

Minutes of December 8, 2003 Meeting

Call to Order – At 12:15 Terry Cargan, Chair of the Executive Committee, announced there were not enough Council members present to call a quorum but discussion could take place on items that did not require a vote. On a motion by Mike Nutter, seconded by Sandra DeVellis, it was voted unanimously to go into a committee of the whole.

This meeting was being held via teleconferencing with the Lawrence Campus.

Teleconferencing Considerations – Alan Foucault noted that teleconferencing works very well except when several people talk at the same time. If people take turns speaking, the results will be fine. Terry Cargan expressed thanks to Alan, as well as to Jim Hellesen who'd made teleconferencing this meeting possible.

Meeting Focus: Exploring communication solutions – To plan this meeting, Terry has been working with a subcommittee. Members include Judith Kamber, Gene Wintner, Sue Grolnic and Sandra DeVellis. The Executive Committee had decided to place the focus of this CAC meeting on communication issues for these reasons:

- In the college's Strategic Plan, student success, the term communication is either mentioned directly or alluded to in several places. This begs the question: How can we expect our students to practice meaningful communication if we don't expect it of ourselves?
- Communication problems preclude other possibilities, such as greater collaboration.
- Communication problems have been a recurring issue raised in CAC (including its previous incarnation as All College Council). In fact, in her summary of the 2000 ACC straw vote, former Chair, Mary Wilson, wrote that "communication needs to be fostered among all levels of personnel. We need to walk the walk and not merely talk the talk."

The questions:

Sue Grolnic prepared two questions to frame discussion:

- What is your vision of meaningful communication at NECC? (What should it look/sound/feel like?)
- What should be done to make that happen?

Presentations

To initiate discussion, five college employees, chosen for their different perspectives, were asked to respond to the questions. Summaries of their responses follows.

Mike Nutter, chosen because of his extensive involvement in the Faculty Association, noted the college community is similar to the human body and what we are feeling is a symptom without knowing what the cause of the problem is. Politics come into play no matter what we do & this hampers communication.

Jane Albert, a graphic designer at the college, suggested that communication could be enhanced significantly by increasing non job-related interaction. There are numerous bulletin boards at the campus for students but one should be reserved for employees only. Good news, items for sale, and postings for outside activities could all be posted at this location. In order to assist each other better, internet forums could take place. A new employee mentor program titled Peer Partners linking new employees with current staff may be helpful. People need to have more communication with their colleagues.

Gladys Gomez, of the Bursar's Office, referred to the college's Strategic Planning focus on student success and asserted that the drawing of knowledge/ideas from one another would be beneficial to that plan. In that, and other matters, employees should be encouraged to ask questions, make recommendations and be part of the problem solving process. People need to be heard. Communication is two way - informal meetings may be beneficial but communication should not be limited to take place just in meetings. Internet forums may be another way of communicating.

Sandra DeVellis, instructor in the Behavioral Sciences area, contended that communication cannot be defined, but when it is happening, you know it. Basically, to improve communication, we need to learn to listen, say what we mean, be honest. We should not ask for opinions unless we really want to listen to them. Individuals will participate in shared governance if they are going to be heard. More clarity has to be provided about what decisions we can make. For communication to be accepted there has to be an understanding that some people are not going to like what they hear and that is fine.

Paul Bevilacqua, Vice President of Academic Affairs, noted that when he began his career at NECC in 1969, faculty members told him morale was lousy and communication was poor. He went on to say that some of the

ideas spoken about today are very good suggestions. He suggested identifying one or two points and building on those to find something that can be helpful. What do people want to know? When? How do they want to receive it? Individuals have told him they are tired of papers in their mailboxes, tired of voice mail messages and tired of email. How do they want to receive information? What do we mean by communication?

General discussion followed

A summary of comments recorded by Julie Carey & separately recorded, then compiled, by Judith Kamber are attached.

Next step

It was unanimously agreed to close this discussion. Judith Kamber has taken notes of issues raised and will compile them into material for the Executive Committee to frame as specific recommendations to the President. Vice-President Bevilacqua suggested that the results be taken back to the entire Council first because we are part of the part of the problem and the resolution.

Reports of Standing Committees:

Doug Jack, chair of the Financial Affairs Committee, noted several meetings took place this fall regarding current budget issues and to discuss what the budget might be for the next fiscal year. Vice President Andrews has been very forthcoming with information. It appears that for the present fiscal year, the college will be okay; however, a large shortfall for next year is expected, despite increasing revenues. Level funding for the college is not good. In the spring, the Finance Committee will determine how it will gather the financial information. It has changed its venue over the past few years and is now focused on these questions: What does the college need to do to meet the strategic plan? How much money will that take? There has been good communication with Vice President Ashley when the committee asked for information regarding the student activities fee. President Hartleb has been increasingly forthcoming with budget information over the past year.

Paulette Redmond, Chair of the Academic Affairs Committee, had to leave the meeting at 1:00 p.m. – no report provided.

Chair of the Student Affairs Committee, Priscilla Bellairs reported the committee has met several times this fall working on the following items:
Understanding of the scholarship process
Distance learning issues
Issues around the television on both campuses

Issues around the college's NP policy

The college will be hearing more regarding the scholarship process in the next few months. Faculty could be more proactive overall in encouraging students to apply for available scholarships.

The committee has taken action on the college's NP policy, which it began reviewing because it felt that distance learning classes were not being included. While it was addressing that specific issue, the committee felt the policy needed a complete rewriting as the current policy does not have a provision for removal of student behavior. They now have a final version of the revised policy. Vice-President Ashley suggested that before submitting the policy to the Academic Affairs Committee, the Registrar and Nancy Sabin should review the information to make sure it is doable. After that the Academic Affairs should have the opportunity to review. The Academic Advising Handbook, which is printed later than January 1st, supercedes the college catalog. A statement could be placed in the catalog stating the new NP Policy will be in the handbook.

Terry Cargan, Chair of the Executive Committee, reported that the committee has been looking into different ways that collaboration can occur throughout the school. Regular Steering Committee meetings with members of the Leadership Team have continued to keep the Executive Committee updated on how the Strategic Plan is playing out operationally & to provide a channel for input. Based on recommendations by the Executive Committee, the Steering Committee will be revisiting suggestions made during the planning process by focus groups and task forces.

The Executive Committee also assisted a fledgling Student Affairs Committee find its wings—assistance which is clearly no longer necessary.

To assure more convenient course scheduling for students & to avoid increasing conflicts between faculty schedules and Standing Committee meeting times, the Executive Committee has proposed that the Monday & Friday 12-1 activity blocks be changed to a 2-hour block later in the afternoon on Tuesday or Thursday. This proposal is currently being studied by the Leadership Team.

The committee also continues to work on bookstore issues and addressing a myriad of constituency concerns.

5. **Adjournment:** It was agreed upon by those present to adjourn this meeting at 1:15 p.m.

Replies to communication questions
DRAFT

Julie's notes:

Some individuals are tired of being asked for their input. If the decision has already been made, just tell them. If it is real and has to be done, just do it. When you do ask for someone's opinion, they will want to put some energy into it because the decision has not been reached. Reference was made to the meeting President Hartleb recently had with the college community where he reported on various items. If the college community does not have the information from the President, they will not know where decisions are coming from or if they are being driven by something we need to understand.

For example, with the Strategic Plan, the college wanted it to be "free flowing" but, at the department level, the form used was very similar to the Board of Higher Education form. The college community had said they did not like that form. Why was that form used?

The Chair of the Finance Committee, Doug Jack, noted that he feels in the past the college community received a large amount of smoke and mirrors. Under David Hartleb's tenure. Information has become clearer but there is still some level of smoke and mirror but they may also be part of the management system.

Sometimes input is sought when the actual decision has already been made. It may be better to announce the decision with some sort of explanation and then everyone can move on. There will always be some people who are unwilling to accept decisions but they need to realize the college is not a democracy.

What happened to speaking face to face? There are many items that have changed our culture - there are fewer people in the hallways at the same time. Faculty have more classroom ours and less office hours. Often faculty close their office doors so they can catch up on emails and other assignments. Priscilla Bellairs notes on her syllabus this is a "face to face" course.

Do people feel disrespected? Do they feel as though they are listened to?

Gene Wintner quoted a line from one of his favorite books, “do not take yourselves so god damn seriously.”

Again, face to face is the best way to communicate. New committees are being formed but old ones are not being dissolved. We can not continue to function on this level when there are not enough people to pull together to have a meeting. Something needs to be done so people do have the time to meet.

Vice-President Bevilacqua encouraged the Executive Committee to consider taking a couple of points brought up at today’s meeting and to start building on them.

What does it mean to be listening? Are we open enough for a difference of opinion?

The college is a bureaucracy and often by the time information is received it is distorted.

Papers and emails are not the same as face to face communication. Are we running good meetings? Do we need communication skills? It is ok to disagree along as it is done with respect.

The Math Department and the Developmental Math Department have tried to help communication among themselves by getting together once a year to talk with people we have never met before. This helps to bring the two groups together and makes them comfortable with each other. An us vs. them situation does not work.

Joe LeBlanc noted that he feels in terms of communication, overall, we are in ok shape. But there is another problem indicated by the lack of a quorum at today’s meeting. What about the high FTE at the college and the fact that we are running with 100 fulltime instructors. Everyone appears to be stretched to thinly.

Mike Nutter disagrees with the statement above and feels the college community does not communicate very well. He referenced the book “Strategy of Conflict” and how important the unspoken can be.

Judith’s compilation of comments: Communications Notes from CAC meeting: December 8, 2003

If decisions have already been made don’t consult us for our opinions. This is informational.

The Strategic Plan was to be long range. The objectives form which we were asked to complete seems to limit our input.

Smoke and mirrors is to some extent how organizations work. It is better under David than previous administrations.

With the increased use of technology we have limited our face to face interaction

If you feel you have been treated unfairly or disrespectfully it is your responsibility to bring it to the person's attention.

Rule number 6. Don't take yourself too seriously

Too many meetings and too little time

Think about what it means to listen. Listen respectfully. Listening and respecting an opinion can still be done even if there is disagreement

We should get to know people better. Getting to know people outside a work setting is helpful.

We are stretched too thin but communication is ok here.

Much of what we do that appears to be called communication but is really coalition building. Often we are just working on our own agendas.

For comments from Speakers:
See minutes