by the beginning of the fall semester. Students will be able to download the forms and acquire appropriate signatures prior to coming to the Service Learning Department for agency assignments. We also plan to develop a chat room where Service Learning participants can reflect on their experience and exchange ideas. Instructors will be able to monitor discussions between students in their class and other Service Learning participants. Additionally, we have developed a Service Learning newsletter that will highlight participating community agencies, instructors, and outstanding students. We anticipate being able to maintain documentation of students who engage in Service Learning and who volunteer service throughout their career at Western so that the students can report their community service upon request or graduation as part of our current co-curricular transcript.

The Division of Student Affairs is excited about the reconstruction of the Graham building into a Service Learning residential center. Students living in Graham will meet specific criteria and interested students may be awarded scholarships. Fellowships may also be offered to faculty for research and instruction in the area of Service Learning. An architectural firm has been recommended to begin work on the Graham Hall project. In addition to residential quarters, Graham will include facilities for instructional and conference purposes. We envision banners of supporting agencies waving throughout the mezzanine of the main conference room. The Service Learning Department is also expected to become the central hub of volunteerism where members of the staff, faculty, and students not enrolled in classes with a Service Learning component will still be able to find information for community service placement.

You can now see how fun, easy, and useful Service Learning can be. If you are interested in adding Service Learning to your course in the fall or if you would like more information, contact me at 227-3059. This is the beginning of a new chapter in teaching and learning at WCU. You can be an important part of it.

**Wayne Robinson, Director of Service Learning**

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