

To: Conference

From: Tom Kirk, Karen Roeper, Bryan Coalt

Date: April 12, 2004

Re: Summary of data from Communications Survey

Since we have heard a fair amount of grumbling about aspects of the campus communication plan we wanted to get a more systematic reading of community opinion. Web Management and Services conducted an online survey during February – March to get this more systematic reading of community opinion. The goals of the survey were to determine (1) the degree of acceptance of Around the Heart and the Earlham Topics listserv, and (2) how well the strategy for and usefulness of the various channels of communication are working. The survey is an effort to get early feedback on the new plan and was not necessarily intended to provide guidance for major revision of the plan. Our hope was that the results might indicate some fine tuning we might do to make the plan work better.

The online survey contained ten items with plenty of opportunity for comments (see attached). A message inviting completion of the survey was sent to the respective listservs and distribution lists for faculty, students and staff and a follow-up reminder was sent about four weeks later. A total of 85 people responded: 19 teaching faculty, 20 administrative faculty, 11 staff and 35 students. This is an underwhelming response and therefore any conclusions must be tentative. Furthermore since the communication plan has been in place for only a few months, it is too soon to make radical changes.

The following tentative conclusions can be drawn. For those who want the data there is attached a summary of the data and a complete set of data is available at [www.earlham.edu/xxxxx](http://www.earlham.edu/xxxxx).

- (1) Among the respondents the most important and most widely consumed information sources are, in descending order of importance: The Word (for all), the daily newsletter distributed on the Faculty and staff listservs (for faculty and staff), and the faculty listserv (for administrative and teaching faculty) and the staff listserv (for staff). Around the Heart is not widely read in its individual formats unless one assumes that respondents read only one format; this is perhaps not a safe assumption. It also appears that users don't seem able to differentiate between the two versions of ATH.
- (2) Among the respondents the typical ways they find out about campus events are, in descending order of importance: posters, word of mouth, the daily newsletter, events brochure, faculty listserv (and staff listserv), the Around the Heart blog, and The Word.
- (3) Almost none of the faculty and staff respondents regularly reads Around the Heart in any format.
- (4) Among students Around the Heart is read by slightly less than half the student respondents and they considered it the least helpful means of communication.

(5) Among the respondents the satisfaction with the current system is definitely mixed.

When asked: Are you satisfied with the volume of Earlham listserv mail you are receiving? The response was:

Too Many 21	Just Right 36	Not enough 17	Other 24
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When asked: Are you satisfied with the current approach to channeling of content to the various means of campus communication? The response was:

Yes 21	No 29	It's too soon to tell 12	I'll use whatever is available 17
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(5) Respondents' comments also reflect this mixed opinion. For almost every positive comment about a particular channel of communication there is an opposite negative comment. Here are a few examples:

Around the Heart:

Takes too much time to read

Accessible Information on all events

Daily newsletter:

Important information for faculty only

Covers less than 10% of activities

Earlham Topics

Fun, spontaneous, about real

More info than I need

(7) We learned that the campus gets its timely information, much as does the general public, from a **mix of media**. Not only did some respondents indicate that print and electronic communication methods were helpful, but others also indicated that posters and word of mouth are still very much a part of our campus' interaction. This makes it even more difficult to concentrate our attention on a single method of communication. It seems as if we must provide something for everyone — an approach that seems more work intensive — rather than make everyone use one means of communication.

(8) The policies for segregating information channels are not clearly understood nor are they fully appreciated. This sentiment is widely expressed in these comments:

- Hard to know decision rules;
- Referring to Earlham\_Topics: “Doesn't work”;
- Overwhelmed with information-so I don't use available channels regularly;

- Current system far too complex-too many overlapping channels-put all the info together;
- Don't want to have to figure out appropriate vehicle to send a message.

(9) Actions to be taken as a result of general conclusions

- A. Redistribute the policies on the uses of channels of information. See attached abbreviated version.
- B. Subscribe all staff and faculty to Earlham\_topics and let people unsubscribe.
- C. Work to integrate daily newsletter and Around the Heart into one flow of information for 2004-05.
- D. Encourage students to conduct their own survey of student opinion to build a better understanding of what would make ATH more effective as an official communication piece. Too few students responded to this survey.