

To: Charles E. DeSantis <charles.desantis@stanford.edu>
From: John Burke Truher <jack@truher.net>
Subject: the Stanford retiree experience
Cc: Retiree Advisory Committee <retadvcom@list.stanford.edu>

I will suggest here some possible improvements in Stanford's communications with retirees. Benefits News, Fall 2004 (pg 6) describes the Retiree Advisory Committee (RAC) as a point of access on matters of concern on all matters for retirees, not only on Health Benefits issues.

(1) I have written a couple times to the RAC in previous years. I never get a response from anyone. That's not interactive communication. That is near absolute non-collaboration.

(2) I enrolled on-line this year. That produces a record of receipt. When I subsequently returned the Medicare + Choice Universal Enrollment Form at the Benefits desk, there was no receipt.

(3) I have assisted other retirees who found the transition into medicare status incomprehensible, and Benefits people unwilling or unable to explain the process in what seemed a timely way. Only after repeated appeals, were we properly informed of what to expect. I believe that such exasperation concerning uncertainties of transition is unnecessary and is not uncommon.

(4) The Stanford University letter to retirees from Charles DeSantis of November 12, 2004, opens by explaining "programming errors that resulted in incorrect monthly cost" calculations in the plan options. This is inappropriate language. The numerical errors in published data, which went uncorrected for most of the enrollment period, is a BLUNDER. For the striking increase of 50% in some categories to remain uncorrected suggests a serious problem in the organization and in the evaluation and validation of data. It is wrong to ascribe this blunder solely to "programming errors". The programmer should not be singled-out or punished. The organization, its managers collectively, and its support and checking processes are at fault.

I was responsible for some two decades for computations, involving creation, preparation, validation, and maintenance of several numerical data bases that were critical to successful operation of the accelerator beams at SLAC. In all this period, my released calculations were NEVER

identified as erroneous. When accelerator beams performed as predicted, my computerized datasets were confirmed. This sort of work is necessarily consultive and collaborative. Independent spot checked calculations should be invited of associated contributors. Isolating segmentation of responsibility should be discouraged. Sources for data and processing equations should be on open files to departmental or even public audit. Free access to an appropriate skills mix should be cultivated. Computational variations are eliminated as the data base is finalized. For errors to survive, propagate, and be published is never accurately explained away as due to "programming errors".

(5) Over my years of employment, access to university libraries was consistently described as a retiree benefit to anticipate. That was true upon my retirement in 1996. My University retiree card would get me access to the stacks. No further access codes were required. Card files or computer Spires or Socrates data bases were available in the library or online to find books.

I was an occasional user of the libraries. But in recent years, this benefit has been withdrawn because now Stanford's computerized library data base is inaccessible unless one has a SUnet ID, Stanford's pin number available only to those who are "sponsored", budgeted, approved project. I have learned of some unsponsored retirees who still have their SUnet ID, but this is apparently capriciously allowed. I have made several inquiries about this into the Stanford vacuum without success. There is NO ONE to deal with this sort of LOSS OF BENEFITS.

(6) For several years, I have made a considerable effort to understand what Stanford BenefitSU is doing. You can find a record of this at <http://www.geocities.com/retireesofstanford>. When I completed BenefitSU selections this year, I wrote into this web page:

"I left the Retiree Informational Presentation and two of the Benefits Fairs encounters this week feeling that I was courteously and wisely advised and assisted. I got the sense that I was encountering a competent and well prepared team of professionals."

Today I still feel that way about my personal encounters this year. My perceptions elsewhere in this letter also remain active.