

Has the housekeeping on the Earlham campus been below standard? asks the *Word*. Housekeeping has been a chronic problem for at least the past decade. We have received repeated and sustained complaints about housekeeping quality from students, faculty, staff, and parents. I've received quite a number of these complaints myself. And we have made a number of attempts to improve, none of them successful.

Housekeeping falls in the division of the college's administration overseen by Dick Smith, our V.P. for Finance. Two years ago when we hired Cherie Dolehanty as our Assistant V.P. for Business Operations, reporting to Dick, we asked her to supervise housekeeping and to make a new concerted effort to improve that area of the college's operations. As part of this effort, Cherie and Dick hired Custodial Consulting, a firm with considerable experience at a number of similar institutions, to do an external audit of our housekeeping quality. In November 2002 Custodial Consulting found our housekeeping to be well below standard. On their scale, our quality in various buildings was in the high fifties to low sixties as compared to a target of 75 as a minimum.

With this evaluation in hand, we tried again to improve the quality of housekeeping. We did more training of housekeepers, adjusted staffing patterns and tried new techniques. And over this period, we continued to evaluate the quality of the work. The Assistant Director of Housekeeping shared the results of monthly performance audits with each housekeeper. But when Custodial Consulting returned for a second audit in May 2003, they found we still fell well short of minimum standards.

Did we follow good decision-making process in deciding to outsource housekeeping? I believe we did. Under our complex governance processes, this was a decision for Cherie Dolehanty and Dick Smith to make after consulting broadly and listening carefully to others. The decision to outsource housekeeping came only after a long process of discussion, consultation, and testing of internal solutions. There were meetings with the housekeepers to keep them abreast of the problem, to let them know about avenues of solution, and to give them opportunities to make suggestions. Dick and Cherie also provided updates to College Conference, Senior Staff, Budget Committee, and Employee Council, and they asked for feedback from all these groups.

The *Word* asked whether I thought students were left out of the process that decided to outsource housekeepers. Our governance process doesn't expect that students will be formally consulted in making every decision. It's important to recognize, however, that many of the complaints about poor housekeeping came from students. That's an important way students have participated. It has also been no secret that outsourcing was under consideration. The *Word* ran a story about the possibility last November. Dick and Cherie have listened carefully to everyone who has offered suggestions or voiced an opinion: housekeepers, students, faculty, and other staff. But at the end of the day, it is Dick and Cherie's responsibility to make the best decision about how we are going to have good housekeeping. They hold the positions they do because we have confidence they understand Earlham, and because they have the expertise and experience to make such decisions.

In seeking an external firm to do our housekeeping, Cherie and Dick will look for a firm that has superior understanding of how to do housekeeping at the consistent level of excellence we expect. They will follow the Vendor Relations policy we established a few years ago. They will insist that the new firm hire all our current housekeepers, and keep their wages and their benefits the same as they are at present.

Finally, the *Word* asked what I have to say to those students who are angry at the administration regarding the housekeeping issue. I'd ask them what they were angry about. We certainly need to improve the quality of housekeeping. We have tried and tried again to solve the problem internally. I believe we have followed good process in making the decision, and I believe we have reached a good decision.