

Faculty Forum

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Table of Contents

Number 1

Litigious

John Ellerbach, Communication

WCU Creates Ombuds Office

Jayne Zanglein, Ombuds

Number 2

Parking Blues

Bill Yang, Engineering and Technology

MOOCs: Disruptive, Innovative, or Both? The Higher Education “Fit”

Carlie Merritt, Emergency and Disaster Management

Number 3

A Defense of Thirty-Nine Hours

Brent Kinser, English

Number 4

Care to Lead

Mark Mattheis, Faculty Fellow for Publications, Coulter Faculty Commons

Number 5

Hand Written

Mark Mattheis, Faculty Fellow for Publications, Coulter Faculty Commons

Number 6

Bill’s Top Ten...

Bill Ogletree, Communication Sciences and Disorders

Help Wanted

Mark Mattheis, Faculty Fellow for Publications, Coulter Faculty Commons



Faculty Forum

from the Coulter Faculty Commons
for Excellence in Teaching and Learning

**Volume 26, Number 1
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Litigious John Ellerbach

Thirty-six of our 170 North Carolina legislators are lawyers. Actually, I suspected that even more were associated with the legal profession, given the recent passage of a law that in many circumstances allows any student who comes before a university disciplinary body to have an attorney present. Lawyers like to pass bills that keep their ilk fully employed. But will this new law take us into other sticky predicaments? A possible scary scenario coming to a university near you:

Professor I.M. Ohso Wise: We're having a quiz tomorrow.

Student I. B. Lawyeredup: (*from the back of the room*): No, we're not.

Professor Wise: (*clearly discombobulated*) Pardon ME?

Student: I just texted my lawyer. He's on retainer. He says your syllabus makes no provision for pop quizzes.

Wise: That was certainly a fast response.

Student: Uh, we just happened to be sexting about...uh... I mean texting about another matter....

Wise: I just want you to know, Student, that I DO support the Legislature's SRTFTICL (Students' Right to Freely Text in Class Law), but I want to advise you that I draw the line on quiz rights. The upcoming is NOT a pop quiz. I am telling you about it now—AHEAD of time. It is a SCHEDULED quiz.

Student: You realize, of course, that the NC Legislature is currently debating whether professors have any right to quiz students at all...A straw vote indicates that 169 out of 170 consider quizzing "cruel and unusual punishment."

Wise: (*wisely backing off, as there are informants everywhere*) Yes, of course, I know that. And I know that the NC Legislature certainly knows what (*voice gets a little louder so Legislature-installed monitoring devices are sure to pick up the sound*) is BEST FOR HIGHER EDUCATION!

Student "Lee" Tigious N. Lovingit: (*from the front of the room*). Professor?

Wise: Yes, Lee?

Lovingit: My attorney corroborates what I.B.'s attorney insightfully ascertained about the pop quiz.

Wise: (*exceptionally impressed that a student used “corroborates” AND “ascertained,” until he noticed that Lovingit was reading directly from a note that her attorney just passed to her. Yes, she brings him to every class.*) Lee, I think it is my professorial prerogative to give a quiz.

F. “Bully” Lee Cochrane: (attorney at large): That USED to be your prerogative, professor. But now, with the legislature mandating that every university course must be attended by an attorney at large...

Wise: Oh, you are not that BIG, a bit overweight, maybe, Mr. Cochrane, but not that large.....(*Wise gives that “go-ahead-and-laugh--I-know- I-am-a-facetious-genius” professorial smirk—we all have one-- but nobody bites, and he is chagrined that the play on words goes completely over their heads...*)

Bully: As the vigilant, legislatively-appointed student advocate/counsel for this course, it is my duty to warn you that such attempted levity could be construed as potentially libelous...

Wise: (*So very tempted to tell the fat guy to “stuff it,” but knowing he must now appear contrite.*) I do apologize, Mr. Cochrane. In fact, if I may, allow my attorney to clarify my posture regarding unintentional, flippant remarks. Shy?”

C. “Cutrate” Shylock Stirr: (*roused from a somnolent respite by an elbow from Wise*) Uh, yes, in my somnolent respite I was able to discern, in my opinion, that my client intended no ill will. To wit, nothing malicious could be conscrewed...

Wise: Construed. After all, this is a class in building one’s vocabulary.

Shy Stirr: Whatever.... (*falls back into somnolent respite mode*)

Bully: And may I remind the professor that he is already in deep doo doo for his remarks at the departmental meeting earlier today....

Wise: All I said was that I was “disappointed when the potluck sign-up sheet went around that one of my colleagues had already volunteered to bring the Swedish meatballs.” I wanted to bring them.

Bully: My associate counsel (*who just burst into the classroom*) has just handed me a note that says your meatballs retort has been reviewed by the dean’s attorney and you have been found in contempt.

Wise: Ah, but hasn’t our departmental attorney already filed a meatball appeal? I thought I saw a PAF (Potluck Appeal Form) in my mailbox today...

Bully: No, that was your departmental secretary’s attorney who filed that, the legislatively appointed keen legal mind who sits vigilantly by the coffee pot...

Wise: Not the keen legal mind who sits by the copy machine?

Bully: No, that’s the attorney assigned to monitor all professors’ office conferences with advisees.

Wise: I see.

Bully: It’s an extra measure to protect our students. Give bad advice, pay the price.

Wise: *(turning toward his own attorney, having to nudge him again; whispering)* Which reminds me, Shy, are you advising me to go with the brownies or the bean dip instead?

Shy Stirr: *(also whispering)* You KNOW I cannot answer that question before you and I have a legislature -mandated legal conference with the UAPM, University's Attorney for Potluck Mediation. You don't want me to be disbarred, do you? I almost got in trouble for "encouraging" one of your students to provaricate at the deposition hearing.

Wise: *(still whispering)* PREvaricate, Shy! And I was being sued for bad teaching, and only ONE of my students would testify that I was not a bad teacher?

Shy Stirr: For 100 bucks and a case of ramen noodles. Lucky they let spouses take professors' classes. But she was still a hard sell. By the way, I am supposed to tell you that it's Ramen Surprise again for supper. She says she "just can't do any better on a WCU professor's pittance of a salary."

Wise: How disgusting! I mean, not the Ramen Surprise... I mean, WHAT has happened to higher education??? Due process is out of control.

Just then a courier knocks on the door and hands Wise a subpoena. Wise quickly reads it and then addresses the class.

Wise: We'll have to dismiss class early again today.

(A rousing cheer from the 30 students and 28 attorneys)

Wise: In a few minutes I'm due to testify in a case against the coach of the WCU Hopscotch team. I was walking by the practice field and heard him RAISE HIS VOICE to a hopscotch player's lawyer when said attorney allegedly requested that his client get more playing time. It doesn't look good for the coach. Sure, he was polite, but the coach YELLED. And I heard it! The NC Legislature says I have no choice but to report on my misguided citizen-comrade.

Of course, nobody heard Wise's explanation. They were all rushing out the door to watch a legislator-sanctioned beheading at the Dean's Guillotine. But that story is for another time.

WCU Creates Ombuds Office Jayne Zanglein

Welcome to the office of the ombuds!

The ombuds is a newly created pilot program at WCU. The ombuds office was established to assist faculty, staff, and administration in resolving disputes and preventing future conflicts.

The term "ombuds" is derived from the Swedish word for "representative." Perhaps a better translation is "intermediary" or "facilitator." In Sweden, a neutral ombuds addressed personal grievances raised by citizens against the government.

Although an ombuds plays different roles depending on the organization, the defining characteristics of an ombuds program remain the same. An ombuds is:

- Independent
- Impartial

- Informal
- Confidential

The ombuds does not act as a judge. Instead, the ombuds works with employees to explore options for resolving a dispute or misunderstanding. The ombuds may act on behalf of an employee by bringing anonymous issues to the attention of administration. The ombuds may act as an intermediary between an employee and supervisor and meet with them separately to address concerns. If desired, the ombuds may facilitate conversations between co-workers or employees and supervisors to help them resolve an issue and to prevent future misunderstandings.

Here at WCU, the university defines an “ombuds” as an “independent resource for problem resolution [who] works to ensure that members of the university community are treated equitably and fairly.” Issues appropriate for the ombuds office include:

- Interpersonal conflicts
- Departmental conflicts
- Complaints of unfair treatment or harassment
- Other workplace grievances or misunderstandings.

The ombuds is not a substitute for the formal grievance and hearing procedures already in place. Faculty and staff are encouraged to contact the ombuds for assistance before the situation escalates to the point where formal action is appropriate.

An ombuds program is built on confidentiality. Discussions with the ombuds are confidential with some exceptions:

1. If the employee waives confidentiality;
2. Where an imminent or significant risk of harm exists to the health and safety of the campus community; or
3. When otherwise required by law.

The creation of the office of the ombuds gives the WCU employee community the opportunity to transform the work environment and make significant cultural changes. In *The Organizational Ombudsman as Change Agent*, an article published in the *Negotiation Journal*, Marsha Wagner describes the role of the ombuds as: “to help resolve the particular concerns brought to the ombuds office, *and* –if the case involves unfortunate oversights, difficulties, or wrongdoing – to address the organizational conditions with recommendations for change to try to ensure that such a situation will not recur.” The WCU ombuds will report to the provost (without identifying complainants by name or department) trends within the university that need to be addressed, policies that need clarification, and workshops for supervisors on recurring themes.

Jayne Zanglein serves as the ombuds for the university. To schedule a private meeting, call her at 828-331-0866 (cell) or 828-227-7191 (office). Her office is in Forsyth 202.

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Faculty Forum

*from the Coulter Faculty Commons
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**Parking Blues
Bill Yang**

It is 6:20pm, Monday evening, Oct. 21st, 2013, and it is getting dark. It is the big night of the Jackson County School Bands' Fall Concert. I am supposed to drop off my twelve-year-old son, Thomas, five minutes ago at the Coulter Music Recital Hall for their final preparation for the night show. Yet, I have been circling around the Coulter Building for the past ten minutes desperately trying to find a parking spot. There is some kind of fair going on at the front lawn of the A. K. Hinds University Center with lively and energetic music playing along. That must have something to do with this shortage of parking spaces, I am thinking. After a few more rounds around the Coulter Building, I finally give up on finding a parking spot and decide to drop my son off at the loading zone in front of the Coulter Recital Hall entrance. Luckily, there are already multiple vehicles with loads of Jackson County middle school and high school student band performers doing the same thing and my son easily finds companion of his fellow band-mates. As for me, I have to carefully maneuver around the other cars in the cozy loading zone with the entry way half barricaded and I did it. Pewf! My next daunting task, however, is to ferry my whole and extended families to the event and now we definitely need to find a parking spot. I grow a bit curious as why we did not have at least some parking spaces blocked for the event, as I recall we often get email notices about parking lot closures due to some events on campus, say, some so-and-so foundation events. Maybe, I am thinking, because we have transferred over the past year close to \$100,000 of parking fine funds (80% of them!) to the K-12 system, we don't need to reserve any parking spaces for their events. Anyway, as I am once again circling the Coulter Building for a parking spot, now with my whole and extended families in a big SUV, all excited to see Thomas and his friends' performance, I suddenly see a car pulling over into a 24-hour reserved parking spot conveniently close to the Coulter Building and apparently the passenger getting off is not the Dean! Darn it, why didn't I think of doing that! I am thinking, well, another golden opportunity lost. After who knows how many minutes and how many rounds we have circled around the Coulter, finally, at the foot around the Forsyth, I found a precious empty parallel parking slot! Parallel Parking!!! Gosh, I have not done that for who knows how many years and my parallel parking skill is as rusty as the newly unearthed iron ore from Smoky Mountains! Last time when I did a parallel parking, it must be on the streets in the New York City when I used to drive to visit there! I was so terrible at it and that, I guess, was a big part of reason why I escaped to the Paradise in the Mountains, where here in the Paradise's rural settings, I don't ever have to worry about parallel parking a car, let alone the big SUV, which by the way does help me go about safely and smoothly in the winter mountains. I must have struggled for three or even more than five minutes to maneuver my SUV into the slot and the car behind me must be wondering earnestly what I was doing.

A nice and attractive looking 23-million- or even 30-million-dollar parking garage standing right in the center of the campus would definitely help out my last parking fiasco episode. It would

even make our current science and engineering buildings look, well, more modest than the garage, which, on another thought, is a statement I definitely don't want to rely to my potential STEM research sponsors. And the hefty parking fees! \$300 per year for most of faculty, staff, and students, and up to \$500 per year for the unlucky few who are entitled to the 24-hour reserved parking spots to finance the new garage, compared to the already increased \$96 per year current parking fee? Hmm, not sure if it will worth it. The current \$96 a year parking fee for 7,000 permits per year, according to a recent email memo from Chancellor Belcher, nicely covers the current parking services personnel and operations, even with more than \$250,000 a year available for parking services capital improvements. A \$23-30million parking garage of 1,200 parking spaces will increase our parking inventory by almost 20%. I guess this means we currently have more than 6,000 parking spaces in inventory for 7,000 permits. I heard from friends at other unfortunate places such as some unnamed colleges in New Jersey that they sell at least ten tags for every parking spot on campus! We certainly could use a few more parking spots to improve our ratio, I am just not sure if the \$23-30 million parking garage makes the most economical sense at this moment, given the current state budget situation. After all, the new HHS Overflow lot only cost \$600,000, although it is gravel. But, hey, we live in the mountains and my neighbor's driveway is gravel too.

For people like me in the Belk Building, we are fortunate when parking is concerned. We are surrounded by parking lots! We have the Belk Building parking lot, the J. W. Bardo Fine and Performing Art Center parking lot, the football stadium parking lot, even the Cordelia Camp Building parking lot and the A.K. Hinds University Center parking lot, all within a comfortable and healthy walking distance. The \$23-30 million parking garage proposal is like a very expensive solution to a non-exist problem for us. If this proposal is put out for a vote, I'll definitely vote no. Of course, for people who are closer to the center of the campus, they may vote a most definitely yes. Hold a moment, on this particular thought, my Political Science and Public Affairs colleagues would know better than I do: for such a "public" matter which will commit such a long term financial burden for everyone with the university, shouldn't we indeed put this big spending proposal to a "public" referendum, so that everyone it affects, including faculty, staff, and students can express their support or non-support?

MOOCs: Disruptive, Innovative, or Both? – The Higher Education "Fit" **Carlie Merritt**

Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) – perceived in the academic community as the worst fad or an exciting innovation for higher education. Dr. Sullivan, the President of the University of Virginia summarized the perspective of many administrators when she observed of MOOCs in 2012 that they are "surprisingly expensive, [have] limited revenue potential and unless carefully managed, can undermine the quality of instruction." Academics have criticized MOOCs for their size (a typical MOOC can have 10,000 participants). How can any institution consider awarding credit for a course that includes little or no individual attention – a correspondence course? MOOCs are also criticized for their failure to retain students (the retention rate is typically 7-10 percent). San Jose State University suspended 5 MOOCs this summer because more than half of the participants failed the final exams.

Another concern is that the online format may not be appropriate for inexperienced learners who have difficulties with reading and writing (especially non-native English speakers) and with time

or information management. High school students and people with no college experience could be encouraged to try MOOCs. Reports show that typically, 30% of participants are from other countries. According to Clark (2013), Coursera, a host and developer of MOOCs, has offered within one year over 328 courses from 62 universities in 17 countries. This includes 2.9 million users from more than 220 countries. In fact, approximately 42% of MOOC users come from developing countries.

So, why offer these courses that may be expensive to develop, may spin out of control with the large numbers, and have low rates of retention? If more than one third of the registered participants are outside the country, are university offerings serving the proper target audience? If retention and course completion are primary measures of success, as they are in traditional higher education, would the introduction of this model have a devastating impact on programs? If the goal is to offer free classes, where is the incentive? MOOCs require an investment in university support, course development and faculty instruction with no apparent return on investment. These are valid questions and each university needs to consider MOOC goals carefully.

In her article “From Campus to the Future,” Oblinger (2010) summarizes drivers of change in higher education. They include:

- An expanded market: the number of individual pursuing higher education has dramatically increased;
- Financial support: the competition for funding from other demands such as health care will continue to “squeeze higher education funding;”
- Cost of education: affordability becomes an increasing burden as infrastructure, labor and service costs continue to rise;
- Efficiency and productivity: institutions continue to examine ways to increase efficiency while reducing costs;
- Sustainability: for research, education and operations;
- Alliances: share infrastructure or leverage scale for greater “procurement power;”
- Student engagement and achievement: student motivation and engagement have a strong relationship with achievement;
- Diversity of suppliers: many types of competitors exist in higher education, including for-profit colleges, community colleges, open universities, corporate universities and certificate programs; and
- Accountability: measurable outcomes, return on investment are both critical to economic vitality.

An understanding of how MOOCs relate to these drivers of change must arise from examining the goals of open courses. The MOOC goals must fit within the higher education business model to have a chance for success, but also the MOOCs must be accepted for what they are... an alternative means to share information.

Expanded market. One goal for MOOCs is to share information that is important to the field with a larger audience, as both the supplier and recipient of information, ideas and perspectives. Some professors use MOOCs as incubators for innovation. Drawing from a global audience can

provide a wealth of new perspectives on relevant topics. From a core MOOC, social networks and interest groups can continue momentum, even after the conclusion of formal learning.

Financial support. MOOCs are often used for marketing programs. The attention and engagement of 10,000 MOOC participants can provide better program visibility than 10,000 brochures, especially at a time when the marketing budgets for many institutions have been severely reduced. Participants who invest in MOOCs are more likely to consider both academic alternatives, which increase student credit hour production, or certificate programs, which provide alternative funding streams for programs.

Cost of education. MOOCs cost little to the participants, except, perhaps, fees for proctored exams or materials, and they provide an opportunity for students to interact with the material and self-assess. Some programs offer courses on a variety of Liberal Arts topics that may better prepare students for enrollment in traditional college courses. Some programs also allow students who successfully complete MOOCs to waive courses, take competency exams, or award credit within the college program if they choose to enroll in the institution.

Efficiency and productivity. Many students enroll in college with little understanding of majors and minors, and hence, fade out of chosen programs within a few semesters. MOOCs provide an opportunity to vet students; in this regard, a 7% - 10% completion rate can be beneficial. Only those who become sufficiently engaged in the material are likely to complete the MOOC and enroll formally in a program. Even 1% of 10,000 MOOC participants represents substantial growth for most programs. The MOOC target audience includes life-long learners, military and business people, community members, and parents of prospective students, as well as those targeted to become students. So, along with marketing, community engagement, a traditional measure of productivity, is a realistic goal for a MOOC.

Sustainability. MOOCs provide opportunities to use learning analytics, both to strengthen programs by examining what best engages participants and to engage in research regarding learner behavior and motivation. Program developers must address issues of scale in today's economic environment, even if just a few courses are increased in size so that others may remain small. Faculty members have little experience with scale in traditional programs and could benefit from this opportunity to transfer MOOC successes into traditional course offerings. How many traditional courses, for example, take advantage of social media engagement other than traditional class or online discussion forums?

Alliances: Lack of direct return on investment, lack of faculty compensation and the size of the enrollment per MOOC provide incentives for team teaching to distribute the workload. MOOCs are a useful bridge for connecting programs with interdisciplinary content from within the university. They can also be used to forge relationships with community college partners or other colleges and universities. Alliances to address other issues, such as streamlined articulation and the development of consortium programs can result from collaborative MOOCs.

Student engagement and achievement. The motivation for participating in MOOCs varies greatly. Some participants are lifelong learners who wish to learn a new subject as "its own reward." Many are "lurkers," who read the material but never take examinations or assessments, much as they would do crossword puzzles. Others participate in the social media aspect of MOOCs and derive satisfaction from connecting to new people and ideas. One could surmise that individuals are engaged in the material and achieve their personal goals, regardless of the

traditional goals established for academic performance. The ability to attract an international audience, as well as a wide variety of participants within the U.S., can provide MOOCs with the ability to engage in ways that are not possible through traditional channels.

Diversity of suppliers. MOOCs provide opportunities to collaborate with other institutions rather than simply competing for students. If, for example, non-traditional MOOC participants can be encouraged to enroll in and complete community college programs, their chances of success in the upper division courses at the four-year programs improve. Also, the tremendous increase in program and university visibility afforded by MOOCs facilitates a competitive edge, especially if the MOOCs provide advising and support opportunities as well as course content.

Accountability. MOOCs could play an integral role in meeting the UNC Tomorrow goals (2008) through which UNC system accountability will be measured in coming years.

Global readiness: MOOCs provide a forum that facilitates communication between traditional and international participants.

Increasing access to higher education: MOOCs provide a forum to engage a wide variety of people, to discuss higher education alternatives, and to set an expectation for academic rigor in a cost-free (relatively) and risk-free environment.

Improving public education: MOOCs are open to anyone and can allow high school students a risk-free opportunity to sample content and share perspectives and experiences with a wide range of people.

Health: MOOCs would be a great tool to advance health information in communities and globally.

Environment: As an incubator of ideas, MOOCs could provide a means of examining innovations that would facilitate environmental sustainability, reaching many more citizens than traditional education, locally and globally.

Outreach and engagement: With participation rates of 1,000 to 100,000, MOOCs have tremendous capability for sharing information, generating new ideas and attracting new students.

MOOCs facilitate emergent learning through peer interaction and faculty guidance. Many faculty members who are used to (and desire to) control the interaction and progress during the life of their courses may find this sometimes chaotic and overwhelming format unacceptable. However, for faculty members who envision their role as facilitating the sharing of ideas and concepts, the ripple effect of social networking and cross-cultural/ interdisciplinary fertilization of ideas can be rewarding. MOOCs cannot be held to the same standard of faculty engagement or course completion as academic courses, but the learning experienced through MOOCs can complement coursework in a variety of ways.

University stakeholders should consider policies related to IT support, faculty and staff compensation, and quality metrics from somewhat different criteria than those used for academic and certificate courses. Perhaps Education Outreach or marketing dollars should stimulate MOOC development, much as Education Outreach dollars stimulated course development for distance education courses a number of years ago. Regardless of how the university ultimately fits MOOCs into its existing infrastructure, MOOCs can be drivers for outreach and innovation and should be given a legitimate place in the higher education menu.

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Faculty Forum

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

**Volume 26, Number 3
November 2013**

**Editor's Note
Mark Mattheis**

Proposed changes in the state wide general education program is the Faculty Forum topic of the month. Brent Kinser in the English Department has written in "Defense of Thirty-Nine Hours" which expresses his views about the process. Comments can be made directly on the wiki at the end of his article. Your articles are always welcomed at the Faculty Forum.

**A Defense of Thirty-Nine Hours
Brent Kinser**

Faculty are now well into the process of submitting their final commentary on the proposed General Education Program that was submitted to Faculty Senate last year (Spring 2012), after more than two years of industry by a representative Task Force. In brief, the proposed program features four components. Students would take a 3-hour First-Year Seminar, 15 Hours of Foundational Experiences, 12 hours in a category called Ways of Knowing, and 9 hours in a category called Integrative Experiences.[1] The program represents 39 hours of coursework for students who spend their entire undergraduate career at Western. I am writing to explain to you why I support the adoption of some version of this proposal.

The world is a much different place than it was when the current Liberal Studies Program was written and adopted late in the last century. Those many years ago, assessment was more of a nuisance than an imperative. UNC Tomorrow and "Synthesis: A Pathway to Intentional Learning" did not exist. Then there was the intervening financial crisis and the new political environment and the endless stream of budget cuts as the pressures of "cheaper, faster, easier" began to define a burgeoning environment of "do more; make less" (parking, anyone?). Never mind the older and wiser adages of "you get what you pay for, haste makes waste, and not everything is supposed to be easy." But this is the world in which we live, and this world, alas, seems healthy enough to last for some time. The current Liberal Studies Program, with no logical pathway to assessment and with significant amounts of program "drift" and with dated outcomes, has surpassed its life expectancy, no doubt having been designed by good people with due diligence and with the best interests of our students in mind. Still, the time has come for us to choose a new path for our students.

And so the General Education Task Force went through a similarly rigorous process of reviewing literature, of looking at other programs, and of negotiating philosophical differences, all of which led to what the members of the task force agreed by consensus to be a workable proposal, one in need of clarification and revision, but one that represented a sincere effort to construct a program

that would serve the best interests of our students. The proposal was reviewed by the Faculty Senate and then sent back to the Liberal Studies and University Curriculum committees with a charge: to gather a final round of commentary and to make joint recommendations on adoption and implementation. Since that Senate action, or lack thereof, the world has changed yet again. When the Task Force completed its work, there was no Strategic Plan, nor was there a determined effort at the GA level to address issues of seamless transfer for the UNC System, an entity viewed by the campuses as a loose confederation of unique institutions, and by the state as a single, seventeen-campus university (check the UNC System website). And so as the faculty considers “final” commentary on the General Education Proposal, the world is a different place than when the conversation began. Rest assured, that world will also be different by the time the conversation is finished, and whatever program enters the implementation phase will require extensibility, especially in terms of how the university will meet the needs of its various stakeholders. This flexibility will lead to program drift and also to subsequent changes intended to hold that drift at bay. But the conversation needs, desperately, to be finished, and the best interest of the students should remain paramount.

Yes, I understand that regular raises seem a thing of the distant past, and that program prioritization has been painful, for some more than others. I know that it is very likely that further cuts are coming and that we are being required to perform as teachers, as scholars, as recruiters, as development officers, as committee members, as committee chairs, as community citizens: do more; make less. Most if not all of you also will be familiar with the latest set of mandates from GA. We will limit to 16 hours the number of withdrawals a student may make and we will preach the doctrine of the 8-semester plan and the Senate will please affirm these mandates by voting yes by the end of November.

More relevant to the current discussion, the North Carolina Community College System—responding to major pressure from the legislature to enact seamless transfer, or else—have been working on revisions to their general education program. I was present at a meeting in Chapel Hill when representatives from GA attempted to explain the NCCCS plan to faculty members from the four-year institutions. They had called us together to identify courses offered at the community colleges that would transfer to all 17 four-year institutions. What they were proposing was a new 30-hour general education core that would be universally transferrable. The faculty at the meeting assumed that this meant a new 30-hour general education program for the community colleges. I heard the question asked more than once: “What, then, will the second 30 hours of the AA and AS degrees look like, and how is that going to affect the Gen Ed programs at the 4-year institutions?” At no time did a GA representative at this meeting mention that these thirty universal hours also would require 14–15 additional hours in General Education for a student to receive an AA or an AS degree. Some of you reading this essay will have heard me pontificate on this issue many times, especially if you have shared an adult beverage with me. As far as I can tell now—and I have been told that this was the plan all along, though no one ever told me of that innocent fact—the proposed Comprehensive Articulation Agreement (CAA) maintains 44–45 of General Education coursework for students receiving an AA or AS degree. The sky, apparently, has not fallen yet, at least in terms of the number of Gen Ed hours. But there are plenty of other reasons to co-opt Chicken Little’s worldview. The community colleges are still seeking input from campuses regarding advising plans to create “pre-major” sequences so they can track students towards particular majors: no drifting, please. The state is

no longer going to subsidize drifting, much less useless degrees in irrelevant subjects such as women's studies (ask the governor). Clearly, according to the disciplinarians, what our habitual course-withdrawers really need is a swift, figurative kick in the backside (my daughter withdrew from a class this semester at NC State because she works too much; do not kick her, please). At Western, we are in the process of implementing a math placement exam. Students who cannot demonstrate that they are ready for Calculus need to be told that they should pursue another path besides engineering, no matter how long or much they have thought about that dream. Faculty will simply have to have a hard conversation with them and show them their 8-semester plan and deem them unworthy (perhaps we might tell them all to consider a degree in English?). So why should the faculty not simply adopt the 30-hour universal core that the community colleges have implemented? SACS does not care about the extra 15 hours; why should we? A 30-hr boiler-plate program would be cheaper for the institution; faster and easier for the students. As much as I appreciate and respect the community college system (both of my children are products of it), I do not see the structure of their model (in its 30 or 45-hr manifestation) as the aspirational model of this university. Our motto is not "Embracing minimum requirements since 1889," nor solely should it be "cheaper, faster, and easier." Surely we can do better for our students.

And in fact, the General Education Task Force spent more than two years trying to design a program that would be better for our students. All members fought their good fights, and we met in the middle with a compromise that addressed most of the concerns that the pro- and anti-liberal arts forces had. But the work was done without the benefit of the newest set of guiding principles for the university: the strategic plan, "2020 Vision: Focusing Our Future" (<http://www.wcu.edu/about-wcu/leadership/office-of-the-chancellor/wcu-2020-plan/>). Strategic Direction #1 of the plan is to "Fulfill the Educational Needs of the State and Region." Consider Goal 1.2:

Fully integrate into the general education program and into each major and minor at both undergraduate and graduate levels an emphasis on those core abilities expected of all WCU students: to integrate information from a variety of contexts; to solve complex problems; to communicate effectively and responsibly; to practice civic engagement; and to clarify and act on purpose and values.

These core abilities are derived from the learning outcomes mandated by the WCU Quality Enhancement Plan, which serves as the center for the academic vision of the strategic plan. Raising the question of useful assessment, by which we can make programmatic changes on the basis of data instead of lore, where is it that ALL of our students develop and demonstrate proficiency in these core abilities? Where do they all integrate information? Where do they all demonstrate their Civic engagement? Then consider Goal 1.3: "Ensure that all programs include cross-curricular, experiential, applied, and international/global awareness opportunities for all students." Where is it that all of our students are not only exposed to but demonstrate proficiency in these areas? OK, they do so in the programs, but would it not be a good idea to prepare students for these experiences and to affirm them, since ultimately the goal is not exposure but proficiency? If we do the "easy" thing and accept the community college program after their process is concluded, then where is it that all of our students will meet the expectations of the strategic vision of the university? Further, and soon I expect, the Senate will be asked to vote yes

to adopt pre- and post-testing instruments such as the College Learning Assessment that the apparently well-heeled [*sic*] GA funded to pilot in the system this year. But if and when CLA or something like it becomes the über-assessment of the university, how are we going to know how to revise and improve curriculum? And more important, if we “choose” to use the CLA, will we be able to say that we have acted in the best interest of our students, or will we have confused their success with the institution’s success?

I realize that many of you are deeply concerned about the Integrative Experiences category that form the final 9 hours designed into the General Education Proposal. But these nine hours are crucial, whatever shape they take. They provide us with the opportunity to create a unique and high quality educational experience that is integrated with both the major programs and the strategic vision of the university. Faculty will not be required to co-teach classes, but Initiative 1.3.1 directs us to “Reduce, and where possible eliminate, bureaucratic and financial barriers to cross-curricular design and team-teaching.” Neither the strategic plan nor the general education proposal suggests that faculty will be required to teach such classes. Both documents do commit us to making sure that faculty will be able to teach co-taught courses if they wish, and that is a joyful prospect for those of us who might wish to teach them. Initiative 1.3.2 calls for “Incorporat[ing] expectations for experiential and applied learning opportunities, including undergraduate research opportunities, in the curricular review process.” How is it that we can demonstrate that we have incorporated these expectations for all of our students? The Task Force designed the proposal specifically to accomplish this type of competency-based expectation. That prospect will require positive and practical suggestions for revision and improvement. Yes, the Integrative Experiences category needs to be articulated more clearly, so as you consider this last round of feedback being solicited by the college curriculum committees, please suggest ways that the articulation of this category and its sub-categories—Civic Engagement, Ethical Commitment, and Global Awareness—might be modified and strengthened to be more firmly aligned with the Strategic Plan and to do what is best for our students. GA also has recently identified two primary competencies shared by all of the institutions in the UNC system: Critical Thinking and Written Communication (GA no doubt will soon ask the Senate to vote yes on these). Where is it that all of our students demonstrate these essential skills proficiently? An adjustment to the 9 hours of the Integrative Experiences Category might allow us to establish that our students both have been exposed to and have developed proficiency in these competencies. It might also be adjusted to reduce administrative fears of affordability. Take Service Learning, for example. How many of our students are already exposed to that kind of experience? Most? Vast majority? A few? Should they all be exposed to learning through serving? If the answer is yes they should be, as the strategic plan instructs, then where is it that they will all receive it? The proposed program—requiring a course that includes service learning, not one devoted to it—offers ways to realize these competency-driven goals. And truth be told, most of our students are being exposed to these types of learning—all of them should be. Identifying classes in which it is happening should be cheap enough, and easy enough. Developing classes that include these types of experiences also should be interesting enough, if the reduction of administrative barriers is fast enough. I would also contend that it would be in the best interest of our students to make one or all of these courses writing intensive (and that means smaller class sizes). Or they might be devoted to critical thinking, or perhaps to critical reading. Surely there is a way to align the competencies of the universal capstone experience with those competencies espoused by our General Education program to show GA, the

legislature, and the taxpayers that students who are graduated from WCU are prepared to succeed. Instead of 1 Upper Level Perspective, the Gen Ed proposal could be revised to make it clear that these 3, 300-level courses deliver a cohesive set of competencies that all of our students need, a set that would also spread the requirements of general education throughout a student's career at WCU.

The proposed program would allow WCU to address the goals of the strategic plan just as we are working to incorporate them into our major programs. There are other possibilities. Many faculty have complained to me, "why can't we just keep the program as it is but drop the First-Year Seminar?" I reply wearily, recalling two years of arguing among the members of the Task Force, "It is the only kind of course that research has shown consistently to have benefits in relation to retention" (see the Task Force literature review). Or, they tell me, eliminate the ULP: "our students don't like it, and it causes Banner trouble." Thus fares the last attempt at making general education less of a check-sheet-driven experience. Rest assured, and this is not Chicken Little speaking, an attempt to hang on to the Liberal Studies Program will require a complete re-write of the LS document, with all courses kicked out before re-approval under a rubric of new guidelines and learning outcomes. If we can figure a way to modify this proposal into a workable program that serves our students, both in terms of their direct experiences and of our ability to achieve useful assessment, then we will have made a great stride towards defining what it means to receive a degree at this institution. More important, we will have done something tremendously good for all of our students. For them, I am willing to put aside the worldview of Chicken Little in favor of Chaucer's immortal Chaunticleer. The rest is not silence, but implementation.

[1] The complete report of the General Education Task Force is readily available online at http://www.wcu.edu/WebFiles/PDFs/Gen_Ed_Task_Force_Summary_Report.pdf

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Faculty Forum

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

**Volume 26, Number 4
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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.

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Faculty Forum

*from the Coulter Faculty Commons
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Editor's Note

Two More Issues this Semester

The Faculty Forum will have two more issues this semester. Deadline for entries will be mid April and the start of finals week. These will be my final two issues as Faculty Fellow. To help facilitate a change in the culture of silence, if you desire to remain anonymous please make that known. I do need to verify the source of the material. I look to you to present solutions to problems, not just expose problems as you see them. Let us try to gain strength in our collective voice so we may be heard above all of the clutter.

Hand Written
Mark Mattheis

In a metal box stashed away somewhere in the back of a closet, are a few of my cherished possessions. Inside the box is a couple of old coins, some baseball cards, and an odd toy or two. Also included are some letters written by people who matter to me. A few are post cards, some on stationary, and I have a pile of those light blue airmail letters. What they have in common is that they are all hand written. A person touched the paper and slid their hand across the page forming visual images in my mind from miles away. There is a feel and smell that creates a sense of connection to the person and I can form a bond. The words themselves are secondary to the swoops and swirls and the staccato beat of a hurried pin. A hand touched that paper and sent it across a distance, allowing my own to hold their thoughts, completing the process of communication that is very, very, personal.

The open meeting last week on campus that covered the new Digital Measures Activity Insight software was sparsely attended yet produced many questions from the audience. The software is designed to allow faculty to input data during the year that can then be accessed by department heads, deans, and certain administrators. The desire to unify the campus in the use of one piece of software will enable information to be gleaned in a more efficient manner. Data typical to an AFE and/or TPR will have specific areas of entry and can be somewhat customized for each department. The end result will be a faster and more detailed data retrieval system for those who have access to the information. Each faculty member will still need to output the entries into a document that can be printed and turned in for review. No on-line review process is scheduled at this time. The white binders will continue to stack up at the appointed place and time. But with

the new system, specific information can now be retrieved without combing through stacks of paper.

This process seems to be rather straightforward. There are competing software companies that provide a similar service and some UNC campuses do use the other vendor. No mandate from GA is in the works to specify which system is preferred and it appears to make sense in some respect to move forward with the software that is suitable to those at the data-gleaning end. But one comment was made at the presentation by an administrator that faculty do not know what their neighbors are doing. That is probably very true. If it is out of your department and not published promoting the efforts, then it would be rare to know. This software will not help that particular situation since your neighbor will not have access to your entries. Unless you are on an AFE or TPR committee you probably have little knowledge about what departmental faculty are up too, let alone your neighbor in another department. A good deal of effort is put into documenting activities inside and out of the classroom. We are asked to provide detailed data on community engagement, student evaluation scores, committee activities, publications, and courses taught. Who we are as educators is entered into the software and eventually those binders. But does the data say anything about us as a person? Are we missing a key element that eliminates the person from the process? I believe we do.

Seldom do I ever see it, but I know my fathers handwriting. He was a draftsman for many years and it is distinctive to who he is. The voice of my mother comes through in every word she has ever written to me. I know my wife's and our kid's hand writing and though they are now on there own, some is still tacked to the fridge door. We can learn interesting details about a person from the way they write. Are they left handed or right? Are they shy or bold? Are they big thinkers or do they need to be exact in everyway? I could probably remember my friends writing from school from those notes passed around during class. I have kept some old school work not because it was stellar, but mainly because a teacher wrote on it. Our students might know our handwriting from white boards and feedback on papers. I always enjoy reading my final exams because it is the only time in class that I test on paper. Blackboard is the tool to use. It calculates and puts the numbers in the right slots. It gives instant feedback if the answer is wrong and it is down right convenient when it isn't cantankerous. It gives me data. My final exam has several areas left blank so students can tell me first hand, by their own hand, what they learned during our time together. It is good to know a person by the use of a pin.

Ask yourself, is the faculty member next to you right handed or left? Do they print or use cursive? If everyone in your department put the same hand written sentence in a box could anyone figure out whose is whose? Maybe the department head or the administrative support assistant could figure it out, but I would doubt if the rest of the faculty could even come close. A hand written note exudes so much power in today's society because of the rarity in creating such a simple act. I find it touching to receive one. Emails, tweets, text messages are placed in folders with headings, deleted, or left to languish for another day. Just a few words handwritten on paper will be placed where it can easily be seen or better yet stored in a sacred place for safekeeping.

Some of our most important documents on this campus have a space for handwritten comments. When that area goes unused there is no sign that a meaningful connection has been made in our institution. There is only data being conveyed, taking humans out of humanity and excluding the person from personnel.

Whee should do better than that.

A handwritten cursive sentence that reads "The quick brown fox jumped over the lazy dog." The handwriting is somewhat slanted and fluid, typical of a personal note.

The quick brown fox jumped over the lazy dog.

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Faculty Forum

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

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Editor's Note:

Final Issue of the Semester

It has been interesting.

Bill's Top Ten....

Bill Ogletree

1. Know the culture
2. Find your fit
3. Be strategic – Set 1, 3, 5, and 10 year goals across teaching, service, and research
4. Collaborate
5. Take my mother's advice – "If you can't say something nice, don't say anything at all"
6. Be seen working and doing good things
7. Ask your chair to give you suggestions (formative) about your career path – listen - share your goals (3 above)
8. Establish or participate in departmental/college mentoring programs
9. Remember the Western Way - "The Western Way means embracing Western Carolina University as our university and taking pride in ourselves as Catamounts. The Western Way means understanding, believing in and helping implement the announced mission of Western. The Western Way means finding satisfaction in watching Western improve and in serving as catalysts in that improvement. It means trying to do what is best for Western." <http://vimeo.com/39498004>
10. Hey, find time for a life away from here – Enjoy your family, laugh and don't take this all too seriously

Help Wanted Mark Mattheis

This is the time of year where our graduating seniors and graduate students begin to realize change is coming soon. Senioritis has set in and motivation has decreased in direct proportion to the increase of the temperature outside. One certainty is the need to find something to do after leaving WCU. Additional degrees are an option, moving home is avoided, military might be a way, but more likely pounding the pavement for that first out of school job is on our student's

minds. Or should it be said, pounding on the electronic device.

Gone are the days of waiting for that one paper issue of the Chronicle that had all of the jobs posted. Gone are also the days of mailing out applications type written on appropriate paper stock so the HR person can feel the quality of our abilities. Modern job-hunting on the surface seems easier than ever. There are apps for that. Just copy and paste your resume and it will populate the specific areas. Create a couple of cover letters and change the appropriate headings, push apply, simple as pie. But the best pie is made from scratch, and so are the skills of the job applicant. Networking is still the key to getting and keeping gainful employment.

Facebook is the modern day Rolodex. Being a “friend” does not however translate to fitting in with a workforce. LinkedIn manages more professional acquaintances and having a high Klout.com score shows you are the master of your own online domain. It takes a good deal of time to stay connected and active in the virtual world, but this activity is native to our graduates. The tweets and instagrams provide exposure to those who might sit across a desk one day and ask, “How many followers do you bring to this company?” So it no longer may be true to say, “It’s who you know” that matters, but rather “who knows you” in order to get your foot in the door and keep it there.

We are in the business of “what you know”. We have spent years getting our students to a level of knowledge that is worthy of their degree. There have been times of heartache and joy, a good deal of frustration and some jubilation. We have imparted what we know and have encouraged our students to understand there is always more to learn. We take pride in their accomplishments and have a great hope for a bright future. When you see a sign that says “Help Wanted” ask yourself if you also taught your students there is more to working than just a check. To “help” is to give assistance or support and to do something that makes it easier for someone to do a job. “Wanted” is the desire to be necessary or needed, and to be needed is essential for a quality life.

Good luck to those who are moving on. Your time here has been appreciated.

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