

Chairs Speech Winter 2014

In the Fall I talked about the frustration we all share at the present time. We push at the frontiers of knowledge and teach what we have discovered to the next generation so that they may follow in our footsteps, only to be treated as if we are parasites on the body politic. One cannot help but be discouraged.

On that issue, let me say there are some hopeful signs. Undermining education in North Carolina is not really a winning political strategy. The public is making it clear that they want a better future for their children, and the business community is making it clear that they value an educated work force. This is good news.

But I do not want to talk about state politics today. I want to talk about governance in the UNC system and at ASU. The term often used to describe the model of decision making at universities is “shared governance.” This is the language of AAUP, and while I generally agree that AAUP is a good guide for organizing what we do, this term implies a bifurcated universe. There are faculty. There is administration. But the art of governance is to make that distinction blurred as everyone is engaged in a common enterprise. In that regard, there is only governance. It may be good, it may be bad, but it is a measure of the possibilities created by the structures and procedures of decision making. Good governance is a difficult ideal to achieve. As Aristotle noted, it is an art, but it is also essential to who we are as human beings.

But before I get into that, I want to make some observations about the UNC system and the campus to give context for my remarks.

I. Observations

1. Everyone in the UNC system and at ASU is trying to do the best they can. We may not always agree on what should be done or how it should be done, but it has been my experience that people are generally acting in good faith, trying to confront multiple pressures while they simultaneously do the right thing. That isn't easy. This may seem like a simplistic statement, but it is important to keep this in mind particularly when we have disagreements over the best course of action.

2. The ability of ASU to act with autonomy inside the UNC system is waning. For many decades we were given an allotment of money from the General Administration and told – “educate the children of North Carolina.” We were left alone with regard to the direction of the campus, the programs that we created, and the goals we set for ourselves. We did an excellent job, so it is easy to understand the consternation as we increasingly find ourselves under the scrutiny of state agencies.

But what we have seen for the past 4 or 5 years is different. Don’t take my word for it. Ask Georgie Donovan or Paulette Marty, or anyone of the other faculty members on this campus who have served on state level committees on curriculum, general education, assessment, or the host of other groups that have been created.

The system is undergoing a transformation. This does not necessarily mean that governance is dead. It means that we need to adapt our thinking.

3. The final observation I want to make is simply this: that in many instances structure is a determining factor in generating the content of outcomes.

In that regard, it matters who is making the decisions that affect everyone. People see things differently depending on where they sit. Therefore, the structures that establish who participates, who has a seat at the table, matter.

Structure is also essential in generating the sense that the outcomes produced are appropriate, fair, and what political scientists like to call “legitimate.” But legitimacy is not tangible. It is not a thing. It is a psychological disposition on the part of the participants.

This means that in the Age of Reason, the legitimacy of governance requires us to gather our facts and engage in discourse, collaboration, and compromise. This is the case not only because no one has all the information, but also because we no longer measure legitimacy in terms of who speaks. We measure legitimacy by who is brought to the table and allowed to speak for themselves.

Therefore, the structure of governance matters. It matters on this campus and it matters at the UNC system level.

II. Where we are at in the Present?

A. UNC System Level

At the UNC system level, we see more sweeping mandates coming from the Board of Governors and the General Administration. We see greater attention to the distribution of degree programs, the consolidation of purchasing for both goods and services, more intervention in the construction of General Education on the campuses, and a mandate for common assessment tools. There are many more, but these convey the general direction we are moving.

This consolidation has many causes: the economic downturn, the transition in the legislature, the penetration of a “business” mentality into higher education, to name a few. But the question for us to consider is as follows: Will this level of system integration decline when the political winds blow in the opposition direction? Is this just something that we need to ride out until the storm is over?

I do not think that is going to happen. In the end, both political parties, the Board of Governors, and the General Administration will be seduced by the rational efficiencies gained by greater system level integration. As a student of that great German Sociologist Max Weber, I will suggest that the bureaucratic model that is being constructed will result in a more centralized system, and a corresponding loss in campus autonomy, not just because it saves money, but because it is easier to administer. It is easier to generate information and reports from the bottom up, and easier to have policies implemented from the top down. As Weber tells us, in the final analysis bureaucratic efficiency will become an end in itself, supplanting other systemic level values. Unfortunately, many people identify this type of integration as synonymous with modernity itself.

I am not telling you this to ruin your day, but so that you will be prepared and think about how to respond to this new reality. The UNC system is undergoing a transition. Is it fully implemented? No. Is the direction clear? Yes. At present, the result is a structure that is somewhat contradictory. On the one hand, the system is increasingly integrated. On the other, there is continuing reference to the uniqueness of the campuses and their special missions.

When it comes to the issue of governance, this leads to two different strategies. One is to continue to stress the importance of campus autonomy and to try and push that at the system level. The other strategy is very different. It involves responding to the centralization of administration by creating a more integrated and

effective faculty governance structure at the system level. These strategies are not mutually exclusive but they need to be consciously conceived and implemented.

System level governance issues have been the arena of the Faculty Assembly. But the current structure is being inundated by the increasing demands. The prescription is clear. The Faculty Assembly will need to create a larger and more integrated structure in order to generate an effective voice for faculty.

Structure matters. At present, Faculty Assembly is only loosely connected to the ragged patchwork of ad hoc committees that are deciding system level policies. There is no formal integration of these activities into a cohesive and long-term strategic plan. That will need to change if the faculty voice in governance is to be effective.

We are also asking President Ross to recognize a common set of governing principles across the system. President Ross has responded to the Board of Governors demands for greater system level integration and accountability but has been slower to respond to the same requests from the Faculty Assembly.

He has argued that he doesn't want to interfere with how the chancellor's run their campuses. Well, from where we sit, that ship has sailed and such an argument is no longer viable. The principles of governance do not change from campus to campus and I am certain that the Faculty Assembly will continue to push this issue.

B. ASU

So what is the state of governance at ASU? That is a complex question. I want to address it in two ways. First, let me say that one of the things that I have learned as Faculty Senate Chair is the extent to which people in the administration want better policies in place. We may at times disagree about the content of policy, but I think everyone understands that we do not thrive with bad policies. In that regard, governance is not an "us versus them" issue, but it is what we do together as a community. I think this is very positive.

On the negative side, I think we have moved away from the structure that has served us well for decades. This is the relationship between deans and department chairs as part of a decision making structure. Today we see much more reliance on the use of task forces and ad hoc committees at the campus level. While faculty

have been enlisted in these groups, the creation of policy in this way is farther removed from the people affected at the college and department level.

As a political scientist, I would argue that when it comes to generating a sense of legitimacy, the further the policy-making process is from the point of contact with those affected, the less likely it is that the policies will promote a sense of participation and inclusion. Again, let me repeat, the issue is not that faculty have not been included. The point is that decisions about policies are being generated outside the context in which they will be implemented.

Further, such practices lack structural and procedural permanence, conditions necessary for the actual practice of governance and the continual testing of efficiency, functionality, and legitimacy. There is simply no connection between the fleeting nature of a task force and the ongoing processes of institutional governance. It is therefore, not governance.

We need to return to the bidirectional flow of information and decision making that is found in the dean/department chair relationship. This is a formal governing structure that already exists, eliminating the need for a multitude of task forces and ad hoc committees. We have a great deal of expertise and experience at the college and department level that can be tapped as we grapple with campus issues.

It is imperative that faculty participate in the governance at this institution. We need to make certain that we have the structures in place that are representative and effective. But we also need to strive to be as efficient as possible with that most precious faculty commodity, time.

III. What the Senate is doing?

We are working on these issues. It is the Senate's responsibility to deal with governance structures and we are working on them. But the task is rather daunting.

The repository for our structures, policies, and practices is the Faculty Handbook. But when we look at the Faculty Handbook we are confronted with several different problems.

- We have policies outlined in the Handbook that are out of step with actual practice.

- We have language that is vague or contradictory.
- We have some policies that are contrary to interests of incoming faculty members.
- And, in some cases, we simply have bad policies.

Given the wide variety of issues that require attention, we have had to prioritize. We are trying to deal with some of the most serious deficiencies first, especially those that effect curriculum and instruction, and the matters that effect untenured faculty.

In the fall:

- we passed language cleaning up the process of getting credit for service at another institution.
- we updated our internal governance structure within the Senate.
- we strengthened our connection and ties to the Faculty Assembly.

In January, we replaced outdated language on Core Curriculum with a revised structure for Gen. Ed. Council. In the process, we made it more representative of faculty and more transparent.

In February, we will be discussing the Handbook language dealing with early promotion and tenure. It simply makes no sense to have a policy outlined in our Handbook that, as far as I can tell, has never been practiced at this institution. It leads to confusion and false expectations. Such disconnects undermine both morale, and the legitimacy of our governing documents.

We will continue to work on these issues for the remainder of the year.

IV. Personal Note – Ken Peacock

Finally, I want to end by making a personal comment or two and I would like to address these comments to Ken Peacock.

Ken, we have known each other for quite a while. We started having coffee together and discussing campus issues even before you became Chancellor. I have

gotten to know you. I have learned something about you as a person, not just as a Chancellor. So I would like to share some things about you, points of which many in this community may be unaware. Our conversations have taught me a great deal.

There are, of course, the things that many of us know.

There is your unbridled enthusiasm at football games. Your tenacity when it comes to fund raising. Ken will leave no stone, no legislator, and no donor, unturned when it comes to raising funds for ASU. And yes, there is the matter of the Hot, Hot, Hot video. You own that. (For you newer faculty, Google it!)

But there is another side that not everyone knows and that speaks to who you are as a human being. It tells us about your character and how you prioritize values in your life and the caring and compassion you have for all the people who make up this institution.

I will share just one of the many stories that I know. My neighbor worked at ASU for years doing mechanical repairs. He retired a few years back and was excited that his daughter had just started attending ASU. But his daughter had heart problems and died suddenly. He and I are friends and I was talking to him a few days after the funeral and he said to me that at the service he looked up and there was Ken Peacock sharing his grief. He told me that he will remember that gesture, that compassionate statement, for the rest of his life.

Many of you may not know the extent to which Ken has fought to protect the staff at this institution, struggling against attempts by the General Administration and the legislature to outsource staff jobs. Over and over again Ken has protected a living wage, health care, and a dignified retirement for the people who live in this community. Watauga County would be a very different place had you not considered all the people at this institution as central to its mission.

Not everyone knows how you have put yourself at risk to protect individual faculty members at this institution from the varied and fickle political winds that often blow in Raleigh. What we do and how we do it is not always popular among some citizens in the state. You have inserted yourself in the middle of these battles, saving faculty members' jobs and careers.

Well, I know these things about you. So before you move on to that next chapter in your life I would like to say one thing. On behalf of all those people you have protected, all those that you have helped, all the careers you saved, and all those for whom you have guaranteed a decent and dignified life, I would like to say, thank you.