

Warren National University (Kennedy-Western) Chief Academic Officer talks with the Herald

(Concludes on page 7)

by Dave FEATHERLY

There have been few more personally satisfying story endings than what has happened with the bogus degree sellers that once made Cheyenne their home. While it remains embarrassing that the Wyoming Legislature was so slow to act, when it finally did, the exodus was swift and certain.

When unaccredited degree sellers had to move toward accreditation or leave town, almost all left immediately. Only one took a legitimate stab at accreditation. That was the newly named Warren National University (the same business had been known for over 20 years as the infamous Kennedy-Western University).

After the recent story here about Warren National withdrawing their application for accreditation because the Higher Learning Commission, a USDOE-approved accrediting agency, denied WNU candidacy for accreditation, a former senior administrator of Warren National University contacted me by e-mail.

I thought if I were ever contacted directly by someone connected to one of the degree sellers, it would be to threaten to sue me. But this contact was anything but. The former senior administrator wrote about her involvement with WNU. She ended that first e-mail with, "I was confident HLC would see through the scam and they did. It seems you did as well. Thanks for the thoughtful and accurate account. It is amazing the school lasted 24 years."

I was admittedly a bit surprised when the response to my request for a meeting was, "I would be glad to talk with you." So, we met for a lengthy discussion.

She had told me in the initial e-mail: "I was a senior administrator at WNU in Cheyenne for 18 months until I was told the at-will clause in my contract was being invoked. I was fired in an email over the Christmas holiday. My departure was timely. I believe I was hired for my credentials and not to actually lead academic change. It was clear to me that a quality program with integrity was never going to happen. The planning by the handful of credible staff hired by me was ignored. (They were fired with me.) Money was the issue. The COO and President had no "real" academic experience. None of the board of directors and later the board of trustees had any higher education experience - except their own university experience."

The credentials she referred to are very, very impressive. She holds a Ph.D. and is a Professor Emeritus at a major university in the region and has served on many of the most impressive boards in her city - both educational and civic.

She told me in another e-mail: "At the time of my dismissal I had a \$19,500 bonus that was for retention and performance. I was never evaluated and three days before the end of the year they fired me. I was told that if I said anything, any separation dollars would be withheld. I was told that I could receive the dollars in the first quarter of 2008. In March 2008, I contacted Paul Saltman, He nor anyone else from WNU responded. I wasn't surprised and never expected any payment. The dismissal process was less the professional."

Note: Paul Saltman is the founder of Kennedy-Western and remains the head of the organization.

I asked her, when we met, why she had taken a job with WNU. To me, it was easy to determine that WNU was an ongoing unaccredited business, not a legitimate university. She believed, because she was told and it was public knowledge, that she was being brought on-board to take the business through the accreditation process. She soon learned that was not likely to happen. She was hired in August of 2006 and, at first, saw a road to accreditation.

Within a year, she saw that was not possible - that accreditation could not be achieved.

When the founder of KWU/WNU (Paul Saltman) visited the accrediting agency, Higher Learning Commission (HLC) in Chicago, accompanied by this chief academic officer (CAO), his pitch to HLC was the strength of his board of directors. HLC had no interest. "Paul had told me that he had an inroad with HLC and that we were going to get this because he 'greased the skids, so to speak'."

He also told her, she said, "but we are going to make a legitimate attempt to get to it."

By April, this imminently qualified and experienced academician had raised a "lot of questions" about the preparation for accreditation. Paul and a board member from California visited her and "essentially told me to shape up and get in line and do what the party line is saying or I would not be an employee."

When she initially went to interview with Paul Saltman, the CFO (Bob Patterson) and a woman (Susan Ishsi, also Ikemoto), who was head of "student affairs," she said, "all Paul wanted to do was show me the picture of him and Dick Cheney on his office wall."

As CAO, her responsibility was to "align all academic programs with the accreditation standards." She hired faculty, three deans and other administrative staff - all of whom were also terminated by WNU.

"The University (Warren National) would admit anybody," she told me, "if you could write the check, you could come to school." WNU admitted people "who were truly not university quality candidates. So, if you're only modestly prepared to do any of the work, you might have to work really hard to do any of the work." (Note: That might explain Bob Fecht's contention that he worked harder for his bogus Lacrosse degree than he did for his bachelor's degree at SIU.)

Students could also do mediocre work and get good grades, she said.

About exams: Students could log onto a website and pull up the test they were to take. Even tests for master's and doctoral degrees were multiple choice. The exam was graded immediately. A student could then get exam results, along with all of the answers, immediately print it out, and if they did not pass, they could call the exam coordinator and say, "I'm ready to re-take that exam."

What was supposed to happen was that the second exam was supposed to be an "alternate exam" - a different exam. KWU/WNU did not do that. They allowed a retake of the same exam and the student would have the printed answers in front of them when they retook the test.

Every test could be taken twice. The neat thing about the second time is that the student had the answers. Printed out from taking it the first time and having or choosing to take it again. Can't beat that with a stick.

In "proctored" exams (at the doctoral level, some exams had to be observed), students could select who would observe the test taking and she discovered one pair of students using the other's spouse to proctor his exam. Accredited junior colleges and colleges and universities will not proctor tests for students of unaccredited schools.

When asked if the master's and doctoral degrees issued by KWU/WNU should be discounted, in terms that they weren't valid, they weren't worth much. "Absolutely," she said, "they weren't worth the paper they were printed on."

During her tenure, there were about ten people in the Cheyenne office, another 50 in a California office. In California were telemarketers, all the IT people, accounting, HR, etc. Shortly before announcing the closing, the California office was closed and four of those employees came to Cheyenne. This woman never relocated to Cheyenne - she commuted.

Asked where the "engine" for the company was, she said "everything was done in California." Asked the purpose of the Cheyenne office, she said, "the legitimacy of the license."

The office in California was "very impressive," she said and was used for student visits. If a student wanted to visit that office, KWU/WNU would take \$300 off their fees. But KWU/WNU did not inform those students that they could not sell their degrees across the street from the office. KWU/WNU could not sell degrees in California, Utah or Idaho.

While "blatant lies" were not a part of the accreditation application, "overstatement of reality" was, she said. What was on paper was not completely true. When she told management "we're not ready to do this," their "pushback" was, "we don't have enough money to last very long so we have to move ahead now."


I had heard that KWU/WNU had received an infusion of \$5,000,000 from a Texas venture capital firm and when this woman was being interviewed for the CAO position, she asked the CFO how much money was available for the accreditation push and she was told "\$5,000,000." The rumor must have been right. That venture capital group also had someone on the WNU board of directors.

A bone of contention leading up to the candidacy for accreditation phase was "testing through" of students. An interested student, especially a bright student, could take an exam without even purchasing a book. They could retake it if they did not pass - even take it again to get a better score. The same exam! With the answers! Her position from the outset was that "you can't give a grade in a course based on one exam."

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When excellent newspapers like the Rocky Mountain News fail, how does a mediocre-to-poor one like the Wyoming Tribune-Eagle survive?

It's a sad day in the field of journalism and reportage when a 150 year-old daily newspaper like the Rocky Mountain News closes its doors.

Just a decade ago, that was unthinkable.

The Joint Operating Agreement between the Rocky and the Denver Post may have bought a little time but it was obvious from the outset that only the stronger would survive. It is quite remarkable that the Rocky made it another eight years.

Newspapers from around the country have fallen on hard times. The Minneapolis Star-Tribune has filed bankruptcy. It was always thought to be the bigger, better and stronger newspaper than the St. Paul Pioneer-Press. If the Star-Tribune ceases publication, many on the Minneapolis side of the River will have a very hard choice to make. Those two cities don't like to have to cross over and do business with the other. And, each's focus was on their own city, not the other.

Some will blame these failings on the Internet but that isn't the whole story. More than the Internet, many in the younger generation(s) simply do not much care about the news. And, many in my own generation care little more.

What has happened? What has caused the indifference and apathy to escalate?

That lack of interest coincides with the lessening of trust and respect for those in the newspaper business. Advertisers drive news, the news doesn't. Here in Cheyenne, if an important story would reflect badly on a major newspaper advertiser, the WT-E will sit on the story.

This newspaper has broken every rule of responsible journalism and violate every tenet of professionalism integrity.

This newspaper has a marketing man on the editorial board. That is a no-no everywhere in the newspaper business. The reason they do it here is not to get a different perspective (there is only one perspective allowed with the WT-E), it is to protect against offending an important advertiser. A large dues payer.

For example, there is a story elsewhere in this issue about contamination to wastewater from the Walmart Distribution

Center west of town. The daily newspaper took a paid announcement from the Board of Public Utilities but did not develop a story about the contamination - even though they were well aware of it.

The Rocky's misfortune was that they had to share the advertising revenue with a major competitor - the Denver Post. Obviously, if only one of them had published in Denver, that one would have generated far more revenue than dividing revenue with another.

When the two papers entered into a JOA, ad rates went up considerably. But not enough to keep both papers profitable.

Which is the better paper down there? That is an argument that has been waged for years. Residents will have the same choice in newspapers in Denver that Cheyenne has long had. None. When there were two issues of a daily paper here, they were both owned by the same family. They had different political bents but advertisers could not play one paper against the other for rates. And they both had the same bank account.

What is the future of daily newspapers? The demand for the broadest circulation of grocery store flyers and national retail inserts on Sunday will require newspaper distribution. No one else can deliver those inserts on Sunday and now the USPS is talking about eliminating one day of delivery each week. With newspaper circulation on the wane, the advertisers are only getting 40-60% of local households when they use daily newspapers for distribution. As that saturation declines further and further, advertisers will seek another way to get their ads in the hands of consumers.

In terms of news coverage, many print and broadcast media have reduced the number of employees in the news-gathering activities of their business already. In Cheyenne, the WT-E has virtually no reporters doing leg work - they produce stories off "feeds" to them (press releases) and most of the pages are made up of wire service cut and paste stories.

Years ago, there were magazines that were important in American life. They are now gone. A generation from now, daily newspapers are unlikely to exist. That will not be a good thing. Or, will it?

KWU/WNU closing

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Interestingly, places like KWU/WNU and Preston University will not accept a candidate for a master's or doctoral degree if they do not have a bachelors degree from an "accredited" school.

Warren National would not hire a faculty member who had a degree from an unaccredited "university" like them. An admission of illegitimacy, isn't that?

Included in the duties of the three Deans she hired was to validate the credentials of all members of their faculty and validate their qualifications to teach the course they were retained to teach. At "the peak," during the 18 months she was there, KWU/WNU had about 100 faculty. Deans were also "redoing curriculum and courses and monitoring their faculty performance." Changes were also made to the "thesis and dissertation process" - to be more consistent with how real colleges/universities operate.

When asked how many students KWU/WNU had, she said no one could answer that. They could not be tracked or counted because, under the old model, once a student, always a student - if they did not complete a course or run out of money. When she wanted to revise a course offering, she asked if there were any students in the course. She was told, "we really can't tell." One student took 12 years to complete a course. If a student didn't ask for help or request an exam, the school did not know if they were still active. She doubts whether KWU/WNU will know how many students are out there in the midst of a course or pursuit of a degree when they close.

KWU/WNU offered both courses and degrees. It was "about \$10,000 for a degree, about \$350 a credit/hour for a course." Students who applied as an undergraduate could test and if they passed, KWU/WNU awarded 60 credits toward a degree which required 120 credits. KWU/WNU had also awarded credits for experience, a practice HLC would never accept and that was ended.

Had Warren National University gained accreditation, degrees granted by them or Kennedy Western up to that point would have carried no value forward. In other words, one who had earned a bachelor's degree before the accreditation from KWU or WNU could not use that bachelor's degree to advance to a master's or doctoral degree with them.

However, earlier Kennedy Western or Warren National graduates could request a duplicate diploma (if WNU became accredited) and it would have shown it was from Warren National University. Students would hope employers would accept that degree as from an accredited university although it had been "earned" before accreditation.

She drafted a proposal that any such transcripts or diplomas issued on those requests must have a disclaimer making it clear that the degree was earned while KWU/WNU was unaccredited. That proposal was rejected. It was as though ownership wanted to enable and perpetuate the deception.

There were two "graduations" conducted in Cheyenne while she worked for the company. One was held at the Plains Hotel and the other at the Lions Park Community House. Asked how many attended, she estimated 25-30 and their families. A final graduation was held at the Holiday Inn. Until it served their purposes to pretend to be from Wyoming, they held graduations in California.

Almost all of the graduates were foreign students, who had no idea, she believed, that the degree they were getting was worth nothing. They resided in the United States but were of foreign origin.

When she heard Preston University had departed Cheyenne, she suggested that KWU/WNU take their larger spaces. She was told, "Oh, my God, you can't say that. They were awful." Pot calling the kettle black, it sounds like. "At least they had windows," she said - a reference to the basement offices in the old J.C. Penney Building that housed KWU/WNU.

She believes Warren National now has four people working in the Cheyenne office. One is there to read dissertations and, "unless blatantly plagiarized," everyone is passed, she has heard. Foreign students believe that plagiarism is the "highest form of flattery" and so copying another's work is just fine.

Why would anyone want a WNU degree at this point, I asked her? She said, "I don't know, I don't know why they'd want a degree. I don't know." The appeal of these degrees remains perplexing. When asked about the sales practices, she said that KWU/WNU "budgeted about 50% to marketing, 20% to academics, 20% for administration ...". In legitimate colleges and universities, 50% goes to academics and the rest to support. Marketers were required to make several sales a day and "if you don't make your target two weeks in a row, you're out of here."

When I told her that I had read the KWU/WNU volume was anywhere from \$3-\$4 million to \$23 million a year and that I had no idea what was accurate, she said, "I would say that in the good years, it was closer to \$23 million, in the bad years, it was closer to \$5 million." "Recruiters," she said, "made \$125,000 a year and they had 30 of them."

When I asked her if she thought they'd have any money for refunds, she said simply, "no."

That will be the legacy of Kennedy Western University. Warren National University existed only in name to distance the company from students who were bound to be hostile to the past of their "education" if WNU had become accredited.

They did not and now it is over.

In the next issue, I'll inform readers how Paul Saltman tried to "grease" politicians and political parties in Wyoming. Who got what and when. My website has other interesting stories and documents related to this subject - the demises of Kennedy-Western/Warren National University, Preston University and Lacrosse University.

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