

Speech to the Faculty - January 7, 1999

Howard S. Neufeld, Senate Chair

Good Morning, and Happy New Year to you all. I hope everyone had a wonderful holiday break, despite the ice and snow. The climate forecasters said it would be a warm and dry winter, and up to the middle of December, it looked like they were right on the mark. But now, if this stuff keeps up, it will only reinforce my perception that forecasting the weather is as much art as it is science.

I have several things I want to discuss this morning that pertain to Senate business. We have a full agenda for the spring, and, we will be conducting elections for various university and college committees, as well as the Senate itself. Gayle Weitz, Vice-Chair of the Senate, will talk about the elections process in just a minute.

1999 marks the beginning of ASU's 100th year, and its 28th as a member institution in the UNC system. This is a time not only to reflect back on what has been accomplished over the past century, but to look ahead to what can be, and how we should get there. Since ASU became a part of the UNC system, the faculty has grown from 350 full-time members to nearly 600. The student population has increased from 7500 to 12,600. And the support staff has also shown tremendous increases over this same time period. ASU is now the largest employer in NW North Carolina, and the economic engine of this part of the state. Suffice it to say, were ASU not here, Boone and the surrounding community would be but a small to modest ski resort town, with few of the cultural and intellectual amenities afforded by the presence of a major comprehensive university. I say this to make a point: what's good for ASU is also good for the entire region. Thus, as ASU grows, Boone, Watauga and nearby surrounding counties benefit, through increased jobs, more taxes from new arrivals, and better schools. ASU's future is tightly linked to that of Boone and Watauga County. Working together we can achieve a sense of harmony and balance that benefits everyone.

As an example of the interdependence of town and gown, the Chancellor has recognized that the increase in student population suggested for ASU by the GA (a nearly 5000 student increase) simply can not be absorbed by the present infrastructure of either the University or the town of Boone. Mayor Velma Burnley also has expressed her concern about such an increase and the burden it would put on city services. The Faculty Senate recently sent a resolution to the GA, the Board of Governors, and the Board of Trustees, stating that such an increase is not in the best interests of this university, or, the surrounding community. GA officials now seem to be backtracking on this issue, and although we will have to grow some, the final size will hopefully be way under the 17,000 that the GA initially wanted.

Last year we received only modest wage increases. These were not as high as either the GA or ASU had hoped. President Molly Broad has vowed to go back to the legislature to obtain further raises, but there is substantial resistance within the legislature to such requests, particularly when the state's coffers are hit up to pay back the \$1B it owes to retirees who were illegally taxed. However, President Broad, hearing the groundswell of discontent from the faculty at this and other institutions in the UNC system, has convened a task force to study ways to increase the benefits package offered to faculty members in the state. Len Johnson, from Human Resources, is our representative on that committee. They expect to have a completed report to the GA by the end of this month.

As you might suspect, our benefits package compares poorly to other states, and even to our peer institutions. Consider the following comparison with Utah State University. The per capita income in Utah in 1997 was \$17,320, compared to \$19,957 for North Carolina, yet in Utah, the state pays 100% of your retirement and 100% of your insurance and medical premiums. If you were a faculty member there, making \$45,000, that would mean \$10,800 in benefits, or an equivalent salary of \$55,800. In North Carolina your equivalent salary would be \$47,152! Its easy to see then, that North Carolina has fallen behind in its compensation to faculty, and both established and newly incoming faculty are disappointed at such a poor benefits package. This is why President Broad is making this a major item in her agenda for the coming year.

But to obtain such an increase in our benefits will require the approval of legislators from across the state. And although the budget for the next few years will be tight, I nonetheless believe this is an issue they must tackle. I therefore challenge our state senator, Virginia Foxx, to work to increase our benefits, and for the first time in her life as an elected representative, to do something positive for Appalachian State University, the largest employer in her district. From my example above, it is clear that the legislature has failed in its responsibility to keep our benefits comparable with those of the surrounding states. Because of this, we risk not being able to attract the best faculty to North Carolina, and, the very real possibility that our most talented faculty will go elsewhere, where the financial rewards are more lucrative. It is time to stop all this bickering between Republicans and Democrats down in Raleigh, and to work in a bipartisan manner to improve the benefits for faculty all across this state. And the same challenge goes out to our House representative, Gene Wilson.

Both our representatives should remember that universities, and their reputations, are made by the faculty they attract and keep.

Back in the fall, at the Senate's retreat, the Faculty Senate voted to hold a forum on the pros and cons of unionizing the faculty. This arose from a frustration with low salary increases and other related items. I would like to announce that this forum will be held on Friday, March 26 in I.G. Greer Auditorium from 2-4 pm. We hope many of you can make it. Pat Shaw, from the AAUP will be there, along with Dr. Tim Perri, from the Business School. Some of the items up for discussion are salary schedules, merit raises, collective bargaining, and outside binding arbitration for grievance issues. The evaluation of the Chancellor that you all filled out last fall has now been approved by the Board of Trustees and the GA, and will be distributed to everybody in the next few days.

As we move into ASU's second century, a number of significant changes are on the horizon. Let me address but a few in my time here this morning. In a few weeks, the committee studying the possibility of moving to Division I-A football will meet and discuss the report of the hired consultant. Then, the report will be made public and the faculty will have the opportunity to make their opinions known. Let me simply say this - You all already know my opinion about this issue, and although my opinion should not be construed as that of the entire faculty, I am confident that most faculty are opposed to this. The Senate will, of course, conduct a poll after the report comes out to make sure, and should the faculty be overwhelmingly in opposition to the move, I would hope that the administration, and the Board of Trustees, listen carefully to their faculty's wishes and to consider the consequences of their actions if they lean in favor of transition. Would it be worth it to lose the support of the faculty simply to play football at a higher level? The Senate will be working to implement the recommendations of the Departmental Personnel Committee Report, which was issued and approved by the Senate back in 1995. First and foremost, we will be discussing the issue of separating search and hire from promotion and tenure. While some departments do create search committees to assist with the hiring process, those decisions still have to be approved by departmental DPCs. The DPC report recommends that these processes be done by completely separate committees. In other words, search recommendations would not go through the DPC, but instead would come from the department and Chair and go directly to the Dean.

The Senate will also look into the structure and composition of DPCs and search committees. For example, ASU appears unique in its closed door approach to faculty searches, by limiting who can and can not see applications. It is a restrictive and secretive process. Yet the Law School at Chapel Hill lets all faculty members see all applications! Certainly if the Law School there can do it, what need we fear here? It is time for the administration to trust its faculty to do the job in the best way possible, with full faculty involvement at all stages. We need a more open policy, one that is designed to bring in the best faculty, not one geared simply to avoid litigation.

In 1995, nearly 53% of you stated that it is appropriate for non-tenured faculty to make personnel decisions on tenured faculty, yet in the next question in the report, almost the same percentage said they thought non-tenured faculty might not provide unbiased input when it came to reviewing tenured faculty. These conflicting notions are intriguing, and the reasons behind them unclear. A majority of those polled (73%) did not agree with the statement that only tenured faculty should serve on DPCs. Yet the recommendation of the report, interestingly, was to restrict DPCs to only the tenured faculty. Certainly there is role conflict

when non-tenured faculty evaluate tenured faculty, who themselves will be making decisions on their tenure in the future. But perhaps this is not a problem at ASU, and we should leave well enough alone. Or perhaps it is a case of protecting a few who do feel threatened when placed in this position. In any case, it promises to be a contentious issue, and one that will be dealt with very carefully. A number of other DPC issues will also be addressed, and if you would like a copy of the DPC report, simply contact the Senate Office.

Finally, we have been asked to review the Bookstore Rental Policy. Yes, we know it's a money saver, but is it in the best educational interests of our students? Does it promote a lifelong love of books and learning, or does it send the message that learning is ephemeral, and non-lasting, something to be crammed into one's head for the current semester, and then forgotten once the next semester starts? How many of us have wondered (however facetiously) if our students truly take anything with them intellectually from one semester to the next? Would making students purchase their textbooks, rather than rent them, reverse the trend toward disposable knowledge? In 1821, Thomas Jefferson wrote this in a letter to former President James Madison:

"Books constitute capital. A library book lasts as long as a house, for hundreds of years. It is not, then, an article of mere consumption but fairly of capital, and often in the case of professional men, setting out in life, it is their only capital."

Perhaps its time we motivated our students to obtain some capital.

Let me conclude with the following: the future of higher education promises to be transformed by new technological innovations, by distance learning, and by a trend toward for-profit universities that may compete for students at traditional schools. While some of these trends may turn out to be ill-advised, others may significantly improve our ability to impart knowledge and skills to our students. It is we, the faculty, who must experiment and determine which changes are for the better, and discard those that do not work. We may also have to rethink the notion that all qualified students must obtain a college degree in order to be successful. We like to point out that a college degree increases a student's lifetime income, but recent studies reported in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* appear to contradict that paradigm. When students are separated by their GPA, only those students who perform above average appear to significantly increase their earnings potential. Students who perform less well would often have been better going straight into the job market. How we will deal with these facts is unclear, especially in a situation where funding is so closely tied to the FTE. But it does make one question whether we should always be going after all the students we can get, or whether we should raise our standards, and concomitantly our academic expectations, to deal with fewer, but better students. Only time will tell how this plays out.

As this is my last speech to you as Chair of the Faculty Senate, let me conclude by saying that it has been an honor and a privilege to have served you, and I want to thank Senate Members for putting up with my sometimes brusque style, and my impatience with seemingly endless debate. And I want to thank all of you here today for supporting your Faculty Senate. This is your representative organization on campus - so make good use of it.

Have a great semester!!

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