



# From the President's Desk

## West is Uncool

Dear Colleagues:

By now I hope you have heard that West Los Angeles College has been recognized by the *Chronicle of Higher Education* as one of the nation's "Great Colleges to Work For" for 2009. This honor results from the recent campus climate survey that we all took this past spring. Although we could have opted to be in the small college category, we chose to have our results compared with the biggest community colleges of 10,000 students or more. So it is all the more impressive that we ranked in the top three in the nation in five of fifteen categories, including an important one of the Supervisor/Chair Relationship: "My supervisor makes expectations clear and solicits ideas." Our results put us in the company of such vaunted institutions as Miami-Dade.

So what is the West secret sauce? Well, as you know I've been working really hard this summer, given our 'money-money-it's-all-about-money-drama' to find new indicators of true value. I've pondered this quite a bit and I'd like to advance the hypothesis here that at its heart West is a college of great teachers and we are great teachers because we are NOT cool. That is, we reject the poses, posturing and knowingness of coolness and openly embrace our uncoolness. We are sincere, authentic, curious, open and warm. We're not smug or contented. We struggle for alternatives. And we laugh a lot—together. And we have a funny laugh and we don't really care because, you see, we are so NOT cool.

I don't mean to offend any of you, but I really don't think of you as cool. There are no cliques here at West. No status symbols or pecking order. West is a place where you can be yourself. And this clearly comes across to our students who play off our uncoolness and feel better that there's a place for each of them in this world, no matter whether you have the right clothes or the right hair stylist. I've always been so grateful to be a member of our West Family. When I re-read Mark Edmundson's article I cite at left, I finally realized why I feel so at home here: West is uncool.

So let us revel in our uncoolness. In a world that is way too cool for its own good, uncoolness is true value and part of what building a great college is all about.

In hope and heart,  
*Mark*

## Words for the Week

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The only true currency in this bankrupt world is what you share with someone else when you are uncool.

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~ from the movie *Almost Famous* (2000). The character of the veteran rock journalist Lester Bangs advising an aspiring young cub writer.

July 21, 2009

### THIS DAY IN EDUCATION HISTORY

John T. Scopes, a biology teacher, was found guilty for teaching Darwinism in a Dayton, Tenn., public school. Clarence Darrow was one of Scopes' attorneys, while William Jennings Bryan aided the state prosecutor. Darrow argued that academic freedom was being violated and claimed that the legislature had indicated a religious preference, violating the separation of church and state. Scopes was convicted, partly because the defense refused to plead any of the technical defenses available, fearing an acquittal on a technical rather than a constitutional basis. Scopes was, however, later released by the state supreme court on a technicality. Although the outcry over the case tended to discourage enactment of similar legislation in other states, the law was not repealed until 1967.

### ON TEACHING— AND UNCOOLNESS

From Mark Edmundson, University of Virginia, in *The New York Times Magazine*, September 21, 2008: "Uncoolness can be a state that anyone slides into, a state in which we're more open, vulnerable and susceptible to being surprised than when we've got the cold, deflective armor on. Teachers live for the moments when their students—and they themselves—cast off the breastplates and iron masks and open up. And good teachers are always ready for those moments to occur."