



REPORT OF THE COMMUNICATIONS TASK FORCE

Presented to

**Dr. Mickey L. Burnim, President
Bowie State University**

Presented by

MEMBERS OF THE TASK FORCE

Deborah Banks

Robert Bartlett

Mario Fenyo

Monika Gross

Anne Gaskins-Nedd

Bonnie Harrington

Dietrick Hart

Marsha Jackson

Jake Johnson

Barbara Mansfield

Rex Martin

Dwight Murph

Clarence Ray

Angela Williams

Charlotte Williams



October 30, 2006

Report of the Communications Task Force

On September 15, 2006, President Mickey L. Burnim appointed a Communications Task Force (CTF), composed of students, faculty, and staff, and charged it with formulating “recommendations for implementation which will address communications problems at Bowie State University.”

This report presents the CTF’s recommendations, followed by a background statement and a discussion of the methodology used to collect, the respondents, instruments used to analyze the data. Constituents may receive a copy of the report by contacting Anne L. Gaskins-Nedd anedd@bowiestate.edu.

I. Recommendations

How effectively Bowie State University communicates with its internal constituents will ultimately determine its success or failure. To ensure its success, the University leadership must review the following recommendations, establish a timetable for implementing them, and develop and implement a plan to assess the University’s progress toward improving internal communications:

1. Develop, implement, and evaluate an on-going comprehensive internal communications plan, including strategies for using current and future technologies (e.g., PeopleSoft, Blackboard, email, BSU Radio and BSUTV, hand-held devices). Distribute electronically to all constituents and in print format to individuals/units on an approved distribution list.
2. Develop, implement and evaluate an ongoing campus emergency plan which is available in electronic format and print formats. Distribute printed copies to individuals/units on an approved distribution list.
3. Adhere to the principles of shared governance, including the involvement of constituents in decision making as stipulated by the University’s governance documents.
4. Develop and implement an effective means of continuously assessing the performance of all employees.
5. Continue to maintain an updated, user friendly website with a standardized calendar.
6. Distribute to appropriate constituents--in electronic and print formats--agendas, minutes, reports, etc., of decision-making bodies, as appropriate, and a regularly published campus newsletter and/or a weekly bulletin of notable student, faculty and staff accomplishments, University events, condolences, etc.
7. Revise, print and distribute periodically in electronic format the University’s catalogs and policies and procedures manuals, with limited printed copies being distributed to individuals/units on an approved distribution list.
8. Provide ongoing customer service training for all employees, including training in the use of e-mail, voice mail and the telephone.
9. Continue to provide opportunities through town hall meetings or other forums for all constituents to interact with and receive information from senior administrations.

10. Review technological business practices and implement SharePoint services, online forms and routing, etc.
11. Ensure that BSU email functions at its highest and most creative capacity, including implementing a uniform set of aliases and using URL links to post large files.
12. Review and revise the current computer replacement and e-mail storage policies and procedures to ensure that all internal constituents have computers and e-mail storage capacity that meet their needs.
13. Update signs throughout the campus periodically and install digital signs where appropriate.
14. Develop and implement a style guide for written and electronic communications (e.g., reports, campus newsletters, etc.).
15. Develop and implement an awards program that recognizes outstanding customer service.

I. Background

In its mission/vision statement, Bowie State University (BSU) describes itself as an institution, which “Through the integration of internal business processes, technology, and the teamwork of administrators, faculty and staff, . . . will be recognized Statewide as a model of excellence in higher education for the effective and efficient use of human, fiscal, and physical resources.”

To become a model of excellence, BSU, like all high-performing organizations, must have as a “keystone” in the way it operates an effective communications system. In such organizations,

- A. Senior management recognizes the importance of communications in achieving business objectives
- B. Senior management bases all communication efforts on a clear, well-defined communications strategy.
- C. Senior managers tie communications initiatives to corporate business objectives.
- D. Employees are provided information about how the firm is doing in meeting its goals.
- E. Communications programs are developed proactively rather than reactively
- F. Employee communications programs place a strong emphasis on helping employees understand the business.
- G. Senior managers adopt a well-defined, two-way communications philosophy.
- H. A comprehensive communications program is an essential part of the organization’s business strategy.
- I. Managers at all levels are rewarded for communicating effectively.
- J. Employee communications programs place a strong emphasis on providing information and feedback to motivate and improve job performance.

Source: Linking communications strategy to achieve business goals. Retrieved October 25, 2006, from <http://www.watsonwyatt.com/research/resrender.asp?id=W-252&page=6>

In his keynote address at the Fall Faculty Seminar in August 2006, the newly appointed president of Bowie State University, Dr. Mickey L. Burnim noted that when he asked members of the Search Committee what they felt the new president needed to focus on, they immediately responded, “Communications.” By communications, he further observed, they meant that people do not feel they are in on important policies and decisions that are formulated for the university and are not informed in a timely manner about when those decisions were made.

President Burnim’s commitment to addressing the perceived problem of ineffective communications at the University is best summed up in his own words: “... it seemed to me that this implied lack of involvement of all of our various constituencies and stakeholders is simply not acceptable. If we are to move Bowie State University forward, we must work together as an efficient team and the basis for that teamwork must be open and effective communication. Therefore, I will appoint a Communications Task Force to develop a set of specific recommendations, which, when implemented, will lead to effective communications systems for advancing Bowie State University’s goals and objectives.”

On September 15, 2006, President Burnim appointed a Communications Task Force (CTF), composed of students, faculty, and staff, and charged it with formulating “recommendations for implementation which will address communications problems at Bowie State University.”

II. Methodology

The methodology used to collect and analyze the data is described below:

- A.** An intensive brainstorming session by the Communications Task Force at its first meeting, which generated an initial list of problems and proposed solutions
- B.** An Internal Communications Survey (ICS), which was distributed to students through Blackboard and to faculty, staff, and administrators through broadcast e-mail, and to all through hardcopy dissemination to academic departments, administrative units, residence halls, and the commuter kiosk in MLK)

The survey questions addressed four areas. The section on “Communication Processes” asked participants to respond to five questions. Using “Always,” “Usually,” “Sometimes,” “Rarely,” and “Never,” respondents indicated to what extent they

- receive information from the University
- receive information from the University in a timely manner
- are kept informed about decisions/policy changes that affect them
- are able to provide input on policy changes that affect them
- are able to quickly contact the appropriate office/person for information or help

In the section on “Communication Values and Needs” participants were asked to rate the importance of each of the following 12 items on a scale of 1 to 5 (1 = least important and 5 = greatest importance). If an item was “not applicable,” the respondents selected “NA.” (See Appendix A for a copy of the ICS.)

- University-wide organizational changes or policies
- departmental/Unit changes and policies
- Curriculum changes
- University events
- Faculty Senate actions
- SGA/GSA actions
- Staff Council actions
- Cabinet/Senior Staff actions
- The University's missions, goals and objectives
- The University meeting its institutional mission, goals and objectives
- Potential changes to my job duties directly from my supervisor
- Potential changes to University-wide policies directly from my supervisor

Through two open-ended questions, survey participants identified a) what they believed to be the greatest difficulty with communications at Bowie State University and b) what they believed to be the best solution to the problem.

- C. A town hall meeting attended by approximately 120 students, faculty, staff, and administrators
- D. A Communications Task Force Town Hall Meeting Comment Form distributed at the Town Hall Meeting, which provided an opportunity for students, faculty, staff, and administrators to share their views on problems, issues and improvements with internal communications within the Bowie State University Community
- E. Nine (9) unsolicited e-mails which commented on problems and recommended solutions
- F. Formal and informal discussions with students, faculty, staff and administrators about communications at the University

III. The Respondents

Three hundred thirty-one (331) individuals responded to the Internal Communications Survey, which asked respondents to identify themselves as undergraduate or graduate students; resident or commuter students; or faculty, staff, administrators, or supervisors. Although the staff, administrator, and supervisor categories and the resident and commuter student categories were discrete on the survey, they were collapsed into three categories—staff/administrators/ supervisors, graduate students, and undergraduate students—because some respondents checked two or more categories, making it impossible to determine their primary role at the University.

Ninety-one (91) staff/administrators/supervisors, 48 faculty members, 23 graduate students, and 175 undergraduate students completed the survey.

The qualitative data were derived from several sources: the CTF's brainstorming session, 2 open-ended questions on the Internal Communications Survey, 24 written comments on the Communications Task

Force Town Hall Meeting Comment Form, 9 unsolicited e-mails, and several informal discussions by the Communications Task Force members with various internal constituents.

IV. Analysis of the Data

The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to analyze the 17 closed questions on the ICS. The raw data were converted to percentages.

Using content analysis, the comments and recommendations from the Communications Task Force brainstorming session; the open-ended questions on the Internal Communications Survey; 24 written comments on the Communications Task Force Town Hall Meeting Comment Form; 9 unsolicited e-mails; and from several informal discussions were grouped under several broad problem areas or themes: Communication Processes, Dissemination of Information, Timeliness/ Deadlines, Technology, Performance, Customer Service, Administrative Processes, Policies and Procedures, Accountability, and Leadership/Change Processes.



Designed by:
Yolanda Dandridge
Office of URM