Since the beginning of the academic year, the Faculty Senate has been focused on the issue of an Ombuds for NC State, which the faculty has been seeking for 40 years. The Senate has passed a resolution and written the proposal for this office. In January the two Ombuds from Chapel Hill came to address the Faculty Senate. They described an office that reports only to their chancellor, and has no other affiliations within the university. They keep no paper, no records, confidentiality is complete, and trust has been earned. Their offices on Franklin Street have the entrance on a side alley where privacy is a given, and they will meet with people anywhere and at any time. Last year they had about 500 cases -- a case may vary from one brief interview to a protracted process involving many persons. Compared to this number, their grievance process had three cases last year, the same number that we have at NC State. When they were asked about their relationship with Human Relations, the reply was -- "they love us." With the goal of helping people to clarify their problems and their needs, and to be the most effective advocates for themselves, the Chapel Hill Ombuds were quite impressive.

As the UNC Board of Governors Strategic Plan took shape, there was much discussion in the Faculty Senate and the UNC System Faculty Assembly of various aspects of the plan. There has been a general approval of the goal of increasing the number of college graduates in the state, but there is some skepticism about the means described to do this. Sensitive issues in the plan include assessment (and the use of a particularly controversial mandated test), general education (and a centralized set of core competencies for all campuses), community college transfers (and the matter of the appropriateness of crediting particular courses), and distance education (how to make an effective use of the technological tools at the campus and system level, and where the increased expense will come from). In the interest of brevity, I will note here only that in each case the faculty believes that campus-based faculty expertise must remain the decisive factor in academic decision-making. There is also concern that the large number of demands
made upon the campuses will increase the number of professional administrators, as well as diverting a large amount of faculty time into administrative work paid for by course releases. The unintended consequences and unconsidered costs of the plan thus remain a concern.

To this end, the Senate, along with other Senates and Councils across the system, has endorsed the Faculty Assembly resolutions on the Strategic Plan, on assessment, general education, and distance learning. These resolutions reaffirm faculty oversight of curriculum and academic standards and call upon the Board of Governors to adopt the recommendations of the (excellent) Faculty Advisory Group report.

The broader issues posed by the Strategic Plan revolve around the matter of centralization and increased regulatory control of the campuses. The differences among the campuses in terms of missions, size, and facilities, can create problems for large research institutions that handle practical tasks efficiently. At the same time, relationships among the campuses are valuable and instructive. As a system, we certainly need and benefit from each other. For this reason, the faculty is pleased to note the recent joint meeting of the NC State and Chapel Hill Board of Trustees. I value the links between the faculty governance bodies of these schools, and will work to strengthen them wherever possible.

The representative governance bodies on campus – all of which report to this body, the Board of Trustees – have had little contact in the past; we hope that his will change. The Chair of the Staff Senate, which also is a stakeholder in the future of the system, has spoken to the Faculty Senate, and we hope to begin regular lunch discussions among the Chairs of the Staff, Student Government, and Faculty.

A sampling of the issues of concern that have recently been brought to the Senate:

The not infrequent violation of the rule that no examinations shall be scheduled during dead week; the nature and extent of athletic advising and support; the low level of response to on-line teaching evaluations; information security concerns with the RADAR (Research Administration and DAta Reporting) website; the inadequacy of facilities for the mandated disability accommodations; and the increase in faculty gym fee. Each of these and many other issues go to our standing committees for consideration and discussion with the relevant university personnel.
Refreshing the “Brand” of the university is not usually a matter that faculty look upon with eagerness, but at this time it is becoming important to project an image of the university that captures it vitality and diversity. Too often, NC State has spoken only of its technological and agricultural components, to the neglect of half of the school. The faculty will closely watch the branding refresh process that has begun, will hear from the University Communications officer (and he will hear from us), particularly in light of the new governor and legislature. And on the latter issue, we shall hear shortly from Kevin Howell about the situation on Jones Street and how the university makes its case to state government.

Respectfully submitted,

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