

Martha Marking, Faculty Senate Chair, Address to the Faculty and Staff, January 4, 2007

Happy New Year and welcome back to the spring semester!

Here we are back at another faculty and staff meeting. And once again I am fully clothed and you are in your new holiday underwear! Some things never change!

I promise Stan, Loren and I didn't call one another to coordinate our clothing!

First and foremost I want to thank my Senate colleagues who have supported me this past semester, as I am not exactly a Roberts' Rules of Order wonk. I especially want to thank the executive committee including Chip Arnold, Tim Harris and Eric Marland. Thanks all of you for your hard work! I have had a great time working with Charlie Wallin of Staff Council, Forrest Gilliam of the Student Government Association and Tony Calamai of the Council of Chairs. I also want to express my gratitude to the former Faculty Senate Chairs, administrators and the many of you that I have gotten advice and assistance from since April.

We are facing one of the most crucial times in Appalachian State University's history. To understand the external pressures we are facing, I listened yesterday to a Podcast from *Inside Higher Education*. In this particular episode there was an interview with Sara Martinez Tucker, the U.S. Under Secretary for Education who was hired to carry out the recommendations of the Spellings Commission report on the "Future of Higher Education". Higher education officials believe that the Commission has taken quote, "an overly aggressive tack", end quote. Ms. Tucker acknowledged that she is responsible for implementing ways of aligning high school graduation requirements with college entrance requirements, curriculums to improve access to higher education, particularly for low-income and minority students. We at Appalachian have begun to undertake this challenge on our campus as we launch the Appalachian Access and Gear Up programs. Tucker later says, "We want to improve access, we want to improve affordability, and we want to improve accountability. If you agree with us on these things, it's going to be collaborative. If you don't agree on these things, then we're going to have to have some tough conversations". Later in the interview she talked about the overall impressions coming out of her work on the Spellings Commission. She said, "At the beginning I was amazed at how quickly we coalesced around what the key issues were....Candidly, I will tell you I was really disappointed at how we fell apart when solution development started coming. The people I ended up respecting the most were the ones that learned to take off their hat at the door and walk in to solve the organization's issues. And finally she said, "...we have a responsibility that's bigger than each of us....". These are just some of the external pressures facing us in 2007.

Faculty Senate will shortly be asking for volunteers for University committees. I ask you to answer the call and assist us with making Appalachian a place where faculty governance and participation is real and vital.

Recently our campus has been energized by three important initiatives, the General Ed Task Force, the Faculty Evaluation and Development Task Force and the Strategic Planning Advisory Council. The numbers of us that have been involved in these endeavors are astonishing. Well over 200 by my count.

The Gen Ed Task Force had 22 members who met weekly for the past three semesters. In all, 78 faculty

and students, along with alumni and employers participated in focus groups. The Task Force has developed general education goals and learning outcomes including: encouraging our students to think critically and creatively, communicate effectively, making local to global connections and understanding the responsibilities of community membership. If you have been at any of the open forums you know the conversation has, at the very least, been robust. Faculty will be asked to supervise and manage a model that is faculty driven, experimental, and open to change. We must not take this task lightly; again as Ms. Tucker said, “we have a responsibility that’s bigger than each of us....”

The Faculty Evaluation and Development Task Force involved another 36 members of our community. Our charge is to review policies and procedures for faculty evaluation and development at Appalachian and to make recommendations for improvement. The end product, to reference the charge, is to find the most meaningful, efficient, and effective ways of articulation and evaluation and to support the work of the faculty, particularly in the context of local and national changes in the nature of faculty work and in university culture.

The Planning Advisory Council has been working hard as well and is comprised of 9 members. Tomorrow Provost Aeschleman will charge the Strategic Planning Commission, which consists of just fewer than 100 members, with looking at the UNC accountability plan and measures, consider the core assets and values, the essential character of Appalachian and other related topics. They will discuss and assist with the development of a new Strategic Plan for ASU. The commission subcommittees will be charged to develop no more than five objectives that can reasonably be implemented within a 5-year time period.

As I was preparing for my address today I went to my bookshelf and read some of the titles housed there. Some books seemed as if they might provide me with necessary inspiration and others, I felt needed to be avoided for one reason or another. Some of the titles seemed somewhat promising such as: *Don't Sweat the Small Stuff*, *Conceptual Blockbusting*, and *Surfing the Himalayas*. Other titles I saw were *Stitch 'N Bitch Nation*, maybe not so much, but have you heard another faculty senate chair work the “b” word into a speech before? I considered *Lessons My Sled Dog Taught Me*, which seemed a bit more appropriate, and one to seemingly avoid was the book *The Yarn Harlot*. And although we won't talk about my proclivity for yarn I didn't feel comfortable baring my soul to you in quite that way. After all I don't know all of you that well! So I settled on quotes from two books: *The Te of Piglet* by Benjamin Hoff and *MindWalks* by Mary H. Frakes. I believe they have something to say about the challenges we are facing.

From *MindWalks*, a book about the advantages of walking, I quote,
“If you've been walking regularly, chances are you have a set routine, a route you travel more often than not. It's wonderful to watch the way the seasons or the time of day can work magic on familiar sights; seeing the new in the everyday is a big part of what MindWalks are all about. But taking an unaccustomed path, or a detour on an accustomed one can bring experiences you can't anticipate. Serendipity-the spontaneous appearance of unexpected pleasures is a powerful force. We learn most from exposure to new things. They broaden our perceptions; give our psyches a new backdrop against which to set existing attitudes, beliefs, and feelings.

Sometimes it takes courage and imagination to attempt the new; by definition, we will have to cope with situations for which we do not feel well-equipped. We do not necessarily know the end result or what we may encounter along the way; that uncertainty is what makes many of us stick to the path we know.

But every so often we need to flex the psychic muscles we use to deal with the unfamiliar....If we don't exercise those muscles they get weak, and we're unable to cope when we need them most: when life throws us those big curve balls."

Frakes goes on to describe a walk that she had taken that was muddier and a bit more treacherous than her usual one. Here is what she said in reflecting on the experience:

"Yet I remember that walk now as one of my most treasured. I saw waterfalls still frozen in mid-cascade down the grey stone hills. I got a helping hand across a treacherous ice slick from a couple who had passed me earlier and turned back to make sure I was OK crossing the ravine. I got a much better workout from all the clambering I was forced to do. And I felt a sense of achievement, of conquest, that I would not have had if I had stuck to the path I knew."

She continues with:

"I'm not advocating recklessness; the unknown can have disastrous consequences. But even when things don't work out well, there are valuable life lessons in the mistakes....Try a new path today."

And finally, *From The Te of Piglet*:

"In the third chapter of Winnie-the-Pooh we are introduced to Piglet, who may appear on the surface as the least significant of the Pooh characters. Piglet, who craves security, much like us I think, in that he lives in the middle of a house in the middle of a tree in the middle of a forest, is the only one of them to change, to grow, to become more than what he was in the first place. "We're all going on an Expedition with Christopher Robin!" What is it when we're on it?" "A sort of boat, I think," said Pooh. "Oh! That sort." "Yes. And we're going to discover a Pole or something. Or was it a Mole? Anyhow we're going to discover it."

Thank you.