

Fall 2006 University of Alabama Faculty and Staff meeting

October 25, 2006

Wow. Never thought I would be here. Several years ago my former dept. Chair (who's in the audience) nominated me for the faculty senate and I actually got elected. You could identify me at senate meetings – I was one of the cynics sitting in the back. I've got to learn to say no when someone says we need/would like you to...

Let me be short and to the point this afternoon. What a difference 5 years can make. Five years ago we had low faculty moral – low salaries as a result of raises for a decade falling well under the rate of inflation. Everyone, and I mean everyone, was exploring their career opportunities. Who was going where was the subject of conversation around faculty lunch tables.

Now this talk is non-existent. Why?

- 1) Spectacular student growth,
- 2) Increased state appropriations,
- 3) Both resulting in markedly increased faculty salaries, at or approaching the 50% of the Southeastern Group of Universities, and
- 4) Significant progress in addressing the deferred maintenance crisis and campus beautification within a well conceived, progressive long-range plan, and

- 5) New initiatives to address staff salaries and to increase the number of faculty to keep up with the teaching requirements generated by the accelerated rate of student population growth.

Simply, things are happening on this campus at a pace not dreamed possible only a few years ago.

Less obvious to an outside observer but also important are that

- 1) the upper administration, in particular President Witt and Provost Bonner, have provided an unparalleled degree of access to the faculty senate, so that many faculty issues are resolved rapidly and behind the scenes and
- 2) The administration has displayed concern for the lives of the faculty, staff, and students through investment in the Wellness Program, Alcohol.edu, a faculty/staff dining area, and other programs, current or in development.

Yet, the faculty senate for the current academic year has a full agenda on its plate. Most notably, this includes

- 1) Increasing level of interaction with the Office of Student services and the SGA. Currently, our Student Affairs committee is working on a joint meeting in the spring with the SGA and other activities built around this. We have gotten SGA representation restored at faculty senate meetings.
- 2) After giving the Office for Research a free hand to attempt to rapidly bring the University into a state of compliance with a variety of Federal regulations, we are working to re-establish a balance of joint administration/faculty governance in

this area. Hopefully, items already put into place but not quite yet running up to speed will have already taken care of this issue.

- 3) Exploring the nuances of putting into place components of a Family Friendly Campus initiative.

Finally, one thing that concerns me personally is that in this time of exponential growth and change that the University not lose its distinctive character. I and a number of faculty members I have talked to came to Alabama because this University allowed one to explore both teaching and research opportunities, without forcing one to chose to try to excel in just one area or the other. This is a truly unique opportunity in this day and age, which I hope will continue to be available to future faculty.

Thank you.