

Michael Ramey's Fall 2008 Opening Faculty Meeting Speech

Welcome to the start of what is already proving itself to be a unique year! The opening ceremony is occurring during the second week of classes. It's the day after convocation and I must say what an excellent speaker we had this year. A chemist has been elected chair of the faculty senate? This is definitely the largest crowd I have ever had the privilege of addressing. I once heard, probably from a TV show, that the best way to speak to a large crowd is to pretend it's a first date and use the skills that made you successful in the dating world to "woo" your audience. Since it's been 15 years since I last went on a first date, I asked my wife, Jennifer, to refresh my memory on what particular skills of mine were successful "back in the day". Prepared for a revelation into my charm or sophistication as a younger man, I received the ego boosting comment of "I don't remember much, you were scary"...Not that I could, but I don't think trying to frighten you is going to help so on second thought I probably should have avoided this whole line of investigation and just red a guide to public speaking. Moving on

The theme of my message today will be about perspective. Think about that word. We must keep a correct perspective on our university lives, or we will be working in vain. I plan on being a little preachy, then a little factual, and then a little encouraging.

I look at my nearly seven year old son, and remember awaiting a phone call on my wife's due date to tell me it was time. That date, September 11, 2001....the phone call...the day, the news, not exactly what I expected.

Right now, men, women, even children are fighting and dying in armed conflicts around the world. Brave men and women of the US military are fulfilling their military duty in very dangerous places. I do not come from a military family, nor have I personally served in the armed forces. I do not appreciate their sacrifices as I should. I wanted to give you an exact number...but there were differing totals from different sources...and saying "around 4000 US deaths" seemed a little shallow. It not around a number, it is an actual number, which accounts for the loss of real and important lives. If you are in this audience and have experienced the loss of soldier in your life, I bet it was not an approximate sense of pride you had when they put on that uniform and I guarantee it was not an approximate heartbreak when you learned they gave their all. So let's all keep it tucked in the back of our minds that there are some things happening right now that are more important than convocations and opening ceremonies. I get the honor of telling you about campus issues, past and upcoming, because many have died to allow me to do so. So let's work together and do our jobs with excellence that will honor those who have fallen.

The FACTS: I would like to mention that Dr. Tony Carey has taken the founding role as Vice Provost for Faculty Affairs. He will be a valuable asset to the faculty as he occupies a unique role not found on many campuses to advocate and develop policies and/or programs to benefit the professional lives of faculty. With somewhere close to 750 tenured /tenure track faculty (45 of them first year faculty) to help, he told me he should have everything worked out in about 3 more days.....no wait, wrong unit, 3 decades!

A task force on diversity comprised of faculty, staff, students, administrators, and community members completed its work under the co-chair leadership of Linda Robinson and Tracy Wright. The findings in the report have been shared with the Chancellor this summer and we await his response. The report details strategies to help Appalachian reach its stated goals for excellence in this broad area.

Several changes to the faculty handbook and policies were also accomplished:

1. This will be the first semester under the new reorganized Faculty Senate Structure, whereby each

department has a representative on the senate. The faculty vote this past January to establish the new structure was the first revision of the Faculty Constitution since 1986. Get to know your department's senator as a way for you to keep in touch with faculty governance issues. I CAN'T predict how your concerns will eventually be handled, but I CAN guarantee that if you never speak up, your voice WILL NOT be heard.

2. Language was added to the handbook to define the process for review of the chancellor and provost from all faculty, staff, and students. This process was completed last year by two review committees charged with collecting and reporting the results of campus wide surveys. The Chancellor's Review Committee consisted of Tony Calamai, Christina DeStefano (President Graduate Student Association), Forrest Gilliam (President SGA), Martha Marking, and Stacy Sears (Staff Council).

Approximately 272 faculty, 343 staff, and 2600 students responded.

This on-campus review will complement the University of North Carolina Board of Governors policy, which mandates a process for formal professional development review of the Chancellor every four years. Chancellor Peacock's review has been scheduled for this fall.

A number of diverse stakeholders within and outside of the University will be interviewed (individually or in small groups) by the review facilitator, Dr. David McFarland with Penson Associates, Inc., and/or asked to complete an online survey. Dr. McFarland is a recognized authority on presidential review in universities, colleges, systems, boards and commissions. Although only 80-100 stakeholders will be personally invited to participate, anyone can and should send their comments to Dr. McFarland. An email was sent to the campus community at the beginning of the semester with more details and I strongly encourage you to participate in this review.

A similar review was conducted for Provost Aeschleman whereby ~ 200 faculty members and direct report staff participated. Tony Calamai, Randy Edwards and Martha Marking comprised the reading committee. (I'm starting to wonder if there was a committee on campus last year that Martha and Tony Calamai didn't serve on.....)

The results of both performance reviews have been shared with the Chancellor and Provost.

3. The process and procedures for promotion to Emeritus status have been clarified.

4. Appropriate sections were added to the handbook in regards to Personnel files including who has access to the file and where it is to be stored. Guidance on what is and is not appropriate for the file is also listed. Faculty members are advised to examine their personnel files, particularly preceding an annual evaluation or a personnel action such as reappointment, promotion, tenure, and post tenure review. A written request for an appointment to review a personnel file must be submitted to the Office of the Dean, or other appropriate Senior Administrator, at least three (3) working days in advance of the date on which the faculty member wishes to review the personnel file. Faculty also now have the right to bring an approved observer to their annual review meeting, in such cases as the faculty member deems necessary.

5. The senate passed a set of recommendations concerning the voting rights and privileges policies at ASU. These recommendations were formed by a 16 member task forces comprised of pre-tenure, tenured, NTT faculty along with several chairs and deans. This wide ranging document contains items too numerous to delineate here, but does include a recommendation to replace the DPC format and move to a craft model for promotion and tenure decisions within a department. Simply stated all those tenured faculty at or above a level being considered would vote on said issue. The voting rights document is currently under review by the

Deans, chairs, and administration for their input. A change to the DPC structure would involve a change to the faculty constitution, and require a vote of the full faculty (like the change to the senate structure) with a 2/3 majority required for passage.

This is a critical issue on our campus as we review the best standards and practices for our changing university.

We must consider our tenure and promotion system to be one of the fundamental ties that bind us together as a campus community and ensures that those deserving of tenure and promotion are evaluated in a way that is both fair and equitable to those under review and also those who are voting on the personnel decision. More information on this will be disseminated later in the semester.

An updated online version of the Faculty Handbook with approved changes will be available soon with thanks to Lisa Felker for her previous work and Sheryl Mohn who has inherited these responsibilities.

With all that work being accomplished last year, you might think there isn't much to left to be done....well except for...

Evaluating and updating the Workload Section of the Faculty Handbook, supplementary pay policies, off campus scholarly assignments, online annual reporting, satisfying UNC tomorrow initiatives... better pay...better environment to live and work in and all the unforeseen items that will be brought to the attention of the senate by you the faculty.

It may seem overwhelming. Now the encouragement. Consider for a moment that we will continually face these and other challenges over the course of our careers. Some of these challenges will seem to be thrown at us from external forces beyond our control and others will arise naturally out of our own desires to build a more excellent academy through change and development.

Have you noticed there is a lot of talk of change in the news!

I believe that we as a faculty body will be better prepared to deal with the changes if we take an honest look at the principles that unite us all and will never go out of fashion. Forget what is changing and look at what is constant. Ideals such as integrity, dedication, professionalism.....may not make campus headlines, but make us who we are and what we should strive to become. We can all become better and more active: better teachers, better scholars, better whatever inspires you to move forward in your professional life. So while we deal with the issues and the inherent stresses of the job, let's actively strive not to allow our commitment to these core standards slip.

We often hear of how the community views professors as living in an ivory tower, and we cringe as to the inaccuracy of said statement. I propose we embrace the ivory tower image. Not as residency high and aloof from our community, but as a precious keepsake placed carefully in its box each night beside our bed. Symbolic of the privileged positions we occupy as members of a university. The tower is entrusted to us all. Realize that with just a single misuse by any of us the ivory tower could fall to the floor and break into a thousand pieces....

So treasure, uphold, and defend our ivory tower with a continual and focused effort each and every day. Respect the freedoms granted to us with an academic position. No task force nor faculty handbook regulation can instill these principles into us.

Realize its more than just awareness, but putting ourselves into action. Action in the classroom, action in scholarship, action in service, action in faculty governance, action in our personal lives...yes even personally for we are not work creatures at certain times who magically change into something new once we leave campus, but are real people balancing the challenges of 2008 just like everyone else you have personally encountered today...except we're blessed enough to have an ivory tower tucked away safe and sound next to our beds....

Thank you for your time and I look forward to the adventures and work we encounter during the next year.