

Fall 2004 Faculty Meeting

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Good Morning faculty colleagues, Chancellor Peacock, Interim Provost Aeschleman, and other friends and supporters in this audience.

I have a major purpose in mind today: to encourage your participation in this university and to improve our professional lives. We are entering an era of significant change at Appalachian, which should open new opportunities for faculty, students, and all others. In this time, faculty must lead the definition of academic policies and practices in the university.

I also had a joke to tell you, but, as those of you who know me well are aware, I can't tell any of them in this venue. I can tell you, though, that I'm taller than Marv Williamsen. It was Marv who long ago, early in his life, at a completely different job, had decided to call in sick. Marv told his boss and that he had anal glaucoma, to which his boss responded, "sounds serious, what is it?" "It's that," said Marv, "I just can't see my ass coming in today."

Now, as we all know, Marv's butt has always been in for assisting faculty and students to develop their international ideas and needs. We are in a time when, if all faculty butts are in, we can influence Appalachian's future for the better. It's certainly clear that the chancellor and interim provost have their's in. So, to put a different face on a metaphor from 15 years ago, this is the train we should get on.

It offers welcome change from the more recent past, when faculty began to criticize one another and to become suspicious of administration.

Over the last 5 years or so, it appeared to a growing number of faculty that administrative paternalism was not adequately responding to the changes growth imposed on Appalachian. The status quo ruled through a top-down administrative model and the resulting frustration bred distrust and the honing of viewpoints, which created the appearance sometimes of greater conflict than there really was. As the climate of criticism brewed, it melded with local frustrations in colleges and departments where workloads appeared to grow exponentially.

On closer inspection, such perceptions require modification. A great deal more got done than credit was given. But too much did not get done.

One result is that I have listed for Interim Provost Aeschleman a dozen Faculty Senate motions or resolutions dating back to 2002, that have not been acted upon. These include office hours redefinition, workload reduction recommendations, solutions to conflicts over faculty needs and construction on campus, recommendations for improving the chair term renewal process, and for reducing the clutter of email boxes. Aeschleman is committed to clearing these up as soon as possible. Thank you very much. The office hours issue was one that got out of hand quickly, involving more emotionalism and fear than trust in professional commitment. To try to reduce contention and misunderstanding, we have discussed this with top administrators, with student government leaders, and with trustees, and Senate has created with the assistance of the Hubbard Center a survey for faculty that inquires into how we actually do communicate with our students. You will receive that in email shortly. I encourage everyone to fill it up. Actually, the last recommendation about email clutter, which was passed by Senate in 2002, is close to happening, even though Senate was not informed that anything was being done. Anyway, and fortunately, it will become possible to opt out of some email notices through an easily managed online personal preference box, which will reduce a small annoyance and give us better control of our delete keys. Thanks to Bill Ward and Jeff Williams for this initiative. But it demonstrates, too, in a small way, the problems of communication that have dogged faculty and administrative relations for too long.

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Chancellor Peacock has made no secret that Appalachian will tread new paths in a "new era," and that he will depend on faculty perspectives in the process.

There's no escaping that these paths include growth, re-evaluation, and re-organization, and that they will aim to underline strengths, reduce weaknesses, and build different structures for curriculum and other academic activity.

Change of significant proportions will come to Appalachian over the next 7 years, and not merely because of new leadership. It will happen because we must hire so many new faculty to meet replacement and growth needs. It makes sense to have in place sound policies for where we want to go when we are planning on hiring faculty on this scale.

Faculty have a unique opportunity this year to significantly influence the process of change by building in cooperation with administration, most of whose leaders are, or will be, "brand new" to their jobs. That

cooperation rests on transparency and trust, even when we might disagree. I believe this administration is committed to these same values. And, that's the opportunity.

It is my intent that Faculty Senate lead this building process on behalf of faculty and toward the end of improving and clarifying standards in support of faculty working environments, so that they can accomplish their professional and personal goals. We will consider issues such as college-wide evaluation standards in addition to departmental ones, and college-level tenure and promotion committees. We also will seek to place a faculty member on the Appalachian Foundation Board, and we will assess the rank or designation of emeritus, among other concerns.

Ideas about how to build the university for a stronger future have been bubbling among faculty for the past 10 years and more; but they have seldom had a full hearing, which is no one's particular fault; it's just what happens when most attention is concentrated on particular emphases and immediate needs.

Some, like DPC revision, have surfaced, and Faculty Senate, after long consideration of faculty opinion, made a recommendation for a new DPC structure. This proposal's aim is to strengthen faculty self-governance, by encouraging all faculty to be involved in personnel activity, and in clarifying standards for evaluation and reward. It does so while allowing every department to tailor its DPC to its particular needs. It also encourages leadership by experience—a value absolutely crucial to the survival of academic values overall, and surely something we will need even more of over the next 7 years.

Chancellor Peacock is beginning review of the university's administrative structure with an eye on whether it can respond appropriately to future needs. Faculty should also review its evaluation, reward, and workload structures for the same reasons. And, we should do so to ensure faculty definition of professional values and academic standards.

Since there is more external interference with academic self-governance with which we have to make accommodation, we should be alert to define its purposes and practices. Post-Tenure Review is the obvious culprit here. PTR is an invidious assault on tenure and an affront to self-respecting academics. It is also the result of poor personnel decision-making by faculty over the years, especially in the absence of well-understood standards and expectations. So, PTR is going to have to be integrated with other evaluative practices and within a meaningful reward structure, if it is to have any chance of overcoming its present negative presence for faculty.

So, we will begin conversations about how to improve our professional lives that rest on full faculty participation and review; on transparency, cooperation, and trust; with the end of promoting the best in ourselves. We can begin to take greater pride in this university and ourselves, which should result in increased opportunity for faculty growth. They are self-reinforcing benefits.

In addition to considering new initiatives, Senate will re-visit concerns at faculty fees for facilities use, and parking. Senate will closely monitor salary issues, and continue to push for the complete end of using faculty salary money for non-academic purposes. We had made some progress on this about three years ago, then came the fiscal crisis; we need to continue urging this issue.

Everyone knows that for this year the legislature allocated 2.5% for salary rises. This was after a pittance last year, which was augmented by tuition charges, and little the year before. Many remember that last spring, at administrative initiative, we agreed to request a \$300 per student tuition rise, with that being split among the same constituencies participating in the previous tuition rise. So, faculty expected that 30% of the tuition rise would go as before into salary adjustments; so, did Chancellor Peacock. But the Board of Governors, responding to strong pressure from students and their parents concerned at the trend, set limits and guidelines for the expenditure of tuition rise monies at the universities that had requested it.

At bottom, the Governors set a limit of \$225 per student rise at all campuses, and specified that the money could go only into support of reducing class sizes, increasing core and required course availability, and hiring fewer part-time and more permanent faculty. Chancellors were also given the authority to "ensure the competitiveness of faculty salaries." At Appalachian, that means that some of the tuition dollars can be used to augment salaries of presently-employed faculty. But, it is important to note that the interim provost and chancellor are committed to using the tuition money primarily to reduce and improve faculty workloads, and to hire additional permanent faculty. This is very welcome news.

So, even though we aren't paid more and have meager benefits, I'm going to plead with you to do more. The opportunity before us can only profitably be capitalized if faculty participate and serve on university committees and councils, by running for Senate, and so on. By getting involved, essentially.

We have no choice, we either govern ourselves in cooperation with administration, staff and students, or we don't. The disruptions of the past one-and-a-half years have temporarily worsened the situation, because no faculty have been appointed to university committees, and the vacancies threaten university business.

We will shortly put out a call for volunteers for all kinds of service.

Please respond positively. There's a lot to learn and to contribute now.

As a historian I'm naturally inclined to think about the ebbs and flows of time, the influences of people and styles and ideologies, and of irony and the sublime as well as the ridiculous in human affairs. I look on the recent history of Appalachian that way, which prompts me to leave you with two observations:

First, I'm optimistic that we can erect more responsive and professional foundations for our future- ones that respect workloads and productivity and personal needs, and that underwrite the kinds of standards in our professional lives that we can be proud of.

Second, over my 34 years here, I have found change slow and the university to have an essentially conservative orientation. But it changes nonetheless. What matters is who moderates the change and thus how it is implemented. It is not often in the history of Appalachian that the opportunity presents itself to build inclusive faculty governance upon clear standards determined by faculty for the benefit of doing our work better. We have been moving in that direction by fits and starts. This is the time to consolidate our efforts for our future.

In the meantime, we all deserve thanks for what we have done to lead this university to success. There's more to do.