

31 May 1973

Report of Communications DTF to Merv and Other Deans

We have met and pondered the problem all year. We find that though it is possible to get a piece of communication across at Evergreen -- by memo, telephone, meeting or what have you -- nevertheless communications are not good in a more general but also more damaging sense: people feel out of touch with each other. And it seems to us that they are out of touch with each other. We have four recommendations we think it is crucial that you implement before leaving your desk, so that we can have them next year. But first, as introduction, let us try in specifics to state the problem which we think our recommendations will substantially remedy (though not fully cure, of course).

We could sum up the problem by saying we feel Evergreen is not a nurturative and supportive place for faculty as it needs to be to fulfil its goals. The reasons are brought out in the following list.

- Faculty do not much meet and talk informally with other faculty outside their immediate team. It is common for a teacher not to realize that what is happening to him or her is also happening inside many others. Or perhaps he or she realizes it intellectually, but nevertheless does not benefit from any real sharing or support. There is remarkably little sense of community at Evergreen.
- Faculty are mostly in the dark about what decisions are being made by administrators. And administrators do not get systematic input from faculty about issues crucial to their decisions. This makes Evergreen far more rumor-ridden and paranoid than it needs to be. The present condition if continued will eat away at the trust that is needed to have a successfully functioning college.
- Teachers tend to have insufficient time to prepare for

for what they are currently teaching. This makes us too often rely on teaching off the cuff -- "winging it" -- making do by means of getting hyped up and relying on some special, personal relationship with the students; not that this is bad in itself, but that it is bad when used as a substitute for substantive competence. We tell our students a lot of untrustworthy bull under the cover of not wanting to be dusty, dry scholars. And we know we do, and it gives us a bad conscience.

- We tend not to relax, rest, and have times when we feel no pressure at all. This cuts down on the possibility of developing friendships with others; the possibility of the kind of sharing that depends on slack in the rope; the kinds of reflection that depend on a quiet mind. And it also makes us often resent student demands on our time that are in fact reasonable, and it makes us more short tempered with students and with each other than we need to be.
- We tend not to work at all on our own work and research. We feel stale with respect to the professional competence we might have struggled to attain. At the end of three years we are liable to lack any special professional expertise that we can bring to an interdisciplinary team.
- We tend not to have the chance to reflect, digest and re-reflect on what is going on; nor to talk to others and write exploratory position papers to clarify issues and develop new points of view. This makes us into an institution that merely reacts rather than one which explores. This is the definition of a stale institution, which we are in grave danger of becoming, however different our practices may be from those of other colleges.

In short, Evergreen does not produce conditions which encourage: refl
reflection; thoughtful, explorative dialogue with others on the
faculty; nurture and support for the personal strains which
Evergreen itself sets up.

We think the four following proposals will help improve this situation. There is one omission: no species of faculty meeting or forum is proposed; we don't yet know how to do that or

whether it is possible. We feel that the problems of previous faculty meetings should be kept in mind, but that it is premature to conclude that it is impossible.

1. Weekly Luncheon Press Conference with Deans and Provost.

Alternate weeks it will be a briefing: on these sessions it will be the responsibility of the deans and provost to make public, however briefly, all the issues, decisions and business they are currently working on. On alternate weeks the meeting will center on a significant policy issue, e.g., evaluation of faculty, recruitment practices, curriculum planning, etc.etc. A small panel of faculty members will be invited to comment or ask questions. The primary objective is to get a serious exchange of views between panel members and administrators, not to generate a wide-open floor debate.

It is our belief that the failures on the faculty-Friday and Wednesday meetings grew from the tendency to treat these meetings as chances for full floor debates, with the reflex tendency to behave as though the meeting were engaged in decision making. The press conference would avoid this problem, its goal being to share information. It will clearly not be participatory. After an hour or so, however, there could be questions from the floor. Only after the press conferences would there be the chance for lobbying by faculty members and smaller discussion meetings, if a need is demonstrated.

2. Wednesday Afternoon as Regeneration Time. No teaching functions at all on Wednesday afternoons. DTFs or discussion meetings might be scheduled during that time, but only on the understanding that there is no obligation for faculty to attend. It is a time for faculty to do their own research, to read and prepare for current teaching, explore materials in the UW library, do their own work, or regenerate themselves however they choose.

We recognize the importance of down time and slack in the rope for students: doing something when you are ready for it is far more effective than doing the same thing when you are not ready. But we fail to apply this wisdom to ourselves. We tend to feel harried and rushed most of the time, and we cannot think or teach well enough in this condition.

3. Faculty Lounge and Coffee Stations. The trial faculty lounge set up for a week or two in the fourth floor gallery at the end of last term (when faculty were most busy) was called a failure by some and judged reason for not having a faculty lounge. We think this is bad reasoning. It will take time for a faculty lounge to be used and to begin to pay off in benefits to the faculty's sense of community and sharing. For the faculty to begin to exercise conviviality and community -- something which is necessary for us to do a good job -- will require ingenuity and support as well as time. The pump must be primed. Anything that ends up successful will likely seem to be failing for as long as six weeks or more. All our habits and reflexes are

against it. It is important that the lounge be accessible and have creature comforts like lounge chairs, magazines, newspapers, coffee and tea.

About coffee stations: at present there are coffee urns in most program secretaries' offices.. This arrangement means you meet people only from your own team while getting coffee. Besides, in the busy office there is no place to chat and effect the tiny kinds of communication that the institution thrives on and which do not get done by memos and meetings. With a bit of planning there could be about half the number of urns. They could be strategically placed, in a tiny office room or out in a hall or corridor. People from a couple of programs would meet and have an opportunity to chat while getting coffee. And fewer secretaries would have to fiddle with coffee.

4. Faculty Retreats. That such group meetings can take place, simply, easily and with lasting benefits, was demonstrated last February, when a weekend gathering of some twenty faculty and staff was convened at Alderbrook Inn on Hood Canal.

It is therefore recommended that:-

- every faculty member and every staff member directly involved in teaching be included in two annual retreats, one in the fall and one in spring;
- selection be made by computer on a random basis from the people with whom the individual has not yet been sharing this experience;
- a topic for the gathering be decided by the group one week beforehand;