

Size limits administrative dialogue

By M. LEE UPCRAFT
Director of Residential Life

Real, honest to goodness, effective, no-nonsense communication occurs when people, in face to face contact with one another, share their important thoughts and feelings, and are listened to in turn.

Understanding and respect are natural outcomes of such communication, although honest differences may remain. It is a model of communication that should characterize student-administration communication, right?

WRONG! It is a myth. It is a naive model, given a large university. It hasn't worked, it doesn't work, and it never will.

I know because, as a student leader, I experienced the frustration of trying to use this model to communicate with the administration; and as an administrator, I experience many of the same frustrations in using this model to communicate with students.

Sheer numbers of students, limited time, complexity of issues, ignorance, apathy and indecisiveness all contribute to the problem.

How does one administrator, responsible for 12,000 residence halls students, really know what is on their minds? How does the president of this university know

what is on the minds of 32,000 students at University Park, not to mention another 20,000 at our branch campuses?

I don't know of any so-called "upper level" administrator who is not willing, from Dr. Oswald on down, to spend time communicating with students.

Likewise, I don't know of any student leader who has been unable to get someone in the upper administration to sit down and talk about a student concern. Both sides are willing, both sides are capable, but somehow the problem remains and it doesn't seem to be anyone's fault.

Sometimes a problem is labeled a communication problem when it isn't. For example, during the recent library crisis, I heard many students complaining that the administration wasn't really listening to students.

On the contrary, I know of no administrators involved in this dispute that didn't understand exactly what students were saying. And students clearly understood what the administration was saying.

A communication problem? On the contrary, the communication was excellent; it was just that students didn't like what was being communicated.

Sometimes a problem in communication is created by the media, particularly The Daily Collegian. Whatever

your opinion of this newspaper, you must admit that it is read, and read carefully by administrators and students.

Impressions are created, directly or indirectly, intentionally or unintentionally, that can inhibit or facilitate student-administration communication. It is a huge responsibility, and one that should not be taken lightly.

I may have to spend a considerable amount of time in any given day correcting an erroneous impression created by the Collegian, or I may occasionally thank God that the Collegian got it right, and formed an effective communication link with students.

In the final analysis, if I am to make effective decisions as an administrator, I must attack the communication problem on all fronts. I must expand my interpersonal contacts with students, recognizing that I am but one person among 32,000.

I must insist that those who work for me also have a commitment to listen to and advocate for students. I must work with student leaders who purport to represent student views and listen to their concerns.

I must continue to develop and expand all mechanisms of communication, both formal and informal. I hope, given the limitations identified above, that communication is accomplished.

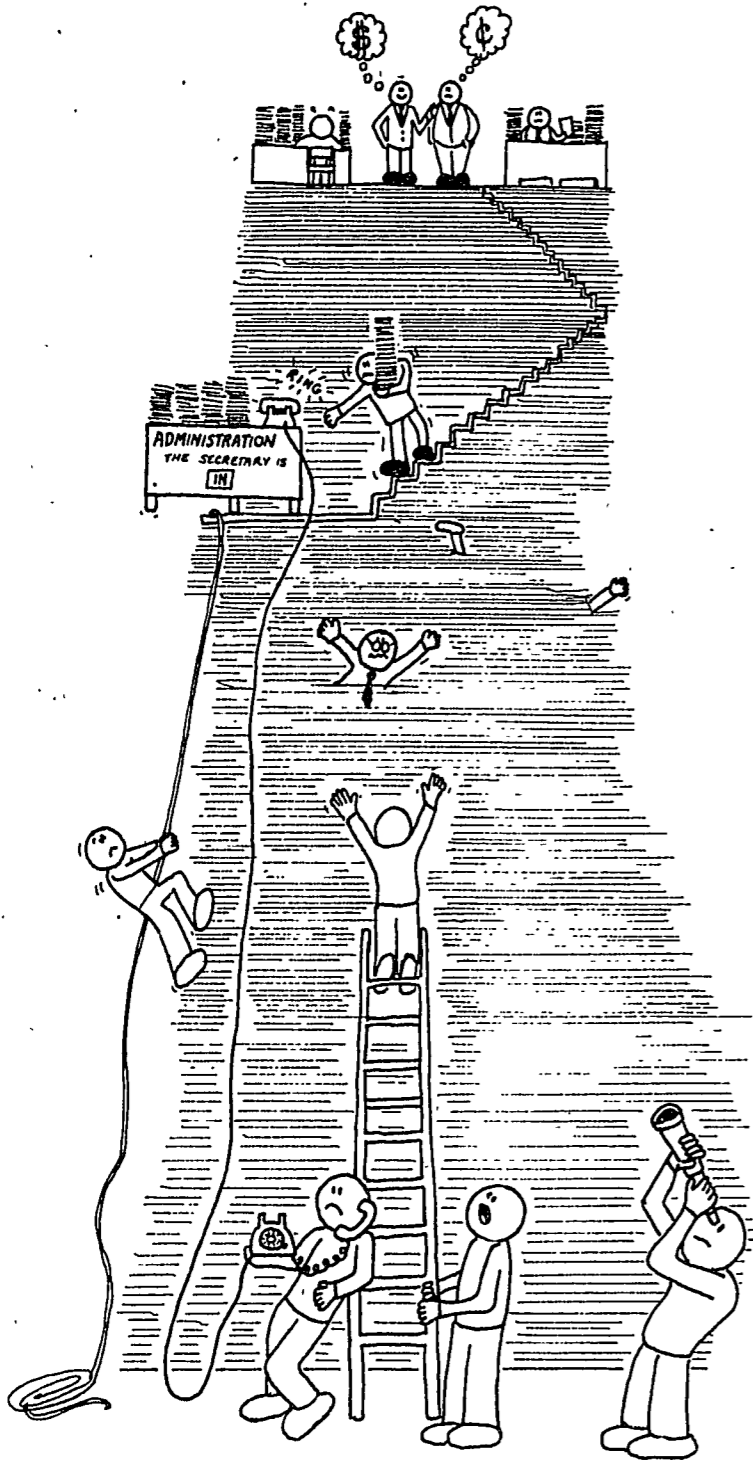


Illustration by Tom DeSanto

Secretary helps unravel Old Main ropes

By KAREN E. EGOLF
Daily Collegian Staff Writer

Have you ever tried to see an administrator and failed?

After explaining your problem to the secretary, she sent you somewhere else.

Or, after calling his office a dozen times, the secretary said she would have Dr. So and So return your call. And he never did.

Part of the problem is the administrators' tight schedules, but many times the students are also at fault, Gloria Decker, secretary to Robert Dunham, vice president for Undergraduate Studies, said.

"If the student knew a little bit more about who he should see at the University, a lot of times he wouldn't have to come to the vice president's office," she said. "I don't think Dr. Dunham's ever refused to see a student."

Many times students' problems could be solved in the students' colleges, she said.

"At most, 10 to 15 per cent that come here really need to see the vice president," Decker said.

That figure includes all students who have academic reasons for seeing the vice president. Many Journalism and Speech 200 students also request to speak to Dunham, she said.

She said the staff first tries to determine whether the student is at the right office. Then she asks if he has talked to the dean of his college about the problem.

"If a student would learn to go there first, he wouldn't need to come to the administration," she said, adding that 90 per cent of the time the problem should be handled in the student's college.

If the student has gone through all the channels, Decker said she tries to schedule an interview with the vice president the same day that the student comes to the office or at the earliest possible time.

"Sometimes he's booked solidly from

eight o'clock to the evening a couple weeks in advance," she said. "The kids have to realize that it isn't always possible to walk right in."

Many times when the students do not get to see the administrator, it is the students' fault, not the administrator's, she said. "The students try to change appointments or do not know exactly what they want to discuss with the vice president."

She said another problem is created because students do not realize how busy the administrators are. Dunham, for example, makes budget decisions, handles admissions scheduling, course cards, textbook lists and up to 900 course changes per term, and attends "tons" of meetings, among other responsibilities.

Many times a secretary can help the student as much as the dean can, she said. The secretaries know where to refer students and can make recommendations about what procedures to follow.

A new policies and procedures manual was distributed to appropriate administrative offices, including every dean's office, this year, she said. The manual tells administrators where students can go for help for specific problems and what procedures they should follow.

Secretaries can be another hindrance for students rather than a help, she said.

"Sometimes they get turned off by the secretary, and the secretary hasn't checked out what the student needs," Decker said.

The student should first define his problem and then take it to the proper person, usually in his college. This could solve the problems that students face when trying to see a member of the administration, she said.

"If they'd go to the dean's office, a lot could be explained to them before they come here," she said. "I think they're very willing to see a student if his reason is legitimate for seeing them."

Barriers fall as executives, students build bridges

By STANLEY F. PAULSON
Dean, College of the Liberal Arts

It may be a student view that deans and other administrators are inaccessible, formidable, and even like it that way. My view is that this dean is accessible, easy to talk to and ready to remove any supposed barrier that exists.

The problem, I suspect, is in the size and complexity of this academic city. How does a dean communicate with 5,000 students in Liberal Arts or with him on matters of mutual concern?

I believe most students want to communicate with those who most directly affect them in their undergraduate lives and, alas, the dean is not probably the highest on that list. Professors, departmental and college advisers are closer to student times of decision.

What we have tried to do in the College of the Liberal Arts, therefore, is to develop opportunities for students to work with those who most affect them. As a result we have student organizations in some 17 departments providing for mutual consideration of areas of academic concentration.

For students with broader college

interests, we have 22 student representatives working with faculty members on college committees covering virtually every aspect of college operations.

The Liberal Arts Student Council deals with issues of student concern on a college-wide level, and its officers are included in the advisory groups of the college. Randy Albright, president of the council, and other officers are invited to meet with me, members of the dean's staff and all of the department heads of the college in our bi-weekly meetings, to be informed of all college developments and to present student views regarding them.

Last week, for example, members of my staff and myself met with 30 students of the council to discuss library hours, an experimental course the students wish to see established, course evaluations and council relationships with students on commonwealth campuses. The council president and I meet each group of incoming students to Liberal Arts to invite their participation in the council and in other College affairs which meet their own interests.

Because we are in agreement that career opportunities for Liberal Arts

students are matters of deep concern within the college, students, faculty and administration cooperate in career counseling forums and in a special Career Day when Liberal Arts alumni from many different fields come to campus to provide advice and assistance to those looking forward to job opportunities after graduation.

We think we are organized to provide every student a chance to meet and talk with faculty and administrators about what is on their minds. That doesn't mean it happens; only those students who take the initiative to make and keep appointments, to attend meetings and to follow up on referrals will ever believe that it really works.

Developing such personal initiative is one of the most important learning experiences college — or life — can provide.

Moreover, students will continue to have an important role in shaping the development of education now and in the future as they have in the past. Perhaps we should remind ourselves in the current concern with the library, that students in American colleges in the last century were instrumental in helping to

build up college and university libraries.

Historian William Rudolph points out that in the 1830s, student literary societies had broader and better libraries of their own than the university or college libraries. As a result of their conviction that institutions must take

responsibility for central libraries, the development of the great intellectual resources the libraries now represent was greatly accelerated.

Today, more than ever, when the University has less financial resources, it is especially important that

students, faculty and administrators work together to maintain and improve the quality of academic life.

We may not be able to do things in the same way, but only a lack of creative planning and motivation can keep us from doing better.

Open channels 'turn on' effectiveness

By DAVID W. ALLEN
President, Black Caucus

When thinking of the Penn State administrative structure, one pictures a giant, bureaucratic, red-tape-wrapped, lunch-box-shaped machine with many controls and levers that have little or no meaning or purpose.

I particularly recall certain experiences like the "Boucke-Shields shuffles," or the proverbial one-liner, "You must have your I.D. card."

For many students, the administrative body is like an unseen force that moves students, money and credits in mysterious ways. There is no contact between the student and the people for whom he pays tuition for salaries. The administration is supposed to be here to ensure that college life is a positive experience.

There happens to be a fault in a concept of fundamental economics. I believe it might be readily assumed that administrators are paid by pennies from heaven.

In actuality, all administrators and some faculty are

economically supported directly by students. Thus comes the presumption that the Penn State administrative body, on all levels, would be partial to students' and-or their parents' concerns. Possibly if this little point of fact was reemphasized, there might be fewer hassles for students in general.

Yet, students, there is also a slight error in our thinking. The administration can be penetrated and dealt with on a personal level. Each and every administrator, office and staff person belongs to the human race, most understand basic English, and all are not totally ignorant of student problems.

Practically all major administrators and their specific responsibilities can be found by contacting an RA, USG, a knowledgeable old-head or by dialing 116. Most have offices with doors and phones.

The easiest way to make the administration effective is to utilize it. Students, be forceful — remember who is the boss. This type of revolutionary thinking is apt to make the administrative system more effective than more pay increases, computer print-outs and lunch breaks.

Paper works for output, but...

Information flow resembles drip

By BOB FRICK
Daily Collegian Staff Writer

Faculty-Administration

Before students can give responsible input into the administration, they first must have complete, accurate output on the administration's actions — output that is provided, in part, by The Daily Collegian.

It is the Collegian's relationship with the administration, then, that largely determines the quantity and quality of news about the administration that the University community receives.

The level of cooperation between the Penn State bureaucracy and the student newspaper varies from nonexistent, to begrudging, to very open and candid.

To a journalist, of course, there seems to be too many in the former and not enough in the latter categories.

Probably the greatest hindrance to reporters is a general directive to staff and administrators that prohibits them from answering even the most simple questions without clearance from some higher source.

One classic example of this happened about a month ago after a power blackout on campus. A Collegian reporter called the Maintenance and Operations office for information. The conversation went something like this:

Reporter: I'd like some information on the power failure that occurred today.

Office: That data won't be released until tomorrow.

Reporter: This is for tomorrow's paper, is there someone else I could call? I really need it tonight.

Office: No, I'm sorry, this is the only office with that data.

Reporter: You mean you have the information but you won't give it out?

Office: Can't.

Reporter: I'm sorry, can't.

This dilemma was remedied by a call to an official in the University's Office of Public Information who simply ordered M&O to release the information. It was released.

Considering Penn State's public information department's responsibility for maintaining a good image of the University, they are helpful not only in opening channels for simple stories, but even controversial ones occasionally.

Some important information which students have an obligation to know because of its impact on the health of this institution financially, and therefore academically, is not released.

University President John W. Oswald told reporters at the last Board of Trustees meeting that the University's finance people had contingency plans for cutbacks in the University and tuition increases according to the amount Penn State gets from the state.

The Collegian was not given the specifics of those contingency plans or the names of the banks Penn State has borrowed from — over \$27 million to date — to keep the institution running. Therefore, no credit ratings could be obtained from those banks.

Perhaps the most frustrating, time-consuming hurdle in getting the news from the administration to students is communication by telephone.

In theory, this hunk of technology is designed for person "A" (the reporter) to talk with person "B" (the administrator).

Often the conversation would need to take only a minute or two, just to ask one simple question or get a referral to someone else, but persons "C" through

"Z" (secretaries) don't fit into the theory.

According to secretaries, their bosses are either occupied, or busy. Or, are up to their ears, busy as a bee, have many irons in the fire, on a kick, on the hop, have other fish to fry, etc. Anything but in.

This is not to blame secretaries — they merely follow their bosses' orders. The administrators who can't spare a moment to help keep the student population informed about their University are to blame.

Being "too busy" is not much of an excuse. One administrator, Gail Norris, director of the Planning and Budget office for the University, always seems to have time for reporters, even during this hectic Fall Term with the budget crisis.

There are other Old Main executives who keep a high profile, most notably the new provost, Edward D. Eddy, who has indicated he will act as a pipeline for student input to the administration.

Still, such administrators are few and far between. The pep talk given new reporters who join the faculty-administration beat on the Collegian is not very inspiring; we believe in letting the rookies know just exactly how frustrating dealing with the administration is.

But many still volunteer for the beat and report on the most important issues despite the tedium.

The real question is, even if the information gets in print, what impact will students' reactions to it have?

The University's power system was once described by a University professor as "A command economy with illusions of democracy."



Photo by Ken Kasper