

Gee, there's an interesting conversation going here, re: Campus Works, Inc.

Well, there's a lot to be told in this regard. For starters, recently CWI was one entity among several bidding on a contract for IT services at Empire State College - <http://www.esc.edu/>

Their bid there was defeated after college community members researched and presented evidence to their appropriate college committees concerning the nature and character of CWI and the performance of CWI at other institutions.

Quoted below are portions of a recent UUP (United University Professionals) Newsletter published at Empire State College. You might note a remarkable similarity to our experience here at CCBC with CWI:

"Chapter President's Report
Jay Gilbert
April, 2009

I want to take this opportunity to inform our entire membership about the details of two major issues that have been ongoing at the college, one that has been ongoing for years and one that has arisen since the arrival of President Davis. The first is the issue of improper appointment letters provided by our college for all of its part time employees. The second concerns a review this past Autumn of the systems and technology that support all of our current college activities. President Davis is now responsible for process and outcome of both. For both, I need to ask -

What is the President thinking?

II. The preparation and aftermath of the "second opinion":

In early January of this year, a "second opinion" document appeared on ESC News. We were told that this "second opinion" was a summary of findings of an audit of the college Office of Educational Technology performed by CampusWorks, a consulting firm brought to the college during the fall of 2008 by President Davis. A number of issues and concerns have arisen from this "audit", especially from the process by which it was conducted. Some of these concerns continue to the present time.

It appears that President Davis had plans to make significant changes in the Office of Educational Technology at or close to the start of his tenure with the college. This in itself is not unreasonable; it almost always makes sense to periodically review and assess the effectiveness of the systems that run the day-to-day work of the institution.

The college senate was told about the upcoming audit at its meeting in October, indicating that plans for an audit were already well underway. Also in October, IT professionals were directed to provide CampusWorks with comprehensive documentation covering all ESC network hardware, software, infrastructure, project plans and schedules, and budget information and schedules.

In late November and early December, CampusWorks consultants spent two weeks at the college. They met with faculty and staff at the Central New York Center in Syracuse and at the Coordinating Center in

Saratoga Springs. Several IT staff felt that their interviews were conducted in a contentious and non-professional manner, and stated that CampusWorks consultants clearly had not read the documentation provided to them. It appeared that CampusWorks did not understand the ESC model even after having spent a week at a center. For example, they wanted to know why similar studies were offered in multiple centers and were incredulous that faculty could write anything they wanted in an independent study.

The presumed summary of the report, the “second opinion”, is highly negative in tone. Some recommendations seemed to be out of context; others seem not to have resulted from discussion with any ESC staff. Recommendations on systems endorse the old idea that all information must reside in one central database; modern information systems integrate data from multiple data stores on an as-needed basis.

It appears that the CampusWorks findings were created without a full understanding of the special nature of our institution. The best illustrations of this are the unsubstantiated claims made in the “second opinion” about the ability to customize “off the shelf” system tools to handle ESC’s unique format. Many successful ESC systems have no “off the shelf” counterpart (e.g., DocPak).

Recommendations from CampusWorks would require our college to adopt the constraints of a traditional college administrative system, such as a strict course catalog, defined course numbering, inflexible course names and preset degree programs. If we were to follow what CampusWorks suggests we would have systems that define the college at the expense of our unique successful learning model. Is this what the President wants for our college? **What is the President thinking??**

The report finally produced by CampusWorks and presumably given to the President has not been released. At least one formal written request for release of the report has been made to the college through the New York State Freedom of Information Law (FOIL). Although President Davis is legally required to respond to a FOIL request, he has not responded to date, and the request has been appealed to the Office of University Counsel. This is almost unprecedented – it is legally mandatory in New York State to provide a response to a FOIL request. **What is the President thinking??**

And just what is CampusWorks? It is a company with a history of contractual discord with the institutions in which it has worked. It has a history of installing its own people into high-level management positions in colleges, and turning short-term agreements into long-term multi-million dollar contracts once it has established itself within an institution. A Chronicle of Higher Education article (Oct 24, 2003) describes Peralta Community College District's experience with CampusWorks. The article describes overpriced contracts that led to budget gaps and labor grievances, and concludes that Peralta's decision to outsource to CampusWorks was "more trouble than it had bargained for." CampusWorks has been involved in disputed contract performance and expenditure issues at colleges in Massachusetts and California that have resulted in scrutiny by oversight agencies in those states. Its founding director was convicted of securities fraud. Why would President Davis bring a company with such a history to ESC? What is the President thinking??

The President met with professionals and managers in our Office of Educational Technology in late August of 2008, basically for a “hello” session. He did not meet with them again until mid December, after CampusWorks consultants had left. The President made no attempt to solicit suggestions or recommendations from ESC employees before or during the visit by CampusWorks consultants. In a third meeting with OET professionals and managers in early January, after release of the “second opinion”, the President was asked about the report’s negativity, as well as the feasibility of the reports’

recommendations in light of the unique structure of ESC. President Davis told OET employees to accept the report and follow it, regardless of their reservations. If I were to paraphrase his response, it would be "My mind is made up – don't confuse me with facts!" The President has had no further meetings with OET professionals.

The college spent approximately \$30,000 to bring in CampusWorks consultants during the fall of 2008 for their "second opinion". In January, an additional estimated sum of nearly \$20,000, (based on CampusWorks' published NYS OGS contractual hourly rate of \$306.83) was paid to this company, at President Davis' sole discretion, to compensate one of their high-level executives for eight days of his "professional" services. The President appears not to have known that for contract awards above \$30,000, State regulations guiding SUNY campus contracting practices require a request for proposal (RFP) to be prepared. A SUNY campus is required to "solicit a minimum of three informal quotations or proposals from responsible vendors offering such commodities *or* services." Once again, I have to ask - did the President consult with legal and policy advisors available to him at SUNY? Did he consult with the Chancellors office or the Governor's Office of Employee Relations to get correct advice on proper procedure for hiring consultants? **What is the President thinking??**

At this point, a proper RFP has been prepared, and a different vendor than CampusWorks has been selected to assist the college in assessing and presumably improving its IT functions. We should all be aware that the college will pay the new vendor at least \$275,000 plus expenses for one year of its services.

During the past decade, the professionals in the Office of Educational Technology have proven conclusively their technical competence, as well as their dedication to developing systems and applications that successfully serve the specific needs of a wide range of users including all of our full and part-time faculty and professionals, staff, management, students, and the college community. Every application has been developed to suit a particular need of a particular segment of the unique ESC environment. Do they all work perfectly? Nobody makes that claim. Are there improvements that can be made to them? Certainly. Do our IT professionals know and understand the advantages, deficiencies, strengths, weaknesses of and potential ways to improve what currently exists and is used? Of course they do.

An honest and effective comprehensive assessment of our complex IT environment, even with the participation of unbiased outside consultants, would therefore have to deeply involve the IT professionals who have worked long and hard to develop what now holds our college together. Our IT professionals have proven over and over again that they kept and continue to keep the needs of our unique college community foremost in their efforts on our behalf. They understand and can articulate the limitations and constraints under which they have worked. They have assembled many future-directed recommendations based on their extensive experience with our educational delivery models.

A leader desiring real change and improvement involves and engages those with a stake in the outcome; President Davis did not permit any participation in the analysis of ESC's systems by his experienced and dedicated staff. A leader desiring real change and improvement keeps the process open and transparent; so everyone can "buy-in" to the eventual outcome; President Davis kept the process secret.

The sad part of all of this is the unnecessary wreckage that has been left behind over the past 8 months by the President's approach to IT change at the college. It takes a long time and sustained positive effort to build a good reputation, one that permits people to trust what you say, that permits people to

understand and agree with your goals, that makes people willing to work for you and follow your leadership. Conversely, it does not take much to ruin a reputation: a series of bad judgments or contentious actions over a relatively short period of time can drive an unnecessary wedge between a leader and the people who must perform the work. It is sad to realize how much more positively a good leader would/could have handled such a major review of college systems, and how much better would/could have been the outcome. I can only continue to ask - **What is the President thinking??**"

More info and further details pending....