

## Campus Climate Committee

Year-End Report – April, 2005

### Introduction

During the Spring, 2004 semester, the Campus Climate Committee (CCC) was proposed by the University Committee to the Faculty Senate to help improve the climate for all employees at UW-Green Bay. The original charge to the committee was to

- "a. consider the various mechanisms for improving climate, as well as assisting individuals;
- b. pilot those that are feasible over a year's time;
- c. evaluate the results;
- d. and report back to the Senate."

Once it was approved by the Committee on Committees and Nominations, the University Committee appointed Lucy Arendt, Lecturer, Business Administration; Anne Buttke, Director, University Union; William Laatsch, Professor, Urban and Regional Studies; Illene Noppe, Professor, Human Development; Robert Skorczewski, Coordinator, Credit Outreach and Director of the Downtown Learning Center; and Georjeanna Wilson-Doenges, Associate Professor, Urban and Regional Studies to the CCC. Grant Winslow, Program Coordinator of Student Life took over Anne Butke's position subsequent to her retirement in October, 2004. Illene Noppe was elected Chair during the first meeting on May 21, 2004.

1. We agreed that the Campus Climate Committee should include a representative from Classified and Unrepresented staff. Mary Ann Rose, Program Assistant, Counseling and Health Center, graciously agreed to attend our meetings as a guest. The University Committee approved the change in Campus Climate Committee membership on September 9, 2004.
2. The members of the Campus Climate Committee were unanimous in their desire to focus on actionable changes during our year of tenure. We committed our focus on realistic change that will hopefully make a contribution to a positive campus climate.
3. Our committee decided to adhere to the principle of inclusivity. Thus, we agreed that a positive campus climate that engenders good morale is feasible only if the entire campus community (i.e., students, faculty, classified staff, nonclassified staff, and administration) is involved.
4. The Campus Climate Committee was created as a *carte blanche*; it quickly became apparent to us that across the campus, people had different ideas as to what a Campus Climate Committee does and what it could accomplish in a year's time. Given the open nature of the task, members

of the Campus Climate Committee decided that our focus would be toward promoting an environment that made UW-Green Bay a place where people felt empowered, appreciated, and contributing meaningfully to the common goal of educating our students. We therefore began our meetings by delimiting the essential elements of a positive campus climate. The CCC identified the six key elements as:

- Respect
- Communication
- Shared Experiences and Values
- Support
- Trust
- Recognition

The CCC also specified that its unit of analysis would be campus wide, rather than dyadic or at the department level. Thus, in its year of existence, the CCC determined that it would not focus upon mechanisms of grievance resolution, but rather be involved in identifying and promoting a positive relationship environment for all members of the campus community. In the spirit of open communication, we also posted all information stemming from this committee on the SOFAS web site. The mission of the CCC was therefore identified as:

***Promote a positive relationship environment through a mutually shared vision, where people in the UW-Green Bay campus community can develop both professionally and personally, feel like they have a valued role in the functioning of the University, respect the roles of their colleagues, and feel recognized for their actions.***

5. At each meeting, one of the elements of a positive campus climate has been discussed. The discussions involved identification of what are the needs, what presently is lacking on our campus, and what could be done to improve the specific target issue. Out of these deliberations, members of the Campus Climate Committee felt that the following issues were of immediate concern:

- Campus climate has been affected by the entrenchment of a number of "fiefdoms" whereby paths of communication are obstructed. We believe that the creation of an All-University Congress could be a starting point for representation of all campus groups to discuss issues in an open format.
- We have discussed with Chancellor Shepard and Provost Hammersmith the need for a designated on-campus alternate to Ombudsperson Melissa Jackson when the Ombudsperson is unavailable because of her prior involvement in her capacity as University Counsel. Dan Spielmann had been designated as fulfilling this position, but more faculty and staff need to be informed about the channels that are available to them should they need advocacy.
- A mature organization loses some of its shared vision if shared experiences are not accessible. Everyone on campus is woefully lacking in shared time to attend many of the wonderful on-campus activities. We need more opportunities to develop and engage in meaningful, productive shared experiences. The Campus

Climate Committee thus determined that in addition to an analysis of campus climate issues, we would try to move forward a proposal that would create All-University Hours for campus meetings and events.

### **Course Scheduling Proposal**

Beginning in November, we began working on a proposal to modify course scheduling so as to free up two hours per week for common meeting times. We learned that this is practiced on many different campuses throughout the United States. We found a scheduling model, adopted by Syracuse University, that would create these hours, while simultaneously shortening the semester's length and altering class meeting times. We have generated several ideas for how the University Hours might be used, and the benefits that could be derived from shared meeting times. We have enlisted the help of Mike Herrity, Registrar, in creating several simulations that map our current schedule onto the Syracuse model. For some, it has not been obvious how this proposal can affect campus climate, but we remain committed to the idea that freeing up times in schedules and arranging for common times for the entire campus to meet would open the door to possible climate change. We hope to forward the final version of this proposal, along with Mike Herrity's analysis, to the UC yet this semester.

### **Evaluation of the Campus Climate Committee**

We have learned a number of very valuable lessons during this past year of intensive work. We are largely all-inclusive, with the exception of student representation, and each of us learned much about what life on campus is like for our fellow colleagues who have job descriptions vastly different from our own. We have learned how important shared visions and common experiences are to promoting collegiality on campus. We have been an active group. From the beginning, we decided that despite the one year limitation for our work, we would do more than just present an analysis of campus climate problems and potential ways to fix these. Thus, we have tried to effect some change this year with our course scheduling proposal. It was through this process that we, as a group, came to realize that a significant contributor to low morale and frustration on campus emerges from an inability for members of the campus community to effect change on an institutional level. Many creative initiatives are supported at the individual level, but systemic problems at the Institutional level more often than not lead to creative and innovative ideas withering away. We all recognize that budgetary problems do not help, but the failing for movement forward also comes from a campus leadership that has confusing reporting lines and appears reluctant to publicly attach its support to specific ideas emerging from campus governance groups. Although we acknowledge that campus leadership has been willing to meet with campus groups to discuss issues and promote better communication, there also is a need for a top-down approach that can support the bottom-up approach that it so broadly applauds, particularly for ideas that are not universally popular. In addition, we find that our colleagues – faculty and staff – seem unwilling to take risks and experiment with courses, programs, and academic initiatives, losing sight of the greater good of the evolution of the University. Thus, it may be the CCC – as presently charged by the Faculty Senate and UC – may experience significant difficulties in improving our campus climate if the underlying resistance from administration and faculty governance groups towards change is not addressed. The current members of the Campus Climate Committee remain interested in moving the course scheduling

proposal forward, and would be happy to continue working with the University Committee (and Senate). It is our recommendation that should the Campus Climate Committee be continued, its focus first must be on identifying the obstacles for change on campus, the means to remove the obstacles, methods for negotiating change, and processes for clarifying reporting and communication lines between and among administration and governance so that initiatives and ideas are facilitated, and not stymied. In addition, representation on any CCC should be inclusive, reflecting the committee's primary emphasis on creating an inclusive campus climate, and thereby consist of faculty, academic staff, classified staff, and student representatives.