June 2012
Senate President’s Report

Provost Helms has approved the Faculty Manual change passed by the Senate in May that makes it possible for lecturers to serve on Department curriculum and advisory committees. This change will be reflected in the new 2012/2013 Faculty Manual.

The Huron consultants assisting the University with compensation issues will present recommendations to the Board of Trustees at their July meeting. I expect that the Senate Executive Committee will receive a preview of those recommendations in late June. As this process unfolds, I will be sure to keep the faculty informed as early and fully as possible, but ask for your continued understanding and patience in appreciating the existence of necessary formalities of this deliberate process that will dictate the precise timescale of doing so.

The Senate Executive/Advisory Committee met in May with Vice President for Finance and Operations Brett Dalton and Project Manager Lisa Knox regarding the Managed Print Services (MPS) initiative. Please point your browser to: http://www.clemson.edu/ccit/help_support/printing_plotting/faq/managed_print_services.html to learn more about the initiative. Some faculty have expressed concern about MPS. After the meeting with VP Dalton, I have a high level of confidence that he keenly understands faculty productivity issues and that faculty should expect to have their needs not only considered, but very reasonably accommodated.

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New Senate Office Location

The Faculty Senate will have a new home beginning July 1. We are pleased to be relocating to the southwest corner of the main level of Cooper Library. I’d like to thank Dean of Libraries Kay Wall, Provost Helms, Senator Scott Dutkiewicz, and Phil Landreth of Instructional & Research Support for their efforts and assistance in identifying and securing this centrally-located space.

Faculty Representative to the Board of Trustees

Tony Cawthon, Counselor Education Professor, serves as the Faculty Representative to the Board of Trustees for the term 2012-2015. Officially recognized by the Board, the Faculty Representative receives minutes, agendas, and notifications of all Board and committee meetings. Tony attends quarterly Board meetings and presents on relevant faculty topics spanning teaching, research, and service. He also attends committee meetings such as Educational Policy, Research and Economic Development, and Student Affairs to gain perspective and build relationships.

Tony’s career at Clemson started in 1991 as the Director of Residential Life in University Housing. After earning his doctorate from Mississippi State University, he moved to full-time faculty in...
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as individual circumstances dictate. Thus, I do not expect our office/lab printers to disappear in the dead of night like our trash cans did. What faculty can expect, though, is for Ricoh to present you with a proposal/explanation of how a Ricoh MPS option may be able to save you money. Inasmuch as there are probably other items we could more productively spend money on than office/lab printing, I simply ask that you remain open-minded and receptive to such proposals and make a data-driven evidence-based decision. If you have concerns as this process unfolds, please let your Senators or me (jking2@clemson.edu) know. My understanding is that the MPS process will begin in BBS.

I know some of you sigh like I do when that May “paycheck” arrives—the one with the summer benefit deductions taken out. Our HR professionals are considering (I emphasize that no decision has been made) the idea of spreading the summer deductions out throughout the academic year, and they would like faculty feedback on this idea. I expect the Senate will formally solicit your feedback at a later date, and I hope you would respond.

I thank those of you who have provided feedback on the draft Mission Statement via e-mail or at the blog site (http://blogs.clemson.edu/sacs). I anticipate that a modified draft based on this feedback will go to the University’s Administrative Council at the end of June and, if endorsed there, to the Board of Trustees at their July meeting.

Several faculty members have shared concerns about the low-emission vehicle (LEV) parking initiative, both questioning the wisdom of particular features of this policy and the process by which this policy was instituted. I have asked the Welfare Committee to examine these questions. If you have feedback or additional questions, please share them with the Welfare Committee chair, Diane Perpich (dperpic@clemson.edu).

Senate President’s Column

Human-Based Higher Ed: Data, Costs, Data, Debt, Data, Salaries

Last month, I told you that I remained “wicked optimistic” about the future for Clemson faculty and would share with you why I hold this attitude. The first reason is that I believe people are critical to the educational enterprise, and “people” is one of our fortés. I pondered the words to relay my thinking, but now find that Google chairman Eric Schmidt has kindly provided them for me at Berkeley’s recent commencement:

http://poetsandquants.com/2012/05/27/googles-eric-schmidt-delivers-2012-commencement-address-at-berkeley/3/

“Life is not lived in the glow of a monitor. Life is not a series of status updates. Life is about who you love, how you live, it’s about who you travel through the world with. Your family, your collaborators, your friends. Life is a social experience first, and the best aspects of that experience are not lonely ones—they are spent in the company of others.

Our landscape has changed, yes, but our humanity will always remain, and that, above all else, is what makes us who we are.”

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Clemson’s Counselor Education program coordinating the Student Affairs concentration. He has also served as department chair of Leadership, Counselor Education and Human and Organizational Development. This combination of perspectives has taught Tony an appreciation of both campus subcultures.

A primary goal of Tony’s is simply to continue the great work of his predecessors educating the Board about faculty culture – the strengths and successes as well as the challenges of serving as a faculty member in 2012. Tony hopes to establish great relations with the Board offering them “insight into how and why faculty do what we do”. This is where faculty can help the representative to the Board. A challenge is determining what to present in the short 3-4 minutes at quarterly Board meetings. Tony has presented on faculty led student abroad programs and will provide an overview of new faculty joining Clemson this fall. He usually presents after the Faculty Senate President’s report and tries to expand upon report topics to further illustrate the work of faculty. This could include new cutting edge research, grants recently received, or innovations in teaching. Tony seeks faculty input and he would love to hear what topics faculty would like presented to the Board (cawthot@clemson.edu).

From his initial meeting, Tony is impressed with the level of commitment and insight demonstrated by trustees and university administrators to work together to make Clemson a better place. He believes that the Board really is interested in hearing and learning about the faculty experience.

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Hold your cards, because I’m calling “Bingo”. In a landscape of massively open courses, MITx (a new online initiative of MIT courses for free to a virtual community of learners around the world), and increasingly powerful artificial intelligence, I think the core of the educational enterprise is still found in human faculty with human relationships with each other and with their students. Of course, what ultimately matters is if our students, their families, and the public taxpayer continue to embrace this attitude. Faculty should consider their vested interest in the social aspects of education, particularly those that bind swaths of our community together (yes, I dare to utter those that shall not be named: football, “student engagement”, living-learning initiatives, etc).

The second reason is that I believe the talk of a “higher education bubble” is an example of dangerous categorical thinking that is too intellectually simplistic. The term treats “higher education” as a monolith, and it is not. It was probably 9-12 months ago that a Clemson colleague reported to me their analysis of data in a Goldwater Institute (www.goldwaterinstitute.org) report that revealed that public 4-year expenditures have increased only 1% over inflation over the past decade or so. My colleague thus suggested to me that the “explosion” in sticker price tuition (several percents above inflation, and on a par with health care costs in the U.S.) is an overstatement of the growth of actual student costs. If so, we need to do a better job in differentiating sticker price from actual cost when we speak with prospective students and parents; and we need better information and data from the administration to do that.

Having kept my colleague’s intriguing conclusion in mind, it was with interest that I recently encountered this interesting article http://www.fool.com/investing/general/2012/06/01/student-loan-bubble-not-as-bad-as-it-looks.aspx which reports the College Board’s analysis of average student loan debt per borrower for recipients of bachelor’s degrees from public institutions increasing by (wait for it....) only 1% over inflation over the past decade. This rate of increase is accommodated by wage increases for degree holders over the same time period.
One can ask the question whether such a rate is acceptable or not. Personally, I believe so, but for the rarely considered reason that our current CPI calculations are no longer based on fixed baskets of goods. If you want to measure inflation as we used to in the 80’s and 90’s, have a look at www.shadowstats.com. In the context of these older methodologies, the implied actual cost increase rate and student debt per borrower rate at public institutions have actually declined relative to inflation, which is running lately at 6% as calculated with the 1990 methodology.

So then, what is the source of this concern about a “higher education bubble”? As the above article implies, circumstances are quite frothy in the private higher education sector. This is ironic given the conventional wisdom that such institutions, many of which rely on online platforms, will wring the costs out of our faculty enterprise. At this time, I fear the true costs have not been wrung; worse yet, I fear they (and the private profits that flow from them) will ultimately be socialized. Score another one for the virtues of human-centered higher ed at most, but not all, public institutions. Of course, the considerations I raise here only speak to accessibility. Bang-for-the-buck, quality, value, etc are different considerations. I’ll address quality in my July column and hope to provide an illuminating reanalysis of commonly quoted (but, I believe, improperly measured) higher ed price-to-earnings ratios for you in my October column.

However, accept (just for the moment), my shocking suggestion that a decline in actual cost and student debt per borrower relative to inflation has held over the past decade at public institutions. Should faculty celebrate? The correct answer is a resounding “maybe”. On the one hand, this suggestion implies a large degree of sustainable accessibility for students. On the other hand, faculty at this public university find themselves in a fiscal regime where we are increasingly reliant on students and their families for our own bi-weekly personal financial sustainability.

No wonder, then, all the angst about faculty salaries. At the beginning of the Huron process and my service on the Compensation Advisory Group last year, I determined that I needed to have my own data-driven view of compensation at the University to a) provide a sanity check on the ultimate Huron findings, and b) prepare myself for the likely findings. I’ve shared with some of you my own best-guess view based on imperfect but publicly accessible data. Let me share that with the rest of you, but not before cautioning that the faculty-driven peer identification process and Huron’s access to better data will likely lead to a more robust view of compensation, and a more granular view that resolves conditions at a more local level. I do this with the aid of two figures.

The Figure above shows cumulative distributions (which spare one the agony of trying to bin a histogram containing a small number of data points) of Associate Professor (left panels) and Assistant Professor (right panels) salaries from the 2010/2011 American Association of University Professors (AAUP) salary survey. The bottom set of panels show the public universities with USNWR rankings 19-31; the top set of panels show an experimental peer
group put together by a group of Clemson Faculty Senate Past Presidents. The long dashed line in each panel define the median of the distributions. The short vertical dotted line indicates Clemson salaries. Seeing one in the 0th-10th percentile is not very pleasing, though it must be acknowledged that the salary data could exhibit significant bias against Clemson in that we lack a medical school and law school. This is a limitation in macro-level data, and a good reason for working with Huron and its access to more granular data. Even with this bias, the data suggest that the conventional wisdom that our assistant professor salaries are fine and that inequities are only present at the associate and full level may not, in fact, be correct.

Another conclusion in preparing for what to expect: If the inter-institution differences are not substantially biased by the differences in the distribution of fields and relative numbers of faculty between Clemson and the sample institutions, then I estimate that approximately $6 million/year is needed to bring Clemson faculty, on average, to the median salary levels of these peer groups. There is undoubtedly a good deal of slop in this macro guesstimate. However, the point to be made is that, based on these average salary data, I’d be surprised if this were a <$1-2 million dollar or a >$15-20 million problem.

As we’ve seen in some Open Forum postings, administrator salaries are also on the minds of faculty. That’s a trickier question to address. I tried to do so with the following Figure, which shows cumulative distributions of instructional expenses per student (left panels) and administrative expenses per student (right panels) for the two peer groups (top panels and bottom panels). The expense data are taken from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) database and are 2007. The key feature of the figure is that our administrative expense ratio (vertical dotted line) is nearly coincident with the median value (long dashed line). To the extent that this ratio can be used as a proxy for administrative salaries, my best guess is that we would likely find that our administrator salaries are much closer to, though not necessarily at, median than faculty salaries are for the same peer group.

Having said that, anyone wanting to rely too heavily on university financial data for inter-institution comparisons should first read http://chronicle.com/article/article-content/130672/. After doing so, I think you’ll likely agree it’s better to use more granular data that directly measures compensation. So, let’s see what Huron finds. If my general best guesses are confirmed, then what to do about it will be a pregnant question as the new academic year begins. In July’s column, I’ll celebrate Independence Day by returning to the Founding Fathers (and Alexander Hamilton in particular) to propose a modest faculty-centric quality enhancement plan to address the question of what to do for faculty.

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