Faculty Senate Chair Summer Report

Just because the Spring Term is over and Faculty Senate does not meet during the summer does not mean that the Administration stops its work. The Board of Regents met three times after our May meeting, May 12, May 25, and July 18, and held a retreat on July 17-18. Administrative Council met in May, June, July, and August. The Academic Deans Council met in May and held a retreat in June. I attended a daylong summit in Socorro of the Association of Academic Research Libraries of New Mexico on August 4, and participated in the “Leadership Summit” on August 11-12. There was a lot of overlap between all these meetings in terms of subjects discussed and personnel in attendance. With the exception of the June 14 Admin Council meeting, which conflicted with the ADC retreat, I attended all of these meetings. Lynn Kelly was kind and filled in for me at that Admin Council meeting.

Administrative Council passed a few policies this summer, among them, a revised smoking policy. Emphasizing the problems caused by second-hand smoke and the need to prevent public access from being denied to an individual with a respiratory medical condition. People will need to be 25 feet from doorways, open windows, ventilation systems, etc., and cigarette trays will be placed or moved more than 25 feet from such locations. Breathing easily is something we all have a right to do, so these provisions make sense. I am not sure what provision is being made for access to smoking areas during inclement weather by people who suffer from nicotine addiction. Human Resources have implemented a new hardship differential pay policy for exempt and non-exempt staff. The non-disclosure agreement of confidential information is being applied to systems access at this point. Something remains to be worked out when the Student Banner Module is up and running in October, because some student information is confidential. This concern eventuated in the policy, passed by Admin Council, about posting of student grades by faculty that has been submitted to the Senate as Proposition 02-06/07.

The Campus Master Plan received probably its fullest presentation at the Regents retreat in July. Among other ideas, the planners envisage turning Jordan and Locust in to gateways to the campus, taking advantage of the intersection of I-10 and I-25 and making that more of an entry point to campus, placing the Arts Performing Complex opposite the Music Building on the West side of Espina, adding many trees, etc. All that would be required now would be money! There will be more presentations before the plan is finalized and presented to the Regents for approval.

Campus real estate has become something of an issue lately. One of the presentations at the Regents retreat dealt with using University real estate, including water rights, in a manner that can generate a stream of income to the University without damaging the University’s ability to carry out its mission. There are proposals for changes in the University real estate policy that concern the level at which the Regents’ assent is required. Then there is the matter of the proposed site for the Convention Center, which the Senate will see at least once this year.
At the Provost’s Council meeting of July 11, Vice President for Research Vimal Desai described some of the issues he is facing and things that he is considering. One is to have the heads of the research clusters report to the VP for Research. Another is that the development of the clusters will probably result in joint appointments for tenure-track faculty. Fortunately, this coincides with the working of the Promotion and Tenure Policy Task Force. VP Desai also wishes to work on strategic development of graduate students (and presumably fellowships) to aid the research programs of the clusters. Paul Gutierrez also made a presentation about developments towards making Extension a University-wide effort. Progress is being made, but I can’t help feeling that broadening the concept of Extension and, in particular, differentiating Extension work from community service is essential. The Promotion and Tenure Task Force is planning on making Extension one of the basic categories considered for promotion and tenure, along with research, teaching, and service. Few faculty members do all of these and few faculty do them in the same proportion, but they are all essential parts of the University’s mission.

The reallocation of this fiscal year’s budget will probably recur in some form in the next few years as the administration attempts to make expenditures better match the university needs. VP Jennifer Taylor made an excellent presentation about the strategic budgeting process at the Regents Retreat, and she has agreed to make a similar presentation to the Faculty Senate. One of the things that most struck me about her presentation is how little “loose revenue” is available for developments in research, start-up packages for new faculty, salary equity and even vital initiatives in recruitment and student success. I have asked the President to come and discuss the implications of the loss of I&G funds if we fail to meet overall enrollment figures this year and some steps the faculty can take to help solve the problems.

This leads on to the question of student success. More than anything else, I think this is most crucial issue facing the University today. More than being a matter of our jobs, the future of the state is at stake. Teaching students so that they can succeed does not mean watering down expectations. I believe that what we need to do is learn to try every means we can to help them succeed and to learn what they need to know. When we went to school, knowledge was ladled out to us. We were expected to figure out what to do with it. We can no longer expect this to work for most students, and tools like supplementary instruction, learning communities, early intervention and the like are simply reflections of this change. The leadership summit was devoted to possible solutions in this area, and I am eagerly awaiting the posting of some of the suggestions the different groups proposed.

When I look at the University, most of our procedures and rules are designed for the benefit of the people carrying out the work, be they admissions clerks or senior professors. I think that all of us, faculty especially, need to look at what we do from the standpoint of the student. How does it appear to the student if I blow off my office hours or conversely if I manage to find time to stay after class to answer questions? Students stay at a university if someone takes an interest in them, friends, faculty, and/or staff. Students have to take responsibility for their lives, but we can surely help the process
along and make our procedures clear enough and flexible enough so that students don’t put off dealing with Financial Aid or Parking or Advisors.

The leadership summit was also intended to provide some introduction to our re-accreditation process with the Higher Learning Commission. I’m sure that you’ve heard about some of the proposed directions of that evaluation. I would like to emphasize, in addition to the first-year experience (and its implications for student success) here, is the focus on internationalizing our programs, both for students and for research and service.

Finally, I would like to talk about the Senate’s major concerns this year. In addition to the usual departmental name changes and proposals for new programs, we will need to consider the revised Promotion and Tenure Policy after extensive opportunity for public comment. As I just noted, we need to determine some ways in which the Faculty Senate can encourage student success. Something that the Faculty Senate will need to keep an eye on is the development of negotiations with the AFSCME bargaining unit. The decisions about work units, work rules, salary increases, the type of evaluation that is permitted, the role of seniority in job openings and promotions, and so forth will probably impact the future effectiveness of the University more than anything else that is done this year, including the revision of our promotion and tenure policy. The University Policy Manual is being reorganized again, with a view towards making it more consistent. Faculty Senate will need to examine the Policy Manual to make sure that important elements haven’t been lost or misinterpreted as happened last time the manual was revised.

I’m sure that I have failed to mention something important, but this report is already much too long. If I am guilty of a sin of omission, please let me know. We should have an interesting year.

Larry Creider