

January 14, 2016

Members of the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities Board;

I have just retired from Inver Hills Community College ending my twenty-two-year tenure there and over thirty years in teaching. Looking back on my career brings me a great deal of joy and satisfaction. I found something I was good at and a way to make a difference in people's lives. Of course, there were more than a few days that I felt I was in the wrong profession when class did not go the way that I wished, but then there were more days when I got my "teacher's high." When I could feel myself connecting with students, seeing the light bulbs going off above their heads.

I was lucky to grow up in New York City when attending a branch of the City University that was free, yes, free. My parents were of modest means and I knew I needed to earn a B+ average in high school so I could attend Brooklyn College. My background enabled me to understand how education can transform a life. I wholeheartedly believe in public education. I have taught at 4-year universities and 2-year schools. My love is for teaching at the community college, in large part because I shared many of my students' backgrounds. Community college is all about providing students of all stripes: those who struggled in high school or at a larger college, those seeking to retrain for another career, those exceptional students who choose to begin their college experience at a community college, those who need more nurturing than would be possible at a larger institution; and first generation college students, immigrants, and older adults. In other words, community college is all about giving students from all backgrounds first and second (and third) chances in life. The focus, very simply, must be about what is best for the students.

I began my teaching career teaching labs at a junior college in Northampton Massachusetts, moved on to a teaching job at a future vocational-technical high school in Lexington, where I was able to plan curriculum before the school even opened. After moving to Tennessee I was hired at Austin Peay State University in Clarksville, Tennessee located next to Fort Campbell, Kentucky where I experienced a diverse student population of traditional high school graduates, returning adults (many of them veterans) and active veterans who were called up to the Gulf War in the midst of the semester. I completed my education at Peabody College of Vanderbilt University in Nashville. I had the option of working towards a Ph.D. in biology or an Ed.D. in science education. I chose the latter because I knew my love was centered around teaching, and not scientific research. I returned to Austin Peay for a couple of years after finishing my degree and then made the big move to Minnesota. Working as an adjunct at St. Mary's, then as a sabbatical replacement at Hamline, I began teaching adjunct at Inver Hills.

When I began teaching at Inver Hills as an adjunct biology instructor in 1993 I found myself in an atmosphere charged with excitement in an institution focused on excellence in teaching. All the ideas and experiences percolating in my mind seemed to coalesce at Inver Hills. I was free to try ideas and fail. Everyone, it seemed, from instructors to counselors to librarians to secretaries knew that their job was to support students. Faculty did not always agree with administration, but we felt we were usually heard and our concerns and opinions were valued. Faculty regularly shared best-teaching practices which were supported by administration. The school seemed like a vibrant laboratory of educational approaches. We were supported system-wide by the Center for Teaching and Learning. I was so proud to have an article published in the annual *Open to Change* publication which highlighted innovative teaching and assessment techniques at MNSCU.

Over the last few years, under President Wynes there has been a palpable change on campus. Although the rumor mill is always present, to some degree, in most institutions it is thriving in a way that I have never before experienced. "Whose head is on the chopping-block? Who will get terminated next? Do you know what happened to _____? I don't see them around anymore?" This is evidenced by more than three dozen staff leaving. Morale has taken a beating as documented by two campus climate surveys over the past three years. Faculty and staff feel threatened by the current administration feeling anxious about expressing opinions and, more importantly, their job security reflected in the number of grievances on campus being unprecedented. It is very challenging to be collaborative and innovative in such an environment.

Student support services have been detrimentally affected during Mr. Wynes' tenure. Counselors have been replaced by "academic advisors." While this may be viewed as a cost-cutting measure it is inappropriate at a place such as Inver Hills. So many of our students come to school with significant issues of mental health, poverty, family, and work obligations, to name a few. On several occasions I have walked students over to see a counselor when I felt the student was experiencing a personal crisis. As an instructor, I needed to know I had this type of professional support that I could depend upon when my students needed it, and I found myself confronted with situations that I do not feel in competent in handling. Academic advisors are not trained in counseling and replacing counselors with them places both students and faculty at risk. Faculty see significant increases in the numbers of administrators while student support services suffer.

Faculty support has also been affected. Thirteen faculty in our building are assigned to one secretary. We now have her only in the mornings so if you have a need and it happens to be in the afternoon there is no support. She is also responsible for nine faculty members in another building during afternoons plus ten additional adjunct faculty. The secretary's office sits empty in the afternoons and if students need assistance there is no one to help them, instead they are met by an empty desk and a sign. The marketing department is now shared with Dakota County Technical College. I know of faculty who have been waiting over six months for their marketing needs to be served.

A planned bookstore renovation, which never took place, resulted in students unable to acquire texts for weeks at the beginning of the academic year a couple of years ago wreaking havoc on course syllabi. It is difficult to hold students accountable when their course materials are unavailable. Students were to purchase all texts and course materials online. Our students often decide to enroll at the last minute or must wait until their financial aid to become available to be able to purchase their texts. Assuming that students can, weeks in advance, purchase their texts reveals a profound lack of understanding of our student population.

Inver Hills is lucky to employ many extremely talented and dedicated faculty and staff but these numbers are dwindling. I want to see the innovative institution in which I spent the majority of my professional career restored where ideas are freely shared and concerns are heard without fear of retribution, and most importantly, where students and their needs come first. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Heidi J. Wetherall". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'H' and 'W'.

Heidi J. Wetherall, Ed.D.

Retired Biology Instructor

Inver Hills Community College