



A CONVERSATION ON



DRS. HOWARD AND BEVERLY DAVENPORT SYPHER HAVE COME A LONG WAY SINCE THE 1970S AND THEIR DAYS AS STUDENTS AT WESTERN KENTUCKY UNIVERSITY. CURRENTLY, DR. BEVERLY DAVENPORT SYPHER SERVES AS ASSOCIATE PROVOST FOR SPECIAL INITIATIVES, INTERIM DIRECTOR OF THE DISCOVERY LEARNING CENTER, AND PROFESSOR OF COMMUNICATION AT PURDUE UNIVERSITY. DR. HOWARD E. SYPHER IS PROFESSOR AND HEAD OF THE DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNICATION AT PURDUE.



Dr. Beverly Davenport Sypher

Dr. Beverly Davenport Sypher's research interests principally focus on communication in the workplace. "I have found that employees with more developed communication abilities are found at higher levels, are promoted more often, are more desirable coworkers, and often make more money than less competent communicators," she said. "Also leaders tend to be better communica-

In a recent article on civil discourse, Dr. Sypher argued that competent communication also must have an ethical dimension. "Competence is not simply achieving our goals in any encounter," she explained. "It also should entail a sense of respect and restraint that forms the basis of civility. In arguing

that we need to reclaim civil discourse at work, I warn of the detrimental effects of spiraling incivility which includes subtle intentions to subvert the interests of others for our own self interests to more overt aggression, verbal harassment, bullying, and 'desk rage.'"

In her award-winning article, Dr. Sypher reviewed a number of reasons why incivility at work seems on the rise including longer working hours; increased stress from an over-stimulated, fast-paced, rapidly changing work and home life; increased anger and depression among employees; more mobility; fewer long term relationships; and less commitment to organizations.

Dr. Sypher's secondary research interests focus on e-health and telemedicine applications. "E-health or telemedicine refers to the use of communication technologies to facilitate the delivery of health care," she said. "It has emerged as one potential solution to address both access and

COMMUNICATION

BY CAROL CUMMINGS

tors than non-leaders. Better communicators evidence more developed listening abilities, are better able to take the perspective of others, are more persuasive, are more cognitively complex, and are higher self-monitors than those with less developed communication skills."

Effective listening and persuasion skills promote a happier workplace. "Those who engage in more pro-social communication — that is communication that respects the needs and wants of the listener — are more likely to engage in communication practices that make for a more satisfying and healthy workplace," she explained.



Dr. Howard E. Sypher

costs concerned with the delivery of health care."

Dr. Sypher has been involved in the design and evaluation of various telemedicine projects which have examined how telemedical consults are organized and understood by the participants. "For example, my coworkers and I have examined issues of access, satisfaction, and understanding in projects that link rural health care providers with specialists at medical centers via computers, videoconferencing, and e-mail," she explained.

Her work has included telehealth projects that used small cameras connected to televisions and

telephone lines to link patients and caregivers with health care providers at remote sites. "Telemedicine is a crucial topic that demands innovative and interdisciplinary approaches to address efficiency, productivity, and quality of health delivery processes," she said. "Recent projects have included everything from telepsychiatry, teleradiology, and telenursing to telehomecare and telehospice."

Beverly Davenport Sypher received her Bachelor's and Master's degrees from WKU in 1976 and 1977. In 1981 she received her Ph.D. from the University of Michigan, where she completed her dissertation on a multi-method investigation of employee communication abilities, communication satisfaction, and job satisfaction.

Prior to her appointment at Purdue in 2002, she was a Senior Fellow in the Office of the Provost at Virginia Tech University, divisional dean for the social sciences at the University of Kansas, chair of the Department of Communication at the University of Kentucky, and a Distinguished Visiting



is the 2005-06 chairperson of the Organizational Communication division of the National Communication Association. She received the university's highest teaching awards at both the University of Kansas and the University of Kentucky and from the National Communication Association.

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Fellow in Melbourne, Australia. She also has been the principal investigator for some \$6 million in U.S. Department of Education grants to promote learning, retention, and graduation among underrepresented students from middle school through graduate school, and she directed the University of Kansas Dean's Scholars Program that was designed to mentor talented underrepresented students in the liberal arts and sciences into graduate school and the professoriate.

Dr. Sypher has served on the boards of various professional journals and associations, and she

Dr. Howard E. Sypher joins his wife in a distinguished career. Currently department head at one of the larger communication programs in the country, his department at Purdue includes a range of instructional areas. "My colleagues are humanists, former Associated Press reporters, Emmy Award winners, lawyers, social scientists, and even a former host of "Nick at Nite," he said. The department has approximately one thousand undergraduate majors and more than one hundred graduate students from sixteen different countries. Faculty include thirty-two tenure-track

members, ten continuing lecturers, several part-time lectures, and more than eighty graduate teaching assistants.

Dr. Sypher is firmly committed to international partnerships. "Since I arrived at Purdue, we have initiated new international research partnerships with Tsinghua University in China and the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven in Belgium," he said. In the same period Purdue has assumed leadership of a study abroad program in Northern Italy as well as summer internship programs in London and Sydney. "We send more students abroad than any other unit in the College of Liberal Arts and more students than most of the colleges at Purdue," he said. "Since I became department head we have also moved to internationalize our faculty by developing new semester-long international immersion experiences. In the last three years, five of my colleagues have spent three to six months teaching overseas on three continents."

Most of Dr. Sypher's academic career has been spent in traditional Research I Universities. However, in every case he has been involved in

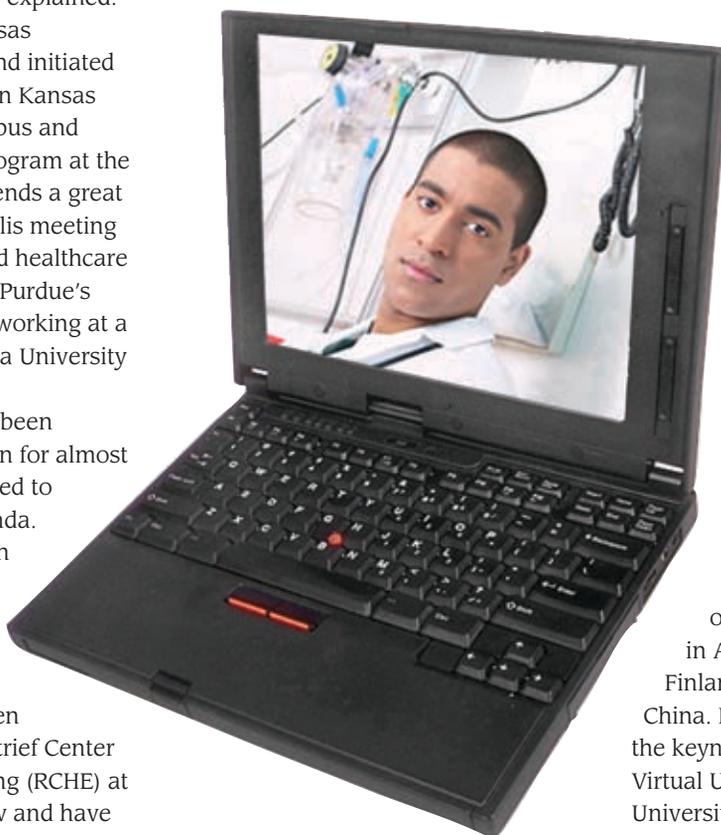
working with corporate partners and/or developing programs in metropolitan areas. "At the University of Kentucky I worked with colleagues at IBM, Corning Glass, and other organizations on research-based initiatives to improve work life or ease the stress of change brought on by technological innovation," he explained. "At the University of Kansas I proposed, developed, and initiated an applied MA program in Kansas City at the Edwards Campus and later directed an MBA program at the same facility." Sypher spends a great deal of time in Indianapolis meeting with business leaders and healthcare managers, working with Purdue's Engagement Office, and working at a campus shared by Indiana University and Purdue.

While Dr. Sypher has been involved in administration for almost fifteen years he has worked to maintain a research agenda. "My current research with colleagues in computer science is funded by the National Science Foundation," he said. "This year I have also been supported by the Regenstrief Center for Healthcare Engineering (RCHE) at Purdue as a faculty fellow and have funded graduate students through several smaller grants from healthcare organizations and from internal grant funds. This work is on the disciplinary boundaries, and I expect it to continue."

In Dr. Sypher's current position he connects academic colleagues (in communication, liberal arts, the sciences, engineering, and other disciplines) with each other and with various business and government leaders. "This has involved working on projects with Eli Lilly Inc. to increase the quantity, quality, and diversity of the pipeline for medical communicators, to working with a community mental health system to

utilize faculty expertise in a branding project," he explained.

As a Regenstrief Fellow and member of RCHE's management team, Dr. Sypher spends about a day a week in Indianapolis, at the IU Medical Center, with Presidents and CMOs of major hospitals, with



various startup companies, and with healthcare providers in an effort to solve real world problems. "My job in part is to align Purdue's resources with healthcare challenges at the state and national level," he explained. "That may involve pulling together an interdisciplinary team to build or evaluate a new telemedicine system, organizing a conference to discuss strategies to pay for healthcare for underserved populations, or working with a technical advisory panel on how to rollout a new Emergency Medical Response system. It's really about solving problems and locating

and organizing the human resources to solve these problems."

Dr. Howard E. Sypher received his Bachelor's degree at the University of South Florida in 1974, his Master's at Western Kentucky University in 1976, and his doctorate at the University of Michigan in 1979. Before his tenure at Purdue, he was previously department chair at Virginia Tech and the University of Kansas where he was also Associate Dean of the School of Business. He regularly teaches and conducts research in the area of communication and new technology. His latest research focuses on "digital identity" and is funded by the National Science Foundation and he is a fellow in the Regenstrief Center for Healthcare Engineering.

Dr. Sypher has lectured or taught in universities in Australia, Italy, Belgium, Finland, England, Japan, and China. In March 2001 he gave the keynote address at the Finland Virtual University Seminar at the University of Jyväskylä in Jyväskylä, Finland. In March 2003 he lectured at Nanjing University and was a guest (with Purdue colleague, Jian Wang) on "Dialogue" — a CCTV9 interview program recorded in Beijing and distributed to over four million viewers. In October 2005 he returned to the University of Jyväskylä where he was one of three international scholars invited to lecture at a meeting on human technology and issues on the human dimension of technology.

Both Howard and Beverly maintain ties with professors with whom they studied during their time at Western. They cherish the connections made on The Hill.