

Interview with former LCCC VP, Dr. James Cook

Part deux, page un

1. If you were president at LCCC, which changes would you make first? Do you think it is necessary to terminate, promote or demote personnel to make the college better?

A. You really want someone to take out a hit contract on me, don't you? If I was president at LCCC and I DO NOT WANT TO BE, I would probably do the following:

First, I would ban the words "phenomenal" and "spectacular" from the LCCC vocabulary. LCCC employees reading this will know what I am talking about. Now on to my real answer.

1. Ask the Board of Trustees for a comprehensive investigation of Costa Rica. That might seem like old news to some people, but it is a rip in the LCCC fabric and the last thing the public saw LCCC do about it was a lame attempt to cover it up. We – everyone – should know the complete truth; the public must be shown that we will not hide things from it and that the safety of our students – their students – is our highest priority; and the individual(s) responsible for this travesty must be held accountable. I would ask Brenda Lyttle to join me in an official apology, on behalf of the entire LCCC family, to the family of the troubled girl on that trip for LCCC's mishandling of what is now known simply as "Costa Rica." I would offer that family a very long-term, full-ride family scholarship (tuition, fees and books).

2. For purposes of complete openness and to start to build trust with the faculty, I would call together the faculty who were on Hammon's "enemies list". He's denied having such a list, never referred to an enemies list and I never saw one on paper, but it was there in his head the whole time. There is no doubt. On a number of occasions, he referred to one or several of them with a statement like, "I just wish there was some way we could get rid of them" or "I just wish we had enough on them to get rid of them". They were always the same set of individuals. I credit Marlene Tignor for staying his hand on several occasions. She never openly defied him, but just had a way of slowing or diverting the train, so to speak. I am convinced his early dislike of those individuals, a dislike that persisted to the end, put pressure on them and created an environment for them that they should not have had to bear. I believe they are owed an apology, told it is a new day, that slates are wiped clean, and then actively engage them in the building of a new LCCC. I have gotten to know some of them and I believe they would be tremendous assets to the college as partners in change.

3. Probably clean house on the cabinet, except for Murphy. I do not think the others are lacking in skill – although I suspect the "Peter Principle" applies to a couple of them – but would the trust be there that must exist between a president and his/her cabinet? I am doubtful. Distrust is a "deal breaker". In each case, I believe there are very capable people who could quickly step into their shoes, so disruption would be minimal.

4. Consolidate the cabinet into two vice presidents – Academic and Student Affairs and Administration and Advancement. The current VP of Student Affairs would become a dean in the new division. The same would happen with the current VP of Workforce and Community Development. It simply makes sense to me that all line functions (content) – those responsible for the living-learning experience – would report to one VP while all support functions (context) would support to a common VP as well.

5. Place current non-academic deans back at director level.

6. Consider if academic units might be re-aligned to cut academic dean positions.

7. HR (Human Resources) would be re-aligned to create a real HRO (Human Rights Office) function and an effective, independent grievance process.

8. I would create a discipline board, consisting of faculty reps, staff reps, HR and a WEA (Wyoming Education Association) representative, to review all proposed disciplinary actions beyond a first written notice and terminations. This would be a permanent committee.

9. I would bring in an independent audit firm to pore over all LCCC financials, policies and practices. Action would then be taken on their recommendations.

10. I would instruct HR to begin comprehensive job analyses of all administration and support positions to guide the future apportionment of labor resources – which could result in discontinuation of positions, job consolidation, new positions, etc. LCCC needs to align as closely as possible labor/expertise needed to labor/expertise provided. I suspect that alignment is wildly off in some cases across campus.

11. I would propose that the following protections be added to or affirmed in LCCC policy;

- academic freedom
- the sanctity of one's working space (with very limited, security-related exceptions)
- the right to free speech
- the right to dissent
- due process *in advance* of disciplinary action or termination, not after
- the right to representation in disciplinary and termination meetings
- the right to sufficient notice of such meetings that an employee can formulate a well-prepared defense
- the campus and public's right to see the unaltered, unredacted results of all college-sanctioned assessments and surveys
- a clearly delineated process for investigating allegations of employee wrongdoing

12. I would bring the faculty senate president and ESSC president into the cabinet.

13. I would advocate for a student position on the Board of Trustees – the ASG president. (He/she would not take part in executive sessions.)

14. I would task Lisa Murphy and a team of colleagues with developing a new plan to begin to repair LCCC's tattered image.

15. I would repeal the cuts in hours for custodial, yard and security staff and restore their benefits. We must have a safe, attractive and clean campus. Those professionals are some of LCCC most important people, as far as I am concerned. It doesn't matter how good our programs and services are. If our campus does not look good; if it is not clean; and if it is not safe, people won't come.

16. **THIS IS THE MOST IMPORTANT ONE** – I would model to the best of my ability – and I would expect all leadership to do the same – the integrity, transparency, candor, selflessness, hard work, humility and kindness we talk about and expect of others. We would also model the philosophy that no one, particularly the president, is above the law, above college policy, above being and admitting he is wrong or above showing respect and gratitude for every member of the LCCC family.

2. Do you think the present make-up of the Board is strong enough to find a good president, then to have a proper working relationship with that person to make LCCC a better community college?

A. I absolutely believe the new Board is strong enough to find and sustain a proper working relationship with a good president. LCCC will become a much better community college because of it.

3. Do you think there are still weak members on the board of trustees?

A. I believe John Kaiser is a weak member of the Board. He would have retained what I believe the evidence clearly indicates is an incompetent, integrity-challenged president. He is an anachronism who will hold the college back if allowed to. I was relieved when I heard he was not elected to an office on the new Board. John has a big heart and I believe is a good man, but he is too swayed by a kind, smooth manner, regardless of the performance that accompanies it. He is too laissez-faire in his philosophy of Board involvement in the affairs of the college – and we saw the terrible result of that: a president out of control. In the final analysis, I think he was too ego-invested in supporting a president he was mostly responsible for bringing to LCCC.

4. Do you know of any present or past LCCC employees who would make a good interim or permanent president for LCCC? Who, if you do?

A. I know of several people who I believe would make a great interim or permanent president, but I dare not mention their names lest I do them more harm than good. I have complete faith that the new board will find the right person.

5. Do you think athletics are a positive or negative program at LCCC? Were you there before athletics were reintroduced?

A. I know the Athletic Director very well. He was without a doubt the most effective director in Student Services when I was VP. Coach Ficca is a strong believer in and an avid practitioner of the student-athlete philosophy. Under his leadership, all sports are improving, LCCC student-athletes – as teams and overall – have improved their GPAs significantly, and Athletics resourcing has improved. Sports were reintroduced before I arrived in July 2009. I do believe athletics are a positive program at LCCC.

Readers may wonder why I have provided so much space in this and the last issue of the Cheyenne Herald for this interview. I will provide an explanation.

First, Jim Cook and I are not friends. Socially. We are acquaintances by virtue of my meeting him at his wrongful termination appeal hearing and we have communicated by e-mail on a handful of occasions. I don't recall if we have spoken on the phone and we have never met for lunch or even coffee. But, even after the termination of Darrel Hammon, I believed there was much that Jim Cook could share with readers of the Cheyenne Herald, and with the members of the LCCC Board of Trustees, that would not be only interesting, but revealing, informational and educational. And, for the Board, perhaps Jim's honest and candid words could help them avoid repeating the mistake that was made in the hiring of Hammon and the contract extension given him. So, I conducted a Q and A with Jim Cook. He willingly and fully answered every single question. No one else at LCCC could, or would, be able to provide as much information about the inner workings of your community college and I am grateful Jim Cook chose the Cheyenne Herald to share his words. All of us have gained from his willingness to be grilled.

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6. Do you think the money being spent on athletics could be better spent on academics?

A. I believe that athletics should look seriously at downgrading a few of its sports to club sports. Some of our programs are too small, they have too few competitors and/or their competitors are too widely spread to warrant the cost of full programs. By going to club sports, LCCC students could still enjoy the activities, still compete and program savings could be shifted to academics. Next, I do believe that a couple of the athletic teams should be discontinued. This is the way I see it - if my family can't afford food and electricity, we are not going to buy expensive clothes. With limited resources, we have to ask ourselves what is most important. The college is in the same boat. What is most important? Additional faculty resources - additional advising resources - are badly needed. Do we need them more than some administration positions or a couple of our athletic teams? I think so. Which teams? Since I am not going to be president I have the luxury of saying that's a secret. (smile)

7. Do you believe claims that athletics pays for itself at LCCC?

A. Unless things have changed drastically since the summer of '09, I know what the Athletics budget is. I know what they spend and what they bring in. LCCC subsidizes its athletics program. Very few athletics programs in America are completely self-sufficient. Only some of the big-time programs can honestly lay claim to that.

8. What do you think is the greatest problem area at LCCC at this point - after Hammon's dismissal.

A. A dysfunctional culture - fear, anger, suspicion, distrust, uncertainty and too much focus on how the *other* guy needs to improve rather than on self. This one is going to be very tough and it is going to take a long time to turn around.

Tied with . . .

The presence of individuals who were particularly dedicated Hammon-ites. Maybe "purging the Baathist Party" is the wrong strategy, but I believe some of those people need to go. They will profess support for new leadership and for change, but we have spent years watching their true colors. "But I was only that way because I was afraid of Hammon" or "I never really agreed with what he did" or "I was only that way because I was following orders." We know how history views those kinds of people. Any leader at the cabinet level who lacked the integrity and courage to stand up to Hammon, given some of things he pulled, should not be a leader at that level any longer at LCCC.

9. You suggested in an earlier answer that the Costa Rica trip and its aftermath were a damaging and festering subject at LCCC. What further do you think should be done to bring that to an end? You suggested a public apology, which is unlikely, and a generous scholarship offer to the girl's parents, can you think of anything else?

A. I stick with my earlier response. I believe the board of trustees should conduct an investigation - perhaps bring in an independent investigator from Mountain States Employer's Association, of which LCCC is a member. They have provided an independent investigator before and she did a very thorough and objective job. The advantage of bringing in an outsider party is it reduces the chance of the investigator being accused of some sort of bias. Beyond that, whether it is likely or unlikely, I believe the institution should apologize to *all* of the participants for a trip that was a mess from start to finish.

10. What is your opinion of promoting a current employee to president as opposed to an outside search? Do you know of any current or former employee who could handle the position, yourself excluded?

A. I believe LCCC needs an insider - someone who thoroughly knows the college - what is right with it and what is wrong. There is a lot of repair work to do and I believe someone completely new to the dynamics of LCCC would require too great a learning curve which would result in solutions too long in coming. I do know of current and former employees who could handle the position very well, but as I said in response to an earlier question, I will keep my own counsel on that.

You mention, "yourself excluded" in your question. Thank you for that. I did not have the slightest interest in the LCCC presidency when Darrel Hammon accused me of plotting with board members to depose him and install me in his place. That suspicion was the result of a wildly inaccurate quoting of something I said to a staff member. I do not have slightest interest now. I am part of LCCC's past. They need to move on past all of the controversy and focus on a new start.

11. You have reached a settlement with LCCC and received final payment, haven't you?

A. I asked for the settlement in two installments - \$100K the first week in December and \$100K the first week in January. I have received the first payment.

12. The word on the street is that you received \$200,000. You have been very open and candid about everything - is that amount accurate? You were also put back on the LCCC payroll some months before the settlement was reached, weren't you? Was the salary you were paid during that time, when you did not actually work for LCCC, subtracted from the \$200,000 or was it in addition to the \$200,000? If it was in addition, about how much was paid during that interim period?

A. Yes, the settlement approved by the LCCC Board of Trustees was \$200,000. I won my appeal on July 21 of this year. Effective at that moment to the first few days of December, I was an LCCC employee - even though Dr. Hammon would not allow me to return to work. I say "would not allow me" because I communicated through my attorney my complete willingness to return to work or, at least, work on projects from home. We were quickly told that wouldn't be happening. I could have insisted on my old job or one equivalent in level and pay instead of part of the settlement. Hammon would have had to let me come back to work, but I felt there was enough conflict and controversy in LCCC's and my life without me wading back into the morass.

I was paid around \$40,000 gross for the time period we were working on my settlement. Quite a high price for the taxpayers to pay for Hammon's bruised ego, but then he was never very concerned how he spent taxpayer money on himself. The salary I was paid during settlement negotiations was in addition to the \$200,000.

13. Back to your hearing for a second - what was the most hurtful thing said about you at the hearing - personally and professionally - and by whom? Did much of the testimony against you surprise you or did it surface during depositions so you were prepared? Do you believe witnesses were coached or "coerced" into their words?

A. I think the most hurtful thing wasn't any one thing said. It was the fact that several people - (Jenny) Rigg, (Jenny) Hargett and (Ron) Bailey, in particular, took full advantage of my generosity and my trust to get themselves what and where they wanted to be - to get promotions, big pay raises, better offices, and a more prominent voice in the affairs of the college. Rigg, (Michelle) Kallhoff, (Dianne) Lowe-Carpenter and Bailey particularly professed great appreciation for my leadership, my mentorship and my friendship - often complimenting me to the point of excess.

We confided many things to each other so when they claimed on the stand they couldn't come and talk to me about their concerns, it rang completely false. They had been way too candid in the past to me - sometimes *about me* - without any negative reaction from me to believe that one day they just woke up and were too afraid to talk to me. I always viewed their constructive criticisms of me more a sign of loyalty than disloyalty. They thought enough to be honest and candid with me. That made me a better leader. I often thanked them for caring enough to exercise that kind of candor with me, so the idea they became afraid of me at some point is totally fraudulent. I suspect the more likely reason was they knew what they were doing was wrong and they couldn't bear to look me in the eye.

I believe what they did was premeditated. I suspect a couple of them wanted to go to Hammon and the rest were too weak to opt out of the peer pressure. They saw a conflict brewing between Hammon and Cook so they made the political calculation that Hammon would be the last man standing. They then threw me under the bus to ingratiate themselves with Hammon. They waited until the day their promotions and pay raises were official - safe - July 1, 2009 to lower the boom. They professed to be very concerned about me as early as January, 2009, yet they waited until July 1, almost six months later? It was all about making sure they got what they wanted. I could have keeled over with a heart attack or stroke - that didn't matter. Making sure they got for themselves what they wanted came first and I remain deeply disappointed in them.

With respect to witnesses being coached or coerced - I am sure they were coached to a certain extent. That would not be unusual. Their coordinated, lame attempt to imply I was abusing some legal or illegal drug fell flat on its face with the hearing officer early on. My attorneys and I viewed that as a clear indication that they were worried/knew they didn't have enough of a legitimate case against me. The fact that they so often could not support assumptions, assertions and conclusions with hard evidence - had to rely on hearsay so often - also confirmed the weakness of their case. Quite frankly, I was embarrassed for them. I suspect they felt pressure to say some things they would not have said without the pressure, but I do not know for sure.

14. What do you think were the greatest strengths of LCCC during your time there?

A. That is a tough one to answer. There are so many strengths. That is the real tragedy of all of the bad press. It has overshadowed the tremendously good things going on at LCCC. LCCC is not Darrel Hammon. I believe the faculty is extremely well-qualified. The staff is very dedicated to its students. I think very few of them view their role as simply a job or a living. They view their role very seriously as educators, as developers of our students. The philosophy at LCCC is *everyone* is an educator regardless of their official job description.

The college is poised academically, technologically, geographically and demographically to become a leading community college in the country. To say it is there now is premature. It needs to first address some cultural issues, employee morale, the future of its leadership, how it plans and implements its plans, and prioritization.

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15. What do you think were the greatest weaknesses?

A. I viewed the moniker “comprehensive community college” as a fancy way of saying “We try to be all things to all people”. You know what they say about a Jack of all trades – is a master of none. LCCC needs to prioritize and focus on doing fewer things exceptionally well instead of a lot of things so-so.

Its culture was a definite weakness then as well as now: fear, anger and distrust were widespread. I also noticed a general tendency for folks to be easily offended. I recall one staff member – this was an adult professional – came into my office in tears because her name was out of alphabetical order in the “To” box of an email I sent. I had to convince her I meant nothing by that. Another time, I was called down by a staff member for starting an email with “Ladies and Gentlemen”. She was outraged that I was use a term as sexist as “ladies”. I told her I thought she was being silly and I considered “ladies” or “gentlemen” as terms of respect.

Another example was telling a staff member who needed excessive handholding that she was a director now and she needed to handle a particular matter. I was firm but calm. The next time I heard about that exchange, I was sitting in the president’s office being accused by Darrel Hammon of verbally abusing my staff. These are just a few examples.

16. Did you have good and regular communications with students? If so, what was their general impression of what was happening on campus at that time?

A. The great majority of the time I had good and regular communications with students. The exceptions would be during the controversy that followed the firing of a staff member who was well-liked by our student government association. I wouldn’t have won any popularity contests that semester. I also stirred up another storm of protest when I took down a large poster that was meant to express appreciation for that same staff member. The fact that it was doing that did not bother me at all. I thought it was a kind gesture. What bothered me was the hate language some students had decided to write on the poster – very hateful toward a certain race and certain sexual orientation. I believe in free speech rights just as much as anyone else. In fact, I have strongly defended the rights of students and student groups to exercise their right to free speech even when I strongly disagreed with what they had to say, but when someone gets into hate speech, that crosses a line that cannot be tolerated.

The students’ general impression – or I should say the Associated Student Government’s general impression – was lack of trust in the administration, the belief the administration didn’t listen enough and the feeling that it too often forced its decisions on the students. I did not agree with those positions then. And I don’t now. I have never worked at an institution where the students are as influential with the administration as they are at LCCC and I could list many instances where the student voice was listened to and heeded in the approach of the administration. The biggest challenge with the ASG when I was there was a couple of staff members who advised the ASG used an “us versus them” approach with their students. This had a very negative impact on the attitudes of some of the ASG members against the administration. I want to clarify that I am not talking about the current ASG advisors.

17. Do you have contact with any of the current students or current employees at LCCC now? If so, what is their feeling about the removal of Darrel Hammon? Are many on his side, lamenting his removal?

A. I have contact with quite a few current employees. The ones I have contact with view Hammon’s leaving as a very positive development, for the most part. I am told there is a sizable contingent on campus who is lamenting his removal. There were people who benefitted from him and they are now understandably apprehensive.

18. From your observation while you were there, how would you rate the quality of education provided students at LCCC on a one to ten scale (1-10) with ten being the highest?

A. I would give the quality of education a 7. I start with a 9 for the quality of faculty and then I deduct one point for an unfavorable student to teacher ratio. At about 24:1 it is, I believe, the highest in the state. The college needs more faculty. I deduct another point because I believe LCCC spreads too few resources over too many programs. They would be better off to devote more to less.

19. From your observation while you were there, how would you rate the morale on campus on the same 1 to 10 scale, 10 being highest? Was it better or worse among one group or another – students, faculty, deans, vice presidents?

A. I would give morale, when I was there, a 4. It was a definite problem, yet employees recognize that there was much that is good about LCCC. I think the morale was lowest among the faculty because they were feeling all the fears, anger, resentment and distrust the staff were feeling *plus* serious concern over the matter of sufficient faculty and other resources to provide the quality of education they wanted to provide. They were also more likely to come under fire for speaking out against Hammon and the administration. They did not believe academics at LCCC was accorded the priority it should be. I tend to agree with that. Next would be the staff. I am not sure which group would be next after that. The deans had serious concerns. The VPs did too – and those primarily centered on Dr. Hammon. One of the cabinet’s (VPs and a few others) most serious concerns was that something bad would be brought down on

LCCC’s head by a decision or action of the president and the president would then shift responsibility to one or more cabinet members, resulting in our paying a dear price for his mistake(s).

Before I leave this, I want to mention that what the administration recently did to Safety and Security, Maintenance and Custodial staff – cutting their hours and depriving them of benefits – was deplorable. The college has shown – especially recently – that when it really wants to, it can come up with quite a lot of money. When a college cuts back on the people who keep it safe, clean and groomed, they are cutting off their nose to spite their face. Everyone who comes to school wants to know that their campus is safe, clean and pleasant in appearance. If we cause people to doubt that or see a campus that is not as clean or pleasant in appearance, LCCC could see a negative impact on enrollment.

According to the U.S. Department of Education, crimes on community colleges have increased by 48% in the last three years. This is the worst time to consider cutting safety and security resources. LCCC should be doing the opposite – increasing those resources. Otherwise, how can LCCC honestly claim its students safety is its highest priority? We live in a “CSI” world and Hogland wants to maintain LCCC safety on a Mayberry Sheriff’s Department’s budget? That is not realistic. Campus Safety and Security desperately needs more resources. In early 2009, I asked Ron Bailey, Director of Campus Safety and Security, if he believed the campus was safe enough. He responded with an unequivocal “No”. I trust his judgment on the matter completely. They need more resources.

20. From your observation while you were there, how would you rate the curriculum at LCCC, same scale?

A. I would rate the curriculum a 9. From what I could tell it was very good – very meaty major courses, well-rounded general eds . . . all very rigorous. The number and types of courses offered, the well-roundedness of each degree program and the rigor of the programs seemed to me to be much more like a four-year college than the typical two year. This is a real strength for LCCC.

21. Do you think the facilities are adequate out there, based on your personal knowledge?

A. I do not believe the facilities are adequate. The college is lacking in sufficient classroom space, sufficient meeting space and its “student union” – I use that term very loosely – is several decades out of date. The string of white concrete buildings looks more like they should have towers at each corner and a razor wire fence around them than they do a college campus. I wish they would paint those buildings different colors to sharpen them up a bit. Another facilities challenge is way too many staff are crammed into small spaces in Student Services. Counseling is located in far too high a profile area to be as confidential/discrete as it needs to be for its students. Gym and exercise facilities are badly out of date.

Finally, I would say the college would really benefit from additional green space. The grounds staff does an excellent job of taking care of the green space that is there, but there is just not enough. Of course, the trick is to balance the desire for more green space with the need for ample parking.

22. What do you consider the most unnecessary offering and the strongest offering at the college?

A. Most unnecessary, unless things have changed: surgical tech; strongest offering: nursing.

23. If you were offered a comparable job to what you held at LCCC, would you consider returning or would your answer be an unequivocal “no”?

A. It would be an unequivocal “no”. As I said earlier, I am part of LCCC’s past. I am proud of what I accomplished. Together, my staff and I accomplished a lot of things that persist today – they deserve more credit than I do, but LCCC needs a clean start – a fresh, new team of leaders to help reinvent that institution.

24. Based on your knowledge of the industry, do you think it should take a salary of \$180,000 plus generous perks to attract a president of the quality the Board should want? If less, what range? \$150,000 or thereabouts?

A. First of all, I believe a college president should never expect or accept a pay raise of a greater percentage than what his/her employees are getting. When Hammon got around 24% a few years ago, the rest of us got 4%. That is just asking to create resentment and bad blood. I would go even a step further and say that during hard times, the top leadership should lead the way in terms of sacrifice. Before the rest of the employees are asked to give up anything, top leadership should be the first to give up raises or even take reductions in pay.

Hammon’s compensation was excessive, in my opinion. It wasn’t excessive so much in the salary, but in the perks. I thought it was ridiculous that the college – the taxpayer – was paying all of his wife’s travel expenses when she accompanied him. I would take that out of the next president’s contract. I would tighten up when he can use a LCCC credit card for meals. The president can go home, bring a lunch to work, or go to McDonalds on his own dime, especially when he is making \$180K. The president should have to show a significant benefit to the college when he seeks to travel out-of-state or out-of-country. And he should be required to stay within his budget.

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25. What was each of the cabinet members concerns about Hammon when you all went to see a board member in Jan/Feb of 2009?

A. Lisa Murphy was particularly concerned with how often the president was away from campus and the impact that had on getting the college's business done. She was also deeply concerned about how the president handled Costa Rica and what consequence that could have for the college. Peggi was concerned about the president's intervention in hiring processes, about his not listening to his cabinet, about the quality of legal counsel we were getting in some cases, and about his lack of honesty. Marlene and Stan focused on what they believed was his general inability to do his job. They referred to Hammon as incompetent, over his head, out of his class, etc.

My concerns focused on Hammon not listening to his advisors; his unwillingness to admit wrong and learn from our experiences; Costa Rica; his tendency to intervene in situations and make them worse; his tendency to ignore other situations until they needlessly became a crisis; and the cabinet fear that the president would bring some disaster down on LCCC as a result of poor judgment. Jerry Harris was with us and, if I recall, he echoed some of the other concerns and expressed frustration over the president's uneven enforcement of university policies and procedures.

26. What transpired with Darrel Hammon, related to Costa Rica, after everyone returned home?

A. When he came back, he told none of us about what happened in Costa Rica. I had to find out by way of a student who expressed her concerns to a faculty member, who expressed concerns to Dean Phyllis Jones. Phyllis then came and told me. I encouraged Phyllis to tell students to complete a Care Team referral. During that time, other Care Team members were finding out about the debacle and they were telling students to do the same. Hammon said nothing to any of us about Costa Rica until I went to him with questions. I told him we needed for him to do a Care Team referral. The Care Team finally got his referral a month after the group returned home. It was either during the return or as soon as they got back that Hammon took it upon himself to work out some sort of plan with the student and the director of the students academic program. As part of that plan, the student was to come to visit with the president every two weeks, I believe. This plan was set up outside the purview of the Care Team and was a violation of the college's policy regarding Care Team responsibilities and procedures. Luanne Gerhart, Chair of the Care Team, and Dianne Lowe-Carpenter, Director of Counseling, were particularly concerned that Hammon was, in effect, conducting counseling without a license; that his "sessions" with the student might prevent her from seeking qualified mental health assistance.

I saw the potential for big problems resulting from Costa Rica so I took it upon myself to direct the Care Team to conduct an investigation, write a report on its findings, and recommend steps for making sure another Costa Rica never happened again. The president was very upset when he found out we were conducting such an investigation, but allowed us to continue as long as it didn't become a "witch-hunt". When I gave Hammon the first draft of the report in mid-December, he directed me to remove criticisms of him, saying the Care Team had no authorization to investigate the president – investigation was not part of its role. I reminded him that the Care Team's investigative role was clearly implied in its mandate to learn from the incidents it dealt with and use that to enhance the safety of the LCCC family. I did not comply with his directive, but did tone down what I considered some incendiary language since it wasn't the content I was concerned about but the tone with which it was communicated. The president was the president and, by virtue of that, he deserved a certain level of respect.

When Gearhart, Lowe-Carpenter and I met with the president in January to officially issue the Care Team Report he was every angry – he again questioned the Care Team's right to do what it did, took me to task for not removing some elements, and emphatically stated that no one would tell him when he could or could not visit with LCCC students. It was Lowe-Carpenter, I believe, that responded, "We are not trying to tell you when or if you can visit with our students. We are simply concerned that you not engage in what could be construed as counseling without a license or the training to do so." The president answered Dianne with a reference to the many years of experience he had counseling youth in his church. Dianne acknowledged respect for that experience, but reiterated that in this context – a public education institution – counseling without appropriate qualifications or license could endanger a student and create significant liability risk for the college.

Hammon was defensive to the very end. He would not admit error, insisting instead he handled it the best way he could under the circumstances. We could not make him understand that "the best way he could" wasn't good enough. That justification would never hold up to the student's parents, the courts, or the court of public opinion. That is why he or another staff or faculty member should have escorted the student home as soon as they learned of her risk to herself or others. At no point did it seem we got through to him. As the semester progressed it looked more and more like the students frustration over the trip might erupt into the media or, worse, into a lawsuit. Lisa Murphy and I strongly encouraged the president to meet with the students who had participated in the trip, recount what had happened, talk about what we learned from our mistakes, talk about what we were doing to make sure it never happened again, apologize on behalf of the college, issue blanket refunds for trip expenses and just calm everyone down. The president finally agreed to do so.

We, in essence, wanted Hammon to "make nice".

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When the meeting happened, only a small handful of students showed up. Instead of doing what we agreed he would do, he rebuked the students for stirring up trouble, not being honest about their experience and for "rumor-mongering". Ironically, the rumor he used as an example was soon thereafter discovered to have been started by one of *his* daughters on her Facebook page. I had the unhappy role of bringing that to his attention and suggesting that he drop the whole rumor-mongering thing. He did. Costa Rica kept persisting after that because Dr. Hammon refused to deal with it forthrightly.

27. You mentioned concern over Darrel Hammon's travel earlier. Did you share that concern?

A. Yes, I shared that concern. It got to the point in 2008 that my bi-weekly one-on-one's with him became a pretty rare occurrence. So many things come up every day, let alone in the span of two weeks, that it is very important that a president touch base with his senior leadership team as a group and as individuals on a frequent basis. What concerned me as much as his absence was the nature of his travel. He would travel off to this state or that state or to another country and no one on the cabinet could have told you what benefit would accrue to the college as a result of that trip. Dr. Hammon and George McIlvaine took a trip to Russia few years ago. Dr. Hammon stated it was to try to start a faculty exchange program with a sister institution in that country. Absolutely nothing ever came of it. That seemed to happen a lot.

Another time, I was sitting in his reception area, waiting to meet with him. One of his assistants, Betsy, came out of her office holding some material on a conference in the Phoenix-Scottsdale area. She asked Dr. Hammon if he planned on attending. He said no. Hammon took a few steps toward his office door then turned around toward Betsy and said, "Wait, before you throw that away, let me talk to Joann and see if she wants to go." Hammon then took the material from Betsy and walked back into his office. I sat there amazed. Hammon was considering going to a conference on the taxpayer dime, not because he had a real interest in the conference, but because his wife might want to go to Phoenix. To me, that incident epitomized his attitude about his perks. *(Editor's note: That Hammon trip was for a WICHE one day meeting (Tuesday, January 5, 2010) offered for the Mountain States Association of Community College members in Scottsdale, AZ. Hammon's expense report shows he went to Phoenix the prior Saturday and stayed 4 nights at the pricey Chapparal Suites in Scottsdale at a cost of \$649.12 to taxpayers - FOR A ONE DAY MEETING! About \$1,350.00 total cost. Coincidentally, the 2010 Fiesta Bowl was played in Glendale, AZ on Monday, January 4th - the day before the meeting and two days after the Hammons arrival. TCU played Boise State, Hammon's alma mater.)*

28. So how have you and your wife been since leaving LCCC? What are you up to these days?

A. As tough a time as the last 17 months have been, God has shown us over and over again how good He is at turning lemons into lemonade. My termination was at the same time one of the worst and best things that ever happened to us. The administrative leave in the summer of 2009 for seven weeks was very difficult. But during that time I did some overdue soul-searching, gave my worries to the Lord and some very good things started to happen.

During most of the past year and a half, we spent a lot of time prepping for my appeal hearing, of course. Our attorneys, Greg and Pat Hacker, told us early on that winning my appeal was going to be an uphill battle. I couldn't have asked for a better legal team than Greg, Pat, Francine and Terri. I want to particularly single out Greg Hacker's phenomenal leading role in my case. He is truly a brilliant lawyer. I enjoyed listening as he and his father would discuss points of law and strategy – bouncing things back and forth. As they did, their thinking would gel into something better than what either man brought to the conversation. They make a great team.

The WEA. is wise to use them – and, by the way, I cannot thank Kathryn Valido, Matt Kruse, Dave Holt, Cathy Rogers with LCCCEA and the WEA organization enough for their support of me and of employee rights at LCCC. Their steadfast stand on behalf of faculty and staff at LCCC did more over the long term to affect positive change at LCCC than anything I or anyone else ever did.

Today, I am doing the most enjoyable work of my life, have made great progress on my writing projects, and work with a ministry that goes into the Middle East and Asia to plant and support Christian churches. We do a lot of support work for their congregation as well. I was in Egypt last year for a while. In 2011, I will travel to India, Egypt and, possibly, China. It is incredibly enjoyable and fulfilling work.

I have an amazing partner and best friend in my wife, Heather. I think what we went through was harder on her than on me, especially when she had to work at LCCC for another three months after I had been fired. She came through with flying colors though. She is a class act . . . and she is tough. She is a Qualls woman through and through. I tell people I married up and I mean it.

Heather works for a non-profit that sends English language teachers to universities throughout the Far East: China, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, Mongolia and Vietnam. She works in the Development Office as Advancement and Events Coordinator and is in charge of coordinating development and fundraising events and activities worldwide. She really loves what she does. On top of that, she is working on her MBA at Colorado State. Add in the mix that my health is now the best it has been in probably 10 years and Heather and I are very blessed.

In spite of the drama and trauma associated with LCCC for us, we look back on so many good things about that school: wonderful people, great programs, even greater potential. I have no doubt that the new board, a renewed optimism on campus, and the dedication of LCCC's faculty and staff will bring very good things to LCCC.