

Speech to the Faculty
Andrew Koch, Faculty Senate Chair
Appalachian State University
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Good Morning.

Here we are again at the start of a new academic year. I would like to be able to tell you that I see a light at the end of the tunnel, but if you read newspapers you already have some idea about the dark times that have befallen education in the state. So when thinking about my remarks today I realized the importance of saying something about how I view the situation at the state level and on the campus.

I have read some interesting books and articles about the condition of the university system in America over the last few months. Many of these works have ominous titles like: *The University in Ruins*, *The Fall of the Faculty*, *Unmaking the Public University*, and *The Last Professors*. The general nature of these changes is summarized in a short article entitled, "How the American University was Killed, in Five Easy Steps."

This article addresses much of what is happening, but it does not say much about why it is happening. I want to say a little bit about the convergence of forces that explains some of why this is happening and what the implications are for the state and our institution.

We should all be interested in why the public university system is in trouble in North Carolina. Not only does it directly impact us but it also reveals some national trends. For the last few years we kept hearing the state budget is bad, we have to tighten our belts. But that is not the issue anymore. In North Carolina state tax collections are ahead of projections, yet the legislature is imposing another cut, on top of years of cuts, and there are more cuts proposed for next year.

Why is this happening? I want to suggest that what we are living through is the confluence of two forces manifesting themselves as a single political agenda. These forces are what I would term economic libertarianism and cultural conservatism. And even though these traditions are constructed on very different

foundations, they manifest policies that are antithetical to the university as an institution.

For the libertarians, taxation is a form of oppression. And, because governments require revenue to function, it is said that governments should perform little beyond the immediate protection of life, liberty, and property. In shrinking government, people can have more freedom, as measured by the consumption of their property as they best see fit. From this perspective a university that cannot fund itself, either through tuition, grants, or corporate partnerships, does not really deserve to exist. A publicly financed university, rather than being a point of pride, is viewed as a burdensome parasite, living off the sweat of the taxpayer.

This philosophy is elegant in its simplicity and appeal. It is premised on the idea that production values, the values of business and property, should be the dominant values in society. It is a philosophy that is concerned with costs, efficiencies, and volume. From this perspective the university should be transformed from an institution that fosters the education of informed citizens able to think for themselves into a job training facility.

The social impact of this ideology is clear from the historical record. The libertarians have become the ideologues of the plutocratic class and the harbingers of a new Social Darwinism. Social mobility has declined dramatically in the United States, and these policies are the cause not the solution to that problem. They have forgotten the wisdom of Oliver Wendell Holmes when he said that taxes are the price we pay for civilization.

In addition to the social problems caused by this ideology, it also ignores a fundamental fact: that production values are not the only values that are present in a community. Other values, such as: health and well-being, justice, sustainability, and others, are part of a dynamic, well-functioning community. Let's add the value of knowledge to this list as well. Knowledge, not just as an artifact, not just as the collection of human thoughts or the archive of our collective action, but knowledge as a process of generating new facts and new narratives about who and what we are.

You cannot have new ideas, a dynamic society, or even a dynamic economy, without providing the conditions that support the generation of new knowledge among the members of society. Those conditions include not only accepting the importance of the free exchange of ideas, but the funding to provide access to that exchange in the institutions of higher education themselves. To paraphrase

Thomas Jefferson from his *Notes on Virginia*, education must be available to all because genius is spread among the people. It is not a product of class or status. We decline as a nation if we do not manifest all the talents found among the people in this country.

This brings me to the second force that is present today, what I described as the cultural conservatism. Universities are places of exploration and growth. They are places in which new ideas are discussed and developed. They are places of discourse and discussion, thinking and learning, and they are places where those who often have little influence are empowered to participate. All of these activities upset the status quo.

Social Conservatives have always feared socialism, atheism, evolution, philosophic materialism, relativism, and the United Nations. Today they have added postmodernism and poststructuralism because these methods inform us that much of what we believe is the product of socialization, not natural or universal law. In the end, all of these philosophic traditions are viewed as dangerous because they generate tolerance for alternative narratives about who and what we are. The university is viewed as threatening because it is the place where there is critical discourse about all these ideas. So we are increasingly under attack and increasingly being monitored.

If you have any doubt about what I am saying, let me convey to you a story that was told to me by someone at the General Administration. I will not say who said this, but I think it conveys a general sense of the situation. As you may know, there are a large number of new members in the state legislature. It is normal for members of the General Administration to do a meet and greet and to impress upon the legislators the importance of the UNC system to the citizens of North Carolina. When this member of the General Administration met with one new legislator he was told the following:

I will not support the UNC budget request because of what my neighbor back home told me. He said that when he sent his daughter off to a UNC school she was a young, god-fearing Christian who loved America and the American way of life. She came back from college as a corrupted atheist/socialist with all kinds of crazy ideas, and was critical of her country and all the good that it stands for.

Those words reflect an ideological agenda. And I must add that this agenda is well-funded and well-organized. You should know that one of these organizations contacted ASU early this summer and asked for syllabi from three courses, two world literature courses and a Russian history course. Our curriculum is under scrutiny. That may sound paranoid, but it is true.

I mention this not to frighten you, but to encourage you to think about the importance of what we do and to encourage you to support the efforts of the Faculty Senate, the Faculty Assembly, and the General Administration to protect this and the other institutions in the UNC system. In your work embody the principles of section 600 of the UNC Code.

Section 600 states:

The University of North Carolina is dedicated to the transmission and advancement of knowledge and understanding. Academic freedom is essential to the achievement of these purposes. The University therefore supports and encourages freedom of inquiry for faculty members and students, to the end that they may responsibly pursue these goals through teaching, learning, research, discussion, and publication, free from internal or external restraints that would unreasonably restrict their academic endeavors

For this reason, academic freedom is essential to the functioning of the university. For academic freedom to flourish, however, it is also essential that the faculty retain control over the curriculum.

Now I said at the beginning of this discussion that there is a confluence of these forces, a common cause between the economic interests and the social conservatives. This is producing some very bizarre legislation. About a year ago the North Carolina Legislature, disturbed by a new scientific study that asserted the rate of sea level rise was increasing passed a bill that restricted all state agencies from using such data for coastal planning purposes. They opted for the traditional linear model of sea level increases, even though that data is no longer accurate.

This is concerning on two levels. First, because it suggests that immediate economic interest can override the logic of long-term planning in North Carolina.

But further, there is an anti-science mind-set in this type of thinking. To paraphrase Sir Francis Bacon from his work *The Great Instauration*, it is demonstration, not tradition that verifies truth claims. Modernity and science are built on this logic, the logic of inductive reasoning. We begin with observations. What do those observations tell us? According to the journal *Nature*, not only is the rate of sea level rise increasing, but the coastal region between North Carolina and Massachusetts has the highest rates of sea level increase on the planet.¹ It is a disservice to the citizens of North Carolina not to take heed of what our inductive reasoning tells us.

So we see the same logic that was represented in the Scopes Monkey Trial – if you don't like what science tells you, pass a law against it. Is that really who we are as citizens of North Carolina?

So these groups have common cause in dismantling the institution that threatens them. They cut the budget and call it “efficiency.” They mandate the “vocationalization” of the university and call it “being responsible to the citizens of North Carolina.” They press for the standardization of curriculum. They push to create large on-line sections to drive more people through the system. After all, why create a performance measure for each campus that stresses completing in four years if you are not trying to create an assembly line ruled by production values?

This is why we should not think of academic freedom, faculty control over curriculum, and due process as separate issues. Taken together they constitute the necessary conditions for a university. We must pay attention because it is the future of the university itself that is at stake.

At the beginning of my talk, I mentioned a number of books and articles on these trends. They are all sounding a warning. After all, what is happening in this state is not unique, but conveys some national trends. And so far, I have touched on three of the five steps mentioned in the article “How to Destroy the University.” The fourth concerns the students. By withdrawing state funding, universities are forced to cut programs, create larger classes, and students are forced to pay more – a lot more. The state used to cover over 60% of university's operating costs. Today that support is down in the mid-30% range. The burden has been shifted to the students. The result is that today we are graduating a new class of people – a kind of educated indentured servant class that is beholden to banks and lending institutions.

So that touches on four of the five items. The last item I want to discuss comes up in a number of the works as a dangerous trend in higher education. That is what the authors describe as the take-over of universities by a managerial/administrative class. This is the focus of much of Benjamin Ginsburg work, *The Fall of the Faculty*. Ginsburg's point is that even with the expanded use of adjuncts, the creation of larger classes, and the reduction of salary and benefits going to the faculty, there are no real savings. This is the case because that money is being redirected to the creation of an expanded group of career administrators who often have little or no classroom experience and tend to view themselves as professional managers more than teachers and scholars.

The implications of such a shift are profound. It manifests itself as a loss of faculty control over curriculum. It reduces the role played by faculty in institutional governance. In the end, it makes the university more open to the penetration of values other than those that foster, as it is put in the UNC Code, "the transmission and advancement of knowledge and understanding."

I mention these things because as faculty we must be vigilant.

Last year, the Faculty Assembly passed thirteen resolutions. Nine of the thirteen dealt directly with protecting the integrity of the UNC system. They concerned matters of academic freedom, due process, and maintaining the vital role that faculty play in matters of both governance and curriculum. This has not always been easy in light of the changes that have taken place at the state level. I believe these matters will continue to be front and center in the upcoming year as parts of the UNC Strategic Plan move toward the implementation phase.

That brings us to our campus and the role of the Senate. We need to protect academic freedom and due process. We need to protect the role of the faculty in matters of curriculum. We need to continually improve our governing structures.

Last year:

We made our promotion and tenure structure more open and participatory,
We gave departments more flexibility to handle their workload,
We gave greater recognition and potential for advancement to our non-tenure track faculty,
We provided greater protection for faculty involved in a grievance hearing,

And we challenged those ideas and policies that we saw as a threat to academic freedom and due process.

This year:

I hope that we can focus more attention on the internal allocation of resources. Program prioritization should be linked to budgetary prioritization more generally and we should be having those discussions.

We will continue the work of the Handbook Task Force to look at ways to update our policies and procedures.

We will also be looking at the Policy Manual to update its content and to be certain that the policies and procedures it represents are both consistent with state statutes and with the institutional culture at ASU.

We will also be looking at structural reforms to make faculty governance more effective on the campus.

So let me encourage all of you to have discussions in your departments about all of these issues.

In addition, let me add that in the next few weeks I will send out a solicitation for additional items you wish the Senate to take up. Also, talk with your Senate representatives about matters that you think should be on our agenda.

Finally, let me say that I think we also need to be having a conversation about something else as well.

We need to have a conversation about what kind of institution we want ASU to be. I am not talking about strategic planning and those activities. I am talking about institutional culture. We need to begin a discussion about the values we hold as an institution and how those values are reflected in the character of our policies and practices. Because every department is represented in the Senate, the Senate is a good place to begin that discussion but I hope that it will take place everywhere on campus.

In conclusion let me say that last year I spoke of our role as the guardians of civilization. Let me repeat that sentiment with one addition. Being aware of the

special place we hold in civilization is simply not enough today. We have to make a collective effort to save it.

Thank you for your time and attention. Go out there and have a productive semester.

¹ Nature, June 27, 2012.