Senate President’s Report
May 2012

The new (Senate) year brought 3 significant challenges to the Senate itself. First, is Faculty Manual Editorial Consultant Fran McGuire’s new role on campus coordinating summer programs. Second is the June 30 retirement of our long-serving and dedicated coordinator, Cathy Sturkie, who has been the continuous heart of the Senate for as long as many of us on campus can remember. I would like to thank Provost Helms for her unflagging support in addressing these challenges: we have secured another year of service from Fran, and a new coordinator started in the Senate office on May 1 and will briefly overlap with Cathy for orientation and training (see the Special Welcome below).

The third challenge is that the Senate Office must vacate the Strom Thurmond Institute by June 30. While a final home has not yet been identified, I must again thank Provost Helms for her assistance in leading the search.

During the uptick in my spring meeting schedule, I found myself frequently listening to, working with, and conversing with a few of the same faculty and administrators that shared common concerns about faculty involvement in campus decision making as well as the direction of the University after a year into the 2020 Plan. Last month, a small group consisting of myself, Senate Vice-President Smith, Past Senate Presidents Fran McGuire and Bill Surver, Marketing Chair Mary Anne Raymond, Vice President for Finance and Operations Brett Dalton, and Provost

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2012-2013 Faculty Senate Officers and Committee Chairs

Your Faculty Senate officers for the 2012-2013 academic year are Denise Anderson (Secretary; HEHD; dander2@clemson.edu); Jeremy King (President; E&S; jking2@clemson.edu); and Kelly Smith (Vice President/President-Elect; AAH; kcs@clemson.edu).

(L to R): Senate President Jeremy King and Immediate Past President Dan Warner

The following individuals will serve as chairs of the Senate standing committees. I thank them for their willingness to serve in these important roles. Please feel free to call on them with questions and concerns related to their committees.

Finance Committee- Antonis Katsiyannis
(HEHD; antonis@clemson.edu)
Policy Committee- Bill Pennington
(E&S; billp@clemson.edu)
Research Committee- Jim McCubbin
(BBS; jmccubb@clemson.edu)
Scholastic Policies- David Tonkyn
(AFLS; t david@clemson.edu)
Welfare Committee- Diane Perpich
(AAH; dperpic@clemson.edu)
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Helms stochastically coalesced, formalized these concerns, and presented them to President Barker.

I thank the University President for being very receptive to these concerns, considering them most deliberately, and giving generously of his time in meeting with this group to thoughtfully discuss how we might best address these concerns. I anticipate that President Barker will soon be updating you on some initiatives resulting from these discussions. The specific concerns noted include many of those that I describe in the editorial President’s Column below—they have been expressed to me by many of you, and I’ve “overheard” them in reading University blogs and the Senate’s own Open Forum. During the past 2 years, Past Senate Presidents Warner and Surver both nurtured good relations with the Administration that have made this work easier than it otherwise could have been; I thank them for having done and continuing to do so.

A challenge for all of us this coming year may be freshman enrollment. The administration has shared the apparent success of revised financial aid strategies in increasing the appeal of Clemson to quality students. At this date, it is anticipated that this success has led to a higher yield of admitted students (projected 3,400) that many of you will notice in the Fall. I ask that you stand ready to work together to accommodate a significant increase in first year students. I appreciate that the median faculty member has been doing more with the same or less for several years now, and share the concerns I’ve heard expressed by many of you that we need some relief in the trenches and that we need to be vigilant to maintain educational quality.

The Senate Advisory Committee has selected Pam Havice (HEHD) as the Senate-selected faculty representative on the Ombudsman (sub)Committee. The Advisory Committee also approved Julie Northcutt (AFLS) as my designee on the Athletic Council. I thank these two faculty members for stepping up to serve.

The new year’s Scholastic Policies Committee already met on May 3 to deal with a few items of business, perhaps portending a busy year ahead. My intention is to ask our Welfare and Policy committees to examine our current “Chair” system (which is really a de facto Head system) during the coming year, and see if modifications could/should be made that would lead to improved communications and leadership on campus. If you have thoughts on this subject, let me (jking2@clemson.edu) or Senator Perpich (dperpic@clemson.edu) know. Past President Dan Warner wants to spend this year working on initiatives to improve campus communication. I’m grateful for his ongoing service, and encourage you to share your thoughts on this subject with him (warner@clemson.edu).

Finally, given important milestones likely to be reached this summer related to the Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP), the new Banner system, and a compensation plan, I urge all of you to stay tuned to your e-mail and stand ready to provide scrutiny and feedback. Vice-President Smith, Past President Warner, and I will continue to serve on the compensation study working group with Huron Consulting Group and President Barker’s Compensation Advisory Group. Like you, we look forward to receiving Huron’s recommendations even as we come to the table with many of our own based on your previously voiced concerns—thank you.

I wish you all a productive and rejuvenating summer, and urge you to accept the faculty summer reading assignment (see the President’s Column below).
A Special Welcome to our New Senate Coordinator

On May 1, the Senate office welcomed Monica Patterson as our new administrative assistant who will “replace” the irreplaceable Cathy Sturkie, who retires on June 30. Monica has lately worked in academic advising in the College of Engineering and Science and taught at Tri-County Tech. She has an A.B. in Government & Law from Lafayette College and a M.Ed. in Student Affairs from Penn State. As you can infer from this terse resume, Monica has valuable experience in varied aspects of the academic enterprise. I’m confident she’ll provide great service to the faculty, Senate, and Grievance Board. Please join me in welcoming Monica (back) to campus!

(L to R): Current Senate program coordinator Cathy Sturkie, Senate President Jeremy King, new administrative assistant Monica Patterson, and the Senate’s graduate assistant Leah Egofske in the Senate office.

Senate President’s Column

Faculty Summer Reading Assignment: Malcolm Gladwell and Margaret Chase Smith, U.S. News & World Report (USNWR) and a Declaration of Conscience

During the past few months, I’ve listened to, received and solicited concerns from faculty related to the direction of the University. In a nutshell, there are shared subjects of angst that we need to address: hiring faculty to fill critical needs in addition to any process, ideally faculty-driven, for strategic hires; a balanced and sustainable compensation plan that includes cost-of-living and market-based adjustments in addition to performance incentives that would include rewards for teaching and service; correcting perceived leadership voids, inefficient communication, absent policy necessary for planning, and needless bureaucracy across campus; greater involvement of academic personnel in campus decision-making processes; and revisiting a mission statement that says both too much and too little.

It would be convenient if this angst was a small kerfuffle that reference to our USNWR ranking could simply ameliorate. It would also be convenient if a couple Washington publishing execs seeking to sell electronic data to replace flagging print circulation had really identified simplified institutional metrics that are truly evidence-based proxies for the things they purport or desire to measure. Unfortunately, neither hope is fulfilled. Thus, some would say that it would be nicer still if we might recognize (just as we would want our Clemson students, perhaps after a future QEP experience, to recognize) the deficiency of evidence supporting these metrics and the pitfalls of arbitrary statistical weighting factors, and walk away from such rankings in future planning and policy. Hence, your first summer reading assignment: http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2011/02/14/110214fa_fact_gladwell

While one may reasonably argue that Clemson faculty have benefited from USNWR rankings via enhanced visibility and internally well-understood and well-communicated goals, I believe the future of Clemson is not linked with USNWR. We must move beyond USNWR. But, I preach to the choir. What, then, is “the problem”? What and where is “the solution”? While some of our challenges are external (and the late great Peter Drucker would hasten to remind us that the biggest fundamental challenges always are), our future can’t and won’t be shaped by data collators in Georgetown, or scads of external consultants, or simply mimicking other institutions; the future of Clemson faculty must, in the end, be primarily shaped by us.
Unfortunately, I suggest we have met the true enemy, and it is also us (or is that ‘we’?). The problem is we are humans. The less dysfunctional among us show healthy and endearing quantities of empathy manifest in a willingness to help each other; confidence rackets have taken advantage of this weakness for centuries. Social scientists are lately positing that empathy is what prevents administrators from hacking up certain faculty and storing the body parts in the campus shrimp farm tanks, and is the Maginot Line (this one actually effective) stopping faculty from hacking up certain administrators and eating the body parts after a year of uncertainty about whether we really can afford to buy beef for the supper table (did I mention my iron deficiency?) Curiously, the cost of empathy appears to be significant mental algorithmic blindspots that disable us such that we do not correctly and consciously calculate medium- and long-term costs of making well-intended but ultimately second- or third-best decisions on a semi-conscious moral basis simply because we can and it’s easier to do so and it feels natural. Or, as a colleague recently whispered to me at lunch: “I’m beginning to think that humans are simply not rational.”

The University is a complex human enterprise. Many of the fundamental challenges we face seem to be due to the vagaries of the outside world, or due to the foibles of colleagues on campus (you know, that administrator that you were complaining about at lunch today). The truth, though, is that if we move beyond proximate causes of our challenges, we’ll find the root cause: elements defining our humanity. It’s deliciously human to make gut judgments in lieu of rational evidence-based judgments that are fashioned and evinced only when we have to articulate our decisions and thinking to others. Surely this is exactly why we like our students to articulate their thinking.

Fancying ourselves as an enterprise reasonably enlightened about such human frailties, our processes and policies contain mechanisms to check such blind spots. These mechanisms require, though, people who can faithfully make nuanced distinctions between power and authority and responsibility. Alas, humans don’t seem to be adept at this either.

To be certain, no one group—the administration, the faculty, the staff, the legislature, the student body—or institution holds a monopoly on these marvelously limiting human traits. Remember that grad student you tried to nurture even though you knew it would be best if they left grad school, but they were so “nice” and you thought maybe you could “help” them? I’m guilty as charged! Did you see that WSJ article about the state with $30 billion in unfunded pension and health care obligations resulting from sincere concern for public-sector employees, but resulting in pressure on their Land Grant institution’s funding? Or maybe that Chronicle article on an administrator at State U who clearly violated the faculty handbook in making a personnel decision because they were trying to be humane to the person involved, but didn’t realize the longer-term costs of doing so?

June 1 marks 62 years since the Declaration of Conscience delivered by my fellow Maine native, U.S. Senator Margaret Chase Smith. Thus, your second summer reading assignment: http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/margaretchasemarginofconscience.html

The date and setting provide the needed historical context: a perhaps well-intended but certainly sorely misguided effort that had run amok to address a perceived national threat. While Senator Chase Smith’s calling out the folly of this process was not the source of its demise (that Korean “police action” interceded), and her Senatorial “gang of six” dissolved in the aftermath, her address marked a fundamental turning point that eventually led to a tipping point.

Putting aside the distracting elephant versus donkey elements in her address, Clemson faculty might find some key points of interest. First, Senator Chase Smith notes how misguided efforts had damaged and were inconsistent with the world’s most deliberative body and a great nation. Second, the analogies with what is perceived to be happening on campus are remarkable. To be clear, there is no one-to-one mapping between a certain 1950 political party or federal entity and some group or person on this campus; nor am I making the ridiculous suggestion
that the McCarthy era is analogous to the current state of the faculty on campus. Nevertheless, I believe the similarities between the disoriented state on campus and those in an august institution and nation in 1950 are striking...but not surprising inasmuch as both are due, in my view, to the innate human vagaries noted above. Perhaps some of you are even sure you’ve lately seen trotting on campus one or more of the Four Horseman that Senator Chase Smith warned about. Does her labeling of an environment of “know nothing, suspect everything” as cancerous resonate with you?

Third, the Declaration reveals that Senator Chase Smith clearly was a person who carefully and explicitly distinguished power, authority, and responsibility. It was this unusual ability that made her a great lady, a provider of great leadership at a critical time, and placed her on the right side (ironic pun intended) of history. Finally, Senator Chase Smith’s Declaration is an attempt to return to oriented mission by (re)illuminating core principles and values to regain “strength and unity”.

I think we can renew and enhance strength and unity of faculty and others here at Clemson. But, it will involve moving beyond USNWR and back to core principles. The late great Peter Drucker would also hasten to remind us that in times of disturbing fundamental change, it does not make sense to preserve status quo, but it is nevertheless imperative to identify what things are and will be constant—faculty deserve to know what is immutable and reliable. What “the future” is, what that bedrock core is, and how the two are connected provide convenient fodder for next month’s column. As I think ahead about these connections and the concomitant future possibilities for Clemson faculty, I remain (as Senator Chase Smith might have said) wicked optimistic. I hope you do too. I welcome your comments, thoughts, and feedback (jking2@clemson.edu).

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

April Meeting Photos

Faculty Senate Past Presidents (L to R): John Luedeman, Walt Owens, Webb Smathers, Alan Grubb, Kinly Sturkie, Dan Warner, Bill Surver, Fran McGuire (back row), Jeremy King (2012-2013 President), Holley Ulbrich, Cathy Sturkie (program coordinator), Pat Smart, and Gordon Halfacre (front row)

The Alan Schaffer Faculty Senate Service Award recipients (L to R): Vice President/President-Elect Kelly Smith (2012 recipient), Alan Grubb, Fran McGuire (back row), Holley Ulbrich, and Pat Smart (front row)