

**Letter to Provost David Marker from Herb Dershem, Winter 1983**

Dear David,

I was thinking about you this past weekend and felt compelled to write and describe to you the circumstances which brought you to mind.

The Boston University Overseas program has about 30 professors like me in residence in Europe and we were called together in Heidelberg last weekend for a faculty meeting. As those of us on the faculty were discussing the shortcomings of the Boston University administration over here (which, incidentally, are many), the discussion turned to our administrations on our home campuses. In the course of that discussion, it turned out that all of my colleagues felt the administration of their home college or university and academic program was at best poor and at worst abysmal. I was the only one who spoke of a home college which was well-run, with far-sighted planning and with a cooperative partnership between administration and faculty. I was the only one to report of an administration for whom I truly enjoyed working.

My colleagues assumed that either I am very easy to satisfy or that Hope College is indeed an unusually well-run institution. Since I had joined heartily in the carping about the Boston University faculty, they eliminated the first alternative and settled, in amazement, on the second. This experience has certainly deepened my appreciation of what you, President Van Wylen, and Sheldon Wettack have done over the years. I know you are quick to receive complaints, but slow to receive comments like this. I hope this will neutralize the effects of the last 10 complaint memos you have received. I hope you will also share this with Gordon on a day when he particularly needs it.

We are having a great time in Germany. I was in Heidelberg for about 4 months. Just before Christmas we moved to Munich where we will stay until our return to Holland in August. We have had an opportunity to travel extensively and see a great deal of Europe. It is a magnificent chance to do this although the change of schools and environments is hard on the children. They have learned the meaning of the word "flexibility." I teach 3 nights a week in Munich this term, Tuesday – Thursday, leaving me four day weekends. Our normal schedule is for four classes scheduled on Mon-Thur evenings and traveling at least twice a week to remote locations. This is what I did last term, but this term my only remote class in Augsburg was cancelled (costing me 10% of my yearly salary) so I am left with this ideal situation. My total enrollment in these three classes is 28 and they are all military personnel or civilians employed in support of the military.

I hope the year is going well for you. I get Hope football and basketball scores regularly and receive periodic reports from Gordon Stegink on the Computer Science Department so I know those parts of Hope College are having an excellent year.

I was somewhat disturbed by Gordon's last report indicating pessimism about the faculty recruitment situation in Computer Science and average class size of 44 in the Spring Semester. I know of your strong commitment to our Computer Science Department and I am sure that you and Irwin Brink will support Gordon Stegink in the difficult recruitment task.

I have had the time this year to do a quality job on my classes here and to reflect on the work I've done at Hope in recent years. This reflection has led me to the conclusion that I have not done the job that I could or should do for Hope because class sizes that are too large, there are too many students to advise, and insufficient computer facilities. We have (hopefully) made great strides on the last problem, but the other two will not be solved until we obtain adequate staff. I know you share my concerns here and we have discussed this many times before, but I feel even more strongly about it now. I am sure that if we cannot bring our staffing and student enrollments into line, that we will lose the Computer Science staff that we do have. As I look at it from my perspective here, I can see that I am doing a disservice to my faculty, my students, my family, and myself in trying to serve too many students and I feel a great deal of frustration knowing that I'm not doing the best job I can for Hope College. I know that you have done and continue to do all that you can to correct this situation and I appreciate that. I look forward to working with you further on this challenging situation when I return.

I hope that this finds you and your family in good health and good spirits. I look forward to seeing you in August.

God's blessings,

Herb