Faculty Senate Report to Board of Trustees
Kelly Smith, April, 2014

I am going to try to keep my remarks today as brief as I can, but there are a few big worries I have as I leave office that I need to make you all aware of. I also want to show you a short video Neil Cameron’s team helped us produce that might help you better understand the daily lives of the faculty who make Clemson what it is. So I might run longer than the 4 ½ minute speed presentation I did last time.

First, I worry about the tobacco free policy. As you may know, the tobacco task force recently finished its work and turned in a plan for implementation of this policy to the administrative council. I just want to council caution here: any policy we adopt will have a major impact on the entire campus community and in particular care must be taken to enact the policy in a way that is caring and humane to all.

Second, I worry about the biggest decision Clemson will have to make in the next few years: how to balance excellence in the classroom with excellence in research. I admit that this is a personal concern, but it is also one shared by many (though not all) faculty. Academic institutions like Clemson naturally experience enormous pressure to increase the amount of research they conduct. The problem is that it is very difficult to do this while also maintaining an emphasis on the classroom experience. I am not saying it’s impossible to manage the balance appropriately, but it certainly is NOT true, though many will say it, that there is no tradeoff between research and teaching. Just as many women find it hard to balance the demands of a busy work schedule with those of a dutiful mother, faculty also have only so many hours in the day. If you require them to spend more time writing grants and running labs, they will respond by spending less time preparing for class – it’s just that simple. And this is not a hypothetical worry: there are already departments on campus whose culture does not value teaching. This will only become more common if you don’t recognize the problem and take active steps to avoid it. In particular, I urge the Board to:
1) Make sure administrators and faculty at all levels understand that the quality of teaching truly matters.
2) Develop metrics to measure good teaching (and associated activities like advising) and use them in assessment of faculty.
3) Incent good teaching in concrete ways.

If you do not do this, Clemson is going to lose much of what makes it special. We will increasingly resemble all those other research universities with huge classes taught mostly by less qualified people and students frustrated when they can’t access the big name faculty whose reputation lured them to come there in the first place. In my book, that’s too high a price to pay for research excellence.

My third worry has to do with the workload analysis you are currently engaged in. Since y’all are not academics yourself, I worry that you don’t have the context with which to judge the raw data you have in the workload report. It is certainly true that
the information in FAS represents an important part of what faculty do, but it’s just the tip of a very large iceberg. What you have to keep in mind is that, for each entry in FAS, faculty have to invest large amounts of time in more mundane tasks that are not reported in the system. So I have been working with Neil Cameron’ new video production folks to make a video I hope will give you a better feel for all the mundane, unsexy work that goes into each one of the sexy accomplishments we like to brag about. (show video)

Technically, I am no longer faculty senate president, so you will be pleased to know that you will not have to listen to me much longer. Unfortunately, my successor, Dr. Antonis Katsiyannis, could not be here for the Board meeting this time. But by way of a distance introduction, Antonis is an alumni distinguished professor of Special Education who researches behavioral disorders - so you can direct all your parenting questions to him. I am confident that he will be just as annoying to you as I was, which is to say he will do a good job representing the faculty point of view.

Finally, I’d like to say a few words about what my term as Faculty Senate President has meant to me personally. In short, my service this past year has been the highlight of my career. I have never done anything so consistently interesting and challenging, nor anything so consistently stressful and frustrating. The old slogan of the Peace Corps, “the toughest job you’ll ever love” fits perfectly. I learned more in this one year, both about myself and Clemson, than in all my previous 15 years here. And I have to say quite honestly that the most rewarding part of this job has been the opportunity to work closely with you, the members of Clemson’s Board of Trustees. Since I am leaving office, I have no reason to suck up, so you know I am sincere when I say that, while y’all are not be perfect, your love of Clemson and dedicated service to your alma mater are an important part of what makes Clemson such a special place. You should be very proud of that and I was honored to be a part of that in some small way this past year. I am not sure exactly what I will be doing next year, but rest assured that I will continue to be active in the faculty senate and am willing and able to help you in the future. Thank you very much and Go Tigers!