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SEPTEMBER 9, 2004

# Wilbur Wright College

One of the City Colleges of Chicago

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Address to Board of Trustees July Meeting  
Thursday, September 9th, 2004

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

Let me first thank the Board of Trustees for their thoughtful gift of the greenery; it has a prominent position in my kitchen now

The retreat for the members of the Faculty Council of the City Colleges of Chicago sponsored by District Office was a wonderful beginning to the new school year. I heard from many of the members that the opportunity to learn about new initiatives such as the changes to the nursing program was a great idea. And although there are some differences about specific changes and the authority to initiate changes, there was universal agreement that the dialogue between the faculty and District Office should be encouraged and continued, and we already are making plans for another retreat for January.

Now let me turn to an issue that has a number of faculty very angry and has ramifications for a number of issues concerned with academic freedom, namely, the determination of the qualifications for adjunct faculty. District Office has decided to oversee and to approve the credentials for all adjuncts in the District, so that, for instance, the chair of the department might hire someone, but that individual is not official until District Office also approves the individual (and, of course, the course does run). Let me reiterate that no faculty member wants an instructor in the classroom who is not highly qualified to teach the subject for which he has been hired. But the problem arises about what constitutes highly qualified and who can best judge the credentials for qualification?

Let me be clear here: I think, and most faculty think, that it is a really bad idea for District Office to decide qualifications for teaching for a number of reasons. I'm going to use the area of Humanities as my main example because I know it well and it also poses a number of challenges that illustrate the problems with this approach. According to the "Teaching Credentials General Rules" that the department chairs received, to teach humanities an adjunct must minimally have either a Master of Arts degree with comparative coursework or a Masters of Fine Arts (that is, a studio arts degree), both

require two years of course work. Unlike some other fields on the list, there is no indication in what area the MA/MFA should be. I will discuss the problems with this standard for assessing credentials and the problems for academic freedom in allowing District Office to determine qualifications in a moment.

But first I want to step back here and give you a context for what we're asking the adjuncts to teach. The courses that most of the adjuncts are asked to teach across the District are interdisciplinary humanities courses which incorporate philosophy, art history, literature, and music and fulfill one of the humanities general education requirements for transfer. These are some of the broadest courses in terms of material across the District. And, if our main goal as humanities professors were only articulation with four-year institutions, these courses would be failures because they are Dr. Doolittle Push-me/Pull-you animals: not philosophy, not art history, not literature, and not music but a composite animal of intertwined areas. If a student does not complete the entire general education packet, Humanities 123, 201, and 202 are very hard to transfer because none of the four-year institutions know with which department the courses should rest. Let me hasten to add that articulation, though important, is not the main goal of these courses and we've fought very hard to continue to offer these courses because of the long-range merits of these courses for our students.

One of the reasons that these courses are so difficult to articulate is the changing face of programs within the humanities. With one exception that I will discuss, there is no such thing as a Masters or Doctorate in interdisciplinary humanities. Humanities is an umbrella term for a variety of fields and some fields, most notably history, claim a position in the discipline of the social sciences and the humanities. The exception is a Master of Arts Program in the Humanities from the University of Chicago and a Doctorate in Philosophy from the Committee in Social Thought, also from the University of Chicago. Both of these programs are peculiar to the University of Chicago and are remnants of an earlier era of crossing disciplines. The University of Chicago used to have two other interdisciplinary programs in humanities, Ideas and Methods (which also spilled over into the social sciences) and the History of Culture, but those committees have both been closed. The reason for this is that humanities graduate programs reflect the increased specialization of the individual fields and even the job market. Graduates from Social Thought aren't hired by schools with interdisciplinary programs but by schools with traditional programs that want to expand their offerings. Moreover, if you look at the CVs of the individuals with the MA in Humanities from the University of Chicago, as I have, their specialization is primarily a hodge podge of various courses in the humanities and does not reflect true interdisciplinary work. Interdisciplinary work is

in the footnotes of the dissertation or articles and not in the transcripts. Degrees in interdisciplinary areas are not the way the fields are moving. So to ask for this kind of degree is to ask for the least qualified, not most qualified, individuals. It is to look at the areas of humanities from the wrong end of the telescope: not where humanities is going, but where it has been. So that's one problem.

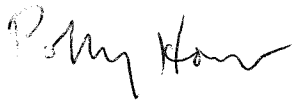
A larger problem, and one that affects all the disciplines, is the question of who is best qualified to assess credentials. I'd argue, as most of my colleagues would, that someone in the field is better qualified to determine the nature and nuance of the credentials and to assess the needs of the department than an administrator who may know some things about the field but not with the depth and experience of the faculty. No one can know everything, but it makes sense that individuals, who have spent at least two years of coursework in their disciplines (and most of the chairs in humanities, for instance, have doctorates so it is upwards of seven to ten years preparing for this career), and who continue to read and to engage with their areas of expertise, perhaps through publications, presentations or seminars, are more knowledgeable about their particular areas and about the disciplines in general than someone who does not participate in the contentious and challenging community of the larger academic world. Let me give you a somewhat analogous situation. Let's say your foot hurt. You would consult a doctor whose specialty was feet, not the administrator of the hospital and not the dermatologist, for example. We must trust our chairs to make informed judgments about the credentials of the applicants and not rely on administrators for this important work.

Let me reiterate the ramifications of this policy. First, the time element: this oversight by District Office makes it very difficult to hire adjuncts quickly for courses that must be opened at the last minute. Second, qualified individuals who don't meet the narrow definition of qualifications are dismissed because those who judge don't really understand the disciplinary implications of the field and of the courses. The individuals may be qualified because of long teaching experience in the area, presentations or publications in research areas outside their original degree, or a degree that, read by the professional, has interdisciplinary aspects. I can give you examples of all of these problems, which have already arisen, but in the interest of time, I won't. Third, and probably the biggest irritation, is that the faculty know what we are about and we understand that disciplines and disciplinary knowledge change and grow and we, and not District Office, can best assess people to teach in this informed way.

Finally, this policy also has ramifications for other areas that I haven't discussed here, such as post-tenure review, hiring of new full-time faculty, and the assignment of courses to faculty, but I'm sure that we'll revisit these issues this year.

This concludes my report.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Polly Hoover".

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