



# The Sentinel

Voice of the ECC Faculty Association  
Local 3791/IFT [www.eccfaculty.org](http://www.eccfaculty.org)  
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## From the President

**We Are Family.** Some of you may remember this song from 1979 originally performed by Sister Sledge and written by Bernard Rodgers and Nile Rodgers. *We Are Family* reached #2 on the Top 40 charts in 1979 and also reached #1 on the R&B charts that same year.

The song has some rather strange lyrics, some of which are unprintable according to the *Sentinel's* standards, but it's rather mild by today's music standards. So, in a **few** cases I've taken some liberties with a few of the lyrics.

"We are family  
I got all my brothers and sisters with me  
We are family  
Get up everybody and sing."

"Living life is fun and we've just begun  
To get our share of the world's delights  
(HIGH!) high hopes we have for the future  
And our goal's in sight  
(WE!) no we don't get depressed  
Here's what we call our golden rule  
Have faith in you and the things you do  
You won't go wrong  
This is our family Jewel."©

We all know that "our family" at ECC disagrees at times. Families get mad at

each other, families have differences of opinions. It would be unwise if we all thought alike on every issue. Family members are unique; no two have the same views about any one subject, and that is the source of our strength. How we handle those differences is how we will decide whether "Living life is fun and we have high hopes for the future and our goal is within sight."

One thing is clear to me: ECC is a family that comes to the aid of its brothers and sisters in times of need. I have been overwhelmed by the support of everyone from ECC on the passing of my husband Thomas. I met Thom at ISU when I was 19, and we married soon after at age 21. Thom was pretty well known around ECC. He served on the CIS Advisory Board as well as the Entrepreneurship Advisory Board. He was a guest speaker for Alpha Beta Gamma as well as International Association of Administrative Professionals. We attended most of the Visiting Chef dinners and Foundation Events. He walked the picket line with us when we went out on strike.

Some of you know we have two daughters: Melissa lives in Baltimore, attending the University of Maryland's Radiation Oncology Research School of Medicine working on her PhD; Denise attends the University of San Francisco working on a master's in business in sport management. The support from the College has been especially important to Melissa and Denise, who are deeply grieving for their father.

So, thanks to all of you, my ECC family. Living life will be fun again; even though I'm not quite ready for singing yet, I have much for which to be thankful. I like this golden rule: "Have faith in you and the things you do; You won't go wrong. This is our family Jewel."

In unity,

Linda

## **Faculty Group Explores Human Resources Issues**

**Dan Kernler**

As a relatively new faculty member at ECC, I notice things that others who have been here longer may not. On more than one occasion, I've made comments about policies, procedures, or just general cultural aspects of ECC that seem illogical. Typically, the answer is something along the lines of "That's just how it is." Often there's nothing wrong with that. If the current policy is that students can register without my knowledge until the first day of the second week, then that's the way it is. I can try to change that, but until any changes are made I can certainly manage to work within that system.

Other times, though, it seems that we as faculty and human beings come to accept the status quo when the status quo is entirely unacceptable. It didn't take long for me to realize that here at ECC, faculty interaction with the Human Resources staff was lacking. We can discuss reasons behind the quality of this interaction – and I will – but there should be no debate that something needs to be done.

You may remember the emails that were sent out about this topic, though I certainly don't blame you if they were lost in the glut of daily messages we seem to receive. After some prodding, Cindy Hutman and Jason Kane were gracious enough to assist me in this project. We collected comments from many of you, and I imagine that the most frequent comment should come as no surprise. Top on everyone's list was the speed of responses to questions. Also high on many lists was the general quality of response. (Read – attitude and tone.) Other topics that were mentioned included record keeping, clearly defined HR procedures, and the search process in general.

When I broached this subject to Roger Spayer, the managing director the Human Resources department, he invited the committee to attend one of his staff meetings. The primary issue on everyone's mind was the timeliness of responses. Jason, Cindy and I made it clear that regardless of the nature of a question and regardless of how busy the HR office is, it is simply unacceptable for a faculty member to wait weeks or even months after repeated

requests before a response is made to a question. Stepping back from the person involved, all parties at the table agreed on that point. When it came to what could be done about the problem, however, we were not able to come to a clear resolution.

Roger acknowledged that there have been times when his staff has not responded as soon as they should. He cited the enormous workload during the fall semester. (Our meeting was on Friday, December 9<sup>th</sup>.) Roger also mentioned that there are many requests that come to him, when in fact someone else should handle the problem. He hoped that the addition of his personal assistant might help in that regard.

Jason pointed out that often it's not that a question takes some time to be answered – we understand when information needs to be looked up – but the greater issue is when our questions are not even acknowledged. Diane Petersen, the associate director of Human Resources, admitted that her inbox fills to the point where earlier messages are simply lost. Both Roger and Diane pledged to do a better job of at least acknowledging our emails, if not immediately answering the question.

We didn't discuss the general tone of responses in detail. More than one email we received mentioned that the tone has improved significantly under Roger's leadership. But this very topic was the impetus for this project, so there is still room for improvement. There is no magic answer to this problem, but we would like to encourage faculty and staff to be respectful of all those they interact with.

The larger issues of HR procedures and searches were simply too much for our small group to discuss. The search process, in particular, is one that clearly needs to be refined. The application process will soon move online, which has the potential of fixing some issues, but there are other, more significant problems with the process. These include, but are certainly not limited to, budgetary issues, applicant privacy, respect for committee members, and timeliness of searches. We strongly feel

they need to be addressed by the college as a whole.

### **So where do we go from here?**

We're hopeful that some positive change will come as a result of this little meeting. It was brought up that most HR staff hear from faculty only when we have a request or complaint, so we encourage all of you to thank them for their time when we get a chance.

### **What faculty can do to help:**

- Check out your own records. If you'd like to see if your transcripts or paperwork have arrived – check yourself. Contact Minnie Carroll, the records specialist, and schedule an appointment to look at your own file.
- Know whom to contact. (See the list below.)
- Keep in mind when a deadline is – response time will be longer if HR is flooded with requests. (Like lane movement questions in January.)
- Visit eNet. Seriously. You'd be surprised how much information is available under the [HR link](#).
- Remember that the person you're communicating with has a list of responsibilities. Your request has to find a place somewhere, and it may not be possible for that place to be on the top of that list.

### **What we feel could improve the process:**

- We'd like to see the creation of email addresses for title in addition to individual. Why shouldn't we be able to email payroll@elgin.edu with a payroll question? Or hr@elgin.edu with a general question that can then be directed to the correct person?
- Create a Frequently Asked Questions page, with information about the most common questions. (Those who used the W-2 option through the Internet may have noted that Kristin Richmond made use of this idea. She also created a

[w2@elgin.edu](mailto:w2@elgin.edu) email address for questions.)

- Make use of software to manage requests – IT staff already use comparable software to help them track installation requests and other calls that come in.
- Make changes. If staff members are unable to answer faculty requests in a timely manner, something needs to be changed. Blame is unimportant. We just need a solution.

#### **Whom should we contact?**

- Personnel file information or changes - e.g. address, tax status, name, etc:  
Minnie Carroll – ext 7450
- Payroll questions – e.g. compensation/contract payments or questions, direct deposit sign-up, payroll deductions/reductions, court-ordered payments, SURS:  
Juline Smith – ext 7996
- Professional expense and health/dental benefits:  
Marianne Cange – ext 7988
- Lane movement:  
Diane Petersen – ext 7125
- Contract, policy, or procedure questions:  
Roger Spayer – ext 7415  
Diane Petersen – ext 7125
- General questions:  
Sally Hodge – ext 7676  
Kathryn Skates – ext 7402
- The complete list can be found on eNet:  
<http://enet.elgin.edu/uploadedFiles/HR%20Contacts.doc>
- Roger also noted that questions about 403(b) plans should be directed to Carole Robertson – ext 7367.

In many respects, the meeting was very positive. I found the HR staff to be very welcoming and understanding. The entire process was an excellent opportunity for the

two sides to share their respective points of view. It's unfortunate that every faculty member doesn't have the same opportunity to meet those with whom we communicate on a routine basis.

On the other hand, promises made at meetings like this one are easy to come by. The true test will be the months and years to come. Will questions get answered a reasonable time frame? Will the search process ever be refined? Will faculty suggestions be adopted, or simply acknowledged, with no action taken?

I feel strongly that our effort – and the willingness of many faculty to share their experiences – was not without purpose. Increasing awareness on both sides has helped. From my own involvement, I'm much more careful now to contact the right person, and I always try to express my gratitude when my questions are answered quickly and accurately. My sincere hope is that *all* parties involved can continue in this effort to improve the relationship.

No organization as large as ECC will ever be perfect, but that doesn't mean that perfection isn't something we can strive for.

## **ECC's HVACR Program Receives National Acclaim**

ECC's Heating, Air Conditioning, and Refrigeration program has, in recent weeks, received national attention.

In early February, it was announced that the HVACR program had earned accreditation through the Partnership for Air Conditioning, Heating, Refrigeration Accreditation (PAHRA). In a letter to Vince Pelletier, ECC Dean of Business and Career Technology, the president of the Air-Conditioning and Refrigeration Institute, William G. Sutton, said, "As only a small percentage of HVACR programs achieve PAHRA accreditation, Elgin Community College's HVACR program has established itself among the premier ranks of such programs."

Also, on 6 February 2006, HVACR student Kevin Wenciker and HVACR instructor and coordinator Andy Erbach were lauded in "Sometimes the Good Techs Find You," an article in *The Air Conditioning, Heating, and Refrigeration News*. The article cites Wenciker's many accomplishments in the field, specifically the number of industry certificates he earned much more quickly than is the norm. The article quotes Wenciker's assessment of the HVACR program at ECC: "I was impressed," he says, "with the variety of equipment and offerings in such areas as sheet metal, residential furnaces, refrigeration . . . they had a little of everything. I knew I would not be doing the same thing over and over again."

Congratulations to Erbach, Wenciker, and their HVACR colleagues for their well-deserved recognition.

## **ECC Faculty Receive Mini-Grant to Investigate Learning Communities**

**Susan Timm**

Learning communities include two or more courses that are linked around a common theme or designed for a particular group of students (i.e., developmental, first time, nursing, etc.). They provide students with opportunities to get to know their peers and build a stronger support network within the academic environment.

Research has shown that specific advantages exist for students who participate in learning communities, including better educational outcomes, improved faculty and peer relationships, better study opportunities, and more cultural opportunities. Research also indicates that as a result of taking advantage of learning communities, students are more satisfied with their overall college experience and are, therefore, more likely to persist in their studies to graduation.

Faculty and curriculum also benefit: learning communities broaden pedagogy, increase student engagement, promote interaction, and infuse skills, all of which result in stronger relationships between students and faculty, students and the educational institution. Thus, the overall quality of education is enhanced, a sense of community is fostered, and a climate of innovation and assessment is promoted.

Currently, ECC has two fledgling learning communities that were started in fall 2006: the Emerging Scholars Program, which follows the blocked format, and Cool Runnings, which uses an integrated approach. With blocked classes, a cohort of students is enrolled in two or more classes that are scheduled consecutively; the classes have a common theme or are interdisciplinary in focus. In integrated courses, a cohort of students is enrolled in courses for which the curriculum has been intentionally restructured to be thematically linked. Two more learning communities are in the works: In Living Color and Talk Soup.

Current ECC learning communities are in their infancy, and more practical knowledge about effectively preparing curriculum for learning communities is needed. Plus, more faculty need to be exposed to the possibilities of innovative community building by establishing learning communities. To accomplish this goal, research will be conducted by a cross-functional team of eight faculty, staff, and administrators from Vocational Education/Technical Careers, English/Speech/Reading, Math/Science, Behavioral Sciences, and Student Services. This team will examine what type(s) of learning communities will work best at ECC: Blocked, linked, or integrated classes or Freshman Interest Groups. The team will also explore the types of active learning methodologies that work best in these settings.

At this point, five people are involved in the team, including three faculty: Andy Erbach, Heating, Air, and Ventilation; Joyce Fountain, Sociology; and Dr. Susan Timm, Office Administration Technology & COL 101 Instructor. We will be attending the Consortium for Illinois Learning

Communities Faculty Team Retreat, which is to take place on May 5-6, 2006. We will also each get a copy of the text *Learning Communities: Refining Undergraduate Education* by Smith, MacGregor, Matthews, and Gabelnick (2004) so that we have a common base of knowledge for our discussions and planning. In addition, other learning community books will be purchased and made available for check-out in both the Retention Office and the Center for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning.

If you are interested in exploring how learning communities will enhance your students' learning or want to join this exciting learning community team, contact one of the faculty involved or Dr. Sharon Baker, Assistant Dean, College-Wide Retention, for more information.

## **Vazquez Probes Issues Facing Latino/Latina Students at ECC**

In Fall 2005, ECC counselor Arturo Vazquez completed a sabbatical research project in which he examined the issues facing Latina/Latino students at ECC. During this time, subgroups of Latina/o students were interviewed. While the data collected during the project is still being analyzed, Arturo provides the following abstract of his findings:

### **Abstract Arturo Vazquez**

The possible factors or phenomena which contribute to the success of Latina/o students at Elgin Community College were investigated. The primary purpose of this faculty development sabbatical project was to investigate what factors or phenomena poses a greater barrier to Latina/o student success than any other barriers identified in the research literature. In this research project, "success" of Latina/o students was defined as meaningful course completion that leads to degree or certification completion at Elgin Community College.

The participants selected for the research project came from an internal list developed by the researcher. The samples selected for the study had the following characteristics: first generation Latina/o students of Mexican, Puerto Rican and Central and South American descent. In addition, the Latina/o students that were selected to participate in the focus groups were returning adults who attended at least one semester of college and dropped out for at least one or more years.

A qualitative research approach was utilized for all focus group interviews and survey data. In addition, institutional data were analyzed to identify factors or phenomena which contributed to the success of Latina/o students at the college. The data collected by the researcher was analyzed to record the most commonly identifiable factors or phenomena, reported by the participants, as possible barriers to Latina/o student success at Elgin Community College.

The results indicated that factors that have been identified in the review of the literature were congruent with factors that the participants had identified as possible barriers to the success of the Latina/o students at the college. The findings included but were not limited to the following factors:

- Factors related to assessment and placement testing
- factors related to access to technology
- factors concerning social, cultural, and psychological environment
- factors related to immigration status of participants
- factors related to understanding the impact of racial and ethnic identity
- factors related to financial support for undocumented Latina/o students
- factors or phenomena related to tutorial assistance and mentoring in academic English language acquisition for second language learners.

The findings support and affirm the hypothetical suspicions of the researcher. Recommendations and possible future policy implications are discussed for a proactive stance toward supporting Latina/o students with an emphasis on factors the participants reported as beneficial to their own success. It is concluded that recommended interventions and strategies from this project will lead to greater retention and completion rates of Latina/o students at Elgin Community College. Latina/o students will benefit by obtaining degrees and the potential to pursue meaningful and gainful employment, and communities will win by developing citizens who are better able to give back to their perspective communities.

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Arturo invites anyone interested in more information about the project, his conclusions, and their potential impact on ECC, should contact him at extension 7418 or at [avazquez@elgin.edu](mailto:avazquez@elgin.edu).