

New Year's Day 2016

To: MnSCU Board of Trustees

From: David P. Page (retired IHCC English instructor)

To whom it may concern:

I was hired as a part-time English instructor at Inver Hills Community College in 1989. Eventually, I rolled over into a full-time position. Throughout my career, I took on several faculty leadership positions and, in those roles, spent part of my time trying to convince probationary faculty that administration was not out to get them no matter what a very few disgruntled full-time faculty said.

Several years ago when it became clear due to declining enrollments and cuts in funding that layoffs might be inevitable, I suggested to President Tim Wynes that he simply be straight with the faculty and create a plan for trimming faculty if necessary. Admittedly such an approach would require some compromise and collaboration—traits President Wynes was apparently not willing to adopt either because he was incapable or because he found them too time-consuming given his schedule. Instead, he chose to detach himself as much as possible from a worsening situation, allowing his staff to belittle employees and work without constraints. Although you will get many specific examples, I will provide one that shows the kind of atmosphere in which employees worked. As the person in charge of faculty development funds, I had to meet with IHCC CFO Dee Bernard on occasion. She believed herself infallible, and we would occasionally have disagreements. At one point, I was even forced to get an opinion from the MnSCU attorneys about a decision she had made. The attorneys told her she was incorrect. She told me she didn't care what the MnSCU attorneys said: She was right; they were wrong. How could anyone work with someone like that? Yes, she was eventually moved out of her position, but not before a large number of good people quit in disgust at her leadership style.

When it came to downsizing faculty, a similar scorched-earth policy was adopted, with one faculty member dismissed, for example, because she obtained permission from her dean instead of the president (as the contract stipulates) for a change to her sabbatical. As grievance representative at the time, I was brought into the process late, and I am not suggesting we ignore the contract. What I am saying is that because of a constant change in top administration at *Inver Hills*, deans were/are not very familiar with the processes, and when the faculty member came to the dean for guidance on a sabbatical that needed to be altered mid-course through no fault of the faculty member, under a more stable leadership model the problem would have been fixed without the drama of a forced resignation. So while President Wynes is able to say he has not laid off any faculty, he has forced out several. Consequently, by the end of my tenure in faculty leadership, I was no longer able to say that administration was not out to get people. President Wynes had created or allowed to be created an atmosphere of fear that even I could not deny.

I honestly feel that Inver Hills is a special place, one where the faculty really do care about students. At this point, I feel administration is sacrificing students' needs on the altar of efficiency and expediency. Allow credits to be sold to high school students studying under instructors with no graduate credits in the field they are teaching? Not a problem until the HLC

steps in, despite the constant concerns voiced by IHCC faculty. Allow graduation at a venue that may tend to make our GLBT students uncomfortable? Not a problem. And if faculty raise concerns, try to intimidate them. If that doesn't work, grudgingly give in but make any faculty who tried to intervene for our students feel disenfranchised.

Education should not be about reaching arbitrary fiscal goals. It should be about meeting students where they are and taking them where they want to be—even if they occasionally need help discovering where that place is. And if hard decisions need to be made, they should be made in an atmosphere of mutual respect.

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