

Wade's Crusade

President MacLauchlan Braves Weather Bomb to Expound Virtues of Communication

by Joel MEGGS

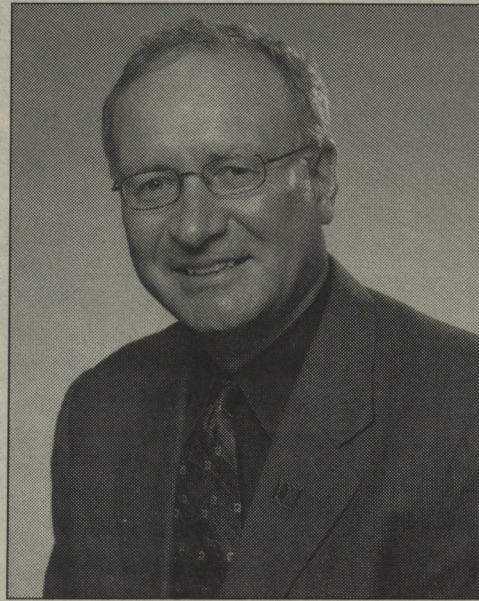
On Wednesday last, three separate weather systems moved into the Gulf of St. Lawrence, producing a rare phenomenon known as a weather bomb. The convergence of these storms produced gale force winds, hard driving rain, and a wide-spread desire to stay inside.

On campus, the final leaves were whisked violently from flailing tree branches, hurled across the ground, and doused with torrents of cold rain. In the midst of all this havoc, President MacLauchlan could be seen, at the ungodly hour of 8:30 in the morning, wrestling with his umbrella, doing battle with the forces of nature to get to his lecture of Prof. Ledwell's English 101 class.

One has to be fairly dedicated to effective communication to have faced the elements on that bleak morning, and President MacLauchlan is just that dedicated.

"Although," he confides to me later, "I think what's really important is for the president to be in the classroom [and] get a chance to get out there and see what's going on, to be a part of it."

This is President MacLauchlan's goal: to have the opportunity to lecture to every university student once before he or she leaves. Because English 101 is mandatory for every student at UPEI, if MacLauchlan visits each section,



President Wade MacLauchlan.

every term, eventually his mission will be accomplished.

And, he points out, from his perspective, composition class is the perfect arena for him to step into, as he believes fervently in the tenets of good communication.

"I don't think there's any more important piece of the intellectual toolkit than the ability to write and to communicate, and, in turn, to think rigorously."

All 101 students receive a package, a sort of a syllabus, prior to President MacLauchlan's visit. The package contains actual memos that MacLauchlan has written as well as several drafts of a memo promoting last year's staff Christmas party.

MacLauchlan prefaces his lecture by saying, "I want to get into every classroom, see what you're up to. And I'm especially pleased to be doing it in your formative years, when we lay down what I call the railroad, the railroad over which your life as a writer and a communicator will travel."

He then delves into his lecture by breaking up the subject into three categories:

1. The Ubiquity of Communication
2. The Blood, Sweat, and Tears of Communication
3. The Joy of Communication.

By this point, it becomes clear that MacLauchlan's lecture isn't entirely in the same vein as a composition lecture; his is more focused on presentation in a professional context rather than the ins and outs of academic writing.

"A very accomplished university department head in the English division said to me when I was starting out, 'Wade, 80 percent of [the impression one makes] is when you walk in the room.'

"I think what was really being said, in regards to communication, is that you just have one chance to walk into the room. And if you come in looking like you came there to do business ... then what follows is that

you'll be taken more seriously than if you kind of slump around."

No doubt MacLauchlan knows what he is talking about; in his capacity as president of a university, he says that he spends a good chunk of his time composing the sort of internal and external memos that he refers to in his handout.

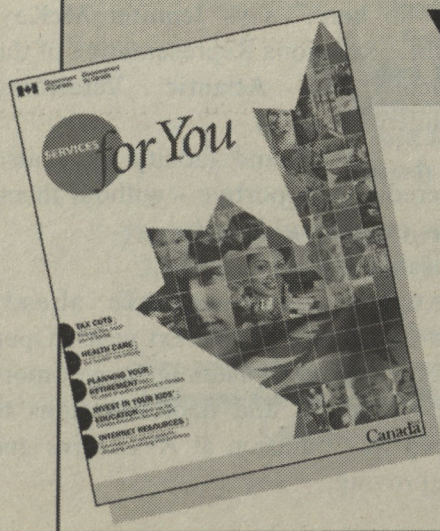
The first memo in the package looks correct enough, but MacLauchlan asks the class to look closer. He points to several errors in formatting and punctuation that could have been averted had he double checked the document before hitting the send button on his computer. In this case, he had blown his chance to make a good first impression.

"Before you let it go, before you decide that this is your chance to walk into the room, take a look at your stuff and make sure that the pages turn out the way that you want them to, and make sure that it comes of the page in a way that speaks with authority.

As he makes his way through his handout, MacLauchlan hits on some familiar composition topics such as paragraphing, vocabulary, active versus passive voice, and pronouns. By referring to the memos, he demonstrates that good writing has a practical real-world application.

He invites students to postulate as to what percentage of their lives are spent communicating; the

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