Faculty Senate Report to Board of Trustees  
Kelly Smith, October 2013

The fall semester is now well underway and the business of the faculty senate is picking up. In particular, there are 4 projects the senate is pursuing that should be of interest to the Board of Trustees.

First, as I am sure you are aware, the administrative council recently approved the goal of Clemson becoming a tobacco free campus. However, there was some concern that this decision had been made without adequate community involvement, so the senate pushed for a more systematic sampling of campus opinion. The tobacco free task force will soon be sending out a questionnaire to all members of the Clemson community in order to gauge reaction to the proposal as well as identify potential problems we need to consider in our planning. I have also reached out to other campuses who have made this transition recently so that we may learn from their experiences and avoid their mistakes.

Second, I have formed a task force to examine several issues related to faculty ranks. These are mostly issues our senate has looked at before but never taken action on. The membership includes faculty as well as administrators and I have charged them to look into the possible creation of new ranks such as master lecturer, university professor and clinical professor, as well as to try to resolve some persistent ambiguities concerning extension faculty. Perhaps the most important charge in light of recent talk of attaining Carnegie very high research status is revising the guidelines for research professors. Clemson currently only has a few dozen of these, partly because we are working with an outmoded model of how such positions work, while schools like Georgia Tech have hundreds, which boosts their research productivity enormously. I have asked the task force to issue their report in time for their recommendations to be enacted by the end of the Spring semester.

Third, I have had discussions with President Barker and Provost Aziz about the need for a strategic plan concerning Clemson’s online initiatives. Clemson has created incentives for faculty to pursue online education, and our new Director of Online Education has a good handle on what we need to do to improve the quality of our online offerings, but we lack an overarching strategic vision of what we want to accomplish. There are big questions we need to address such as, “Do we want to offer degrees which are completely online?” and “How can we insure that online students still get ‘the Clemson experience’?” Without such a vision, we will simply drift into doing more and more online classes and may very well find ourselves in a place we don’t want to be 10 years down the road. I believe we should establish a task force to look at these questions, with representation from the faculty, administration, and Board of Trustees. The task force would be charged with providing a set of guiding principles that would bring strategic coherence to our efforts in online education.
Fourth, there is the search for a new president. Clemson is truly at a turning point in its history, and faculty are like everyone else: both excited and worried stiff. A new president will either lead us to greatness or cause us to stumble and lose hard won ground, so it’s critical that we get this right. Faculty believe that their perspective is critical to this process and as our search begins its final phase, I urge you all to familiarize yourself with their point of view. There is an essay posted recently in the faculty senate open forum and another which will be up soon that are well worth reading. Now, as you know, diplomatic communication has never been a faculty strength, but the sentiments there are both heartfelt and carefully considered, so I urge you to focus on the message rather than the bluntness with which it is delivered. And of course I stand ready to answer any questions you might have.

Lastly, I wanted to thank the Board for inviting my son Sam and I to the BOT box for the SC State game, where we both had a blast! And I want to thank my son’s favorite board member, Joe Swann, for making it possible for us to join you at this weekend’s game as well. Finally, Sam wanted to be sure to tell you that when we make it to the national championship, he is definitely available again, even if it is a school night!

Go Tigers!