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CONTROVERSY

Yes, We Run Our College Like a Business

by: Dr. Scott D. Miller, President, Wesley College, Dover, Delaware

A college or university can apply business practices to its operation

As fiscal uncertainty approaches, higher education can be well served by closely reviewing and adopting effective business practices. "Heresy!" some academicians say; "Higher education is not a business, and can only be compromised by such invidious comparisons." But higher education can forge a salutary relationship between the traditions of the academic and tested business designs. A college or university can apply business practices to its operation.

For years, this unexamined argument against operating like a business has fostered largely inefficient, wasteful, and significantly less effective practices in our colleges and universities. For instance, technology is often compartmentalized in Academics, Finance and Administration, Student Affairs, and Advancement, or loosely coordinated under a separate line officer who is more of an inventory-keeper and repairperson than an accountable administrator. And, in strategic planning, many institutions have little more than wish lists. What is desirable are good business plans with timelines, estimated costs, and accountable persons.

As a college president, I see my role as aligning the essential functions of **Wesley College** in ways that are efficiently consistent and effective for the educational mission of our institution. This means thoughtfully reviewing our organization and ensuring that management assignments are made in line with the ability and role of each officer. We must place academics under Academic Affairs; most administration and accounting areas under Finance and Administration; students under Student Affairs; and fundraising, public relations, and alumni under Advancement.

When I arrived at Wesley in 1997, the Board of Trustees and I launched a comprehensive Institutional Review (using a prominent group of national experts) that examined all aspects of campus operations and helped craft our agenda for the 21st century. Since then, we have instituted a number of business practices unheard of in many institutions of higher education. We have outsourced payroll services, portions of information technology, physical plant maintenance, campus safety/security, bookstore operations, food services, and financial aid services. We also use the Interim Registry of College and University Presidents for transitional executive assistance.

One controversial issue that has continued to surface over the years is the recognition and rewarding of meritorious faculty service. Unlike the business world, the academy generally considers the evaluation of faculty as too difficult to be performed validly and fairly; the tendency is to lean towards a uniform allocation of salary increases. In spite of this, and in an effort to encourage and recognize differences in faculty performance, beginning next fall at Wesley, a supplemental \$1,000 Presidential Stipend will be added to the base salaries of selected faculty members for outstanding educational service. Recommendations for recipients will be requested from the academic deans. At the same time, the faculty is being urged to develop an objective evaluation system, which will become the basis for future salary rewards for exceptional professional/educational service.



We have made generous use of consultants to build enrollment, develop and expand advancement, create and implement a 10-year campuswide master plan, help with new board member orientation and leadership development, institute corrective maintenance assessment, and standardize branding. And, beginning this fall, we will provide privatized housing for students in a new apartment-style residence hall.

We have complemented outsource business strategies with educational partnerships throughout Dover and Delaware. Our Center for Adult Studies is a partnership with another institution. Wesley classes are offered to military personnel and their families at the Dover Air Force Base. Classes for clergy and lay leaders from our sponsoring denomination are offered on campus in collaboration with two seminaries. The Wesley/YMCA Addiction Resource Center provides education and counseling to over 200 campus and community members annually. The Wesley Boys and Girls Club serves 500 school-age children (mostly with single parents and from low-income households). The Campus Community School, the first publicly funded charter school on a private college campus, operates at maximum enrollment of 300 students in grades one through eight. And the Campus Community High School opened in fall 2002 with 240 students.

A business approach has guided Wesley College without endangering its academic nature, and enabling it to view our situation through the twin lenses of the two primary canons of American colleges and universities, The AAUP 1940 Statement on Academic Freedom and Tenure and The 1966 Statement on Governance of Colleges and Universities. From this unique perspective, we conduct our policies and practices according to the best business principles, more than doubling enrollment in five years, and tripling full-time enrollment. We have tripled our budget, increased SAT scores of incoming freshmen by 132 points, and raised our retention rate by 30+ points, to 90 percent. Working within the sometimes uneasy balance of the academy and business, we have provided the resources to focus on our expected tasks of teaching, research, and public service.

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