The provost-level summary of the independent COACHE survey has been provided to the University administration. The response rate by faculty was impressive—thank you! I find the summary results to be in line with the Faculty Senate's own survey conducted several years ago by the Senate’s Welfare Committee under the leadership of Christina Wells (CAFLS). Upon the suggestion of Provost Helms, the COACHE summary results have been provided to the current Welfare Committee to review and compare with the last Senate survey. Provost Helms has asked the Senate to work with Associate Provost Aziz to address issues of concern identified by COACHE; I believe this process will necessarily have short-term and longer-term elements, and am encouraged by the initial administration response.

At its July meeting, the Board of Trustees moved to direct a joint BOT-faculty-administration task force to review and make recommendations concerning a revised University mission statement drafted by the Mission Statement committee appointed by President Barker and subsequently approved by the Administrative Council in early July. My expectation is that the BOT would consider the work of this task force as its October meeting.

Some of you know that President Barker has been chairing a NCAA working group whose aim is to streamline the maze of NCAA rules. The report of this group has been completed and can be found here: http://chronicle.com/article/Boosters-Could-Pay-Coaches/133343/?cid=at&utm_source=at&utm_medium=en

The Finance Committee

Chaired by Antonis Katsiyannis, Teacher Education, the finance committee is responsible for investigating and reporting on financial matters related to Faculty Senate. Specifically, the Finance Committee has an emphasis on matters concerning faculty compensation and instructional facilities. They work closely with the Budget Accountability committee and are part of the larger Executive Committee. Other members of the Finance committee include: Susan Chapman, Biological Sciences, Feng Chen, Food, Nutrition and Packaging, Tom Dobbins, Agriculture, Forestry and Environmental Science, and Pradip Srimani, Computer Science.

In the coming year, the Finance Committee is working towards a number of goals. First, they plan on discussing the 2012-13 budget priorities with a “focus on financial health and sustainability across the university, particularly on the instructional side.” Second, they are looking to ensure that the salary report is available by January. In the process, they intend to take a critical eye to the report to look for trends and larger issues with regard to faculty and administrator compensation. Third, they aim to advocate for competitive faculty compensation, address disparities between compensation and compression, and help the administration implement the “Huron” report. Fourth, they intend on promoting the need for high quality instructional facilities and improving university infrastructure. Lastly, they want to “clarify and establish
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policies regarding benefit rates” in regard to grants maintaining foreign personnel on J1 visas.

The Finance Committee would also love more faculty feedback (antonis@clemson.edu). The administration has been helpful in providing information. The CFO’s office provides a wealth of information:
http://www.clemson.edu/cfo/.

New Shuttle Service

Thanks to the efforts of Dan Warner, Professor and Immediate Past Faculty Senate President and Jeff Martin, Executive Director, The Conference Center and Inn at Clemson University Seasons by the Lake is now offering a new complimentary shuttle service for faculty and staff. Running from 11:15am until 2:00pm, the round trip is 20 minutes long. Patrons will be dropped off and picked up, if weather permits, at the lakeside Seasons entrance. Drop off and pick up locations on campus are as follows:

• In front of the IPTAY office
• At the covered breezeway behind Harcombe and beside the Student Post Office
• At the west side of Sikes Hall
• In front of the Hendrix Student Union

For groups ten or more reservations can be made at this number: 864-656-7444. The last shuttle leaving from the Madren Center departs at 1:45. With that consideration patrons should plan to arrive by 1pm. The shuttle will not run on weekends or when the University is closed for breaks. Further information, as well as a map, can be found at this address: http://www.clemson.edu/centers-institutes/madren/shuttle/index.html.

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I encourage faculty to review the report, which contains intriguing ideas such as allowing athletic boosters to more directly compensate university coaches. Overall, the report presents a vision for increased local control and (importantly) accompanying local responsibility and accountability. Putting aside the issue of the vision itself, the philosophy seems oddly at odds with the institutional vote that Clemson cast last year to override an NCAA policy allowing each institution to individually determine whether they may offer multi-year scholarships to student-athletes. You can read a little bit about this issue at:
http://www.usatoday.com/sports/college/story/2012-02-17/multiyear-scholarships-survives-close-vote/53137194/1
If I garner insight into this apparent contradiction, I’ll let you know.

The Senate Executive Committee heard the Huron consulting group’s report on faculty compensation in late June. The report, which was received well overall, presented the current faculty salary landscape and made several recommendations in moving forward. As an observer at the July BOT meeting, I was pleased to see a budget approved in public session that contained, by my arithmetic reckoning, significant monies over and above those needed to effect the State’s approved cost-of-living increase. I expect faculty will be apprised of compensation-related initiatives well before next month’s newsletter. Like the COACHE-based initiatives, compensation initiatives are likely to have short term and long-term components.

Finally, I was pleased to note that a recent Bain & Co. report (you’ve likely heard a good deal lately about different entity with Bain in its moniker) indicates the University lands in the top 20% of all universities in financial sustainability as measured by placement in a financial merit matrix composed of equity and expense ratios. Many of our competitors did not fare so well. Indeed, the report suggests that as many as 30% of universities are financially unsustainable or a long way down the road to financial unsustainability. Given that assessment, I believe our faculty benefit from what I see as a conservative attitude regarding finances and a productive and transparent relationship between the Senate Finance Committee, Budget Accountability Committee and the University administration. You can read about the report and access the results at:
Senate President’s Column

Agriculture and the Mission Statement

During my work on the Mission Statement Committee this summer, I heard much concern about the Committee’s work as an effort to diminish the importance of agriculture on campus. After clearly stating that the Committee was given no such charge or instruction (nope, not even subtle hints or suggestions), I thought I would begin this month’s column outlining, as a single faculty representative on this committee, my own thinking on these concerns. I hope this conveys that, in my mind, quite the opposite is the case.

One of the unexpected highlights of my family’s trip north early this summer was learning about an initiative at a private farm in central Maine to produce sufficiently nutrient dense food, including some animal protein, to sustain 80 individuals for 20 weeks on 2 acres of land. A simple back of the envelope calculation suggests that this effort, scaled, can in principle serve a 9 billion human population. The devils in the details, of course, are whether such an initiative can be scaled and distributed, and if such food will be affordable to anyone given rising input prices.

Still, this vision starkly contrasts with that of large public multinational conglomerates (which I call AG! because it’s big and bold and in your face) pushing no-till farming—largely of corn and soy—using genetically engineered seed immune to the conglomerates’ own herbicides. It is not clear from the math that such an approach will nutritiously feed 9 billion people—even if the genetics braintrust manages to transfer the photosynthetic efficiency of C4 plants (e.g., sugar cane and corn) into C3 plants (e.g., soy, wheat and rice).

The AG! enterprise, with its marketers, food scientists, and willing corporate consumer product and packaging partners, have been successful beyond their wildest dreams at seeing their vision fulfilled in a malleable and willing domestic populace—so much so that we now live in an era that has seen the first teenagers undergoing liver transplants due to hyperconsumption of corn derivatives. Within the lifetime of many/most faculty, we face a future where a majority of U.S. adults are obese, diabetic, or both. I think faculty quickly forget that such metabolic conditions lead to chronic, expensive health care that all takes place in a “system” where individual choices and corporate interests lead to very real costs that are socialized. I shan’t even mention that the metabolic triggers of such expensive maladies are provided as conveniently as possible to our students in places of purveyance around campus or in essentially unlimited quantities in dining halls, and that some faculty enterprises benefit from the revenues that such on-campus commerce generates. Ooops, I just did. So, in the way of full disclosure, I should acknowledge that those beneficiaries include the Faculty Senate.

Alas for faculty, those very real costs mentioned above: a) only increase pressure at both the State and federal level on the scarce funds needed for higher education, and b) only consume more of our compensation dollars on health benefits relative to salary. Indeed, some pundits have noted the necessity of distinguishing between the temporal behavior of the income gap and the compensation gap—they are different. Most faculty understand that when Clemson's employer contribution to every campus employee’s monthly health premium rises by a flat $50/month, that’s $50 a month that can’t go into salary. Faculty seem acutely aware that that $50/month not going to salary has a disparate deleterious impact on lower paid staff compared to faculty. I don’t find it a coincidence that, nationally, real net personal incomes as a percentage of GDP have been falling for a few decades while health care expenditures as a percentage of GDP have been rising. Faculty ought to worry that state and federal support for higher education is now on the same track as real net personal income—and perhaps for much the same reason. Perhaps it is not too far-fetched to at least consider whether we may be eating ourselves alive by eating ourselves (agonizingly slowly) to death.

If these concerns aren’t enough for a monthly column, consider the continent of Africa where movement towards sedentary corporatized farming (some of) whose end products’ flow and prices are driven by energy-related demand largely from off the continent. This complex circumstance may have as much or more to do with...
recurring famine as it does with drought. Meanwhile, back at the ranch an ocean away, I fear we are blissfully unaware that the campus E10 fuel policy announced in August 2011 may mean we are unwittingly filling our vehicle tanks with the lives of sub-Saharan women and children—the perennially defenseless population that always suffers the most when critically unexamined policy goes awry on Stanley’s dark continent...a population that deserves more consideration as we make policy locally.

Such unintended consequences result when AG! and the varied and myriad forces of SUS!tainability come together and reinforce each other in critically unexamined ways. The SUS! forces are not unlike those local ones, well-intentioned and supported by people of good will—that have given us a new LEV policy that seems to have led to some division on campus already. I’ve heard from some of you that the new LEV policy deserves reconsideration on the basis of its intellectual merit and its political merit. I tend to agree—it represents a rather fundamental shift in the relationship between the University and its employees; I’m not sure that shift is healthy or makes any sense. Perhaps it would be wonderful fodder for a new critical thinking class as part of the QEP...seriously...but, I digress...

In northern Africa, pregnant issues surround price and accessibility of foodstuffs. We have seen how agricultural prices have contributed to the Arab Spring, and careful observers may wonder if these will help foment a Persian Spring with its attendant serious geopolitical implications. By some analyses, northern Africa contains ¾ of all easily accessible cheap reserves of the potash that are another centerpiece of the AG! vision. Assuming AG! can deal with or deflect concerns about runoff and effects on aquatic ecosystems, we may see in our lifetime the initial rise of a northern African fertilizer cartel with as much geopolitical importance and wealth as OPEC today.

All of this is to say that the wild success of 20th century agriculture has led to a 21st century agriculture with growing, daunting, and diverse challenges and implications, and that it is much more than farming and information provision—indeed, it’s success in the 20th century means that it must be much more. A comprehensive approach to the modern enterprise requires expertise in genetics, nutriceuticals, political science, quantitative finance, geographical information systems, digital librarianship, energy studies, biosystem engineering, and a host of other endeavors (apologies if yours was not named).

The point is that the modern enterprise of agriculture is one that is so important and vast that its tentacles are or should be distributed across and integrated within the 21st century research university. What would seem to me to be the biggest danger for agriculture (and society) is if it chose to be an institutionally isolated, cloistered, and tightly-labeled enterprise in a university structure. A challenge for faculty is to consider whether "agriculture" can be reasonably contained in a single college and whether we can come out of our silos and embrace the required integration, interdisciplinary approach, and increasing sweep and scale of the enterprise.

Our own recent experience with on-campus integration in the area of economics should be a cause for concern. I confess that, despite the origins of that integration, the lack of success dismayed me a bit given much wonderful insight into the operations of higher education coming out of resource-economics-type studies that I so naturally associate with Ag Ec. Next month, let’s examine one of those studies. Afterwards, I'd like faculty to consider doing their own difficult cost-benefit analysis: we'll consider the growing body of knowledge and concern regarding non-financial human costs of FB! and share a fascinating, recent National Bureau of Economics Research working paper that examines the benefits to the higher education enterprise that faculty should expect to flow from FB!

As always, I welcome your thoughts and the opportunity to learn from you (jking2@clemson.edu).

Jeremy King is solely responsible for the views expressed in The President’s Column. They neither reflect the views of nor are endorsed by the Faculty Senate or Clemson University.