Overview

The course of academic life was powerfully disrupted a month ago by the emergency situation of the health crisis. In a very short period of time, the faculty was asked to revise completely its understanding of teaching, to turn to a technology that is awkward, not well understood and, in many cases, not well accepted. The faculty is diverse in its attention to technology, and ranges in age from graduate assistants in their 20s to veteran teachers in their 80s. All of these men and women have found ways to adapt, although it is certainly clear that the result, at best, cannot be the equivalent of the fully functioning university. Our students also understand that they are not receiving the "college experience" that they have worked to obtain.

Yet all are doing what they can. The challenges to students, like technological inadequacies and personal/family emergencies, are many. The difficulty of working from home (in some reported cases, even from a parking lot where a computer hot spot can be located near-by), especially with children home from school, can affect students, staff, and faculty alike. Faculty face the added expense of providing office space, computer equipment, and the other maintenance costs that are entailed in having professional working facilities. All in all, the NC State faculty has done a remarkable job, but eagerly looks forward to the end of this emergency. There is concern that the longer actual person-to-person pedagogy is supplanted by distance education, the more will have been lost and made more difficult to recover. This is
Chair of the Faculty Assembly and Professor of Law at NCCU Law School David Green's remarks noted the unexpected hot issues that had made his term interesting. The resignation of the UNC President (to whom he reports) and the appointment of an interim leader, the smoldering issue of Silent Sam at Chapel Hill, and the controversy over ECU's interim chancellor were mentioned. Obviously, we need not add that he could not foresee the earthquake to come. Green mentioned that as a practicing attorney he came to the Chair job not knowing what a resolution was. Motions, yes. And he said that a member of the Board of Governor's assured him that they don't read resolutions. Green believes that it is personal relationships that influence people. His interest is in student access. "Whether a person who looks like me (an African-American) can be admitted to Chapel Hill is more important to me than a Civil War statue." His comments on shared governance and his approach to governor's and legislators were instructive and at times inspiring. He concluded by stressing the importance of service to the university and the System in shared governance.

At this meeting, David Green was followed by the Chair of the Staff Senate, Dr. Janice Sitzes, who described the structure of her senate, now 25 years old and representing 6000 members of the NCSU staff, who serve in many capacities. She mentioned some of the many initiatives with which her senate is involved. As I have
noted before, the Staff Senate is a focused and effective body.

The meeting of 3 March 2020 was the first to address the Coronavirus situation. Provost Arden spoke of the uncertainty and seriousness of the epidemic, and in particular the concern for students and faculty abroad who would be brought home quickly. The cancellation of conferences and other activities were noted, including sports seasons.

The major speaker was Doug Morton, the Associate Vice Chancellor for Facilities. Morton presented the great needs for upkeep on the vast NCSU campus and the inadequacy of the funds to perform it. A cooperative "integrated priority list" has been created to direct work to particular needs. He also mentioned "customer support teams" to address communication issues with the people affected by facilities work. Finally, he noted the current priority, the renovation of the aging electrical grid.

On 17 March 2020, the General Faculty meeting took place under unusual circumstances. First, the Chancellor redirected the purpose of the meeting from its original agenda, to discuss the Coronavirus and its impact on the university from a public health and an academic perspective. Student Health, Emergency Management, and Distance Education were all represented. Second, this meeting of a dozen people was held without an immediate audience and was streamed and videoed to the faculty and others. Questions were taken on-line. Attendance was good.
31 March 2020 was, unfortunately, a landmark date for the Faculty Senate, our first virtual (ZOOM) meeting. Both the Chancellor and the Provost spoke at length about the university's responses to the epidemic, now a pandemic. They were followed by a report from the athletic department concerning the academic success of student athletes. Prof Joel Pawlak, faculty athletic representative spoke at length, then Katie Graham and Athletic Director Boo Corrigan described the special situation today.

They were followed by a presentation by the sole candidate for Chair-Elect of the Faculty, Dr Jade Berry-James, Associate Professor of Public Administration.

Issues of concern

Regardless of the financial emergency of the state, the issue of salaries remains paramount for faculty and will not go away. President Roper said this morning that making the case "just got a whole lot harder," but a way must be found to address this years-old problem.

Of great concern to the leadership of the faculty is the inadequate response to calls for participation in shared governance. Empty senate seats and uncontested elections have become too common.

The absence of faculty leadership involvement in decision-making, especially compared with other institutions in the System, is a related issue. The decision to go on-line and the implementation of that decision was not a faculty-driven decision.

The regular contact between administration and faculty leaders has dwindled.
The list of issues addressed by the quite active committees of the senate is long, and ranges from speeds on Centennial Campus to the problem of graduate student payments (which are due before their stipends have begun).

Faculty Assembly

On 3 April 2020 the Faculty Assembly met virtually, confronting, mainly, the academic changes on the campuses. The introduction of a more generous S/U grading system and flexible Tenure and Promotion schedules for faculty are more or less the norm.

Chair Green noted that the Board of Governor's first attempt at a virtual meeting was not without problems. He also commented that it was much hard to get a sense of things without face-to-face contact. President Roper was asked to have the Chancellor's place shared governance into their impact statements because of the crucial role that the faculty must play in the academic decision regarding teaching, schedules, planning. The incoming Chair, Tim Ives of Chapel Hill presented a draft of the Advocacy Primer, a guide to building faculty relationships with leaders of various sorts -- trustees, governors, legislators. This work is done in conjunction with former State Senator Fraley.

There was concern for the funding of staff and non-tenured faculty, and medical coverage for those who might lose their jobs. Possible enrollment drops worry some
campuses. The use of dorms as field hospitals has become a possibility. In general, the situation has darkened.