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To: [REDACTED]
Subject: Re: technical difficulties
From: [REDACTED]
Date: Wed, 05 Sep 2007 16:23:31 -0600

Message from the Dean

One can rely on the fact that the beginning of term is not without its share of bumps and hiccups. Extraordinary circumstances can expand the dimensions of the bumps and the intensity of the hiccups. The beginning of this term is experiencing such unusual difficulties in the area of technology support, particularly for classroom equipment. These difficulties can be very frustrating, particularly so given the context and timing - i.e. meeting new classes. Malfunctioning equipment doesn't help to create an impression of competence and confidence. These difficulties ought not to have happened and I very much regret that they did. I am, however, glad that these difficulties have been brought to light so that remedies can be instituted.

It is a common habit of mind to attempt to explain the reasons for such extraordinary experiences. In this case there are, I think, two factors which go a very long way to explaining the recent experience: the extremely intense, perhaps too intense, schedule for occupation of the Robbins building; the new system for the assignment of work to the two A&S computer techs. I don't doubt that others could add factors.

Another most attractive habit of mind seeks solutions for difficulties and problems. In this circumstance it would seem reasonable to ask several questions: how long will these difficulties last; what steps are being taken to resolve them; will they be repeated? The objective in posing such questions is to encourage remedies and inform planning, should adjustments be necessary.

Answers to these questions are important. The duration of the current scale of difficulties will be very short. The principal factors behind the difficulties are being resolved: the intensity of work associated with moving into the Robbins is quickly reducing; improvement of the new system of work distribution is already underway. Problems will obviously always occur, but, with the benefit of hindsight, one could say that the scale of the difficulties might have been reduced if the coincidence of the Robbins move and the implementation of a new system

for the distribution of work had been avoided. I would be foolish to say that history provides a ready source of lessons for current plans, but, if I may, I'll distinguish between history and hindsight.

I'll conclude by referring to yet another habit of mind: the making of allowances, an action which sometimes springs from the realization that with the measure we use, so shall we be measured. Let me put my point in another way. May I solicit your understanding and forbearance while we move forward?

Again, thank you for bringing these difficulties to my attention and, thus, giving me the chance to respond.

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To: [REDACTED]
Subject: Technologies at MacEwan...
From: [REDACTED]
Date: Thu, 06 Sep 2007 09:43:59 -0600
Cc: PatersonWeirJ@macewan.ca, mays@MacEwan.ca

All

So, we have at least two chronic issues:

- ITS fails to provide timely classroom support, fails to ensure upgrades actually work (failed to replace remotes, for example), fails to inform instructional staff of changes to classroom technology (removal of overhead projectors, for example), and fails to fix problems reported months ago (5-158, for example). (These are chronic, NOT just related to the Robbins Center opening.)
- students register in courses without the pre-requisites.

And our administrators again ask us to stick our heads in the sand instead of addressing the real issues.

Regarding ITS: the problems identified above and the plethora of emails I received identifying technology problems are an embarrassment to the college, the instructors, and the students. These problems DIRECTLY affects student learning: valuable class time is wasted, the students' first impression of the instructor is [greatly] diminished as the instructor tries to get things to work, and the students impression of the institution is diminished as they find technology issues in classroom after classroom. If Academic Council is not the proper venue for these chronic problems directly affecting student learning, WHAT IS?

Regarding registration: I have brought up the prerequisite checking issue several time at Academic Council and once with the Registrar. I received a copy of the discussion paper presented to ALT (12 April 2006) listing reasons why pre-requisite checking isn't a good idea AND I DISAGREE with many of the points. For those privileged to have a copy of the discussion paper, reread the paper considering the following:

- is the point relevant given that we currently do not check prerequisites at all?
- does the point benefit the marginal student who possibly shouldn't

be in the course or the upper student who wants to get into the course.

Since I am on a rant, here is another idea that I recently proposed but was advised that, to go anywhere, institutional buy-in was necessary: waitlists. Waitlisting students wanting to get into a course. Benefits:

- If a waitlist reaches 30+ students, another section can be opened up at the same time and those waitlisted students automatically enrolled in the new section.
- Currently, when a student drops, the space remains unfilled until some lucky person checks, finds space available, and registers. With a waitlist, the first person on the waitlist is automatically enrolled into the course. A much fairer process.
- There is always attrition during the first week. And missing the first week is detrimental to learning. With waitlists, the first three or so persons on the waitlist can be encouraged to attend class from the beginning. When someone drops, they are automatically enrolled and haven't missed any of the material!
- YES, our registration system (Colleague) has the capability to handle waitlists.

Finally, when someone says something can't be done technologically, take that with a grain of salt. Just because they don't know how, doesn't mean it can't be done. This too is a chronic problem at MacEwan.

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
Chemistry, Grant MacEwan College
[REDACTED] 10700-104 Avenue
Edmonton, AB T5J 4S2
[REDACTED]

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To: [REDACTED]
Subject: Re: Technologies at MacEwan...
From: [REDACTED]
Date: Thu, 06 Sep 2007 09:51:14 -0600

[REDACTED]

Would it be possible for you to send me a copy of the ALT discussion paper re: prerequisites? I'm quite curious about it, and the prerequisite issue has become a nightmare up in this neck of the woods!

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]
Chair, [REDACTED]
Grant MacEwan College

Re: Technologies at MacEwan...

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To: [REDACTED]

Subject: Re: Technologies at MacEwan...

From: [REDACTED]

Date: Thu, 06 Sep 2007 11:23:15 -0600

great rant on all issues

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Department of Psychology

Grant MacEwan College

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To: [REDACTED]
Subject: Re: Technologies at MacEwan...
From: [REDACTED]
Date: Thu, 06 Sep 2007 12:47:30 -0600

[REDACTED],

I have no idea WHY I received this email, but I do agree. But you haven't whined about students not getting the books on time for class yet.... I have taught at MSC for several years, and my students have not yet been able to get the books for classes. Maybe we should LOBBY to start in the second week of September?

As well, ITS really bugs me; I, and students, have had numerous problems with them. Why not temporarily hire more people during the busy times... Or use more hours. And I remember a problem with 5-158 when I used it...

Grumpy English instructor..

[REDACTED]

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To: [REDACTED]
Subject: Re: Technologies at MacEwan...
From: [REDACTED]
Date: Thu, 06 Sep 2007 12:59:29 -0600

Hi [REDACTED],

Just like to say bravo and thanks for the way you so clearly identified the problems you spoke of and which most instructors have faced. Hopefully, some constructive action directed at solving the problems will be forthcoming immediately.

Thanks

[REDACTED]
Psychology

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To: [REDACTED]
Subject: Re: Technologies at MacEwan...
From: [REDACTED]
Date: Fri, 07 Sep 2007 09:57:52 -0600

More. I love it.
Diane and I are currently working on a position paper for Term Issues.
Hope your summer was bloody fantastic - mine was just bloody.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Anthropology Instructor
Grant MacEwan College

Subject: Technical difficulties among other things
From: "David Higgins" <HigginsD@macewan.ca>
Date: Fri, 07 Sep 2007 16:16:02 -0600

Hello,

First, I must apologize for adding to your list of e-mails and I suggest that, if the topic is of no interest to you, hit delete. I would not have written further* on this topic except for the recent dissemination of some misunderstandings and misconceptions about IT, prerequisites and waitlists. (*The reference is to my memo of Weds. on the topic of tech. problems which your chair forwarded to you.)

Chronic problems with classroom technology are clearly most undesirable, as are immediate and singular ones. The identification of a problem and the determination of its nature are obviously critical steps to the provision of a remedy. I'm given to understand that work for the delineation and presentation (most appropriately at Technology Council) of the chronic 'slippage' is underway by faculty members. I am fully confident that IT will work to resolve problems – indeed work is well underway. Should you encounter an issue and consider it sufficiently important, don't hesitate to e-mail Lachell Leibel with a copy to John McGrath.

Prerequisites are of course a crucial component of sequencing progression between courses and not to be taken lightly. The possibility of requiring the presentation of prerequisites at the time of registration is being explored. Exploration obviously involves the consideration of contrary indications and perspectives. The presentation of a contrary view should not, in this case, be understood as a halt.

Waitlists have their place. Implementing waitlists is a much bigger matter than simply enabling a capability within the registration system. When classroom space is in short supply, scheduling a reserve room for a waitlist is not feasible. Students will of course act to maximize their opportunities in any registration system. Waitlists can be used to achieve ends not intended. For example, if the purpose is to maximize access to spaces rather than obtaining the optimal schedule, what would be the relationship allowed between actual registrations and being on a waitlist? How many waitlists could a registrant occupy? The programs in the Faculty have in fact considered the issues with care and concluded that waitlists are not beneficial for their purposes.

Finally, I'd like to clarify my approach to sand at work: when you see it, have nothing to do with it – it only gets in your eyes. Certainly don't put your head in it. I'd also like to assure you that on this topic at this time you've heard the last from me.

David Higgins, D.Phil.,
Dean
Arts and Science