The Faculty Senate begins the year with many new members and an open agenda. Several concerns remain from last year, including the ban on any work, even voluntary, by retired faculty, a rule which can place a burden on graduate students. New concerns of the moment are large and small – wildlife safety on Centennial Campus as traffic there increases, the merits of a non-stop shuttle between the Hunt and Hill libraries, the status of academic support for student athletes, a call for an ombudsman at NCState, and the need for a better website and communication strategies for faculty governance.

At their first meeting the Senators selected from a list the issues of greatest interest to them as a focus of discussion. Distance Education was the topic most selected, reflecting the rapid and expansive proliferation of programs and a sense of the difficulty of grasping them all, academically and professionally. Our next two meetings will feature conversations with the new Director of Academic and Student Affairs, Mike Mullen, and two weeks later with Louis Hunt, university registrar, who will talk with us about enrollment trends, coordination of academic metrics among the UNC institutions and much else.

Summer saw activity as well for the Faculty Assembly (of UNC schools’ faculty governments). In July, the Executive Committee of the Assembly met for a 2 day retreat at ECU, where we stayed in a dormitory and were royally fed. System President Ross and Vice-President Ortega also attended parts of the retreat, and insisted on staying in the dorms. Three major topics of interest came out of the deliberations: faculty well-being in
its broad sense; articulation of standards for students; and international programs. The question of articulation, in particular, is of concern this year at State. Do our student athletes get an education that is of value to them? Are the transfer students arriving at the university ready to thrive in our academic majors? Can foreign students show the general skills, especially language skills, needed to function in the classroom? The Faculty Assembly has a new chair with an ambitious direction. (If only its meetings didn’t conflict with the Board of Trustees so often!)

Since the last meeting of this Board a number of difficult situations have brought prominent universities into the news. The events at Virginia, Penn State, and Chapel Hill are quite different, but they remind us that the unexpected can and will happen, that athletics must play a subsidiary role, and above all that open lines of communication are essential to recovery from challenging events. In all these cases, the role of the Faculty Senate changed quickly, as they found themselves a major voice in the universities. The trustees found themselves in a similar position. I believe it is important that trustees and faculty begin to forge a closer relationship, so that when the unforeseen occurs we are without communication and understanding.

Respectfully submitted,

Hans D. Kellner
Professor of English
Chair of the NC State Faculty