FS Chair’s November Report

Normally, I start my report by listing developments outside the Senate that concern faculty. This month, I would like to begin with a matter that is largely internal. At its last meeting, the Senate defeated a proposition on faculty workload. I think the legislative process broke down in the case of Proposition 03. Many of the Senators complained that there was insufficient consultation by the Administration with the Senate on this bill. The matter is a little more complicated. In the system of shared governance at NMSU, Faculty Senate is the last voting body before the Board of Regents for most changes affecting academic policy. Most of our consultation takes place when we consider legislation in committee or at our meetings. In order for us to make good legislation, it is imperative that the Senators make their concerns with bills known early in the process. A few years ago, the Senate shortened the time allowed for speaking about bills when they are introduced. The intention was to ensure that discussion was informed and wasted little time. An unintended consequence is that the committee discussion becomes even more important. If the difficulties people saw with Proposition 03 had been raised at the Committee meeting, the Committee could have considered changes or requested another month. Amending a bill during the meeting of the whole Senate is difficult. The process broke down here because neither the committee nor I realized some of the issues seen by others. I know I had not thought about the details of implementation or how administration or faculty might use the language in the bill. If the people with issues had participated in the committee session or communicated those issues to committee members earlier, we probably could have come up with a better bill. We are all busy, but senators need to read new legislation prior to the meeting at which it is introduced and make their concerns known to the committee assigned the bill by e-mail or by attending the committee meeting. Committees and I need to be more imaginative about the unintended consequences of legislation and the details of implementation.

Neither Provost’s Council nor the Naming Committee met in October. Administrative Council met in October, and once again there were a number of presentations on the United Way Campaign and an update on changes in the admissions office. The Board of Regents met October 20. I was not part of the working session on the community colleges the previous afternoon and was unable to attend as a spectator. I hope the minutes of that session will appear somewhere. The consent calendar on Friday consisted almost entirely of approval of leases, grants of rights of way and one year tuition waivers for dual credit students enrolled in high school and NMSU Alamogordo and NMSU Grants. VP Ben Woods asked for and received approval of 1) a letter of intent with Intercap Institutional & Investors for the purpose of developing a hotel on the SE corner of Union and University, 2) the addition to and renovation of the DACC Workforce Development Center, and 3) the approval of a combined Phase Three and Four of the DACC East Mesa site. President Martin’s report was short and most noticeable for a complaint about the inaccurate facts being distributed about the University’s reserves and their availability for salary and benefits purposes. There were a number of informational items. VP Jennifer Taylor gave an update on budgetary performance for the fiscal year that ended on June 30. Most units ended up in the black. There was a combined report on enrollment and retention that indicates that while
headcount is up slightly, student credit hours are up more. Retention from first to second year has improved by five percentage points. The hard work done by many people is paying off, and we need to continue the efforts. Dean Carruthers made a report on Goal III of Living the Vision, which is about being internationally and nationally recognized in research and creative activities. The situation is better than I thought, but we have a lot to do. I believe that some of the metrics being used, such as various citation indexes, are problematic and need to be used carefully. VP Woods gave an update on the Las Cruces Center and described that some decision on a cooperative project with the city will probably be made this semester. Michael Rickenbaker, University Architect, announced that NMSU has received a final draft of the Campus Master Plan and working to get that ready for presentation to the Regents, probably in December. Dean Carruthers spoke about a report on the effect of waiving out-of-state tuition on enrollment done by Professors Jim Peach and Rick Adkisson that concludes that under the current funding formula, such waivers will never be cost-effective. Commissioner Bill McCamley made a presentation asking the Board to endorse a Gross Receipts Tax to help fund the local contribution of the proposed Spaceport. ASNMSU President Ben Hardy stated his dissatisfaction with the theme for Homecoming because of the failure of the X-Prize group to support NMSU students with any concrete actions. Tim Nesbitt reported on the New Mexico University Staff Association that has been established with representatives from the four-year universities in NM. He is vice-president. The organization sounds like it will serve some of the same functions as the council of faculty senate presidents of New Mexico with perhaps a heavier emphasis on interfacing with the legislature. The next Regents meeting will be on December 15 before commencement.

The Academic Deans Council met twice in October. The meeting on October 24 was a regular session of the ADC. A proposal for a Major in Agriculture and Community Development was re-introduced following a discussion last Spring and approved pending the completion of the report on library resources. The proposal’s next stop will be the Faculty Senate. A proposal for conforming the language of the policy manual concerning Community College course approvals and degree programs to the practice of the last several years was presented. This should eventually come through Senate. Professor Walter Zakahi, head of the Communications Studies Department, made a presentation on the ESL courses offered to international students and on the way students are assigned to these courses. The comments on plagiarism in the course on scholarly writing were particularly interesting. Unfortunately, the issue had to be tabled due to the absence of Dean Lacey of the Graduate School. The proposals for new majors for creative media in the Bachelor of Applied Studies have become concentrations and three minors (CMI-Film, CMI-Animation, and CMI-Game Development, effective this fall, along with moving the proposed for a Bachelor of Creative Media from Fall 2007 to Spring 2008. So we will probably see that proposal next semester. In my presentation, I spoke about the process for discussion of the draft promotion and tenure policy and the upcoming memorial on changes in the academic discipline process in the Student Handbook. I also spoke about the upcoming memorial concerning faculty workload policy. The deans expressed interest in working with the Senate on the issue. Dean Egginton spoke about the visit of American Council on Education personnel on internationalization and made a
report on academic collaboration with China. I missed the last of these because I had to leave to attend our COC meeting.

The ADC met again two days later to discuss progress on the academic efficiencies identified at the group’s June retreat. Progress is being made in a number of areas, such as assuring the Provost sufficient dollars to support priorities and innovative programs, beginning to allocate resources based on resources generated, adopting a general education core for all majors, ensuring that the Provost controls the academic budget, etc. In regard to some recommendations, such as extending tuition waivers and reducing academic duplication, further study has revealed that there are few gains to be made by pursuing them. However, one idea that might be useful is the reduction of duplications in undergraduate and graduate quantitative methods courses. The adoption of a university-wide faculty workload policy is one of the recommendations that needs further work, as do recommendations on revising distance education funding to reward growth, clearly defining roles and the chain of command under the ongoing reorganizations, setting caps for minimum and maximum enrollments, centralizing research operations while decentralizing faculty support grant assistance, and a few other topics.

Larry Creider