

How to Change with the Times and Stay on Track

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Another Bible College takes the plunge down the slippery secular slope, or does it? The telltale name change from "Bible College" to "University" provided the final nudge down this unavoidable predetermined destiny. Have we lost another one? With folded hands and a lean forward, North Central University president, Gordon Anderson quietly responds, "Absolutely not."

North Central University (NCU), formerly North Central Bible College, is a small privately owned Assemblies of God (A/G) school located in downtown Minneapolis, Minnesota. With its current enrollment just reaching past the thousandth mark, it bears a rich heritage of alumni including A/G general superintendents and prestigious names of spiritual valor. Concerns of losing this legacy have been met by administrative optimism.

Keeping these concerns in mind, how does the relationship between the board and the president work to keep NCU on its founding track? While examining this, three specific components were identified: 1) the interactive relationship NCU has with its constituents, 2) the predisposition of the board members, and 3) board loyalties to the president and the mission of the university.

Eleven encompassing Assemblies of God Districts own NCU. Therefore, its board is comprised of approximately thirty-five licensed A/G ministers and fifteen additional members who are in good standing in their local A/G churches. The district superintendent, district youth director and a representative from the laity are elected by their respective districts comprised of licensed and ordained ministers and delegates representing each local Assembly. By virtue of their office, the superintendents and youth directors automatically serve as board members. The composition of the board anchors the university firmly to the banks of its constituents. Anderson states,

Our constituents are the students, parents, pastors, lay people, alumni, and the General Council. The board is the university's gatekeeper - we share common constituents. And they do have considerable influence on desired outcomes. When expectations and desires are voiced, they are heard, taken to the Strategic Planning Committee and responded to. Each Strategic Planning Committee starts regularly by evaluating internal and external issues. All of our officers are out there either visiting the local churches, District camps, or related conferences gleaning input. Information and accounts of interactions are brought back to the Strategic Planning Committee to be examined in writing. We're constantly asking 'what's happening out there and what are we doing about it?' The institute must be ready and able to respond to necessary change.

NCU actively pursues ongoing feedback from its constituents.

Finkelstein and Hambrick (F & H) postulate, "The greater the demographic homogeneity, the greater degree of social integration. And the greater the social integration within the top management team, the greater the degree of consensus within the top management team" (p. 127 & 128). Anderson states, "The homogeneity (of the board) is so strong it serves as a presupposition for decision making...energy behind discussed concepts is already there in contrast to trying to build energy - leaving you dead in the water." F & H further conclude that the more prestigious a board's directors, the greater its involvement in all stages of the strategic decision-making process (p. 237). Serving in a District Office is not only considered prestigious and bearing national recognition, but it is also a humbling honor toting incredible levels of accountability and responsibility. "Because we come from similar homogenous units, we can communicate and be understood, share and support one another. We come to the table with the same desire," comments Anderson. When asked if the predisposition of the board led to an occasional group think mentality, he responded, "Each board member is intensely connected to external constituents - they keep our feet to the fire avoiding the paralysis of academia." The NCU trail of shared governance seems to reach deep enough into the heart of the local Assembly that it heightens the positive attributes of a demographically homogenous board.

The third and final aspect centers on the board's loyalties to the president and to the mission of the university. The paralysis of territorialism is broken by the realization that the well-being of the entire university rests on the shoulders of the board. The ultimate mission of NCU converges at the heart of the Great Commission and a vision for lost souls to be reached with the gospel. Each board member is personally committed to the training of young men and women as Pentecostal leaders reaching their world through whatever vocational tool the Lord provides for the accomplishment of this task. Anderson is highly esteemed by the board, his peers, subordinates and external constituents. His involvement in ministry, prior to being elected as the president of NCU, has earned him the respect and trust now appreciated by the board. These opportunities cultivated trustworthy relationships and friendships needed to forge through the maze of uncertainty when confronting change and challenges.

So, have we lost another one? Predictions on this side of the bend are difficult to make. However, upon examining the aggressive interaction NCU enjoys with its constituents, given the predisposition of the board members, and their loyalties to both the institutional mission and the president, one can anticipate that a rich heritage is yet to come.

References:

Finkelstein, S. & Hambrick, D. (1996). Strategic leadership: Top executives and their effects on organizations. Minneapolis, MN: West Publishing Company.

North Central University: Constitution and Bylaws. (1999).