

Howard Neufeld, Chair, Faculty Senate

Fall 1998 General Faculty meeting:

Good morning and welcome to the fall faculty/staff meeting. I hope everybody had a productive and enjoyable summer. I can't believe the summer is over, but here we are - hopefully rejuvenated and refreshed. This morning I want to do several things: first, I want to let you know what the Senate did last year, and what it hopes to accomplish this year; second, I want to address some issues that have come up over the summer; and lastly, I want to offer some musings about teaching and learning as we prepare to enter the new millennium.

The Faculty Senate at ASU has generally had a good working relationship with the administration - one which continues to the present. This does not mean that the Senate has a record of capitulation and subservience, but rather, has established lines of communication and understanding that enable both sides to accomplish tasks that otherwise would not be possible. One indication of this cooperation is our success rate regarding Senate resolutions. Last year, the Senate passed 18 resolutions requiring administrative approval. Seventeen of the 18 were approved or sent to the Board of Governors, without change, by the administration. This high approval rate comes in part from the hard work done by the Senators you elected, and also because the administration does value the input it receives from the Senate. While we may not always get our way on all issues, our voice is important, it is heard, and when we make recommendations on matters, action follows. Sometimes it seems to take forever, but we persevere and get results. What were some of the more important resolutions passed last year? The Senate passed a resolution stating its dissatisfaction with the manner in which the administration handled certain changes to the Handbook, resulting in a letter of concern being sent to the Board of Governors (from whom we have not heard back). The Senate has created a Faculty Grievance Assistance Committee, made up of former members of the Grievance Hearing Committee, which will informally advise faculty members about the potential merit of their grievances, and on ways to improve their presentation at a formal grievance hearing. This committee, whose use is optional, will be available to faculty members starting this semester. The Senate is on record opposing the new funding formula being developed by the GA, which, if approved in its current form and applied to all classes, would mean the loss of millions of dollars in appropriations to this university, effectively wiping out the equity funding we just received. It is the Senate's opinion that the new funding formula (in its most recent incarnation) discriminates against the comprehensive university in favor of the research universities, and that this is unacceptable. The Senate has also formed an ad hoc committee on Faculty Privacy Rights, whose mission is to investigate those actions that affect a faculty member's privacy, such as receiving and storing email and phone messages, saving computer files, and obtaining regular mail. The ultimate goal is to establish a set of rules by which the administration and faculty operate so that if actions are taken against faculty members, they are done so in accordance with whatever privacy rights are available, and with due process. If any of you have comments regarding faculty privacy rights, please contact either me, or the Senate office, and I can pass these on to the committee, or, I can have you meet directly with the committee. In addition, the Senate will be continuing its study of various other issues, such as child care facilities, pay raises for part-time faculty, and recommendations concerning departmental personnel committees.

At the Board of Trustees retreat, held in July, a small number of vocal alumni asked the University to study the feasibility of moving our football team up from Division I-AA to I-A. Although I have not polled the faculty, or even the Senate on this, my conversations with various faculty members suggest to me that there is little support for such a move. To put this into perspective, let me provide you with a story about another school, Rutgers University, my alma mater, that made the move several years ago to "the big-time". Rutgers has the distinction of having played the first intercollegiate football game, against Princeton, in 1869, a tradition that continued right up through the 1980's, at which time Rutgers decided to join a league and play the big boys. Prior to this, the program at Rutgers was moderately successful, and they played such schools as Lehigh, Cornell, Columbia, Princeton, and Delaware. However, when Rutgers moved into the big leagues, it found that it had to spend millions on its stadium and athletic facilities, and had to begin paying its coaches extremely high salaries, including some that exceeded even the most senior administrators at the school. And ever since they moved up, they have had losing seasons almost every year, going 0-11 last year. More importantly, the program, which was probably solvent in the early days, now officially loses some \$3.3M/yr, and if hidden costs are added in, more likely \$7M/yr. Over the past

decade, Rutgers athletics has lost over \$30M of state appropriated monies, while at the same time having losing season after losing season.

Well, I could go on and on, but the point here is that moving up to big-time football is having an adverse impact on the academic reputation of one of the finest state universities in the country. Well known for its high academic standards, Rutgers is often compared favorably with Berkeley in the west, and Ivy League institutions in the east, to which many people think Rutgers belongs. Some alumni are concerned that the emphasis on athletics, and the monetary drain, will make people think of Rutgers first and foremost as an athletic power, and only secondarily as an institution of high academic quality. Milton Friedman, the Nobel prize-winning economist, and a Rutgers alum, wrote recently, "Universities exist to transmit knowledge and understanding of ideas and values to students, not to provide entertainment for spectators or employment for athletes."

So how does this apply to Appalachian State? I think the tragedy is that Rutgers athletics serves as a clear warning of what can happen at this institution if we move to go big-time. Oh, you say, but Rutgers is the wrong example. Better to compare us to ECU, which has successfully made the transition. I counter that argument with a simple statistic: of the 2300 athletic programs in the United States, 98% do not break even or make a profit. How likely is it that Appalachian State, with its remote location, difficult geography, and poor weather, will be in that 2% that breaks even? Not likely at all.

Recently, one of our alums stated that this move would "increase the credibility of the university." What credibility is he referring to? If by this he means athletic credibility, then we must ask, but by what standards does he rate our credibility? Our athletes currently graduate at the same rate as our overall student body, and their SAT scores are close to the general student body, not something we could probably maintain under the pressures that exist at the Division I-A level. And under the current situation we generally have winning seasons. That's athletic credibility. But if by credibility this alum means our academic reputation, then I consider his statement to be highly offensive. Are we currently without academic credibility because we are Division I-AA? Do we, the faculty, perform unsatisfactorily because we are not Division I-A? This kind of thinking is an insult to the faculty of this university, who work hard at their teaching, who spend long hours doing research and scholarly activities, and who devote many hours to community service, all while being paid significantly lower than faculty at other member institutions in the state system. And what is the result of all this dedication? Appalachian currently ranks number one in student satisfaction among all 16 institutions of higher learning according to a recent Board of Governors survey. And I should note at this point the contributions made by staff employees here at ASU, who work hard to accommodate both our needs and those of our students, and who have contributed to that satisfaction rating. Thank you all for your hard work and dedication. In measures of academic achievement, we rank 3rd or 4th in SAT scores, retention rates, and graduation rates. You want credibility, that's credibility - but a Division I-A football team in no way improves academics at any institution, and in fact, most often detracts from it.

Moving to Division I-A would entail enlarging the stadium to accommodate 30,000 people, raising average attendances to 17,000, and awarding more football scholarships. Lets start by first making the existing program financially solvent. Currently athletics loses almost \$1.1M each year at Appalachian State, \$660,000 of which comes in the form of a subsidy from Academic Affairs to pay coaches who do absolutely no teaching. These monies should be going to support the academic mission of this university, by providing additional positions or higher salaries. So until athletics gets its present fiscal house in order, there can be no serious discussion of moving to an even more expensive program at this university. Now, a change of subject - low faculty salaries. According to a recent Chronicle of Higher Education Report, ASU ranks 3rd from the bottom in average salaries for professors, 2nd from the bottom for associate professors, and 5th from the bottom for assistant professors. Only Winston-Salem State and Elizabeth City State pay their professors less than we do. On a national basis, we fall in the bottom 40% in terms of pay. If you add in compensation in the form of our benefits package, we're even worse off. Our low pay here at ASU is said to result in large part from the fact that we have the highest proportion of full professors of any institution in the state, (48% vs a state-wide average of 24%) and the resultant salary comprehension. But I'm not so sure that is the total picture. Promotion to full professor does not yet come with a substantial financial reward, and simple promotion therefore can not greatly impact the salary structure. What can and probably does impact the structure is if retention of professors is much higher at

Appalachian than elsewhere, something Bobby Sharp is looking at right now. If true, then our salary compression results more from longevity than a pattern of premature promotions, as the GA accuses us of doing. So, how do we get out of this situation? Retirements and attrition are not expected to reduce the number of full professors anytime soon, and without such a reduction, there are few options available to address the situation. However, we must ask the administration here, and at Chapel Hill - how long will our current faculty have to suffer with low salaries for actions taken by administrations of years gone by? At what point will the GA realize that low salaries will eventually (if not already) impede our ability to attract and retain high quality faculty? I think it is time to conduct a salary equity study across institutions within the state-wide system, and to ask them how they can justify our low pay. Something needs to be done. We complain year after year about our low salaries, but nothing is every accomplished. Now, the situation is getting worse to the point that a creative solution must be found before it deteriorates even more. Each morning, administrators should wake up and ask the following question: What can I do to promote and facilitate the work of the faculty? After all, that is their prime mission. But as long as salaries at this university continue to fall behind those at other institutions, I think every administrator should feel some sense of failure and be thinking very hard about what creative solutions can be found. Based on our academic success, and our fine faculty, we deserve higher salaries.

Finally, permit me some short speculation concerning the direction of education in the coming century. Next year is our Centennial year, a milestone for any institution, and celebrations are planned throughout the year. However, as we celebrate the past, we must also prepare for the future. And for the faculty, I think that means taking an introspective look at what we have been teaching our students the past several decades, and then asking ourselves, what could we do in the coming years that is new and innovative, that addresses the perceived needs of students for the 21st century. This is not an easy task, as hindsight is always better than foresight.

In his book, *Consilience: The Unity of Knowledge*, E.O. Wilson, professor emeritus of biology and Pulitzer prize winner, argues that unification of the major fields of study (the sciences, the arts, the social sciences, and the humanities), is the great challenge for the next century. Wilson calls this unification "consilience", derived from a 19th century treatise by the philosopher William Whewell, who wrote, "The consilience of Induction takes place when an Induction, obtained from one class of facts, coincides with an Induction obtained from another different class. This Consilience is a test of the truth of the theory in which it occurs." Consilience will not be easy, argues Wilson, but is necessary to replace what he considers the moribund liberal arts curriculum found at most universities. I quote from Wilson's book, "During the past thirty years the ideal of the unity of learning, which the Renaissance and Enlightenment bequeathed us, has been largely abandoned. With rare exceptions American universities and colleges have dissolved their curriculum into a slurry of minor disciplines and specialized courses. While the average number of undergraduate courses per institution doubled, the percentage of mandatory courses in general education dropped by more than one half. Science was sequestered in the same period.... only a third of universities and colleges require students to take at least one course in the natural sciences....Win or lose, true reform will aim at the consilience of science with the social sciences and humanities in scholarship and teaching. Every college student should be able to answer the following question: What is the relation between science and the humanities, and how is it important for human welfare?" I would hope, as we study organizational changes at this university, and as we contemplate future needs of our students and ourselves, that we heed the words of Wilson, and in some small measure, strive to reach across the colleges to colleagues in different departments, and to ask, "Can we develop courses that bridge the intellectual gaps between us, building on what is being tried in Interdisciplinary Studies?" Can we achieve consilience, and in doing so, better prepare our students for the century to come? If we get institutional support for such courses, and work out the logistical problems, then I think the answer to these questions is unequivocally yes! And more than anything else, innovations such as these will in the end act as attractors for the best and brightest students, and faculty!, thus solidifying our reputation in the coming years as one of the best public comprehensive universities in the southeast.