

Michael Ramey's Spring 2009 Opening Faculty Meeting Speech

Good afternoon. On behalf of the Faculty Senate, I would like to thank you for your service to the University, students, and attendance at this meeting.

Much of the legislative action taken by the Senate this Fall has centered around correcting inconsistencies between different sections of the Handbook and updating sections as required by the Code or actual practices on campus. It would be reasonable to state that many of these actions did not substantively change policy or procedure. Of note, after much deliberation and discussion the Senate approved an annual report template that will be used in conjunction with the electronic reporting software we will soon be using. We worked to ensure that the proper language describing the protected classes for equal opportunity were present throughout the Handbook. Paraphrasing this language,

The university does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, religion, creed, sex, gender identity and expression, political affiliation, age, disability, veteran status, or sexual orientation.

Similar language was used to update several sections of the Handbook.

This Spring we will be tackling several difficult policy and procedural issues. Significant investigative work and discussions are currently underway on these issues and for the sake of time I will simply list some of these items for you now. Please contact me or your Senator for more information.

Departmental Personnel Committees and their possible restructuring

New General Education Curriculum in conjunction with APP and the Senate's responsibility to populate the different Coordinating Committees

Post Tenure Review changes and inclusion of "Engagement" in our TT assessment structure as required by the Code

Enhancement and Improvement of our Off Campus Scholarly Assignment Program

Defining how faculty with unique appointments, such as within University College are properly evaluated and fit into our governance structure

Soliciting nominees for various University committees with vacancies; we ask for your continued willingness to serve

In light of all of these issues, I would be remiss not to address our most immediate challenge. It will come as no surprise to you, but economics and the University budget are at the top of most peoples' list of issues facing them and the campus over the coming months and possibly years. From facts, to suppositions, to rumors, there is no shortage of discussion. I would propose that any budgetary reductions, we as a campus must make, be considered as the sum of "required cuts" and creative cuts where our campus has more discretion. Let me assure you that I realize that using a soft word such as "creative" to distinguish one category of cuts in no way actually makes those reductions any less real or painful to those affected by the loss. I chose creative because it embodies what Appalachian faculty do. We create, new courses, new pedagogy, new approaches, and new solutions. The faculty on campus are extremely creative individuals and are a tremendous source of resourceful solutions to most any problem. While no one can predict the future or what may need to be done personnel wise next year, most faculty feel that "cuts" in faculty (hiring pauses,

NTT release,...TT release) are not out of the realm of possibility. If such unfortunate scenarios do come about, I insist that Appalachian's plan is formed with faculty input as early as possible. This is crucial to maintaining the self governance protocols to which this University adheres.

As such, I requested of the Chancellor and Provost that the FS Budget Committee be part of the early planning strategy for budget cuts and serve as a conduit between the administration and the faculty. They have welcomed our assistance. Peg Werts (LRE) chairs the FS Budget committee which is made up of John Geary (Finance), Adam Newmark (Government and Judicial Studies), Susan Roggenkamp (Management), and Wayne Van Devender (Biology). We must tackle the budgetary "what ifs", long before they become "must do's". Transparency in these decisions will be crucial to maintaining faculty confidence in such unsettling times. Contact me, your Senate representative, or these committee members with your concerns and ideas so that we may use your creative solutions to help the campus meet these serious challenges.

As a firm believer that there really is nothing new under the sun, I found the following statement as part of Dr. Paul Gates Fall 2002 opening comments when he served as Senate Chair.

"As we've watched the deficit figures in the daily press balloon to more than 1.5 billion dollars, we've also seen an accompanying failure of leadership in Raleigh. Afraid of election year fallout, legislators are unwilling or unable to summon the courage to create a realistic revenue plan, and the Governor touts the uncertain benefits of a lottery as the solution. Meanwhile, the state's gilt-edged credit rating --- and the University --- suffers."

I remember attending that 2002 meeting as part of my first week on campus as a newly hired assistant professor and thinking....uh oh, last hired ...first fired. Well, this time around some of Paul's statement is already untrue. 1.5 billion is now expected to exceed 2.0 billion and lottery benefits aren't a possible solution. We can only hope that a failure of leadership in Raleigh will also prove to be untrue.

I'll leave you with these passionate words from Dr. Gates circa 2003:

"Tough economic times can't be viewed as an excuse to cut spending on education. Indeed they are a clarion call to bolster these institutions for the day when the state's finances turn around and the economy resumes its growth."

Let's get that message to Raleigh and DC.
Thank you for your time and have a great semester.