Faculty Representative to the Board of Trustees
Report
Thompson Mefford
February 4, 2016

Review of Goals:
As part of my tenure as Representative, I will focus on three main areas: recruitment, retention, and reputation. Each of these is key for the betterment of the University and the advancement of the careers of the faculty. In addition, I will focus on the continual improvement of Clemson as my central bridge in enhancing the two-way communication between the faculty and the Board.

Representing the Faculty:
One of the challenges of the role of the Faculty Representative is attempting to represent the collective concerns of 1,281 individuals. The composition of faculty has shifted some in the past 5 years. For instance, the number of teaching faculty that are 30-39 years in age has gone up by 34%, and the number of African American teaching faculty members has gone up 0.3 percentage points (i.e., 3.6 to 3.9%), which still far from where we should be.

In seeking input, I have been attentive to concerns raised by the Faculty Senate, Senate subcommittee meetings, and a network of contacts I have developed for feedback across all of the colleges. Because there is no representative to the Board for students or staff, I have also tried to be sensitive to their concerns, while keeping my focus on the faculty.

Issues with Recruitment:
To make Clemson stronger we need to attract the best and brightest to our campus, the ones who are the true leaders in their fields. Recruiting these leaders extends beyond offering a competitive salaries and start-up packages. Clemson needs to be a place where it is desirable to be at, not only from an academic prospective but from a social one as well. I feel that the athletic department understands this well. In their recruiting, great efforts are spent on social media, infrastructure, and one-on-one conversations with prospective athletes. The uniform message is that Clemson is a place where we have the support to achieve greatness. The academic units should adopt the same prospective. By placing excellence in scholarship as our central focus, programs and activities can be evaluated to see if they support these efforts.

As an example of creating an environment to attract faculty, family and health options are of major concern. In the recent COACHE survey Clemson’s faculty views on “Personal and Family Policies” and “Health and Retirement Benefits” ranked in the bottom 30 percent of all institutions surveyed. In speaking with those outside of Clemson, the faculty may not convey that Clemson is a good work environment. Another example is that the CampusPrideIndex rates Clemson at 1.5 out of 5 stars for its LGBTQ-inclusive policies. A prospective faculty member could potentially not bother applying to Clemson based on this low score.

Issues with Retention:
Workload is also becoming a pressing issue. Growth in ranked faculty (i.e., Assistant, Associate, and Full Professors) has not matched the growth in students. Over the past 4 years the number of students has grown by an average of 3.33% per year. The number of ranked faculty has grown at
a rate 1.92% per year, while the number of lecturers has grown at 4.80% per year. In addition, the staff support for faculty has been stagnant (0.75% growth per year over the past 4 years). At the October Board meeting, the University was lauded for having one of the lowest ratios of staff per student compared to our peers. This sort of ultra-lean view has the potential severe consequences for the entire organization.

Each year we lose approximately 84 teaching faculty, the major of which are leaving for reasons other than retirement. The good news is that the rate at which we are losing ranked faculty to other opportunities has gone down from the high numbers 5 years ago. However, our retention numbers among junior faculty (i.e., associate and assistant ranks) has stayed at relatively the same level. Seeking explanations for these numbers, I started looking for indicators of faculty unhappiness, and motivators for relocation.

Issues identified in the recent COACHE Survey is that faculty views on “Mentoring”, “Leadership: Divisional”, and “Leadership: Departmental” ranked in the bottom 30 percent of all institutions surveyed. These three categories are intertwined and strongly suggest the need for a comprehensive leadership training and development program across the University. The last such program was over the 2014-2015 academic year organized by former Provost Nadim Aziz (which I was apart of). Clemson could make great progress following the academic restructuring to focus on “Coaching-Up” new and rising stars. It is from this pool of well-trained individuals that you can pull the next department chair or dean. In addition, having this pool also provides a source for peer and near-peer mentoring, which will assist in issues we are currently facing in retention. Mentoring is also important for the retention and advancement of under represented faculty members.

Issues with Reputation:
Over the past few months, Clemson has risen to be a household word across the Nation thanks to the success of our athletic teams. My personal fear is that our national reputation will be one of a “Rah-Rah school” rather than a higher seminary of learning. In thinking about this, I examined our scholarly output relative to our peers. For the faculty, one the most important indicators of scholarly prowess are publications and citation. Over the past 5 years, Clemson produces around 1,344 papers per year (See Figure 1 for a longer historical date and citations).
When normalized per faculty member comparisons can be made to peer institutions (using those defined by the recent COACHE Survey). Figure 2, gives the number of publications per year per Academic staff member (i.e., tenure track and lecturing faculty). What is interesting from this data set is the variance between our peers, as there is almost “banding” in the normalized scholastic output overtime. Clemson is currently near the median of our peer group. For our academic reputation to grow, as outlined in the 2020 Forward Plan, the scholarly output per faculty member is going to need to grow as well.

While publications and citations only scratch the surface of issues related to academic reputation, the next logical question can still be raised. What should we be doing to enhance the research infrastructure to raise our reputation? We need to have the support structure to be effective scholars. I want to remind the Board that scholarship is inherently a student centric process. Our students would be better served with facilities that support their own scholarly pursuits. Part of the Clemson Forward plan is to turn the attention to our core mission. When I walk through the various buildings on campus, I see space that is in need of an upgrade. The time to improve this
space is now. Over the coming years we have a great opportunity to build the campus environment that will take us to the next level.

Perception of the Faculty by the Board:
Members of Clemson’s faculty are the drivers of the University. We are the ones who have day-to-day direct educational interaction with the students. Because of this, members of the faculty have a unique prospective on operational mechanics of the University. In conversations with several members of the Board, I realize that this prospective is often not voiced at the quarterly board meetings. I am charging myself to overcome this obstacle by arranging several events between meetings to provide those members of the Board who are interested additional viewpoints from the faculty.

Perception of the Board by the Faculty:
In the few short months in taking this role, I have received significant feedback from various members of the faculty concerning the Board. What has struck me the most is lack of understanding of the Board itself. For many faculty members the Board is quite an enigma. Therefore, just as I want to better connect the Board to the viewpoints of the faculty, I feel like I would like to improve the communication coming from the Board to the faculty. Specifically, when major decisions are made, I want to capture some of the thought process and discussion so that members of faculty can be aware of the context of the decisions.