President's Report to the UNK Faculty

December 20, 2001

As part of the Faculty Senate Executive Committee’s initiative to improve communication across campus, I am offering an end-of-semester report of Faculty Senate activities to the UNK faculty and campus.

One of the main reasons for the Faculty Senate’s existence is to give a voice for faculty members in the decision making of the campus. Some of the responsibilities of the Senate are specifically and clearly defined in the Regents Bylaws. However, in many less well-defined cases, the faculty have opted to relinquish their roles in governance to others with more time, more willingness, and, perhaps, more “knowledge” of the technical and bureaucratic morass. The indifference of some of the faculty is understandable given the pressures placed on them in teaching, scholarship, and service. The tangled web of Department, College, Administrative (UNK and Varner Hall,) Faculty Senate, and UNKEA authority also sometimes makes it necessary for faculty to pick and choose the area to which their energies go. Nevertheless, this is no different than the problems faced by citizens who may have to decide on how to best support their community. Good citizenship requires an investment of energy and effort. This is also true for academic citizenship.

The Senate has undergone reorganization over the past two years. Faculty Senate Standing Committee elections occur early in the fall, so that Senate Committees can elect their officers in November and operate fully by December. We have a full complement of Senate Standing Committees on board now. (A Senate brochure was distributed on campus last month. The listing of committees is on the Web at [here](here).) Much of the detailed review of issues occurs within the Senate Standing Committees. Each committee reports to the Senate via its meeting minutes. The full Senate then can act on the committee’s recommendations.

The Senate has two new Standing Committees, created last spring and newly elected this fall. The Academic Information Technology Committee (Chaired by Greg Anderson of Ryan Library) has been formed to look at issues concerning the implementation of technology in the classroom. We have modeled the committee after the Teaching, Learning, and Technology Roundtable at Wake Forest University. The Faculty Welfare Committee (Chaired by Kay Hodge of B&T) has been re instituted to look at issues concerning the implementation of the union contract and at work issues not necessarily covered by the contract. For example, the committee will be discussing faculty work load assignments and whether they are applied evenly across departments. As with all Senate Standing Committees, issues of concern to the academic community can be directed to the Committee Chair who can add the issue to the Committee’s agenda for discussion or at least direct the issue to the right committee. Any member of the Faculty Senate is willing to help get an issue appropriately addressed, but it is important that the issue be brought to our attention.

The Senate will occasionally appoint (or instruct the Executive Committee to appoint) ad hoc Committees to study and make recommendations concerning specific issues. At the present time, the Senate has ad hoc standing committees; the ad hoc Committee on Assessment (Chaired by Liz Peck,) the ad hoc Committee on the First-year Experience (Chaired by Stan Dart,) and the ad hoc Committee on Advising (Chaired by Bob Young.) The Senate will be addressing their recommendations in future meetings.

Elections for Senators occur toward the end of the spring semester, with new Senators and new Senate leadership taking office at the last meeting of the academic year (on the last Thursday in April.) This gives the Executive Committee the summer months to get organized and develop an agenda for the following academic year.

I have just summarized our first major initiative for the Faculty Senate, to reinvigorate the Senate and reestablish it as a strong voice in shared governance. In that context, we have also addressed and will continue to address a number of important issues.
Budget Cuts. The State’s revenue shortfall and the resulting budget adjustments have many faculty concerned about the specific nature of the cuts on the UNK campus. The media has already given several reports concerning the budget cuts and some are seemingly contradictory. UNK will cut approximately $288,000 from the base budget this fiscal year (2001-2002). That same base budget will be cut approximately $900,000 in the next fiscal year (2002-2003.) However since our cuts this year are permanent cuts ($288,000 carrying over to 02-03,) the administration will have to find the remaining $600,000 (i.e., $900,000 minus $288,000, approx) in cuts.

Since the largest portion of the budget is devoted to academic affairs, SVCAA Roark has been keeping the Faculty Senate and the UNKEA informed of the process. So far, the administration has already worked out a plan for this year, identifying cuts that will have minimal impact on existing programs. However, the cuts for next year will be more difficult and are being discussed by the administration at the present time. The final decisions will need to be made by February 1.

The management of the budget is the job of the administration. The administrative structure, from the Chancellor to Vice-Chancellor to the Deans to the Department Chairs, should make every attempt to inform the faculty of the process and to get faculty input. Likewise, comments concerning the specific budget cuts should be directed through administrative channels. The Senate, while an interested observer of the process, can certainly attempt to influence the decisions (via resolutions passed by the Senate,) but it is not directly responsible for the decisions.

The Chancellor Search Committee. The Faculty Senate was involved in nominating 12 faculty members as potential members of the Chancellor Search Committee. Our representatives were appointed by the Central Administration and are Charles Fort, Jim Scott, Charlie Bicak, Jose Mena-Werth, and Joan Lewis. The Faculty Senate will make every effort to give all of the faculty an opportunity to meet and question the final candidates when they visit campus. We are sure that the members of the search committee are receptive to comments from faculty concerning the desirable qualities of a UNK Chancellor, the search process, and other issues relevant to hiring the best leadership for UNK.

Faculty Forums. The Faculty Senate will sponsor at least two more faculty forums in the spring semester. We hope to have the definite dates established in January. Possible topics for discussion include the report of the Senate ad hoc First-Year Experience Committee, shared governance, and possibly a discussion with the members of the Chancellor Search Committee. The agendas will also be open so that faculty can add issues for discussion.

Tenure. The Faculty Senate has discussed the possibility of defining tenure so that it is associated with the UNK campus rather than with a specific UNK Department. In other words, when a faculty member is tenured they are “tenured at the University of Nebraska at Kearney,” rather than, as it is presently, “tenured in the Department of ----.” The proposal originated in Varner Hall and would make it easier to reorganize departments and programs. The UNK Faculty opinion expressed in our discussions is that UNK has undergone departmental reorganizations recently and tenure as it is presently defined has not been a hindrance. So, tenure as it is presently defined does not need to be changed. That opinion will be relayed to Varner Hall.

Service. The Faculty Senate has been discussing the relative importance of Service in the evaluation of faculty. The Faculty Welfare Committee is currently reviewing the issue and will prepare a resolution for consideration by the Faculty Senate.

Early Warning Referral. Mary Daake attended a Faculty Senate meeting and described the P.A.S.S. program, wherein students give permission for parents and significant others to be sent early warning referral forms. Faculty were asked to use the early warning referral forms to help make the program successful and to assure parents that they most likely will be notified if their student is having difficulties.

Committee Assignments. The Senate is frequently asked by the administration to participate in decision making by the appointment of faculty to administrative committees. Frequently this is handled by the
Faculty Senate Executive Committee as is specified in the Faculty Senate Constitution. The usual procedure is to send out a call for nominees to Faculty Senators and pick from the nominees—if there are any. On some occasions, members of the Executive Committee are asked to join an administrative committee. For example, as Faculty Senate President, I have been asked to serve on the Diversity Committee and Space Allocation Committee. (The Space Allocation Committee is preparing a set of recommendation for SVCAA Roark concerning the needs of academic offices in preparation for the relocation of COE into their new building.) I report our activities to the full Senate.

**Communication.** The Senate is also working on expanding its forms of communicating the minutes of the Standing Committees. Jeanne Cutler and I are working on a means to make Senate standing committee minutes available on the Web. Faculty will have the same information available to them that the Senators have and thus will be better able to participate in the process. The next Senate meeting is scheduled for Thursday, February 7, in Ockinga. The Faculty Senate Web page is [http://www.unk.edu/committees/facultysenate/](http://www.unk.edu/committees/facultysenate/)