

## Fall 1998 Faculty / Staff Meeting

September 16, 1998

Margaret P. Garner, President

### The University of Alabama Faculty Senate

It is a pleasure to bring you an update on the activities of the Faculty Senate. Throughout the summer the Steering Committee continues to meet every two weeks to follow ongoing projects as well as to serve as a communication link on behalf of the faculty with the administration. I have decided to share with you just a few of our accomplishments and current activities.

#### I. **Effective Communication is our Goal.**

**Secretarial support for the senate is a reality!** As you know Dr. Sorensen granted our request for a .5FTE Secretary to support the 16-member steering committee of the Faculty Senate. During the summer we found just the right person for the job. You have been introduced to Linda Knowles through *Dialog* as the first secretary for the senate in its 25-year history. She had recently retired from the University after 32 years of service as administrative secretary to Coaches Bryant and Stallings, but found herself missing the University. You can find her in our new Faculty Senate Office in 461 Alston. She is available by email and voice mail to maximize her availability. Since the position is half time; check the senate web page for details. Linda has been busy getting the senate files organized from former senate officers. She attends all our senate and steering committee meetings and is available to assist the 6 standing committees in their work. The Senate is very appreciative of this support provided by Dr. Sorensen and to Dean Barry Mason for providing space in Alston.

**Senate web site is three years old!** On our web site you will find a complete listing of the senate members, officers, standing committees, agendas minutes, resolutions passed, pending projects and more. If you are interested in just the highlights of senate meetings, the senate webmaster and Faculty Senate Secretary Ray White provides headlines of the major issues under discussion. Our goal for effective communication with the faculty is serious; help us by letting your senators know your concerns and interests as we strive to continue the tradition of excellence at The University of Alabama.

**Communication with the administration.** I'll just share one example of a new strategy in communicating with the administration that has been mutually beneficial. As many of you know we have been working on an outreach document for the Faculty Handbook since the fall of 1996. Transmittal of paper had occurred but it became very clear that miscommunication and

misinterpretation were impeding our progress. We approached the Provost with the idea of having a subgroup comprised of the Faculty Senate Steering Committee and the Council of Deans, which would discuss the issue and prepare a response. In the case of the Outreach and Academic Citizenship Document, just two meetings of our subcommittee have resulted in moving this document more quickly to completion. Misunderstandings between the groups have been resolved and, I believe, respect for each has grown.

**Communication with external audiences: Our legislative leaders.** The tide has certainly changed over the past year. Both current Legislators and candidates are calling us, asking for input and indicating their support for higher education in general and The University of Alabama in particular. Some may question what our role should be in this area. It appears to me that we need to be responsible citizens, knowledgeable of the issues facing our local and state government and communicating our concerns about education at all levels K-12 through higher education. Many legislators have complained about not hearing from us in the past. Responsible citizenship is an active role, one that implies participation. Under the leadership of Scott Bridges, Chair of the Agenda Committee, faculty and staff have been encouraged to be **informed and involved**. The effort last year in partnership among the administration, faculty, alumni and staff resulted in long overdue raises for our faculty and staff. This cooperative venture was a first and the outcome rewarding. We are in an election year now. We urge all faculty and staff of the University to take an active role by contacting the candidates of your choice, communicating with them about issues confronting the University and our needs for a fair share of the Education Trust Fund. Education and higher education in particular are too important to the future growth and development of this state to ignore the needs for adequate funding. We encourage your voluntary participation in the Higher Education Partnership, an advocacy group for higher education representing all 15 four-year institutions in the state. Check the governmental affairs area on the UA web page for more details. In addition, Chancellor Meredith announced the formation of the University of Alabama System PAC last year. While this is not the first higher education institution in the state to develop a PAC, it provides an opportunity for faculty, staff, students, alumni and friends of the University to contribute to efforts to communicate the needs of the University of Alabama System to elected officials.

**Communicating with external audiences: the ACHE Faculty Panel.** Through the summer I served as the Senate representative to the newly formed Faculty Panel for ACHE. The purpose of the Faculty Panel is to advise the ACHE on issues before the Commission from a faculty perspective. All 15 four-year institutions have representatives from their respective faculty Senates. At issue has been the legislative mandate to move to Performance Based Funding for higher education. On your behalf we have strongly communicated the need for awareness of the uniquely different missions of colleges, regional universities and comprehensive, doctoral research institutions. Dr. Rob Ingram, VP of the Faculty Senate, will serve as our representative to the Faculty Panel for this academic year. We expect an active year since the legislature mandated a report on progress on performance indicators by October 1998.

## II. **Issues in University Governance.**

The Student Affairs Committee Co-Chairs Mike Miller and Bob Sigler have continued to meet with the Office of Student Life through the summer. They have reviewed the Task Force on Diversity report and will be making a -resolution for the senate at its upcoming meeting. The Academic Affairs Co-chairs have aggressively collected data regarding the impact of the plus / minus policy following a full four-year history since its inception. The Academic Affairs Committee expects to make a recommendation to the senate soon. Also with the possibility of the conclusion of deliberations of the outreach document, we expect that the completion of the revised Faculty Handbook can be accomplished soon.

## III. **Continuous Quality Improvement-a new initiative.**

President Sorensen has proposed a new initiative in Continuous Quality Improvement. In his investigative efforts last March, he sent a small team of faculty, staff and administrators to Penn State University which has had an 8-year experience in this effort. I was fortunate to go on that trip and learn first hand about their excitement over the progress they have made due to this initiative. I urged President Sorensen to send other faculty senate representatives if another trip was made to a major institution. A second trip was planned to visit the University of Wisconsin-Madison and also included a small group of faculty, staff and administrators. On the combined trips we were able to send Past President Amy Ward, Vice President Rob Ingram, and Co-chair of Academic Affairs Committee Jim Richardson late in the spring semester. In addition, other members of the faculty participated in one of these trips including Charlie Haynes and Stuart Bell, both former members of the Faculty Senate. The responses of those visiting these two prestigious campuses have been very favorable. The Senate Steering Committee has had several meetings with Mr. Bill Rose, a retired volunteer consultant to Dr. Sorensen on this initiative. Some are skeptical and have raised good questions and others see this as an opportunity for positive changes. Let me encourage both faculty and staff to consider attending the CQI Forum on September 24th. This opportunity will allow you to hear first hand about the initiatives at two doctoral research institutions and help to shape the University of Alabama's effort to become an even better place to work.

I have shared with you just some of the recent activities of the Faculty Senate. In summary, the Faculty Senate is committed to aiding the University in fulfilling its mission in teaching, research, and service. We strive to accomplish this through:

- **Fostering effective communication** at all levels,
- **Participating in planning and shaping the future** of this great institution,

- **Encouraging excellence in the classroom and scholarly pursuits,**
- **Supporting the enhancement of our technology infrastructure, and**
- **Promoting outreach to extend the influence of the University to the problem solving and leadership needs in the local, state, national and international arenas.**