

Institutional Goals & Planning Committee
Report on Purchasing

In response to the Faculty Senate evaluation of service areas on campus (Spring 1988), the Institutional Goals and Planning Committee has been following up on the comments and suggestions of the faculty. With respect to the purchasing area there appear to be several problem areas. We will first list these areas, followed by some recommendations for ways in which the purchasing process might be improved.

I. Problem Areas

A. Bad relations between WKU and vendors.

Bad relationships with vendors result in a loss of prestige and credibility for faculty members as well as for the University. Many examples of late payment of bills and quibbling over bills have been reported to this committee. This type of activity hurts the University's reputation in the community and among professional organizations and can result in an increase in price for similar purchases in the future.

B. Problems with the Bidding Process

With most funded projects there is a very tight schedule for executing the proposed work. Most faculty surveyed felt that the time it takes to purchase equipment at Western is excessive, especially if it has to be bid. In general many faculty commented that it is not worthwhile pursuing special projects or grants because it requires too much time and effort to deal with Purchasing. When the faculty cannot receive necessary equipment or services within a reasonable amount of time it reflects poorly on them and makes it more difficult to pursue continuation of a project. Many faculty view Purchasing as the number one stumbling block to pursuing external funds.

C. Unwillingness to engage in problem solving

Any situation that is the least bit unusual will almost certainly result in problems. By demonstrating some flexibility in solving problems that arise with special projects and grants the faculty involved would be able to spend time working on the projects instead of writing memos, making phone calls, and trying to straighten out administrative details.

D. Poor understanding of technical matters

Purchase requisitions are rewritten in the Purchasing Dept. before they go out on bid or are ordered from the vendor. The individuals writing these orders may not have the technical expertise to determine what is an equivalent piece of equipment. Faculty members are frequently not given the option of returning

equipment which is not satisfactory and the Purchasing Dept. is prone to taking the attitude that they know more about what equipment is needed than the project director.

Conclusions:

Faculty members/Project Directors spend far too much time dealing with unnecessary problems generated in the Purchasing Dept. In the original survey, of the 118 faculty respondents who use purchasing services, 40% replied that they frequently had difficulty purchasing large items, and 27% frequently had difficulty purchasing small items. An additional 28% and 33% reported that they occasionally had these difficulties. In written comments faculty stated that these time-consuming and frustrating experiences resulted in their unwillingness to pursue external funds. It is a poor reflection on both the faculty and the University as a whole when projects cannot be completed in a timely manner. From the faculty members' perspective, Purchasing personnel do not seem to be willing to help in meeting special requests or solving problems, but rather look for ways to deny requests. There does not appear to be any effort to help faculty fulfill their obligations to the granting agencies by expediting purchases of equipment and services. If productive faculty quit pursuing external monies and/or leave the University then Western will have lost not only prestige but needed additional income. The following list of recommendations are ways in which we feel that relations between faculty and Purchasing could be improved.

II. Recommendations

1. Distribute a list of purchasing rules and regulations to faculty.
2. Eliminate misinformation from the Project Director's Handbook or don't distribute it.
3. Accept the competency of the faculty member in orders for technical materials. Contact the faculty member if questions occur.
4. Give the faculty member a copy of the purchase order before it is mailed, allow him/her an opportunity to explain why a given item is not equivalent goods so the correct item can be ordered in the first place, have him/her sign off on the purchase order and inform him or her when a bid will go out.
5. Design a questionnaire for faculty to evaluate University services after a grant contract has been fulfilled.
6. Provide the faculty with the name of a designated individual in purchasing who will work with them in facilitating purchasing requests.