I don't know of any crisis in any branch of science in all of human history which is more full of consequences for our understanding of man and his place in the world and the universe than this crisis of gravitational collapse. * - John Archibald Wheeler

SENATE STIRS.

Patricia Trutty-Coohill
Ed Dorman

We have been asked to inform you that your comments on your administrative superiors, in the Administrative Evaluation forms to be filled out during the period Feb. 1 - Feb. 10, will not be given out in the form of typed transcripts (as we had previously been advised) but will be xeroxed in the form in which you hand them in, and the xerox copies will be given out. If you are afraid of having your handwriting identified, you might want to type your comments.

Faculty Senate Elections

Departmental senators will be elected during the third week of February; college at-large senators, during the fourth week. College caucuses will meet after the spring break.

Salisbury Stakes Out Position on FDC

Vice-President Davis has appointed Richard Salisbury, of the Department of History, to replace Donald Tuck on the Faculty Development Committee.

What COSFL Is Up To

Collections for the political action fund are proceeding apace. Not all Universities have completed their drives yet, but enough money has been collected to finance one general mailing to legislators and to reimburse some travel expenses to and from the legislature.

COSFL wants to make the point that education in Kentucky is a unified and interconnected organic whole, no part of which can be altered without perturbing the remainder (the ecological model†), and, in particular, that one cannot dismantle parts of the higher educational component without impairing the other components. COSFL members are working on a statement concerning this matter, which they will circulate to all member campuses in order to get an endorsement of some sort from each of them.

Harry Robe emphasizes the close working relationship of the eight member institutions of COSFL. COSFL delegates have very little difficulty in reaching a consensus in their deliberations. Dr. Robe, by the way, has been elected Vice-President of COSFL.

What the Purdue Evaluations Are Used For

Margaret Howe has informed the Senate of the results of a survey of WKU department heads on the degree to which the results of the Purdue Faculty Evaluations are employed in

* More on this story as it develops.
† Reports that COSFL staffers are already at work on a holographic model to succeed the ecological model are, as of this date, unconfirmed.
making decisions involving promotion, tenure, merit pay, and salary increments. Twenty-seven heads responded, as follows: one head said they were not used at all, three said they were the least important factor, nineteen said they were used in equal measure with other factors, three said they were very important factors, one declined to rate them. One department head wrote, "Now that attention is being focused on effective means of evaluating teaching performance, some university-wide policy about the use or non-use of these evaluations would be helpful." Another wrote, "I believe that if student evaluations are used in personnel decisions, it is just a matter of time before a faculty member who is a member of a protected group (female, minority, handicapped, over 40, etc.)* challenges such decisions in court. The University will be unable to demonstrate that the student evaluations are reliable and valid indicators of teaching effectiveness and, therefore, will be proscribed from using such evaluations as a basis for making any personnel decisions."

More About Administrative Evaluations

Questionnaires will be distributed to faculty members by February 1. The completed forms must be returned to the Office of Institutional Research by February 10. Senator Howe reports that processing and distribution will be completed by March 1.

The Professional Responsibilities and Concerns Committee was directed by the Senate (in the Murphy-Rust motion to suspend Faculty Senate evaluations of administrators, passed by the Senate at the September 8, 1983 meeting) to examine the instrument and procedures of the administration's Administrative Evaluations, and to make recommendations as to their adequacy in fulfilling the functions that the Senate considers important in such evaluations. Senator Howe – Chair of this Committee – has pointed out that, in view of the fact that the PRC Committee will not have access to the results of the evaluations, it would be very difficult to measure the correlation between those results and the subsequent actions of the supervisors who would be presumed to make use of them. The PRC Committee therefore intends to supply the Senate with a study covering items such as:

(a) The percentage of faculty members who participated in the evaluation,
(b) Whether these faculty members feel that the right questions were asked,
(c) Whether administrators are satisfied that (i) the results of the evaluation were helpful in enabling them to improve job performance, and (ii) the results were fairly used by supervisors in decisions concerning promotion, etc.

Senator Joan Krenzin reported that faculty comments in these evaluations are to be xeroxed and the xerox copies to be given out to whoever gets such things, rather than having typed transcripts prepared and distributed. The reason given for this change is the pressure of time.†

Faculty Regent's Report

Faculty Regent Mary Ellen Miller announced that the next meeting of the Board of Regents will take place on February 4, at 3:30 pm. The Academics Committee will meet at 1:30, the Athletics Committee at 2:00, the Finance Committee at 2:30, and the Student Affairs Committee at 3:00.

Articles

ADMINISTRATIVE EVALUATIONS

Rich Weigel

Questionnaire forms for the evaluation of department heads or directors, academic deans, and the Vice-President for Academic Affairs will be distributed to the faculty by February 1. They must be returned to the Office of Institutional Research by February 10.

* What are we over-40's protected from? We would like to know, so we can stop worrying about it.
† "The wheels of God grind slowly, and we work with other wheels."
I strongly encourage every faculty member to use this opportunity to have a voice in the formal evaluation process of our administrators. I also advise typing comments on the reverse side to allay any fears of handwriting analysis since the written (typed) comments will be xerographed to speed up the process. Please also inform your senators of your views on the specific questions included on the form. If there are questions you feel should be added, let us know. We can try to have these added or include them in the Faculty Senate evaluation instrument.

MORE OF THE SAME . . .

E. Margaret Howe

This is the time of year when the tabulated results of the Purdue evaluation are circulated to faculty. Reactions vary. Some faculty rush for the WATS line and dial the career change agency in New York ("There must be something I can do"); others leave even earlier on Tuesday afternoon to throw some hay to the cows ("At least they appreciate me"); while others may be found staring desperately into the mirror trying to determine the nervous twitch which is preventing would-be mathematicians from understanding the principles of calculus. A few ill-fated people find themselves grovelling in the dust beneath the Department Head’s feet, pleading for mercy (usually slow in forthcoming . . .). This will last for a couple of weeks while faculty huddle around lunch tables confiding in one another the secrets which were originally intended for their eyes alone, explaining to people in agriculture why the psychology major was in a "sour grapes" mood on the day of the evaluation and that actually there isn’t any lab work in history ("That’s how dumb these students are").

And after that? Well, the initial idea was that after careful study of the tabulated data and after contemplation of the carefully thought-out student comments, the faculty member would be able to assess his or her weaknesses, calmly and objectively, and would be able then to plan a strategy for self-improvement. It sounds so uncomplicated that one wonders what could possible have gone wrong.

Well, let’s take a look first of all at the tabulated data. The purpose of the Purdue system was to give faculty an enormously wide variety of questions from which to choose. Now if the goal of the evaluation is self-improvement, a wise faculty member will select those items which relate to areas where a weakness is suspected, or where new teaching methods are involved which may be still a little edgy and in need of tailoring. But the faculty member is well aware that there is another goal – the results will be used in the determination of promotions, merit pay, and so on. A career may be at stake. In which case a wise faculty member will select only those items which indicate areas of strength – fine for the second purpose but useless for the first.

"All is not lost," you may be saying, "we still have the pages of comments to go by." I don’t know for sure but I suspect that it is these comments which cause the most grief. There may be 104 reasonably flattering comments, but the one which nags at the heart is the one which is definitely not true ("I am always available in my office hours") – or worse still amounts to defamation of character ("I never act in a highhanded and uncaring manner"). Now if these were seen only by the faculty member, perhaps things would be better. But the fact that these comments are circulated to Department Heads, promotion committees and so on leaves faculty vulnerable – at the mercy, so it would seem, of the whim of some aggravated student who is determined to have one last snarl in the shadow of an anticipated D.

So where do we go from here? I have a suggestion to make – feeble though my voice may be. Might we not bravely accept the fact that the purpose of faculty evaluation, whether so stated or whether so assumed is twofold – self-improvement and career determination? And as it is exceedingly difficult to come up with a document which is satisfactory for both purposes, why not have two separate documents? It would work like this –
Self-improvement.

Each department draws up a document which is perceived to be a useful indicator of teaching effectiveness - a document which would include space for student comments. Each department supplies faculty with copies. Faculty would be responsible for presenting these to any four classes a year at a time deemed suitable. The results would go directly to the faculty member and would never be seen by any other person. A faculty member might discuss the results with the Department Head at evaluation time, indicating areas in which changes seem necessary and stating a strategy for accomplishing these.

Promotion, etc.

A document would be drawn up by a University committee which would indicate the gut level facts concerning a teacher's performance as an employee of WKU. And I mean gut level. Questions like these -

(1) How many class periods did your instructor miss? Were you given an explanation? How was the class time covered? (Find out which instructors make a habit of missing class - actually this is one of the biggest complaints that I hear: "I turned up for my 8:00 am class and it was cancelled," "He often meets us for ten minutes and then sends us away with an assignment.").

(2) Was the course challenging - average - plain boring? (I agree that this question evaluates the course and not necessarily the instructor, but this is the kind of thing an administrator ought to know).

(3) If you made an A or a B in this course, did you make this with - very little effort - average effort - super-human effort? (Find out which instructors are offering an easy option).

(4) How many writing assignments were you given to be done in the classroom? Did the instructor grade these and make helpful comments? (Find out which faculty refuse to co-operate with WATAC!).

(5) Could you hear what the instructor was saying? (Obviously if someone is in the teaching profession there is an obligation to be audible. The matter of whether what is heard is understood is a matter for the faculty member to be concerned about, and should be on the self-improvement form).

(6) Were you tested over - none of the work - some of the work - all of the work? (Find out whether the instructor is giving the student an incentive to learn).

Enough has been said to indicate the different direction of these inquiries. In fact, enough has been said . . .

ON HAVING A WORD

Ed Dorman

"Come now, my child, if we were planning to harm you, do you think we'd be lurking here beside the path in the very darkest part of the forest?"

- Kenneth Patchen

When the administration's new procedure for the periodic evaluation of (some of) themselves was being thrashed out, a great deal of time and emotion, and some thought, were devoted to the issue of faculty anonymity: specifically, whether administrators should be allowed to see faculty comments in the form in which they were handed in (handwritten, or whatever). The final form of this procedure, as adopted by the

* Your editor, for one.
President, requires that only transcriptions of the faculty's written comments be given out. Quoting from page 4 of the procedure described in a memorandum (from Dean Gray) bearing the remark, "The report as accepted by the President:"

3. The numerical data will be summarized statistically and the written comments will be transcribed by the Office of Institutional Research.

4. The statistical summary and the transcriptions will be made available to the evaluation committee and will become a part of the committee's report. The individual evaluation forms (A and B) will then be placed in confidential storage.

The only reason for specifying transcriptions was to preserve the anonymity of the commentators, and the only reason this provision was adopted was that the Senate requested it and faculty representatives put up a dogged fight to get it.

Now we are told that, this semester — the very first time these evaluations are to be given, the administration intends simply to ignore this requirement. Xerox copies of the original comments will be given out. You heard me right. They just aren't going to do what they said they would. That's all.

"There is a phrase which you sometimes come across in country districts," says T. H. White. "Farmers use it in Ireland, as praise or compliment, saying, 'So-and-so has a Word. He will do what he promised.'"

A disposition of the spirit, intimated roughly in sayings of the sort: "he keeps his word," "she doesn't break a promise," "he doesn't welsh on a deal," "she plays fair," "I have to do it because I said I would," exists, without which it is difficult to be a person at all, as opposed to a mere congeries of psychological flotsam blown about by the afflatus of the moment. The issue of anonymity is secondary. The question is whether one's word is a reliable covenant.

Our present system is based on discussion, compromise, and agreement. And then, keeping faith. If promises are not to be kept, there is no point to the lengthy processes which lead to them, and no good reason for having a faculty senate. We can do without the comfortable fog of words.

The excuse given for breaking the rules is that it would take too long to type transcripts. The number of weeks it would take is inversely proportional to the number of secretary-hours per week allocated to the job. Given the secretarial resources of this institution, and the will to do the deed, the comments of about six hundred faculty members can be transcribed in a modest time-interval. We are given a leisurely ten days in which to fill out the forms: the compelling sense of life's sweet shortness appears to arise only in connection with the part of the process which was intended to guarantee faculty anonymity. At any rate, this problem (if it is a problem) should have been considered before a policy was adopted. If the adopted policy is found to be unworkable, it should be altered formally and publicly, avoiding the demoralization caused by seeing a commitment publicly made, casually flouted, and the further erosion of the trust on which the governing of men and women is based.

It is actions of this sort — not the reporting or deploiring of them — which are divisive and irresponsible, which widen the split between faculty and administration, and which are not in the best interests of the University. I cannot believe other than that the President is privately embarrassed at having a policy adopted by him disregarded by underlings. It is not too late for him to do something about it; if he does, he will be strengthening, rather than weakening, trust, and we should applaud him for it. I hope he does, not in order to preserve our anonymity (for we can do that ourselves, if we are forced to that indignity), but rather because, when one has the power to break one's word with impunity, and uses it, though there are many heady pleasures available to one — even (perhaps) the pleasure of the last laugh — there will be felicities denied: among them, respect.