Goodman’s remarks bring faculty, dean response

By Sally Thompson
Daily Reporter Writer

A recent Mankato Free Press article about Chair of Ideas holder Mitchell Goodman has generated a rash of response from some faculty members.

Statements on which Goodman is quoted in the article that some faculty may have taken issue with the following:

“Goodman is not optimistic that Mankato State will be opened up to the real world. It’s not going to happen in Mankato, I’m afraid, which is a place heavily loaded up with conservative faculty that only want to continue the old routines, from what I’ve heard.”

“YET HE BELIEVES the college has a ‘progressive administration,’ and said President James F. Nickerson is ‘a hopeful element here. But he’s apparently got a faculty that for the most part is fighting him and is dragging...and won’t change.’

‘Goodman also praised the dean of the School of Arts and Science, Elwood Ehrle. As with Nickerson, however, Goodman believes Ehrle is ‘being fought by the faculty.’

‘Ehrle is full of good ideas. Whether he’s got the boldness to push them through past the inertia of his faculty is a very large question.’

GOODMAN referred to college as it exists in the U.S. today as being academic ‘holding pens’ – places where young people go “to learn how to become grown up and in the world” because society has given them no other alternatives.

Responses from faculty prompted Ehrle to send an open letter to the 312 Arts and Science faculty members. (See letter to the editor on page 15).

In the letter Ehrle defended faculty against “various slurs being thrown upon us.” “Alluding to the creativity and potential inherent in this faculty as a ‘holding pen’ is a travesty I find difficult to endure,” said Ehrle.

AS STATED in the Free Press article, Goodman and Ehrle agree that a college like Mankato State is hopeless in its present condition.

“College level instruction just isn’t what it ought to be,” said Ehrle. Too much education is dedicated to making people well-informed, Ehrle continued, “and a well-informed person is the most useless bore.”

Goodman said part of the problem with colleges as he sees it begins with graduate schools. “A lot of faculty are the product of a graduate school - which is essentially a deadening process. They lose their flexibility and inventiveness there,” he said.

FACULTY WHO try new things in their classes, Goodman said, run into students who’ve been turned off by the educational system for 14 years.

But students are more aware than they used to be, Goodman continued, “and some are beginning to question whether a teacher really knows what he’s saying and whether the material presented will make any difference in his life,” he said.

“Faculty, though are afraid to reform - it’s too threatening to them,” Goodman said. “There’s only been a pretense of reform during the past few years.”

GOODMAN emphasized he found some faculty at Mankato State who are trying alternate approaches to education. “I was surprised at the number of creative, lively students here, because I was led to believe before I came here there wouldn’t be many,” said Goodman.

Ehrle called for Goodman to “Sprinkle criticisms some good ideas about what can be done about problems.”

Alienating the faculty, Ehrle said, is not the way to make changes. “It’s not all helpful if you turn off the people who have to do the job,” he said.

IF GOODMAN cannot make suggestions for reform and ways to implement them, said Ehrle, “then it’s questionable whether we’ve been helped at all.”

Goodman said an example of constructive suggestions he has made was an offer to speak to freshman composition instructors about his experiences in a U.S. Office of Education funded experimental English project at Stanford University.

“I got no response at all. I take that as a symptom of inertia here,” said Goodman.

His role in the Chair of Ideas, as Goodman quoted from information given to him on the position, is to “stimulate and challenge both students and faculty.”

“I am engaged in drawing out challenges,” Goodman said. “Some challenges have been taken defensively by faculty as slurs.”

Ehrle sees reform at Mankato state coming not from restructuring schools or changing curriculums but in changing attitudes.

Goodman: ‘Faculty are afraid to reform - it’s too threatening to them.’

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