

UI WASTES MONEY ON "CHIEF INSPIRATION OFFICER"

By Nick Gier

Over the past year the UI Provost Douglas Baker has hired a Minnesota consultant Magaly Rodriguez to mediate problems in various departments. Some of the faculty involved were not satisfied with her work, and they also assumed that Rodriguez's visits were one-time affairs.

In a superb piece of investigative journalism Halley Griffin, a reporter for the *Moscow-Pullman Daily News*, obtained copies of Rodriguez's contract and other vital information. Even though she sometimes does not come to campus during any particular month, Rodriguez's retainer is \$12,500 a month. One-time workshops she conducted before 2008 have cost the UI \$10,000-15,500.

In a phone interview with Griffin Rodriguez's declared that her general goal is to build "global peacemaking communities." Provost Baker calls her his "Chief Inspiration Officer."

Rodriguez also claims that she coined the word "peacemaking." She should have checked the Oxford English Dictionary before making such a rash claim. The first use of the word "peacemaking" was in 1563 and it has appeared in print in every century since then.

In her interviews with faculty and administration Griffin found that the latter thought that Rodriguez was worth every penny, but the former believed that it was a waste of time and money.

As a part of its efforts to reduce the budget, the UI administration called for the elimination of at least two dozen degree programs. The physics department was shocked to see that their undergraduate program was on the chopping block.

Some of the faculty called for a no confidence vote of the dean of the College of Science and the administration backed off. Provost Baker arranged a

one day workshop with Rodriguez as an attempt to calm tempers and consider options.

In an e-mail physics professor Francesca Sammarruca explained her expectations for the workshop: "When I heard of a workshop with a professional facilitator, I was expecting a roundtable with a neutral moderator, who is knowledgeable in physics, science, and institutional planning."

Sammarruca said that the problem was not about personal conflicts; rather, it was a hasty and ill-conceived decision by the dean. The negative effects were not just internal to the UI. Once again, Idaho had become a laughingstock, this time among the national and international science community.

Sammarruca also said that Rodriguez's retainer "is quite outrageous. That kind of money can support 7 graduate students each month." Or it could have saved the jobs of six instructors whom the UI math department let go this spring.

Early in 2008 Rodriguez conducted a two-day workshop with the computer science faculty. One faculty member described it as follows: "The workshop reminded me of the 'I'm OK, you're OK,' workshops back in the 1970's. It focuses on improved relations, rather than solving problems. The department members get along better, but we still have the same fundamental problems because all we do is agree to disagree rather than move in one direction for the good of the department."

In my 36 years of handling grievances on Idaho's campuses I have found that the best way to solve disputes is to have all the parties in the same room. Only if there is no progress should the administration bring in a mediator experienced in academic affairs.

In one recent case with which I'm familiar the Minnesota therapist did not bring the parties together; rather, she met alone with the faculty assuming that the problem was their fault and that they needed to work out their feelings.

Without exception faculty described Rodriguez as a nice person with good skills, but they all agree that she is the wrong person for the problems that they faced in their departments.

Even when the administration has brought in academic consultants and mediators, the results have been very disappointing. In a column for this paper (January, 2008), I wrote about the Yardley Report, which criticized programs unfairly and insulted faculty with incredible charges. The bill was \$130,338.

In the last five years a San Francisco attorney was hired to investigate at least two grievances at the UI. The people involved told me that the reports, one costing \$250,000, were white washes. This is not surprising because the attorney's day job was to represent his own university.

Recently I got a call from a professor who has been threatened with probation. She has not had an opportunity to clear her name, and her dean has failed to follow the correct procedures.

For years the faculty union has made the simple request that Idaho's college administrators make sure that their deans and department chairs know the Faculty-Staff Handbook. We have also recommended that they receive conflict resolution and personnel management training.

The people of Idaho pay campus administrators big bucks to do their jobs, but many of them are shirking their responsibilities by hiring outside consultants to do what they and their assistants should be doing.

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