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OCTOBER 6, 2004

# Wilbur Wright College

One of the City Colleges of Chicago

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Address to Board of Trustees October Meeting  
Wednesday, October 6, 2004

Greetings, Chairman Tyree, Chancellor Watson, members of the Board, Officers of the District and all others present.

Committee A and Faculty Council met in September and faculty raised a number of issues concerning curriculum and shared governance, but I was asked to wait before I addressed the Board on some of those issues.

Instead, what I'd like to discuss today is, I think, a general misconception about the kind of schedule that community college instructors have. Some might argue that a community college instructor has an extraordinarily wonderful life: we could take our summers off (without pay, of course) and at most we teach only fifteen hours a week during the school year and the rest of the time we eat bonbons by the pool.

The reality is somewhat different. Let's take a hypothetical instructor, a fulltime humanities instructor who teaches fifteen contact hours. For the City Colleges, this means that this instructor could have between thirty-five and thirty-nine students per class in five classes; this is an instructor who is trying to teach from 175 to 195 students in a semester. (And in my department, these are not unusual numbers.)

The most recent research on best practices suggests that rather than one or two large projects, students are more engaged, do better academically, and have greater learning outcomes if their instructors require a number of smaller, scaffolded assignments over the course of the semester. (Here I would point you to Richard Light's book *Making the Most of College*.) So let's say that this instructor, following the best practices model, assigns some writing exercise, short project or group assignment each week; let's say that the instructor spends only ten minutes on each student's work, which is really not much time. That comes out to about six hours of assessment per class per week or about thirty hours of work for just that one assignment in all of the classes. Minimally that is a forty-five hour work week.

But teaching is not like going to the office and churning out projects; it is more complex and closer to what a successful trial lawyer must do. Successful trial lawyers do not enter

the courtroom naked in terms of preparation; they and their associates must meticulously prepare their cases, their witnesses, their arguments, and their clients. Without preparation, they will surely fail even if they are veteran lawyers who have many years of experience under their belts. So too with community college instructors. With our student populations, we cannot afford to enter the classroom without extensive and constant preparation both in our fields of expertise and in areas of pedagogy. This preparation takes time and creativity and intellectual space that we really only get during the summer. And we don't have associates, paralegals, and the massive support staff that many trial lawyers have.

So what haven't I covered: departmental and district wide meetings, paperwork, which includes attendance records and grade sheets, the seven hours of office availability, and the new technologically enhances 24/7 availability of instructors via email. How about the emotionally distraught student sitting in our office whose relatives died in the recent hurricanes in Florida; or the student whose brother beats him because of issues of sexuality and he can't get his papers in on time; or the student who is called to war two weeks before the end of the semester? All are scared and all are crying in your office.

We faculty often feel at the end of the semester as though we have completed a triathlon since we are asked to mentor our younger colleagues and to teach our students, to keep up with the research in our fields (with, I might add, minimal institutional support), and to help lead the District in new and innovative ways.

So let me add this up. I teach my five classes for fifteen hours. I have one assignment a week for which I spend ten minutes for each student in assessing the work for a total of thirty plus hours. I have seven hours of office time. I have one meeting of, say, an hour and a half. I take an hour for each class to prepare, for a total of five hours. This is a sixty hour work week.

Granted that not every instructor assigns something every week, but it is in the best interests of our students to do so. And we could multitask by grading during our office hours, but it would not help students to ignore them so that we could grade. And we could, and some do, abandon committees, but that too is to the detriment of the District and to the students to abdicate our institutional responsibilities. And we could come to class unprepared and unmotivated, but that again only hurts our students.

Moreover, most instructors do much more than the minimum that I've outlined above. Most instructors spend considerably more than ten minutes on each assignment; we are

meticulous about being explicit on paper as well as in person with our students about revisions, grading policies, and improvements. Even the most experienced of us need more than five hours a week to prepare for courses if by preparation we mean rooting out the best articles, composing open-ended but challenging questions, and keeping up with our disciplines, not to mention the mundane collation of handouts and presentations. We need time to construct appropriate exams and stimulating assignments. Many of us have more than one meeting a week. This is a light week for me, for instance: I only have three meetings and none in Springfield. In short, best practices in learning demands time and space to think and to implement change.

Why have I counted the hours and outlined the tasks of a community college instructor? It is the faculty who shoulder the burdens of the District, the poorly prepared students, the inadequate funding, the demands of ICCB and the four year institutions. And we are angry when we are asked to do more, more classes, more students, more paperwork, because the people who suffer the most from these demands are our students. Not us, our students.

This concludes my report.

Respectfully submitted,

Polly Hoover  
President of Faculty Council of the City Colleges of Chicago