

Faculty Senate Planning and Operations Committee

Report on Proposed changes to the COMMENCEMENT Ceremonies

February 12, 1997

Faculty object to their being excluded from consultations about this significant change in the academic calendar, and are apprehensive about the validity of the administration's recently stated desire for their input now that additional commencements seem to be a fait accompli. Many faculty object to the anticipated additional demands for their presence at ceremonies during which their roles in the actual graduations of the students they have taught are lessened or eliminated. In blunt terms, they object to being asked to put in more time where they are honored less, and they particularly resent this in light of divergent recent salary trends for faculty and for the highest administration, and in light of a governmental and social attitude which, they believe, undervalues their work and dedication to the betterment of the citizens of Alabama. A number have also voiced the opinion that it is not a sensible idea, nor will it appear to the citizens of Alabama to be a sensible idea, to be spending more money on three separate commencements. Senior faculty recall the decision to abolish the August and December commencements in favor of a single May commencement as one of the more enlightened administrative decisions of the seventies. On the other hand, a little less than 5% of faculty responses on this issue favor three commencements a year, though several of these responses noted that no faculty member should be asked to attend more than one commencement ceremony per calendar year.

In terms of the proposed restructuring of the graduation ceremonies, the abolition of divisional ceremonies during which diplomas are actually presented to students in the presence of their faculties is almost unanimously lamented. It moves graduation in the direction of regimentation and depersonalization. The faculty do not see the smaller departmental or divisional social occasions suggested by the administration as being at all the same sort of things as a true divisional graduation.

Even if this new form of graduation is to be installed, the faculty notes that this spring, when we still have a full year's worth of graduates to process is certainly not the time to install it. Faculty who have sat through past divisional graduations recognize that the estimate of 2 1/2 hours per ceremony for the spring is just ludicrous and that each ceremony will surely take at least 4 if not 5 hours. The suggestion that diplomas can be easily distributed to those students who attended the first ceremony in the football practice facility while the second ceremony is going on in the Coliseum is, to use the word most often used by faculty, insane.

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