



FACULTY MORALE AT CENTRAL, 1960s-2000

by

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About a decade ago, a trustee asked me how the Board could make the faculty happy. I laughed and told him it was not a question of making the faculty happy, only happier in any given situation. As you will see from the narrative that follows, the evidence suggests that Central's faculty has been unhappy for large portions of the last four decades. We have experienced three calls for votes of no-confidence in administrators, a protracted impasse with the Board of Trustees and a variety of documents evaluating the campus climate. As I worked on this talk, I had to ask myself whether our experience is typical, or whether our university is abnormally dysfunctional. At the end of this lecture, I'll attempt to give myself and you an answer.

This story begins in the 1960s. It was a very heady time, full of national and local schemes for improvement. Here in Ellensburg, the decade began with a name change from the College of Education to Central Washington State College, and President James Brooks arrived with many new ideas. He introduced academic departments, faculty

selection of chairs, and he initiated the spring symposium, a two-day series of talks and panels on current topics in which nationally known scholars and thinkers participated. In his history of Central, Sam Mohler says that Brooks wanted advice and accepted criticism because he genuinely desired institutional improvement. For the faculty, wrote Sam, the situation was exhilarating.

Nevertheless, the general exhilaration masked an undercurrent of problems. In the spring of 1967 in response to biologist Dan Willson's call for a faculty evaluation of administrators, the Faculty Senate distributed a questionnaire in which faculty articulated their "attitudes" about the direction of the College. Of the 220 survey forms sent out, 185 faculty responded. Overall, 62% indicated that they were very dissatisfied or only fairly satisfied with faculty life at Central.

The answer to this negativity was the Senate's appointment of a Faculty Morale Committee. When this Committee of Five finally submitted its report to the Senate in May 1968 it cogently diagnosed the problems causing poor faculty morale. Reporting that the size of the faculty had risen 172% since 1963, it noted that Central had "suddenly" grown beyond the "face-to-face, see-you at coffee stage. . ." of development. The faculty, it said, was separated "geographically, in widely dispersed buildings. . .[;]" It was certainly true that Central had begun to add buildings, even on a campus primarily confined to south of the railroad tracks: Nicolson Pavilion in 1960, Bouillon Library and Black Hall in 1961, Hertz in 1964, the Samuelson Union Building, also in 1964. The physical dispersion of a mushrooming faculty meant that "it no longer shared experiences." The committee found "striking differences" among the faculty, characterizing it as "an assembly of sub-group[s] ," divided by "disciplines, schools, functions, factions, and prejudices." Given these fractures within the faculty, what did the committee recommend?

The previous year's crisis had dubbed the Senate to be ineffective—a recurrent theme over the next several decades-- , and the Committee of Five advised several ways in which to strengthen it. For those of you who don't remember, it's worth while reviewing how the Faculty Senate operated up until 1968. Members of the Senate included representatives of academic departments and of the group currently covered by the administrative exempt code. Chair of the Senate was the president of the College, with a faculty vice-chair. In order to make the Senate stronger, the Committee of Five

recommended that only teaching faculty should be members, and the number of senators should be reduced to 15—candidates to be nominated by departments and elected by the whole faculty. This more wieldy group of people should have reduced teaching loads, as should the Senate chair, who became a faculty member in 1968, and members of the most important Senate committees. To aid in handling the increased workloads of Senators, there should be a regularly paid, civil-service secretary and a Senate office.

At least one of these recommendations was heeded. The Senate quickly received an office and a full-time paid secretary. But the faculty never did get around to reducing the Senate's size to 15, and it was not until the 1980s that the Senate chair finally received released time as a matter of routine. The time-consuming committee assignments still went unrewarded by anything other than, sometimes, a merit increase.

In 1968, a large section of the committee's report revolved around the issue of compensation, where, in the previous year's questionnaire, 85% of the faculty had indicated dissatisfaction. Faculty perceived that deans paid little attention to quality teaching and thought that the new expectations for faculty research were problematical. Added to these complaints was discontent about the scarcity of promotions and the threat that faculty without the Ph. D., most of whom had been appointed before Brooks' arrival, would be frozen at the assistant professor level.

The Committee of Five's report targeted the inconsistency in the way that departments across campus collected and presented data concerning faculty performance. Few departments, said the committee, had defined personnel policies and procedures. No criteria existed for evaluating instructional competence. Moreover, neither the deans of the two schools nor the dean of the faculty—a position that eventually transformed into provost—had enough time to read files and judge faculty merit adequately.

To relieve the administrative overwork connected with personnel, the committee recommended that associate deans be created in each school who would devote more time to evaluating faculty members more consistently. It's one of the few, if not the only time, that this faculty thought there should be more and not fewer administrators. Above all, said the committee, merit increases should clearly be awarded for merit and not for any other reason. Exactly what was meritorious should be clearly defined.

In succeeding years, even though the deans appointed associate deans soon after

1968, many of these problems persisted. Not until the 1990s were departments required by the Faculty Code to develop policies for the award of promotion, tenure and merit. And only in that decade was meritorious performance specifically spelled out.

After 1968, some of the Committee of Five's more general recommendations did come true. Among them was the institution of long-range planning, which plagued us for decades. Also the Director, later Dean, of the Library was included on the deans' council as a symbol that the library was an integral part of academic affairs.

Lastly, the Committee of Five attempted to educate faculty as to how the College's budget worked. At that time, the legislature funded instruction on the basis of a formula that became more generous as one ascended from lower to upper-division to graduate instruction. Even though the legislature never funded 100% of formula, in 1967-68, CWSC operated at 80% of formula, and in 1968-69 at 84% of formula. One of the complaints of the time was that the faculty had grown by 172% over the last four years, but the budget only by 150%. We now know that, despite all the complaints, this funding level was almost luxurious. Never again, in my generation at least, was so much money available for so many people and activities.

In the early 1970s, Central's enrollment plummeted, budgets were cut, tenure was threatened by outside forces, and increasingly jobs were at stake for a previously self-assured faculty. As these storm clouds gathered, trouble was also brewing between the faculty and the Board of Trustees. At the end of the 1960s, President Brooks charged Assistant Attorney General Tom Dalglish to draft, for discussion by the faculty, a modernized version of the Code, a document that had remained basically unchanged since 1947. Dalglish had just finished his draft when the existing provisions obligated the trustees to sit through a long hearing in the dismissal case of the infamous Iqbal Jaffree. Some of you will remember that Jaffree was an associate professor of art who claimed to have a Ph. D. from Herbert Read College in Pakistan—an institution that was completely fictitious. After the hearing, the trustees wanted to avoid ever again having to spend so much time with a crackpot professor and demanded a Code change. At that point, they discovered that they needed faculty approval for any revision. The Board, which was politically very conservative, now determined to reassert its "management rights" and gain or re-gain control over the Code.

What had begun as a modernization of the Code soon turned into a contest of wills between the trustees and the faculty. During the academic years 1971-73, the Code Committee worked with the Dalglish draft, made a number of revisions but did not incorporate the trustees' demands. The Board then determined to break the impasse that had arisen. At their meeting in May, 1973, the trustees amended the Code, giving them the sole right to approve revisions, and directed the president to appoint a committee to work with him to incorporate other changes the Board desired. This action threw the faculty into an uproar. The Senate and other organizations "condemned" the actions of the trustees. For them, the crucial issue was shared governance—the prerogative of the faculty to cooperate in determining the terms of academic work.

Resentment against the Board was still intense when, as the academic year 1973-74 began, the legislature and the governor cut Central's budget severely due to enrollment decline. To give you an idea of the magnitude of the problem, the College's enrollment had peaked in 1971 at 7300 students, but by the fall of 1973, it had fallen to 6,400. Moreover, the legislature and the governor had cut the funding formula to 73% and insisted that the College shed almost 45 faculty positions over a two-year period. In fall 1973 the Board declared a state of financial exigency, accepted a reduction-in-force policy, and approved sending termination notices to seven tenure-track faculty. These terminations were later rescinded as enrollment improved, and retirements, resignations, and reassignments opened up positions. But the faculty was now trying to absorb a variety of shocks, and resentment against the Board and the College's administration was very bitter.

The result was radicalization, among young and old alike. In spring 1974 a group of faculty formed a local chapter of the American Federation of Teachers to rival the long-standing American Association of University Professors. In autumn 1974, the local AFT requested the Senate to hold a faculty-wide vote of confidence in president Brooks. The Senate rejected this idea but decided to institute an ad hoc committee to review the role and responsibilities of the president.

Meanwhile, the Code Committee returned to negotiations with the Board, represented by the president, and eventually specific provisions favoring the faculty in matters of salary and working conditions were either retained or inserted. However, the trustees still insisted on asserting their ultimate power to run the College, and in February

1975 they unanimously adopted, over the objections of the faculty, a Code that explicitly gave them the right to change the document unilaterally. Almost immediately after the February vote, the AFT and the National Society of Professors—an arm of the NEA--, joined by the AAUP, filed a lawsuit challenging the right of the trustees to change the Code without faculty approval. In September 1975 Judge Frank Baker, in Thurston County's Superior Court, rendered his decision: the Board had won and the faculty lost. This defeat echoed down the decades thereafter and, to my mind, was a factor in last spring's collective bargaining election.

In retrospect, however, the question arises as to why this three years of impasse between faculty and Board occurred. Where salary and working conditions were concerned, the new Code incorporated concessions made by both sides. Later in the decade it was even possible to work out compromise language concerning the Board's authority vis-à-vis the faculty. Why couldn't this have occurred between 1972 and 1975? There are a number of possible explanations. First of all, in the world outside the College, the post-war boom had ended, the price of oil had quadrupled, inflation proceeded apace, and the U. S. had suffered defeat in Vietnam. The adverse political and business climate probably helped to make the Board more truculent than it needed to be. Inside the College, hardly anyone had time to think very well. Flipping through the Campus Crier and the Faculty Senate minutes, one senses a condition of seriously overworked people. There was a proposed incorporation of the Faculty Senate into a university council; the College introduced the federally mandated affirmative action policies; the faculty debated a new general education program; a whole new set of procedures for student appeals had to be written and approved; student evaluation of faculty was instituted. Central Washington State College proceeded toward university status, and that meant the creation of new school such as Business and Economics and the appointment of new administrators. Meanwhile, the normal work of teaching classes, dealing with curriculum changes and handling personnel matters proceeded apace. All this as the College bled enrollment and the budget that went with it. The wholesale revision of the Faculty Code and the financial exigency simply added to the overload. Too much was happening too fast. In the end, President Brooks thought so too. In October 1976, he submitted his resignation, effective at the end of August 1978.

When the new president, Don Garrity, arrived on the scene, Central Washington State College had become a university, the enrollment situation had improved, the conservative trustees had resigned or had not been reappointed, and for a few years there was an increase in faculty morale. Then came the Reagan recession of 1981-82. The fiscal impact on the state of Washington was so great that the governor cut the university's budget three times within a twelve-month period. In fall 1981, the Board declared a state of financial exigency, and, as provided in the Faculty Code, vice president Harrington and the Faculty Senate executive committee developed a lay-off plan. The Hebel laboratory school, most of whose staff was not tenure-track, ceased to exist, as did the Speech Pathology and Audiology program. A number of other faculty positions were cut, including three staffed by tenured faculty.

The behavior of the faculty in the midst of these reductions was mixed. In order to save the jobs of younger faculty, older professors took advantage of a special plan for early retirement provided by the legislature. At the time, I was told that the local AFT discussed and rejected the idea of taking a salary cut in order to save jobs; the Faculty Senate also refused to take a clear-cut stand on this issue. One department voluntarily reduced its salaries in order to provide support for at least one of its laid-off tenured members until he could find a permanent, full-time job. Two laid-off, tenured faculty members, supported by the AFT, filed grievances against the university. In these cases, the hearing officer upheld the reduction of one and told the university to make provision for the other.

After the reduction in force at the beginning of the 1980s, the state changed the way in which the university was funded and capped enrollment in order to save money. Among the faculty, the situation more or less stabilized until the retirement of vice-president Ed Harrington in 1988. When Robert Edington replaced Harrington as provost, long-range planning was once again on the agenda. As faculty hired in the 1950s and '60s began to retire, it was necessary to articulate goals for the next generation. Edington therefore arranged, at the beginning of fall 1989, a retreat at Camp Field, now the Icicle Creek resort in Leavenworth, that included both deans and faculty. He also engaged a facilitator for the planning process who, seemingly, had been given an agenda that some faculty participants disagreed with. The acrimony that began at Camp Field soon spilled over to the campus in general.

During the ensuing academic year, Edington created consternation over an affirmative action plan that would have given bonus positions to departments willing to appoint minorities and would have paid elevated salaries to minorities who were hired. In addition, faculty found it difficult to communicate with him about any issue, and decisions seemed to emanate from his office without any consultation with the faculty. Also, during 1989-90, the popular basketball coach and faculty member Dean Nicolson was forced to resign for the alleged misuse of public funds. In 1990, the university lost its NCATE accreditation and endangered the credibility of its teacher-education programs. All these problems provided fertile ground for faculty discontent, and in winter, 1991, thirty-four faculty members petitioned the Senate to hold a vote of no-confidence in the provost. It was an index of the discontent that out of 370 ballots distributed, 318 were returned, and 67% of those expressed no confidence in the provost. Edington resigned, effective at the end of August 1991.

The local, regional and national press had all carried stories about Central's accumulated problems. While I was attending a conference in Weimar, Germany during the following year, one of the German participants recognized the name of Central Washington University immediately, because of reports he had read in the Chronicle of Higher Education while a visiting professor in Florida. The adverse press was too much for the trustees, and they requested that President Don Garrity, at whose desk the buck effectively stopped, resign at the end of December, 1991.

New tensions emerged already during the search for a new president. In contrast to the previous process, where five faculty had served, only two faculty members were appointed to the presidential search committee. The Board assumed a very active role, notably Chair Roz Woodhouse, director of the Seattle Urban League. When, in 1992, the trustees appointed Ivory Nelson, who had little experience in four-year educational institutions, large sections of the faculty were already disaffected. Private complaints against the president began almost immediately.

The public response to the new president appeared in the Campus Climate Task Force report. This task force was formed in 1994 to address "physical, emotional, environmental, racial, ethnic and sexual violence" across the campus. Yet a large part of the report, submitted and made public in 1996, related to faculty morale. In some ways, the

complaints of the 1960s had come full circle.

To give you an idea as to how perceptions change, the task force compared the state of CWU in the 1990s with that of CWSC in the 1960s and 1970s—when “things used to be better.” The task force lamented the “dearth of social and intellectual interaction among members of the campus community.” Echoing the report of 1968, the task force said that departments, had become “small, isolated conclaves.” The “Friday Fest” of the 1970s, which had pulled together people from across the campus, no longer existed. Once the quarterly registration in the SUB and field house stopped, so did the socializing among the faculty that went with it. Although a welcoming event for new faculty at the Kittitas County fairgrounds occurred, it was uncomfortable for singles and for gays because a “couples dance” ended the evening.

There were other problems as well. Poor student attitudes and academic performance, said the task force, contributed to a “relatively low level of satisfaction” with one’s work. The increasing expectation that faculty engage in scholarly and creative activities in the face of decreasing institutional support had given rise to great frustration. Hence the faculty, continually “beaten up at work,” had retreated into golfing, boating, the computer and other non-intellectual havens.

Merit increases were still a problem. Not only were they not funded on a regular basis, once awarded, they went only to a “small proportion” of the faculty, in ways that “defeated the . . . purpose of the system.” If, said the task force, there was no likelihood of introducing an equitable merit system for faculty, then merit should be dropped altogether and replaced with an equity adjustment system.

The Task Force reserved its most forceful criticism for President Ivory Nelson, who acted “uni-laterally, arbitrarily, and autocratically.” Nelson was too “pre-occupied with structural details” and too practiced in the “bottom-line mentality.” The new president had arrived with a “fully-developed plan” that “bore little resemblance to the issues raised” on campus when he was recruited. According to the task force, the trustees bore the ultimate responsibility for the campus climate. And one indication of their failure was their lack of public response to the “faculty unionization issue.”

Unionization was not new to the story of faculty morale. Nation-wide the issue had arisen during the 1960s. According to a report of the Carnegie Commission on Higher

Education published in 1975, increasing enrollments had changed the structure and function of universities, and faculty had lost control over many decisions. Collective bargaining was a remedy for the loss. The first massive unionization of four-year faculty occurred in the New York city and state systems in 1968. In Washington, the legislature's Public Employees' Collective Bargaining Committee had asked four-year colleges and universities in fall, 1970 whether their faculties desired legislation enabling unionization. Professors in all ranks were ambivalent about the idea, and no enabling law passed the legislature. Nevertheless, in an attempt to combat the worsening budget situation, the local AAUP conducted the first card-signing campaign in 1972; 61% of the tenured and tenure-track faculty favored collective bargaining. At the time, Central's conservative trustees refused even to entertain the idea. Yet, as Washington's financial woes continued, university faculty lobbied the legislature for enabling legislation for the next three decades.

Over the years the inability to unionize became the focal point of faculty frustration and discontent. Finally, in the mid-1990s, the trustees at Eastern Washington University, even in the absence of enabling legislation, agreed to recognize a faculty union, United Faculty of Eastern. The first contract was signed in spring 1995. At the same time, two different local organizations merged into the United Faculty of Central. Conditions provided fertile ground for this group's recruiting efforts. Not only was salary compression—in the words of the Campus Climate report-- “a potentially catastrophic problem,” average salaries for tenured and tenure-track faculty had fallen to an all-time low in relationship to similar institutions nation-wide. Meanwhile remuneration for part-time faculty had not changed since the beginning of the 1980s, and the university relied more and more on their services. This group wanted higher salaries, more benefits, job security, and a greater voice in academic affairs. Collective bargaining was supposed to remedy these grievances.

In spring 1998 Central's Faculty Senate conducted an extra-legal election in which the faculty voted both for collective bargaining and for representation by the UFC. The trustees simply ignored this action, and President Nelson expressed his opposition to collective bargaining in public forums and private conversations.

Faculty frustration came to a head as strategic planning once again appeared on the university's agenda. The academic year 1998-9 opened with the Faculty Senate's

discussion of that part of the draft plan that dealt with salaries and university governance. At its October 7 meeting, the Senate asked the Board to make an increase in salaries its highest priority. It also requested the Board to agree immediately to bargain with United Faculty of Central. On October 9, the Board agreed to raise salaries, but it resolved to cooperate with the Senate, and not the union, as the faculty's elected representative.

Faculty exploded. At the Senate meeting of October 28, union members introduced a successful motion to conduct a vote of no-confidence in President Nelson. In the discussion that accompanied the motion, individual senators mentioned salaries, a "stressful economic and political environment," and threatened cuts to instructional budgets as reasons for the lack of confidence. Yet one senator succinctly summed up the faculty's mood: "The real issue here is that we are supposed to have a shared governance model, but nothing happens. It comes down to an issue of power. It's not a communication issue, it's a power issue. Our concerns are being ignored." Out of 398 ballots distributed, 346 were returned with 63% of those expressing no confidence in President Nelson. Soon thereafter, the Board asked for his resignation, and he left in August 1999 for Lincoln University.

What does this experience tell us about Central Washington University? Is our experience typical? First of all, we cannot escape our interface with the surrounding society. Much of the poor faculty morale over the last four decades originated in Washington state's fiscal dilemmas. Faculty morale was also affected by the deep and rapid changes experienced globally and nationally that percolated down to the local level. Change can be a wrenching experience, and people sometimes cope with change by trying to regain the control they once had over their previous lives. Both the reports of the Committee of Five and the Campus Task Force harkened back to a perceived Golden Age. One of our resident sociologists analyzed the attitudes of those who signed the AAUP's cards in 1972 and found that those who favored collective bargaining primarily wanted to "preserve the status quo." In other words, some discontent was simply due to growing pains.

On another level, however, Central shared poor faculty morale with other, similar colleges and universities. A special report of the Carnegie Foundation, published in 1987, noted that faculty imbibe academic values of individualism and self-determination in graduate school and carry those values with them into the colleges and universities they work for. These values work best in institutions that reward published research, where there

is hardly any questioning of faculty prerogatives by administration or trustees.

In contrast, said the Carnegie report, four-year comprehensive, public universities, are “muddled” institutions. Evolving from the old normal schools, their faculty have not achieved the status, the privileged salaries and teaching loads, or the self-determination enjoyed by the research universities. According to the report, the four-year comprehensives have inherited “authority environments.” It is particularly tempting for trustees, who come from milieux that operate on the business model, to impose their control over the individualistic culture and “orderly chaos” of the university. Two of the crises of Central’s last four decades, those of the 1970s and of the 1990s, arose because the Board did not share with the faculty the same understanding of the university. That lack of understanding, the Carnegie Report would say, threatened not only the faculty’s satisfaction with its work, but its very identity as faculty. Central was not alone in having this experience. The Carnegie Report noted that four-year comprehensive, public universities have been especially prone to unionization because it promises either to introduce or to restore conditions that bolster a “real” faculty image. If the Carnegie Report of 1987 is correct, then the Committee of Five and the Campus Climate reports, the impasse of the 1970s, the votes of no-confidence were simply Central’s variant of woes that afflict institutions of our “muddled” type.

