

January 24, 2016

To the MnSCU Board of Trustees:

As a recently retired faculty member, it saddens me to see what has happened to what I once felt was a shining example of an institution that was dynamic, innovative, collaborative, and student-success focused.

I first came to Inver as an adjunct in 1995, arriving from another metro community college that was in the throes of dysfunction. It felt like such a breath of fresh air to be teaching in an environment where employees genuinely liked and respected each other, employee input was valued, there was no back-stabbing, and where everyone was working together for the benefit of our students. There was a vision of what students needed, and everyone was working together to accomplish this.

Unfortunately, that little gem of a school where I used to teach has disappeared in the past five years. A lack of top leadership with vision and oversight has turned this into a rudderless institution that keeps switching course according to which of the ever-revolving cast of top administrators is currently in power.

As the president of the college, Tim Wynes has made a number of very poor top executive hiring decisions. All too often these people he has selected have come in and seized control while ignoring the advice of those who work beneath them and know the institution well; and then they made a series of extremely poor decisions that have negatively impacted the college as a whole. This has resulted in an incredible amount of employee turnover in a college that once had an extremely stable and dedicated workforce. Before I left for retirement, it seemed as though at least once a week there was an invitation to come to a goodbye party for yet another employee who was so fed up that s/he had found a different job.

In addition to an exodus of disgruntled employees, Inver's enrollment has seen a large and steady decline in the past five years. As a faculty member, I was always incredulous that these enrollment figures were only presented in terms of decrease since the past year's enrollment rather than looking at cumulative numbers over a broader time range. Alarming as the year-to-year decreases have been, I am quite sure that if one looks at the enrollment drop since President Wynes took office, the figures must be appalling.

As has been the standard under President Wynes' leadership (or lack thereof), it is not enough to attribute these significant enrollment decreases to fewer students overall enrolling in the community colleges metro-wide. The question needs to be asked why Inver's decreases are consistently so large in comparison to some of her sister institutions. In my perspective this is directly attributable to a series of very bad decisions by top administrators who have received no guidance and no direction from President Wynes.

Class scheduling is but one example of why I believe numbers have dropped. Despite being told by the faculty members who know students' lives and work/life challenges best that many

students would choose other institutions which offered more appealing class schedules, the attitude from administration seemed to be that student class schedule preferences did not matter. Scheduling would be done based on what works best for the institution rather than what works best for students. Obviously, as a result, many students voted with their feet and went elsewhere.

I am particularly disheartened over the fact that President Wynes and those he has chosen to run the college appear to lack a true understanding of the challenges in the lives of many of Inver's students. Many students are coming to Inver's doorstep with messy lives—childcare problems, work conflicts, lack of financial resources, mental health issues, poor past school performance, disability issues, etc. Yet, despite the fact that more and more students have more and more complex needs, decisions from the top have replaced true trained counselors with academic advisors. There is a huge difference between merely assisting students in choosing courses that will fulfill degree requirements and counseling students so that they can handle their individual life challenges and be successful students at the same time. I sincerely believe that this change to ever more rely on academic advisors instead of counselors has contributed to declining enrollments. All too many students are not receiving the kind of intensive help they require in order to be successful students, so they quit or don't complete classes or don't re-enroll.

There are numerous other examples I can think of that indicate that this college needs a change of top leadership if it is to thrive and once again become a college that proves to students this is a good place to study and to employees that this is a good place to work, but I will stop now.

I loved my students, and looked forward to working with them every day (well most of the time anyway). I used to love teaching at Inver, but by the time I retired I was happy to be able to get out of a workplace with such low employee morale and where only lip service was given to the idea that faculty and other employees have valued expertise and ideas. I am sad that this was the case, but those are my feelings.

I care so strongly about this issue that I am writing this from Cambodia and taking time out of a trip to communicate my concerns.

Julie Stenberg

Retired Reading Faculty