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Council of Chairs Meeting, September 25, 2013 - Report on Campus Ethos 1

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**Council of Chairs Report
on Campus Ethos
(Submitted 23 Sep. 2013)**

On 5 September 2013, the Marshall University Council of Chairs met with President Stephen Kopp to discuss the University's current fiscal situation as well as budget projections for coming years. We also sought to establish a dialogue regarding ways in which the Council and the President can work together to improve our ability to provide the best possible environment for learning and working for students, faculty, and staff.

The information below—requested by the President—is a compilation of the primary concerns offered by Council members in response to the President's invitation to bring our most pressing needs to his attention. A list of specific items mentioned in a survey of Council members appears after the summary table.

The Council notes that a pattern of concerns remains consistent across disciplines and colleges, small and large departments, and those with and without revenue-generating capacity. Thus, we offer this information and these recommendations for action as a group of peers who experience the same obstacles in our efforts to do our jobs for students, faculty, staff, and the institution. This report is **not** a compilation of individual experiences; it is, rather, a statement of the current work environment for department chairs in the University.

We appreciate the President's offer to hear our concerns and look forward to continuing dialogue as we work with him to create a more positive and productive environment for all.

Executive Summary

Concern	Proposed Action Plan
<p>Inefficient administrative procedures</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Human Resources b) Academic Affairs c) P-Card d) Travel e) IT 	<p>Eliminate redundant steps in processes</p> <p>Cross-train staff key to moving paperwork forward</p> <p>Shift from obstruction/“gotcha” ethos to problem-solving ethos</p> <p>Streamline, modernize, use external support systems (i.e., MLA/Interfolio collaboration)</p>
<p>Poor and poorly timed communication</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Changes made but not made public b) IT reconfiguration of teaching technology c) Curricular changes outside faculty governance procedures 	<p>Include a Council representative in key policy discussions to enhance communication with faculty</p> <p>Increase substantially presence of teaching faculty on all groups making IT policy that affects teaching</p> <p>Ensure full and consistent implementation of current faculty governance policies and procedures</p>
<p>Lack of public support for faculty</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Undermines morale, especially in hard times b) Creates adversarial ethos c) Causes escalation of every issue into a crisis 	<p>Respond promptly and persuasively to public attacks on faculty</p> <p>Enlist Council as best source of information on faculty morale by creating a mechanism for regular consultation</p> <p>Recognize that most faculty want the mission of the University to be fulfilled and use that common desire to move forward</p>
<p>Breakdown of institutional administrative structure</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Deans do not consistently convey chair-level concerns to Academic Affairs b) Academic Affairs does not consistently communicate with chairs through deans or directly c) Chairs frequently left to explain/justify to faculty policies or decisions about which they know nothing 	<p>Examine causes and effects of this breakdown</p> <p>Facilitate transparent discussion of what types and level of communication are desired by all involved</p> <p>Establish clear, frequent, two-way communication as a top priority of all administrators on campus</p>

Specific Items Cited by Respondents (in no particular order)

One statement perhaps sums up the most important concern expressed in all that follows: “The same problems occur over and over. Once the problem has been defined, nothing is done.” Another globally pertinent comment is this one: “Morale is poor; service is usually worse.” Finally, we offer these bullets as a refrain of sorts, pertinent to all categories of concern:

- **Items often get lost even when personally delivered to the appropriate unit/individual.**
- **All systems are outdated, slow, cumbersome, and needlessly complicated. Business that takes 10 working days on other campuses takes months and months at MU.**

Recruiting and retaining faculty and staff

- Recruitment takes forever, includes too many steps. Human Resources actively impedes the hiring process.
- Recruiting and retaining strong faculty is practically impossible for chairs and departments.
- Improvement in the hiring process promised in the Council’s Fall 2012 meeting with Academic Affairs and Human Resources never materialized. No follow-up from that conversation has happened.
- Academic Affairs and Human Resources do not communicate effectively between their units or with departments throughout the recruiting process. That failure makes collegial and professional communication with applicants and candidates impossible for departments. Departments regularly lose their top (and even second, third, and beyond) choices in searches because of the inability to respond in a timely (and professionally acceptable) fashion.
- Record-keeping during searches in Human Resources is slow and inaccurate.
- New programs are forced to go through the freeze committee even though the program was established to create new curricula and thus hire teachers to deliver those courses. This illogical step in such cases further delays program development.
- Once hiring paperwork leaves the Department, no communication from other units involved occurs until/unless the Department begs and pleads for it or, after weeks, someone chastises the Department for not using a new form or making a typographical error. New forms are never announced until someone at the department level fails to use them—individuals obviously cannot use forms that they don’t know exist.
- Academic Affairs insists that departments cannot contact that office directly. All communication must go through deans’ offices, even requests for clarification of paperwork submitted to AA. Often the unresponsiveness from

Academic Affairs leaves departments unable to make decisions or to plan adequately.

- Decisions about staff pay grades are made by single individuals who frequently do not understand the non-degree qualifications involved.
- Other units on campus have become competition for academic departments as they seek to hire and retain strong faculty and staff. MURC and INTO, in particular, have “poached” multiple employees from the departments. Pay scales in these separate entities (who are also campus citizens) make stable staffing in departments impossible.
- Disincentives related to the hiring freeze create a situation in which dismissing someone who is not performing satisfactorily becomes nearly impossible, for fear of losing the position altogether. Offenders know this and wind up being passed from unit to unit on campus rather than dismissed and replaced in a timely manner.
- **All systems are outdated, slow, cumbersome, and needlessly complicated.**
- **Business that takes 10 working days on other campuses takes months and months at MU.**
- **Items often get lost even when personally delivered to the appropriate unit/individual.**

Paperwork and interaction with non-academic units

- Purchasing cards create huge problems (even though designed to increase efficiencies).
- New staff have far too much difficulty acquiring purchasing cards. E-mails are not answered by that office, all phone calls go to voicemail, seeing someone face-to-face can be accomplished only through aggressiveness. In at least one case, an application for a purchasing card remains unprocessed after two years.
- A promised revamping and simplification of travel procedures promised in Spring 2012 has neither materialized nor been followed up on.
- Because of innumerable hurdles, reimbursement for candidate and visitor travel takes an embarrassingly long time, therefore making the Department and the University look bad to outsiders.
- Faculty are not consistently paid in a timely manner. When chairs question this failure, they often receive explanations that are not consistent with fact or policy. Some employees involved in ensuring timely processing of payroll documents appear to be protected by the bureaucracy rather than held accountable to the units for whom they provide support.
- Chairs are often put into the position of looking unresponsive and/or dishonest to faculty and others because units other than the Department fail to respond and act in a timely manner.
- Chairs feel that they, like their students, get the run-around from multiple campus units that should be facilitating rather than obstructing their work.

- The unacceptable “pushing downstream” of computer and telecommunications costs to departments happened without planning, input, or explanation at the departmental level. These are utilities in the same way as water, electricity, heating and air conditioning. Thus, they are University-level financial obligations, not departmental responsibilities. Paperwork and staff time in departments should **not** involve these matters.
- Computer purchase and replacement policy is not followed. Department inventories from IT and AA are inaccurate. No one can clarify the policies or explain the recurring pattern of inaccuracies; IT and AA appear to operate under different policies. Thus, many faculty have computers so old that IT refuses to service them without additional payment from departments. At times, colleges have forced departments to pay for replacement computers from department funds. Staff computers are not included in any replacement rotation or funding model, a situation unacceptable in terms of long-term planning and budgeting for the basic costs of doing business.
- Efficiencies and chain-of-command policies are not recognized or prioritized.
- The physical plant is broadly incompetent.
- **Items often get lost even when personally delivered to the appropriate unit/individual.**
- **All systems are outdated, slow, cumbersome, and needlessly complicated. Business that takes 10 working days on other campuses takes months and months at MU.**

Curriculum procedures and delivery

- Curriculum paperwork “disappears” after passing through Faculty Senate. Departments remain in limbo for months, not knowing whether or when they can offer new or revised courses.
- Budget decisions coming from Academic Affairs are far too late to make good academic planning possible. For example, deans don’t find out how much money will be available for faculty development grants until well after the pertinent semester begins, making it impossible for faculty and their departments to plan course offerings. The end result is that faculty often cannot utilize the funds granted and must delay their research.
- Fears about possible changes in distribution of student fees, lab fees, e-course funds, and summer funds cause extreme anxiety as many departments function in the current environment due **only** to those revenue sources.
- Staffing, supplies, and equipment are regularly subject to needless delays that make delivery of curricula at best a crisis situation and, in the worst case scenario, impossible.
- Departments that hire multiple temporary faculty on an annual basis need to be allowed to make a substantive number of those positions 3-year term positions to facilitate planning and curricular stability and to reduce the highly non-productive searching and paperwork cycle that results from a repeated pattern of last-minute hires each year.

- The proposed BA in General Studies seems to have evolved in ways that are not consistent with policies for new program development and faculty governance of curriculum. Chairs have not been consulted about how the advent of this program might impact majors and planning for delivery of curricula to be involved.
- **Items often get lost even when personally delivered to the appropriate unit/individual.**
- **All systems are outdated, slow, cumbersome, and needlessly complicated. Business that takes 10 working days on other campuses takes months and months at MU.**