

Distinguished Researcher's Speech

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Recently the scholar's speech has become the pinnacle of concern, wit, criticism, and whatever else one wants to hear in another's remarks. My strategy today is to place this speech within broader intellectual contexts--the context of my sociological training and interest and the context of formal organizations. Social scientists and sociologists in particular are specifically trained to examine the relationship between individuals and groups, between individuals and organizations, and between individuals and other individuals. Because sociologists are trained to do these things doesn't mean that all sociologists can execute the exercise. Some sociologists like other academicians become too political to be critical and objective. Today, I would like to apply the critical, objective, analytical skills of a researcher to a specific organization--Morehead State University.

However, before I systematically begin, allow me to briefly qualify myself as a speaker does in Alcoholics Anonymous, an organization that I have studied for years; and allow me to express my appreciation regarding the Distinguished Researcher Award. I have served this university as a faculty member, a department chair, and briefly as an acting dean. My reputation as a scholar in several literatures is strongly established at the national level. During the past year I've been interviewed by U.S. News and World Report, The Boston Globe, The Miami Herald, Science Magazine, and several others. The department I

chair is the first unit and the only academic unit on campus to be showcased at the MSU Board of Regents Spotlight. The department has tripled in majors in five years and we have added four new faculty lines during the past two years. While I have been significantly involved in these changes the real work has been accomplished by the faculty in my department. In Alcoholics Anonymous speakers qualify themselves so that their audience might be receptive to the sharing of their experience, strength and hope. My intent today is the same. I have only one agenda --to make this university the best university it can be. I stand here today as a supporter of no single constituency or point of view. My only assumption is a belief that facts, knowledge, reason, and ethics guide the way better than myths, politics, rationality, ideologies, and friendship or kinship ties.

Before I forget--I must express my appreciation. The Distinguished Researcher Award was a significant symbolic as well as instrumental reward. In addition the award has helped me continue my momentum as a scholar and it has helped validate my most important identity--that of a sociologist.

I would now like to move from the intellectual to the practical. So as to make sure that my message is clear, my comments will be organized around a number of specific themes.

1. As organizations, academic organizations tend to be conservative. While universities are frequently the sites of new

ideas, inventions, and discoveries, paradoxically they are rather slow, cumbersome, and conservative organizations. Burdened by numerous committees, administrative and political layers, universities have shown a similarity to adapt about as quickly as dinosaurs. The implication here is that one cannot blame lack of change and progress only on the administration. When the faculty senate and the faculty generally go for across the board raises, that is a conservative response. The worst, not the best time for a conservative response is when external resources are scarce. We have all participated in discussions of advising, planning, evaluation systems, and merit pay for years and somehow little ever gets accomplished. We pay internal and external consultants but rarely seem to decide on anything.

2. All universities are teaching universities. I know some great teachers at major research institutions. In my view the best teaching universities are small liberal arts schools. Why is it that these types of schools, schools interested in teaching, significantly outpace us relative to research? Perhaps it is because they realize that the single best indicator of faculty growth and professional development is research activity. Why is it that we pretend that research isn't supposed to take place at a teaching university? We need to encourage and promote more research at MSU. I do not say this because I am a researcher and it is in my interest to do so. I say this because research, creativity and scholarly pursuit are the only avenues of knowledge.

Teaching without knowledge will always remain a fraudulent activity.

3. Significant numbers of persons are underpaid at Morehead State University. I don't know about you, but I've been benchmarked to death. What does it say to students, to the people of Eastern Kentucky, and to us when as a group we finish dead last relative to salaries. Researchers talk about statistical significance. Simply stated, statistical significance tells us that the differences between two or more groups are large enough to be attributed to something other than chance factors. We are last in faculty salaries, we are last in the percentage of our salary that we are paid for summer work; we are last in graduate assistantship stipends. While we are under-funded so are all of the other universities in the system. What is so unique about MSU that its faculty are treated significantly differently from nearly 30 benchmark institutions?

Universities have a range of resources but the most significant are their human resources. A university's faculty is its most significant human resource. Students are four year visitors and life long alums. Faculty frequently give their entire working lives to an organization. Some people might add that there is no logical way to dispute that faculty are the most important constituency for the university. Anybody who thinks that faculty are only one of a number of necessary categories of employees and not the most signifi-

cant group doesn't know what a university is. The current administration did not cause this circumstance they inherited it. However, what does it say about an organization that over the years has treated its most valuable resource in such a way as to kill its productivity, morale, and life?

This point that faculty are the most valuable resource at a university is important and several additional themes must be elaborated. Faculty represent diverse backgrounds and academic preparation. Ph.D's are, by definition, a society's educational elite. Relative to other employees Morehead State University faculty have fewer possibilities for advancement. There are only two steps in the promotion system--from assistant professor to associate and from associate to full. Those changes have historically amounted to a total salary increment of \$1,000. Why are significant salary adjustments and reclassifications for staff, but not for faculty, important to the university's mission? Organizationally, the fair and wise thing to do is to make promotion more difficult to achieve and correspondingly to reward it more highly. At least \$2,000 for the first promotion and at least \$3,000 for the second promotion. Additionally, to provide further incentive we should institute a new rank--university professor for those who have repeatedly demonstrated outstanding accomplishment to their disciplines and to the university. These relatively inexpensive changes are not really even costs. Rather, they are investments. To

make the investment increases the quality and quantity of the work that the faculty produce. To not make the investment is to vote for mediocrity.

4. Significant numbers of persons are overpaid at Morehead State University. Some MSU faculty and staff are coasting. Equity, ladies and gentleman, has its roots in philosophical and economic theory, however, I'm most familiar with it in terms of equity theory in social psychology. There are two sides to equity--the input side (investments, costs) and the output side (rewards, profits). To pay people the same wage when some persons work is significantly greater in quantity and quality is not equity but inequity. Inequity produces organizational strain in addition to reducing worker productivity and honesty. What organizational sense does it make to reward the least productive of the workers at the same or worse yet at a greater rate than the most productive ones?
5. Organizational productivity and goals can be significantly furthered, enhanced, and reached through the development of a reward system. Quantity and quality of work are the near exclusive resources that fuel an organization. Organizations that reward competence in teaching, research, and service promote productivity, enhance morale, and are competitive in the market place. Merit pay exists in the majority of academic and nonacademic organizations. Why is it that we are willing to pay individuals for their accomplishments and merit when we offer an initial contract but that we cannot

reward them for merit once hired?

6. We have and are addressing inequities in every possible category with the exception of the most important one-- competency. We are obsessed with categorical thinking: men vs women, blacks vs whites, staff vs faculty, recent hires vs old timers, FARTS (Former Administrators Returned to Teaching) vs Non-FARTSs, terminally trained vs non-terminally trained. I could care less about any of these categories including my own-- why don't we look at competence versus incompetence. I know people, I have people in my own department who are outstanding teachers, superior researchers, and heavily involved in the committee process. When productive people are not rewarded for their productivity what message does that send? If competency and productivity aren't rewarded in an organization the organization will produce mediocrity.
7. We need to be less concerned with market value and more concerned with plain, old value. What sense does it make to respond with dollars to attract average people in high demand areas to come to MSU but not to respond with dollars to keep our best and most productive faculty from leaving? Resources are not great enough to pay our best people what they deserve, but even token adjustments would be effective in keeping some of our best people at MSU.
8. Compared to other academic organizations we are top heavy in staff and administration. I do not say this because I am a



faculty person. The numbers at similar universities say that for every faculty member there are approximately 1.6 staff members. At MSU we have more than 2.3 staff per each faculty member. A similar exercise can be undertaken relative to the proportion of our budget being allocated to academic affairs. We are beginning to make some progress in this area but we need a vision statement. A statement that sets target goals and that specifies means by which these goals can be realized. For example, staff vacancies caused by resignations and retirements need to be examined with the same scrutiny that we use to examine faculty vacancies. When possible, funds from unfilled staff vacancies must be used to address the faculty/staff ratio and the academic affairs budget.

9. Organizational impediments to change are many:

a. An administrative structure, culture and history that have lost sight of the central purpose of any university--to produce knowledge and share it internally and externally.

b. A faculty as well as an administration characterized by the following problem: Those most interested in promoting change, competence, and accountability have little power and those with the most power have little interest.

c. An administrative structure that places too many demands and responsibilities on a single person. It does not make good organizational sense for an organization's chief executive officer to be burdened with recruiting,

politiking, fund raising, and everything else that comes around. It is impossible for any one person to accomplish all of these functions. We should explore president/provost options or similar possibilities that more broadly allocate functions and responsibilities.

- d. An organizational structure that does not allow much autonomy nor demand accountability from its administration as well as its faculty. This is particularly obvious at the department chair and dean level.
- e. An adversarial relationship between administration and faculty. This is a two way street. Increased communication, trust, and respect must be established if we are to collectively move MSU forward to meet the challenges of the next decade and beyond.

I have remained objective, critical, and analytical. There is much political turmoil on campus. Political decisions, be they on the street, in superintendents' offices, in the senate, or behind closed doors will not serve us and our students well. It is time for all of us to connect reason with rationality and to move forward. It is a time for mission, vision, leadership, and action.