

TOWARD IMPROVING FACULTY MORALE AT H.S.U.

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One of the many nice things about sabbatical leaves is that they give us a chance to see how academicians live in other locations. I spent a semester at a university where faculty morale appeared to be relatively high. It was distressing to return and experience the dismal state of morale shared by many faculty members at H.S.U. even though morale problems are probably more serious in many other schools. I assume that a decent state of morale is desirable in order for faculty to function well as teachers, scholars and human beings. Some of our problems stem from statewide and systemwide developments. Proposition 9 was frightening. We are lost in an immense bureaucracy which affects our lives via rules and regulations created by accountants and non-accountants in Long Beach, Sacramento, and other important places. We have reached a plateau of student enrollment and faculty growth and will be looking at each others' faces for many years. We need to cope as painlessly and constructively as possible with the externally imposed and often counter-productive pressures and avoid the "burn-out" phenomenon common in many professions. I believe that there is a high potential for a creative, useful and enjoyable professional and personal life style at H.S.U. and that to achieve the potential, it would be helpful to identify, examine and remove the noxious routines which we inflict upon ourselves and each other. We may sometimes, at best, only cope with some externally inflicted destructive pressures and requirements. Hopefully, perceptive administrators will function as flak catchers and permit professors to go about their activities with minimum harassment. The institution of the ombudsman is a potential faculty resource. We can attempt to initiate action at both a campus and system level through our faculty organizations. However, we can exercise maximum control and eliminate most readily self-inflicted,

non-productive, time consuming procedures. Fortunately, there are some glimmerings of activity moving in this direction.

The mechanisms we create to aid us in completing our many tasks often go berserk. I recall submitting an employee suggestion to the state Merit Award Board back in 1971 (I resorted to this because no one of authority on campus would listen) to simplify the procedure for delivering boxes of books from the Education and Psychology Building to the Library. Over eleven discrete steps including at least eleven different people were involved in the process. Surely at a university, with all the expertise available, someone should have seen the ridiculous and unnecessary complication of a simple process. Or perhaps the unarticulated goal was really to create "busy work," or satisfy the demands of a contemporary Moses who conveys to us certain bureaucratic procedures chiseled in stone. Or more likely, procedures are developed and often fail to receive critical examination. What can happen is that some of the ways we conduct the business of our institution become atavistic, unpleasant and destructive. I'm not about to go on a soap box and claim that all we have to do to improve faculty morale is to remove the wasteful and silly way we go about some of our business. However, I do think it would help.

There are departments where some faculty members feel uncomfortable in their work settings and apprehensive about meeting certain colleagues. What has happened to make these people feel so unhappy about their colleagues? Why do many professors treat their colleagues in an inhumane manner? Can we become more supportive of each other? Can we reduce the busy work which so many of us resent and resist? I have heard several professors state that they manage to avoid most committee assignments and all the "Crap" entailed

in serving. Does this mean that they are lazy, pulling their rank to avoid work? Or could it be that the committee routines have become so cumbersome that an unofficial boycott is an intelligent adaptation to the situation? How many of our committee assignments really make a difference? Perhaps the boycotting of committees is partly an expression of the feeling that it doesn't matter anyway. I know of some individuals who decline to be considered for promotion because of the demands of the promotion process. After seeing the supporting materials for one candidate on their way along the promotion trail, I had the fantasy of an endless caravan comprised of bearers of boxes of supporting materials. It is about as inhumane to produce the volume of supporting data, aside from the high costs of time and materials, as it is to read and assimilate the materials. Too much data can saturate the reader and induce a numbing effect. One colleague raises the question, "Will anyone argue that the avalanche of data has made the promotion process more effective, discriminating and fair?" The time and effort devoted to certain aspects of the promotion process most certainly can be more usefully directed. Other faculty members resist curricular innovation because of their distaste for the process entailed.

The greatest strength of a university is in the diversity of the people who teach, study and make it function. Yet the tendency of bureaucracies is to develop rigid self-protective practices which are often designed to save the convenience of bureaucrats rather than the clientele that should be served. It is essential that each segment of an academic community subject itself to regular self-examination as well as examination by those who should be served. As a faculty member, I have received few invitations for suggestions by segments of the academic community that exist to support instruction.

In an academic setting, the bureaucratic tendency toward rigidity can pose special dangers; e.g., a curriculum committee can impose a uniform structure on all curricular proposals even though the structure is of questionable applicability in many cases. It is my contention that flexibility is generally more appropriate than rigidity in an institution of higher education devoted to exploration of the diverse academic worlds.

Are we adversely affecting morale by promoting conflicting goals, letting our actions sabotage our alleged goals, and becoming overly legalistic? A rather lengthy quotation from one faculty member addresses some of these issues:

The increasing pressure for "research" (by which term publication is actually meant) has reinforced an increasingly obvious schizoid tendency in life at HSU which advertises itself as primarily a teaching institution. Meanwhile some excellent teachers, usually synthetic thinkers rather than research specialists, have been completely demoralized by a promotion process which praises teaching and colleague review but practices counting papers and students' checkmarks. Meanwhile the "open" file system has made honest faculty input into promotion all but impossible except for those who thrive on confrontation and contact sport. By allowing the promotion procedure to slide into the lawyer's format, CSUC has ruined any sense of spontaneity which is the life-blood of a community. No wonder many faculty have decided to go fishing or sell real estate as a better way to spin their wheels.

The adoption of the pretentious title "university" was the critical sign that we had become permanently schizoid. Incidentally, some of the people who most vociferously championed the change from HSC to HSU would have lost their way in the library. Meanwhile as we further develop as a "university" we see periodicals being stripped from the library, a greater vocational trend in curriculum, courses based on consumer demand, a cafeteria-style General Education program, a collapse in the Liberal Arts--it would have been more reflective of reality if we had called ourselves HSJC.

To what extent do other people share some of these concerns and see inhumane colleague relationships and work routines as destructive to morale? Can we attack these problems in any direct way? Can we apply scientific methods, humanistic perspectives, and principles of organizational management to these problems? If we can't, it may challenge the legitimacy of several applied disciplines.

Collective bargaining may be viewed by some as a panacea for all that troubles us in academia. I don't happen to share that optimistic view

although I recognize that collective bargaining may be helpful, especially at some of our sister institutions. I am inclined to evaluate faculty organizations by their track records, particularly on the local scene. It would be lovely if our organizations, as well as the academic senate, and our administrators would make the issue of faculty morale a high priority one. The concern about faculty development should be directed to the morale issue. Poor faculty morale is antithetical to development. I have tried to stimulate discussion of this issue and would welcome reactions. If there is widespread concern, it should be funneled to those in positions to implement changes, i.e., our academic senators, administrators and leaders of our faculty organizations.

I have addressed the morale issue from the perspective of a faculty member and have not attempted to speak for students or staff. In the absence of systematic data or relevant studies, the generality of the concerns raised is not known. I have also tried, perhaps not successfully, to refrain

from taking too many pot shots based on my possibly idiosyncratic pet peeves. My recommendation at this time is that either the H.S.U. Academic Senate or one of the competing faculty organizations attempt to identify the specific concerns of each faculty member and establish a priority and mechanisms for pursuing corrective actions.

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