Polling My Way to the Forum

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On my way to publishing another issue of Forum, worried that enough of my colleagues did not care, and desirous of drawing out the opinions of many "lunchroom critics" who wish to be anonymous—I decided to take a straw poll on some issues of interest to this academic community. My "scientific" poll is analogous to Johnny Carson's (or is it Ed McMahon's?) infamous mayonnaise jar procedure and the technique of Karnak the Magnificent. I sent out approximately 110 copies of 8 questions, one to each department chair and 20% of each department on campus. you may be surprised (I was) that 52 faculty members bothered to respond. What follows is a restatement of the questions asked, a tabulation of responses, and verbatim comments offered by some respondents.

Question #1: "Do you favor the continuation of Forum as an on-campus publication? Suggestions for improvement?"

Yes - 43; No - 2; Uncertain - 7

Comments: "No comment"/ "Don't really care"/ "Faculty apathy toward broader communication is difficult to fight, yet worth working on"/ "try to be more selective in what is published".

Editor: Well, nobody's perfect!

Question #2: "Do you have confidence that the University Curriculum Committee and the Academic Senate represent your best interests?"

Yes - 19; No - 20; Uncertain - 13

Comments: "Should be 2 questions"/ "I don't doubt the good intentions of both"/ "I'd like to see much more polling of faculty on essential issues"/ "A.S. overall yes; UCC No!"/ "Should be abolished or suspended for 5 years"/ "Often sounds like a bunch of fuzzy-thinkers"/ "Could display greater independence from administration"/ "I think the Senate is composed largely of incumbents in need of promotion points".

Editor: I think there is a credibility gap!

Question #3: "Do you favor collective bargaining in the CSU system?"

Yes - 28; No - 23; Uncertain - 2

Comments: "Not really aware of what it is"/ "Collective bargaining leads to unions which are the refuge of the lazy and unambitious"/ "No, but I can live with it."/ "What chance do we have in the matter of economic survival?"/ "faculty salaries, benefits, and academic programs are at present not given nearly enough priority"/ "I see no gain in having my life determined by a labor bureaucracy."

Editor: It ain't unanimous!

Question #4: "Do you believe publications should count more heavily in the promotion process?"

Yes - 15; No - 34; Uncertain - 3
Comments: “NO - less!”/ “Quality teaching goes hand in hand with research and publication”/ “Teaching effectiveness and dedication to one’s field are more important.”/ “how can publication be continued with this system where no time is allotted?”/ “We are still a teaching institution and will, from all signs, remain one for the foreseeable future.”/ “They count too heavily now.”

Editor: We are not the Harvard of the West yet!

Question #5: “Do you favor evaluation of tenured, full professors?”

Yes - 37; No - 11; Uncertain - 4

Comments: “Waste of time, but no objection”/ “Keep ‘em on their toes”/ “We spend too much time and energy on that process anyway”/ “Only when there are indications of a problem”/ “On the basis of teaching effectiveness”/ “Not as mandated currently by the Chancellor’s Office”/ “Why not?”/ “Without some evaluations, there are those who ‘retire’ early (I’m a full).”

Editor: Most agree that evaluation is “ok”, so long as it means nothing.

Question #6: “Do you favor the semester over the quarter system?”

Yes - 31; No - 16; Uncertain - 5

Comments: “The semester system will reduce the curricular flexibility provided by the quarter system”/ “Is the Pope Catholic?”/ “Better educational system for students”/ “Fifteen-week, fully paid sabbatical”/ “Quarters are good for fast-stuffing; Semesters are good for learning”/ “I can deal with either system”/ “Less cost to university”/ “Less hectic for the faculty.”

Editor: Economic reasons will probably be the determining factor.

Question #7: “Do you favor preservation of the liberal arts nature of HSU, regardless of FTES and faculty allocation?”

Yes - 32; No - 13; Uncertain - 7

Comments: “Central to preserve, or we are dead”/ “FTE is codeword for Failure To Educate”/ “I’m not sure it is there to preserve”/ “Not really”/ “Not at any expense”/ “Why should a person get credit for teaching to an empty classroom?”/ “Question is loaded, Bill”/ “Yes, but liberal arts means sciences, humanities, and the arts.”

Editor: Is it just as impossible to define the conservative arts?

Question #8: “What do you think should be the most important goal for HSU in the next decade?”

Rough and paraphrased tally: 5 - “Maintain adequate funding”/ 7 - “Survival” or “Staying alive”/ 24 - “High quality education”/ “Quality not quantity education”/ “quality liberal arts education along with vocational preparedness”

Editor: Those who respond appear more concerned about what goes into the head, not the pocket.