

General Faculty and Staff Meeting Address – September 17, 2010
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Good afternoon faculty and staff colleagues, Chancellor Peacock, Interim Provost Baumhover, and other friends and supporters in the audience. I bring greetings from the Faculty Senate, and updates about recent and up-and-coming issues facing us this year, starting with the two matters most likely forefront in your minds: the budget and the Provost search.

Concerning the budget, importantly, unlike other universities nationwide, we have *not* had to let faculty go and are, in fact, even going to be able to search for new faculty this year. For our relative good fortune in weathering economic crises while keeping our academic core intact, I am grateful for the expert financial planning of our Chancellor and Dr. Tim Burwell, combined with the selfless action of the Student Government Association for fully supporting the modest tuition raise this summer that had been approved, system wide, by UNC president, Erskine Bowles. Looking forward, the Chancellor has reported that although he does not have a crystal ball, he does not foresee furloughs as being an issue for us this year; and in fact projects that next year will be better than the last. He also informed Senate at our first meeting that Erskine Bowles hopes that this year we can return to our plan to move toward faculty salaries that are in line with the 80th percentile among our peers. I'm taking this all as a good sign about our budget.

Now, like most faculty, I was disappointed that we could not start the year with a new Provost; and, I am aware some faculty are worried that action on decisions and various needed changes will not go forward under a Provost who serves in an interim capacity. Well, like the Chancellor, I do not have a crystal ball; but I do think I have some good news in this regard because so far my impression of Dr. Baumhover is definitely NOT of someone sitting in the Provost's office just to keep the lights on. Dr. Baumhover and I *already* have had *several* productive conversations about Academic Affairs matters that need attention this year; he has responded in a *timely* manner and *favorably* to my questions and requests; and he has asked for, *and acted upon*, my input on several issues that needed immediate action, such as creating an interim religious observance policy in response to a new state law—a policy that will be revised later this year by upper administration and the attorneys working together with SGA and the Senate. I have been very impressed so far with the sound judgment and high academic standards that Dr. Baumhover brings to his temporary position from his many years of experience both at an R1 and at Appalachian. I look forward to continuing to work collaboratively with him and the Chancellor during the next year, even as I also serve diligently on the new Provost search committee, which, by the way, the Chancellor has informed me should be constituted within the next week or so. I am excited at the prospect of a new permanent Provost; and I firmly believe that because it is such an important position we should be sure to pick the right person—someone we are quite enthused about. But at the same time I don't think we should despair or feel paralyzed at the situation we find ourselves in. We are, after all, a bunch of pretty smart people in this room. We don't have to wait for a permanent Provost to move forward. In the famous words of African American poet June Jordan, echoed by author Alice Walker, singing group *Sweet Honey and the Rock*, and most recently, President Obama: "We are the ones we have been waiting for."

You'll notice that I used the phrase "work collaboratively" in the previous paragraph. That's been my mantra the past few weeks following an all-day Faculty Senate retreat where your dedicated Senate representatives and I spent a great deal of time talking about how to improve communication and trust between faculty and administration. Inspired by the retreat, I gave a presentation at the most recent Provost's Council on "Policymaking and Productive Collaboration with Faculty Senate," in which I advocated, among other things, that Senate be consulted earlier on in policy-making processes, so that we are asked less often to rubber stamp fully-formed ideas that originate elsewhere. Among many, one rationale for my emphasis on collaborative policy making was, of course, the value of faculty governance, both in principle, and as a stated core value in Appalachian's Strategic Plan.

I am pleased to report that I have received very positive feedback on this presentation, especially from the Deans and the Chair of Council of Chairs, Dr. Janice Pope. In the spirit of collaborative policymaking, Senate and Council of Chairs have both already agreed to form a joint ad hoc committee for the much-needed task of revisiting certain aspects of post-tenure review. Similarly, Enrollment Services has asked for, and I have appointed, a Senator to the Implementation Team for DegreeWorks, which is a huge software audit system, requested by the students, to augment advising and provide a way for students to track their progress toward graduation. Admissions and Enrollment Services will also be seeking Faculty Senate input as admissions criteria for transfer students are re-examined later this year. With this morning's provocative conference on Business and Environmental Ethics, sponsored by The Walker College of Business but featuring presenters and attendees from all over the university in mind, I also want to mention the new Sustainability Council which has asked for, and received, a Senator appointee, and which will provide an exciting forum for collaboration on sustainability issues—both environmental and social—from across virtually every unit in this university. I am optimistic about making all kinds of improvements and successfully taking on various initiatives, if all stakeholders work together, focusing not on our differences, but on the priorities and goals we have in common.

Other big tasks on the Senate "to do" list this year include the following: (1) tackling equity in faculty workload issues across colleges; (2) making recommendations to help fine tune the new General Education program, including decreasing faculty workload creep for Gen Ed and addressing faculty concerns about departmental control over their curriculum; (3) working, alongside other campus entities--from the Chancellor's Office to the SGA--with the Office of Equity Diversity and Compliance on making Appalachian a more diverse, welcoming and inclusive environment free of issues of harassment and discrimination; and (4) re-examining faculty and staff benefits, especially those offered through the Flex programs. Additionally, I know the following things have been on the "to do" list for a very long time, but this year I really do plan for Senate to consider university P&T guidelines in line with our aspirational peers, including college-wide Promotion and Tenure committees; and once and for all, to settle our current problem of a non-tenure-track rank and title system that irrevocably and problematically ties DPC voting privileges to other departmental and university voting privileges, across all disciplines, even where that makes us an anomaly among our peers and sister UNC institutions.

Senate will also continue to be dedicated to the ongoing project of making sure that all university policies, as outlined in the *Faculty Handbook* and Resource Manual, reflect current practices, that our current practices are governed by our policies; and that both are sound and transparent, fair and efficient. There are basic housekeeping updates and revision that need our attention, and new policies as well. For instance, a new Gift Policy was passed late last Spring with the approval of the Chancellor; and just this past Monday, Senate approved the *Faculty Handbook* language for the new Gifts Acceptance Committee that will ensure that non-routine conditional gifts to the university do not come with strings that would compromise academic freedom in a faculty member's teaching or research. Other recently passed policies slated for Handbook revision include a Supplemental Pay Policy and improvements to the portions of the Handbook that deal with Grievances.

Now, those of you who know me, and my love for my area of specialization, Victorian literature, may be sitting there thinking (or perhaps dreading), "where's the quote from Dickens or Bronte, or Tennyson or Oscar Wilde? A speech from an English professor and only one quote so far--a pithy one at that--Is she running a fever? Did she lose her *Bartlett's Quotations*? Was the Internet down? Well here it comes, however, I'm going to move toward my conclusion with a few lines not from Dickens but from the Victorian sage John Henry Newman, whose eponymous 19th-century essay contributes, as many of you may know, to the modern "Idea of the University." Newman writes:

a University is a place of concourse, in which the intellect may safely range and speculate, sure to find its equal in some antagonist activity, and its judge in the tribunal of truth. It is a place where inquiry is pushed forward, and discoveries verified and perfected, and rashness rendered innocuous, and error exposed, by the collision of mind with mind, and knowledge with knowledge. It is the place where the professor becomes eloquent, and is a missionary and a preacher, displaying his science in its most complete and most winning form, pouring it forth with the zeal of enthusiasm, and lighting up his own love of it in the breasts of his hearers.

In the above passage, we see the university described as a place where professors possess the eloquence of preachers, but also as a "place where inquiry is pushed forward." In other words, the university is not just about the dissemination, or teaching, of knowledge, it is about the *creation* of *new* knowledges. In fact, here Newman sounds an awful lot like the vision statement of Appalachian's Strategic Plan, which states that we aspire to be "a nationally recognized university combining the best characteristics of liberal arts and research institutions by resourcefully blending teaching and scholarship."

I had nothing to do with the process of crafting it, but I like this vision statement. I like it a lot because the part about the characteristics of the liberal arts institution—that's our renowned focus on teaching and on nurturing our students—reflects what I know we have all experienced—what Newman describes as: "lighting up [our] own love of [our subject] in the breast of [our] hearers." But simultaneously, that love, that "zeal of enthusiasm" is informed, and for many of us, made possible, by what our Strategic Plan identifies as the best characteristics of research institutions, and what Newman poetically describes as "inquiry is pushed forward, and discoveries verified and perfected." Certainly, we want to remain a student-

centered university. We do that well and will continue to do so. But as we grow into our 21st century Strategic Plan and move into the future, I think we should reflect on the fact that individual students come and four (or maybe six) years later, they go. Hopefully they maintain a relationship with Appalachian as alumni; yet they no longer walk these halls, *we do*. We, the faculty, create knowledges, not merely teach them. We, the faculty, with the support of the staff, are the key and necessary component of the research component of our Strategic Plan. And because “inquiry is pushed forward, discoveries verified and perfected” only in an environment that enables, both “safe speculation” *and* the passionate, even metaphorically violent clash of ideas, we need to carefully, wisely, and respectfully guard the resources, and the principles and policies that make those inquiries and discoveries possible: faculty governance, academic freedom and tenure for safe speculation; rigor and mutual respect for exposing error through the “collision of mind with mind, and knowledge with knowledge.”

The University, like its goals and policies, is a growing, changing entity, and the Senate, as the representative of the faculty, is an active agent of that change. Please talk to your Senators, and to me; let us know your concerns; volunteer to serve on a committee when the next election comes around, and most of all, enjoy your teaching and your research—revel in “the zeal of your enthusiasm” over your “collision of mind with mind and knowledge with knowledge.” We, the faculty, with support of the staff, *we are the ones we have been waiting for*.

Thank you, and have a good semester.