Since the last Board meeting, a number of issues have been addressed by the Faculty Senate, despite the winter break.

The November 29 meeting saw Board of Trustees Chair Barbara Mulkey visit the Senate and speak about the role of the Board of Trustees and their interest in the Strategic Plan and the future of the university. Her comment -- "If we are not talking about excellence I don’t know how to be a part of it." -- expressed a sentiment that is well received by the faculty, and is reflected in her recently published book Building Bridges. We thank her for her attendance.

Three dean searches are getting underway, all of them with faculty involvement. Two academic colleges, Natural Resources and Agriculture and Life Sciences, have seen elections of faculty members for the search committees; these elections are organized by the Faculty Senators from each college. The third deanship -- of the new Division of Academic and Student Services -- has no faculty constituency, so the four faculty search committee members were appointed by the Chair of the Faculty. As it happens, two are current Senators, two are former Senators.
One of the greatest Issues of Concern for the Faculty Senate this past year has been Business Operations -- BORST -- and its impact on the professional lives of faculty who have a lot of grant responsibilities. We have heard from Vice Chancellor Leffler that service improvement is the key factor of the plan, and we have discussed this with the new director of Business Operations, Scott Inkley, who appeared at the January 24 meeting of the Senate. The faculty remains wary, while recognizing the arguments for change.

Another issue of concern has been the reform of Distance Education. A Task Force last year recommended ending the tuition premium for distance education courses, which most of us agree created irrational and perverse incentives. At the same time, the money for distance education was the only source of discretionary funds for many departments without grant monies, and an important source of income for many faculty. Vice Provost Tom Miller came to the Senate on 10 January to explain how the funding would be impacted by the changes, and to reassure the faculty that this important element of departmental funding would not disappear.

The Faculty Excellence Plan, which calls for proposals for clusters of interdisciplinary new positions funded by the Chancellor, has also been a topic of great interest and concern. It is certainly important to the faculty that the choices made by the committee headed by Vice Chancellor Lomax and Dean of the Graduate School Larick do not favor one part of the University over another. The faculty is awaiting the outcome.
There has been one grievance filed, and some indication that the regulations may need certain, minor, adjustments.

A final word about the Faculty Assembly, which met in Chapel Hill on 20 January. President Ross spoke to the delegates about the Board of Governors and issues of tuition, noting the four legs of the funding process. Discussion with the president was vigorous. He was followed by VP Ortega who spoke about the ongoing development of performance-based measurements for university programs. She noted the importance of buy-in from the campuses, simplicity and flexibility. She also noted that "seat time," may be a more useful indicator then clock time as a measure of institutional success.

A unique feature of this Faculty Assembly meeting was an appearance by several officials from the John William Pope Center for Higher Education Policy, who shared their opinions with the faculty delegates. Following lunch, representatives of the NC Policy Watch and the NC Budget and Tax Center, offered a very different picture of what the state ought to be doing. The Faculty Assembly, representing faculty from the entire university system, is the place where campus leaders can get some insight into the Board of Governors operations, and beyond that, into state politics. The meeting was informative.

Respectfully submitted,

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