

Board of Trustees Report
September 18, 1998
Margaret P. Garner, President
The University of Alabama Faculty Senate

Once again it is a pleasure to represent the University of Alabama Faculty Senate and bring you an update on some of our activities. A major goal of the Faculty Senate is effective communication in all areas of University life. I would like to thank Dr. Sorensen and Provost Barrett for their openness and accessibility throughout the past year. They begin their third year as leaders of the University and I have entered my second (and last) year as Senate President. I'll share with you three areas of communication where we have demonstrated a commitment to excellence: communicating with our administration, faculty and staff; communicating with the community and alumni, and; communicating with external groups.

COMMUNICATING WITH OUR ADMINISTRATION, FACULTY AND STAFF

The UA Faculty Senate Web Page is entering its third year and it has become a major source of information for all. It has greatly reduced our need for hard copies of many documents we want senators as well as the University community to review. Timely notices of minutes, major resolutions passed, pending business items or draft copies of reports are just some of the types of information made available. We are dependent on the use of electronic mail, a critical avenue of information in a convenient and speedy format. During the legislative session, we provided frequent updates to the faculty. One of the best comments made to me at the end of the spring semester was from a faculty member who said she had never before felt so well informed about what was going on. Through the Legislative Agenda Committee and Senate, our faculty and staff were informed and more responsive to educating our elected leaders. A legislative platform was developed and carried out by a group of dedicated faculty, staff, alumni, administrators and students all working together. We served as a leader for other college and university campuses in the state through regular communication with their senate presidents. Several senate presidents indicated to me that they used our legislative updates unedited as a means of updating their faculty.

COMMUNICATING WITH THE COMMUNITY AND ALUMNI

The University of Alabama has had 5 or 6 faculty or staff participate in Leadership Tuscaloosa last year and for the upcoming year. This program is one way that the University can demonstrate its commitment to the community through active citizenship. We were able to encourage this year's program to include a session on the issues in higher education. You will also find that our faculty and staff are visible on a number of the working groups of Challenge 21, a strategic planning initiative for Tuscaloosa City and county. Also this last year we began sending a faculty member to a number of the alumni group meetings around the state. Our goal was to bring the

message of the academic community and its needs to our alumni. Our conviction is that the better our communities and alumni are informed about our needs as well as the contributions we make to Alabama citizens, the better equipped they are to support us. Our message was simple: there is excellence in the classrooms and in the continual creation of new knowledge. Excellence cannot be taken for granted. It takes a long time to achieve and can be lost quickly through neglect. We have been bold in asking for their help in informing the public and elected officials.

COMMUNICATING WITH EXTERNAL AUDIENCES

The Legislature. This past year represented an unprecedented record in the partnership among faculty, staff, student, alumni and the administration to change the tide of cuts and level funding for the University. In contrast to approximately a year ago when prominent legislators told us the "higher education is simply not a player at the table", we have made an impact to the point that now legislators and candidates are calling us! We like that turnaround and we worked hard to earn it. Aided by the Chancellor's theme of "8 in '98", the weekly teleconferences with all three campuses, the guidance of our Legislative Liaison Bill Jones, the enthusiastic participation of our Legislative Agenda Committee led by Scott Bridges, we pounced on Montgomery with passion and unrelenting commitment. We thank you for your part in helping us achieve the increased funding for salaries this year. This has boosted morale tremendously. Please be diligent in seeking opportunities to talk with the press, your civic and business organizations in your own communities, or chambers of commerce about the important contributions of the University of Alabama to the state. You are people of significant influence and your continued support in this effort is critical to ongoing improvements in acquiring our fair share of the Education Trust Fund.

The Alabama Commission on Higher Education (ACHE). In the spring ACHE formed three new panels to serve in an advisory capacity, similar to the President's Council. Through the summer I served as the UA Senate representative to the newly formed Faculty Panel. Similarly they formed a Student and Employer Panel. The first major issue we will need to address is the proposed performance based funding model that ACHE is now legislatively mandated to develop. A report is due to the legislature by October 1st and we are anxious to review the plan. We have strongly stated that performance based funding should be based on the differing missions of the institutions and that "one size fits all" is inappropriate. A major education need exists for the public and elected officials to recognize the uniqueness of comprehensive, research institutions.

Besides the communication efforts of our Faculty Senate, I would like to share with you some evidence of excellence at UA. How does one measure the success of an institution like ours? I submit that one looks at the people it attracts: our students; the people who sustain it: our faculty; our products: the achievements of our students and faculty; and what others say about our stature in the higher education community.

First let's look at the students we are successful at recruiting.

Freshmen: Our freshman class increased by 500 last year, the largest increase since admission standards were increased 8 years ago and our largest freshman class at 2600.

Freshmen retention rate from fall to spring was 95%, a record high for the past 10 years.

Average high school grade point average for AI Freshmen was 3.30; two thirds of the freshmen were in the top 25% of their high school class; and the average freshman ACT score is 24.2, the highest in University history and more than 3 points above the national average! This past year's freshman class includes 102 national merit and National Achievement Scholars---distinguishing itself as the largest group of national scholars EVER TO ENROLL IN ANY UNIVERSITY IN ALABAMA!

Diversity: This past year's freshman class represented 14% African Americans, the highest percentage of African American students in the freshman class in the University's history.

These represent the caliber of students we are attracting. Next let's talk about what our students are achieving through their experiences at The University of Alabama. The business community would call this our products.

Miss Nada Memon, one of our senior students, was named last spring to the USA Today All-American team, honoring her academic achievements and her contributions to the community. Also Cathy Baker of the MFA program in Book Arts and Mike Lemaster, an English / Philosophy major, and member of the Honors Program, became the first UA students to win Javits Fellowships for graduate study-----worth over \$65,000 each. The University of Alabama Debate Team, under the leadership of Drs. Frank Thompson and Carrie Crenshaw, won their 12th national championship last year, now tied with AI football for national championships!

Because of their success, the University of Alabama will be hosting the 1999 American Forensics Association National Individual Events Tournament. This will bring top students from over 120 universities around the nation to compete right here on our campus next spring. A signal honor for UA.

Evidence of Excellence----the heart of any university, the faculty.

Faculty productivity has been extraordinary. There was a 53% increase over the previous year in nationally competitive contract and grant funding, leading to a rise from \$32 to \$49 million in support of faculty driven initiatives. Numerous research projects initiated and ongoing include work relating to the environment, improving productivity in industry, improving magnetic information storage, and helping to develop the next version of the internet just to name a few. Added to the countless research activities of the faculty are a host of service and outreach projects where faculty make direct contributions to the community, state and nation to improve the lives of people. The 21st Century is upon us. The world of the student and faculty is changing dramatically. When I was in school, the library was the focal point for my academic work.

Increasingly that is no longer true. For many students their primary library is their personal computer and the World Wide Web, which can be accessed any time of day or night---in other words on a student's schedule and lifestyle. Through the exploding electronic technology, faculty can teach and students can take courses literally on the global highway. We are already doing so. We are preparing to make The University of Alabama strategically focused to keep pace with these growing opportunities and challenges. But we need more resources to do so. Recently Harvard University received a \$200 million grant to improve its distance education programs; that figure represents our entire budget. As you can see, the competition is great. We have talked about evidence of excellence---and I have shared with you facts about our students and our faculty. You will want to know what outsiders are saying about our institution as further evidence.

External Reviews of Excellence.

The 1998 edition of the Princeton Review's Student Advantage Guide to the Best 311 Colleges examined over 3000 institutions of higher education. We are proud the University of Alabama was listed as one of the nation's 311 best. America's 100 Best College buys, 1997-98 edition ranks the nation's top 100 college educational buys based on cost and quality. UA was listed as one of America's best buys last year and is also listed for the publication for the '98-99 year!

For 10 years the US News and World Report have been ranking universities in tiers or categories; for the first time the University of Alabama was listed in the second tier! UA and Auburn are the only Alabama universities so highly ranked; this places us along with other institutions like the Universities of Florida, GA, and Ohio State Univ. The Chronicle of Higher Education reports the University of Alabama 12th in the nation in the number of students who participate in study abroad and international exchange programs.

A recent survey by the Alumni Association Executives show yet another way that the University of Alabama distinguishes ourselves. Our alumni support their alma mater. Although UA ranks 51st nationally in the number of alumni for whom we have addresses, we are 4th in the number of donors, 3rd in the amount given by our members and 1st in the number and amount of scholarships given. Excellence has both a cost and an outcome. While we could never depend on state funding to fully cover our costs, it is reasonable to expect that the state would adequately invest in an institution which returns so much. Some of you may have known Dr. Bill Gunther, an economist who has researched the value of an undergraduate education at the University. Using a model that quantifies the impact of the University on the lifetime potential earnings of its graduates, and then subsequently on the impact of the state's sales and income tax collections, he projected the economic impact for one graduating class. His study was featured this spring in the Wall Street Journal. An individual student who invests in an undergraduate degree from UA would realize an average annual return on his investment of 21 percent. Over a lifetime, UA graduates earn an average of \$400,000 more than they would have earned with just a high school degree. Using last years graduating class, Dr. Gunther estimated the total value added would exceed \$1.7 million. This

translates into significant return on investment by the state when one realizes that about 70% of graduates continue to live in Alabama throughout their lives.

Clearly the greatest outcome of excellence is the difference a quality education makes in the lives of people and the next generation. Here is where we cannot afford to shortchange our state or nation. The faculty and our administration are committed to assuring that the evidence of excellence in our mission of teaching, research and service remains strong and competitive in an ever-changing global society.

In summary, evidence of excellence at the University of Alabama is strong. Excellence is Evident in the recruitment of excellent students, the productivity of our faculty, the creativity in our planning for the 21st century in the global electronic age, the achievement of our students, the commitment of our alumni to support us, and the recognition by prestigious national groups in both the education and business communities! The University of Alabama one of the state's most precious assets and best-kept secrets.