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## **THE MORALE OF FACULTY, STUDENTS, AND STAFF UNDER A CORPORATE MODEL:**

### *The Case of the University of Kansas*

Raymond Pierotti

There has been considerable debate over the employment of corporate models on university campuses in recent years. Typically, the justification for such models has been the need for financial restructuring under reduced budgets, as increasingly conservative state legislators question the expenditure patterns of university administrations. What is rarely mentioned is that a number of very different corporate models are available. For example, emphasis can be placed upon the quality of the product produced, employee loyalty, placing responsibility on executives for business related problems, and retaining individuals throughout their careers in order to preserve their accumulated knowledge and experience. Profits are typically plowed back into the development of the shared enterprise, which includes the human resources of the corporation.

If universities were to employ corporate models, loyalty-based enterprises would seem to be the most appropriate. After all, many successful and highly creative ventures fall within this framework, and universities are first and foremost creative enterprises. The corporate models employed by most universities, however, appear to be the personality and profit-driven enterprises that characterized American business during the 1980's. Such corporations emphasize star CEOs who ruthlessly "trim fat", practice "downsizing" (also known as layoffs), attempt to maximize profits, and believe that stockholders are the most important individuals involved in a corporation. It is inappropriate for public universities to emphasize the latter type of corporate model, because universities are not expected to turn profits, given their tax-exempt status, and have no functional equivalent of stockholders.

There are typically two major consequences resulting from use of the current type of corporate model to restructure universities. First, emphasis is placed on increased productivity on the part of faculty, who are perceived as if they were mid-level sales personnel within a profit-based corporation. As a result, there is a demand for simultaneous increases in both the number of courses taught and course enrollments, and in research productivity, typically measured in terms of grants received and papers published. Such policies inevitably lead to a lessening of time and effort available for the development of human resources (i.e. mentoring students and junior faculty). Second, administrators appear to perceive themselves as corporate CEO's and vice-presidents, rather than as members of the academic community. As a consequence the CEO (Chancellor, President) often raises the salaries of his or her immediate subordinates (Provosts and Deans), presumably in an effort to increase their motivation, but also to increase their loyalty to the corporate model being installed. The Provost and Deans follow a similar pattern in raising the salaries of their immediate subordinates.

The irony is that increases in administrative salaries are not necessarily tied to any increases in

productivity on the part of administrators, as they would be in actual corporate enterprises. Administrators merely are required to follow the lead established by their superiors, rather than maintain loyalty to their faculty colleagues, even though they nominally remain members of the faculty.

The faculty themselves rarely see any significant increases in salaries. Instead they experience an analog of downsizing, as tenured faculty are not replaced in kind; there is a decline in the number and percentage of faculty who are granted tenure; and faculty lines are increasingly replaced by lecturers and adjunct faculty on term contracts, who can be easily hired and terminated. As a consequence, there is often a decline in faculty morale, which is associated with the institution of corporate models on university campuses. What is unappreciated, however, is that there is also a corresponding loss of morale in unclassified staff, graduate students, and even undergraduates, which is associated with declines in faculty morale.

In this essay, I describe issues related to morale of faculty, staff and students at the University of Kansas, a major Midwestern research university, after a corporate model was implemented by a new administration in the mid-1990's. I will emphasize three aspects of demoralization. First, I discuss recruitment and retention of minority and female faculty and minority students, both before and after the implementation of the corporate model. Second, I discuss the morale of faculty in one of the university's top ranked research departments, as well as the morale of graduate and undergraduate students who work closely with those faculty. Finally, I discuss the morale of unclassified staff, particularly in a division where the administration was attempting to force mergers between departments in an attempt to "trim fat" and "streamline" administrative structure. Various aspects of this process have been extensively covered in the media, and background information, newspaper articles, legal documents, and supporting data can be accessed at our website at <http://www.seekpeace.com/KUSRVC>.

### **The Basic KU Story**

In 1994 the Chancellor of the University of Kansas (KU), Dr. Eugene Budig, left to become President of the American Baseball League. While the University conducted a search, a professor of Microbiology, Dr. Delbert Shankel, was named acting Chancellor. The individual chosen as the new Chancellor, to take office in September 1995, was Robert Hemenway, then Chancellor of the University of Kentucky.

Among Chancellor Hemenway's initial actions was to change the administrative structure of the university to a Provost system. The individual who was appointed as Provost was Dr. David Shulenberg, a Professor of Business, whose area of expertise is labor relations. In addition to restructuring the administration, an act that may have functioned primarily as a justification for rewriting the Faculty Handbook, Chancellor Hemenway announced several major themes for his administration. They included: 1) an increase in the number of National Merit Scholars enrolled as undergraduates, 2) negotiation of an exclusive beverage contract with either Pepsi or Coca Cola which would provide additional revenue for the university, 3) an increase in research funding, presumably to improve the national rankings of the University of Kansas and its research programs, and 4) increased recruitment of minority faculty to reach a stated goal of 200 minority faculty by the year 2000.

The first goal has allegedly been achieved. More undergraduates described as "Merit Scholars" have been enrolled. However, this achievement was called into question by the student run newspaper, because most recipients were not awarded National Merit Scholarships, but instead received "Kansas Merit Scholarships" (Kirsten Phelps, "Scholar designation differs at schools," *University Daily Kansan*, September 8, 2000). The winners had excellent high school records but did not qualify for National Merit awards. The University of Kansas provides extensive financial aid for these students and describes them as "Merit Scholars." Unfortunately, as part of his initial effort to find funding support, Chancellor

Hemenway appropriated funds which were targeted for support of minority graduate students. In recent years the "Merit Scholars" have been supported by funds acquired through the beverage contract (Jason Krall, "Coke: hard to swallow," *University Daily Kansan*, November 16, 2000).

The beverage contract was successfully negotiated, with Coca-Cola winning the competition to exclusive rights on the KU campus, including athletic events. The Coke contract, above all, has come to symbolize the corporate domination of the university and its mission (Krall, op cit). In exchange for exclusive rights worth many millions of dollars, this multinational corporation, whose name has become a symbol for corporate oppression (Coca Colonialism), provides a few hundred thousand dollars outside the normal university budget for a fund that appears to be spent at the discretion of the Chancellor.

With regard to research funding the University claims success, i.e. an overall increase in the total number of research dollars acquired. The increase appears to have come at some cost, however, since there have been no increases in the national rankings of any University programs. In fact, several formerly well regarded programs and departments have slipped perceptibly in National rankings. For example, KU's Department of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology, consistently ranked in the top 30 programs of its kind nationally, was most recently ranked 43rd (Brett, et al. 1999. *Bulletin of the Ecological Society of America* 80(4):250-256). Similarly, KU Medical Center has slipped markedly in national rankings. It has changed from an institution which served a predominantly minority community as provider of reasonably priced health care into a profit driven institution which has been sued by community groups and patients for failing to provide care to which the institution had made a previous commitment (Melissa Davis, "Former Med Center Chairwoman resigns," *University Daily Kansan*, Nov 8, 2000).

As for the final objective, the recruitment of more minority faculty to meet a year 2000 goal of 200 faculty, the university has failed completely. In fact, KU and Chancellor Hemenway have been the target of 29 Civil Rights based lawsuits. Several suits were based on alleged discriminatory treatment of minority and female faculty, and for retaliation against individuals who filed complaints of discrimination. In April 2000 a federal jury found KU guilty of retaliation against a female faculty member who had filed complaints of discrimination against the university (Erwin Seba, "Former professor wins lawsuit against KU," *Lawrence Journal World*, April 12 2000).

### **Last Hired, First Fired: Recruitment and Retention of Minority and Female Faculty as an Indicator of Campus Morale**

Prior to the arrival of Chancellor Hemenway in 1995 KU had been engaged in a serious effort to increase its numbers of minority faculty and students. For example, when I arrived at KU in the summer of 1992, I was the second Native American tenure track faculty member at KU out of a total of nearly 1000 tenure track faculty. Over the next four years KU added five more tenure track Native American faculty, and actually had attained a critical mass that was able to develop a graduate program in Indigenous Nations Studies. When I arrived at KU, there were approximately 170 Native Americans enrolled as either graduate or undergraduate students. By 1996 the number of Native American students enrolled at KU was nearly 300, and the largest single major they selected was Biological Sciences, my area of study. There were also significant clusters of Native American students in the Schools of Social Welfare and in the School of Education, where other Native American faculty were active in the recruitment and mentoring of students.

After reaching a peak of seven Native American faculty in 1995, there has been a steady but gradual decline over the last few years. In fall 1998, the senior of two female Native faculty left KU, and in summer 2000 the third Native faculty member recruited to KU left immediately after receiving tenure. At present there are six Native American faculty at KU (one was hired as director of the Indigenous Nations

Studies Program in 1998), but at least four, and possibly five, of them are on the job market. Concurrent with the departure of Native faculty has been a decline in the number of Native American students enrolled at KU. Current numbers are around 150, or fewer than when I arrived at KU in 1992.

Similar patterns are observable in the recruitment of African American and Hispanic faculty in the early 1990's. By 1995 there were 13 African American male faculty, and this number increased to 17 by 1998. Over the last few years, however, minority faculty, but in particular the male faculty, have been leaving KU, and by 2000 the number of African American men was down to 14. However, since Chancellor Hemenway has let it be known to his deans and departmental chairs that he considers only African Americans and Native Americans to be important minorities for purposes of faculty recruitment, Hispanic faculty recruitment and retention are deteriorating.

In 1996 the University held a series of hearings with minority faculty, conducted by Associate Deans from the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences (CLAS, the largest single academic unit at KU) and members of the staff of KU's Equal Opportunity Office (formerly the Affirmative Action Office, until Chancellor Hemenway changed its name in 1996). The hearings generated a report produced in 1997, in which it was clear that morale was generally low among minority faculty, and that many faculty regarded KU as an unfriendly place they planned to leave when opportunities arose. The report was suppressed by the administration, and only became available in 2001 through the Freedom of Information Act.

Minority departures have been part of a general exodus of faculty from the University of Kansas over the last few years. At one point the Dean of CLAS stated that she "had more than 40 requests for matches from departments that had faculty who had received offers from other universities." The reasons faculty leave a university are complex, and the story put forward by the KU administration is that faculty leave KU for higher salaried positions at other institutions. All of the individual cases with which I am familiar, however, have indicated to me that dissatisfaction with "changes in KU in recent years," and the feeling that "KU is no longer a friendly place to work" are the predominant reasons for departures.

For example, an African American scholar with a PhD from a top Ivy League University explained to me that he was leaving KU in 1997 because of a failure of departmental support and a negative atmosphere on the KU campus. A prominent female minority faculty member stated at a reception at the Chancellor's residence that she had been planning to leave KU since 1996 (the year after Hemenway's arrival).

To demonstrate that departures are not confined solely to minority faculty, two of the top ecology faculty in the Department of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology, both white male full professors, left KU because of the atmosphere in their department established by a new department chair. Both individuals had testified in a civil rights lawsuit in a way which was perceived as not supporting the Chancellor's corporate policies, and as a result suffered retaliation from their chair. The plaintiff in this case had sued the university, after the decision to grant her tenure by the University Committee on Promotion and Tenure was overturned by the Provost. The action by the Provost was an unprecedented assertion of his power as the "academic CEO," an action which flies in the face of the traditional view of faculty governance.

Female faculty have been disproportionately victimized by the new corporate approach to tenure. In 1997 only women were denied tenure, while all of the male candidates were granted tenure, a situation unprecedented in the history of KU. There is also considerable evidence that female faculty take significantly longer to achieve both tenure and promotion to full professor than do white male faculty. Typically departments appear to target their most dynamic female faculty, so that rather than culling academic deadwood, KU is losing a generation of leaders who could increase both diversity and overall campus morale. The reason women seem to be targeted is that they have been vocal in their opposition to the corporatization of KU. What is doubly ironic is that many targeted female faculty have been

significant role models for the "Merit Scholars" that KU and Chancellor Hemenway have worked so hard to recruit. As a consequence, attacks on women faculty have not only lowered faculty morale, but the morale of the student population as well.

### **Loss of Teachers and Role Models: Student Morale under the Corporate Model**

Students are more aware of what is happening on campuses than is generally perceived. A key aspect of understanding student morale is to realize that, although they rarely have access to all, or even most, of the facts at issue where faculty-administration dynamics are concerned, they are very aware of the mood and morale of faculty members. Low student morale is clearly illustrated by the general departure of Native American students from KU in the last few years.

By 1998 serious problems were apparent between the KU administration and its Native American faculty. In fall 1996, the Dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences imposed a new chair on my department, a member of the National Academy of Sciences who had recently arrived from another university. Unlike the previous chair, he clearly intended to be a manager rather than a faculty advocate. In spring 1997 a major rift developed over the issue of recruitment of minority graduate students, with the new chair instituting policies which would greatly decrease the ability of the department to recruit them.

The conflict escalated throughout the year, with the chair retaliating against me for my opposition to his policies. His retaliation culminated in February 1998, when he removed my research space while I was out of town participating in a panel for the National Science Foundation. He also impounded the belongings of two Native American students who were working housed in my lab. Accounts of the incident spread rapidly throughout the Native American undergraduate body and throughout the minority student population. By the fall semester of 1998 the number of Native American Biology undergraduates began to drop.

In spring 1997 there was also a national search for the position of Director of the new Indigenous Nations Studies program. Three prominent Native American academics were interviewed, and the program faculty voted unanimously to offer the position to a Native American man who was a tenured full professor at a mid-rank west coast university. The candidate was strongly endorsed by his prospective tenure home department. However, the Tenure and Promotion Committee of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences voted not to award him tenure at KU, which killed the negotiations and left the new program without a director.

The decision not to tenure the chosen candidate was clearly related to a new attitude towards tenure at KU. One member of the College P&T Committee was the newly appointed chair of my department, who had stressed that he was going to increase productivity in our department, and consequently he would be hard on tenure. The presence of a department chair on a College P&T committee was a new and questionable phenomenon, and appeared to be related to the overall corporatization of KU. In a subsequent meeting in summer 1997 between the Dean of CLAS and the Indigenous Nations faculty over denial of tenure to the Director candidate, harsh words were spoken, and it was clear after the meeting that a bond of trust had been broken with the Native American faculty.

In February 1998 the Rock Chalk Revue, a charity performance run primarily by the predominantly white fraternities and sororities, included a skit which was perceived as racist by the Native and African American undergraduate community. Ignoring the requests of minority student delegations, the Revue presented the skit, triggering a demonstration against the Rock Chalk Revue, during which many white students and their families ignored and insulted minority students and faculty. The Revue, combined with the removal of space from me and my Native American students, led to a precipitous decline in the morale

of minority undergraduates. It was at this time that the number of minority students overall started to decline on the KU campus, and their numbers have not recovered over the last three years. I was personally told by some of KU's Merit Scholars "that KU is getting rid of its best teachers" and "KU seems to be attacking its only good faculty." Several minority students changed majors away from departments where they felt uncomfortable and into multidisciplinary programs.

Ironically, one of KU's most hallowed institutions, its nationally ranked basketball program, has become involved in the controversy. In fall 2000 the national magazine, *Sports Illustrated*, published a survey of Big 12 basketball players, indicating that among Big 12 coaches, KU coach Roy Williams was the one for whom most players would least like to play. One reason for their reluctance may be that, although the majority of Big 12 basketball players are African American, KU players are predominantly white. During his tenure at KU Williams has never started more than two Black players, and he almost never plays more than two Black players at the same time. In contrast Big 12 rivals such as the University of Texas, the University of Missouri, and Baylor University regularly have four or five Black players on the court together at the same time.

In a related matter, the only player ever to leave KU early was a Black player from California, Paul Pierce, who felt that KU failed to give him sufficient recognition (Pierce is now a star with the Boston Celtics). Pierce's white teammates at KU, who were given more publicity at KU, are either NBA journeymen (Raef LaFrentz) or out of the NBA (Jarrod Haas, Ryan Robertson). This year there was concern that another of Williams' Black players from California, Drew Gooden, might leave for the NBA. It should be emphasized that Gooden did not start for most of the 2000-2001 season, despite being KU's leading scorer and rebounder.

In general, there is a perception among minority students and faculty that KU and Lawrence are not friendly places for non-whites, an attitude shared by the more liberal and open-minded white students, including a number of the touted Merit Scholars. As a consequence, minority enrollment and retention continues to be a problem at KU, and KU's national reputation continues to decline. During the 2000-2001 academic year the university newspaper has printed numerous exchanges on this theme, and the general perception is that KU cannot recruit or retain minority students. In fact, the latest student senate election may have hinged on the minority issue, when a minority student was elected Student Body president for the first time ever.

It may only be a coincidence that Coca-Cola is an Atlanta based corporation which has major problems in dealing with minority employees. In 2000 Coke settled a discrimination lawsuit filed by a number of Black employees, who felt that they were not being promoted or given opportunities for advancement ("Coke settles suit for record 192.5 million," <http://CBSnews.com>, Nov 16 2000). Many students feel resentful towards Coca-Cola and its influence on the KU campus, and some minority students have even begun to refer to their university as KKKU.

### **Killing with Indifference: Staff Morale on the KU Campus**

In addition to its problems with faculty and students, KU is also facing a crisis of confidence among its unclassified staff. One clear example has been the so-called "streamlining of departmental staffs," accomplished largely by merging numerous small departments into larger "super-departments," with the ostensible goal of eliminating waste and redundancy. The actual result has been a decline in morale among the unclassified staff, and an apparent increase in discomfort and paranoia among some of these individuals.

The most egregious case involved the Division of Biological Sciences, a group of six departments that

worked in a reasonably cooperative manner to share an administrative structure and office staff, in many cases sharing faculty who had joint appointments. The Dean of CLAS and the new chair of my department forced a merger between three departments, creating a new super-department. At the same time, three other departments were merged into a second super-department. The chairs of each new super-department then decided they needed their own separate staff, thus increasing rather than decreasing staff and redundancy. The addition of new staff, combined with the creation of new offices for them and their new chairs, resulted in increased crowding. One major consequence of administrative restructuring was that members of the Division staff were shunted around from office to office, with diminished responsibilities and increased pressure. A recent survey of staff has indicated a serious decline in morale, and several have taken early retirement.

A more troubling case has developed within the staff of the humanities departments. The humanities are housed in Wescoe Hall, a building originally designed to be a parking structure. This building does not circulate air well and has problems with internal air quality. The Dean of CLAS tried to enforce mergers between departments within the humanities, although she was less successful than in Biology. One consequence has been increased crowding of more staff into small offices, with resultant increases in temperature and reduction of air quality. Over the last few years a few faculty and staff who had offices in Wescoe Hall have died, generating a widespread rumor that the Wescoe Hall air circulation system was infected with Legionella bacteria and that individuals were dying of Legionnaires' Disease. Rumors escalated to the point that office staff and some faculty accused the University of not caring whether people died, so long as it was able to cut costs. The crisis was resolved only after the Head of KU's Office of Environmental Health and Safety addressed a town meeting of Humanities staff. According to the Office, although air quality in the building was generally low, tests had been run, and there was no evidence of contamination with Legionella bacteria.

## Conclusions

This last example demonstrates how low morale had fallen among some of KU's staff. People were actually beginning to believe that the KU administration was willing to let people die in order to reduce costs, a serious breakdown of trust and confidence between the administration and all other components of the KU community. Faculty continue to leave KU in record numbers, students are withdrawing or simply not enrolling in the first place, and staff are willing to believe that the profit motivation at KU is so strong that lives can be sacrificed to its goals.

The crisis of confidence has led to 29 employment discrimination lawsuits filed against KU since Chancellor Hemenway arrived. Several lawsuits have been settled at considerable cost to KU—two have gone to court, with the university being found guilty of retaliation in the second—and several more are pending. Faculty, students and staff all continue to leave KU, while the University boasts that it has increased its levels of external research funding to new heights. But who is going to teach the few students that remain, when and if KU attains its ultimate goals of remaking itself into a well-endowed research corporation?

There is a popular saying among some of today's young conservatives that students are a university's customers. This is an inappropriate economic analogy. Faculty are the economic analogues of producers (workers and creative staff) and students are in fact our products. Ultimately universities earn their reputations from their faculty and their students. Harvard gets its enormous endowment because of its long term record of turning out top students, who are successful when they leave the university to make their way in the world, which is the real "bottom line" of a university.

The problem at KU is not solely that it is attempting to follow a corporate model in its efforts to redefine

itself. It has chosen a model that is a recipe for failure in the long-run. As mentioned at the beginning, the appropriate model for a university is one that emphasizes employee loyalty, high quality products, and robust consumer confidence. Instead, it appears that KU, Chancellor Hemenway, and Provost Shulenberg have chosen to emphasize profit margin at the expense of all of the above factors that make a corporation successful. If employee (faculty, staff) loyalty is low and the best employees leave, if the quality of the producers declines because more and more tenured faculty are replaced by short-term lecturers, and the quality of the products go down because fewer students stay to graduate at KU, the fate of the corporation is assured. Prospective customers (employers) will no longer want KU's products, regardless of how much "profit" has been made while the corporation destroys itself.

Anyone who doubts this scenario need look no further than American automobile manufacturers, who had lost consumer confidence because they were maximizing profit over quality. In fact, the Wescoe Hall situation combined with KU's attitude towards lawsuits described above is very similar to the situation that Ford Motor Company faced after it was revealed that they would rather settle lawsuits than recall and fix the Ford Pinto. Today the Ford Motor Company is a mere shell of what it was when that decision was made. A similar fate may await KU and other major US universities that try to operate as profit-driven institutions and sacrifice consumer confidence for monetary gain.

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