

Faculty Senate
Chancellor's Report
23 September 2015

Notes of Thanks

I am very grateful to members of the Faculty Senate for their participation in two efforts:

- At the initiative of Faculty Senate Chair, David McCord, members of the Faculty Senate spent time with the Board of Trustees when they were on campus for their September meeting. The gathering was social in nature, providing an opportunity for Trustees and faculty leaders simply to get to know one another and enhance relationships. We intend to facilitate a similar get-together later in the year. In addition, we want to find a similar venue for Staff Senate to interact with our Trustees. I thank David McCord for this idea which has the potential to enhance the collaborative spirit which we are working to build at WCU.
- I am grateful to members of both the Faculty Senate and the Staff Senate for their leadership with the campus conversations built around the four areas of strategic focus which I announced at the opening assembly last month. Senators are facilitating some of the conversations and otherwise participating in the conversations. Let me encourage faculty and staff from across the university to take advantage of the opportunity to engage in these dialogue sessions. We are looking for ideas, solutions, and outside-the-box thinking which can help us address some of the challenges which are before us and with which we must deal in order to thrive in a climate of pretty remarkable change.

Natural Sciences Building

As you are probably by now aware, the final bond package proposal includes \$110M for a new natural sciences building (NSB) for Western Carolina University. For the record, let me detail again why this facility is so critical for our university.

- Many of the fastest growing majors at WCU – nursing, engineering, health sciences, forensic science, etc. – require majors to take courses in biology, chemistry, and physics.
- These very disciplines have large undergraduate majors of their own and serve all undergraduate students through the liberal studies curriculum.
- When the current vintage NSB was constructed in the late 1970s, WCU had 15 nursing majors. Last year (I don't know this year's numbers), WCU had 434 undergraduate nursing majors, between 100 and 150 pre-nursing majors, and between 100 and 150 graduate nursing students.
- In the late 70s, WCU had no engineering or engineering technology degrees. Now we do, and they are thriving.
- We are simply out of space (and the space we have is pretty, shall we say, "vintage") and we will not be able to grow enrollments in these key high-demand, workforce-related majors without more and better space.
- The NSB is key, not just to WCU's enrollment growth, but also to our ability to meet regional demand for such key vocations as nurses and engineers.

I have been delighted over the last year with the support our NSB proposal has received from the Board of Governors, Governor McCrory, the House, and the Senate. All of these key players have seen the increased impact which WCU can have on regional economic and community development with a new NSB.

Of course, we are not at the end of the road yet. The bond package will be put before the voters of North Carolina in a referendum anticipated to take place in March 2016. Working in tandem with General Administration, we will participate and lead in an education campaign to make a compelling case for our

facility. As plans unfold, we will be in touch with you to let you know how you can participate in this effort.

Finally, please join me in thanking several key folk who have been instrumental in getting us to this point with our NSB proposal. Director of External Relations Meredith Whitfield, Chief of Staff Melissa Wargo, and Arts and Sciences Dean Richard Starnes have played particularly pivotal roles in championing our cause. In addition, members of our Board of Trustees and other volunteer boards have advocated on our behalf. I am grateful to all of them.

Budget and Enrollment

As you are aware, the General Assembly has passed and Governor McCrory has signed the state budget. This is the strongest budget for higher education in recent years, and I am grateful to our elected officials for their support. Next, the Board of Governors must allocate both funding and cuts to the various institutions in the UNC System. I anticipate that we will receive word soon, at which time we will be in a position to finalize our own budget for this year.

While we wait, our budget picture is becoming clearer. WCU should receive enrollment growth funding this year because we hit our enrollment growth targets last year. However, because we did not hit our enrollment growth targets this year, we will be required to return some of our enrollment growth money to the state next year. In addition, because we have not hit our enrollment growth targets for this year, we will not receive any enrollment growth funding next year. Thus, we will take a two-year budget hit because WCU didn't hit its enrollment growth target for 2015-2016.

Allow me to offer some details and additional thoughts:

- First, we must celebrate our 80.06% freshman-to-sophomore retention rate. Our retention rate goal for **2020** was 80% and we have thus hit our target **five years early**. The faculty, staff, and students of our university have made this possible.
- WCU's total enrollment this year dropped by only 42 students. So, our enrollment has plateaued. We can and will continue our enrollment growth from here.
- While our overall enrollment dropped by only 42 students, the number of first-time, full-time freshmen dropped by around 125. That number represents a "negative bubble" in our overall enrollment which will likely be with us until this class graduates. By my calculations, in order to erase the negative bubble, WCU would have to achieve with this year's freshman class a retention rate of 86%; were we able to achieve such a retention rate, next year's sophomore class would equal this year's in number and the negative bubble would be history.
- We should receive around \$5M in enrollment growth funding for achieving last year's targets. We calculate, however, that, because we didn't achieve enrollment growth targets, we will have to return about \$2.3M next year. Thus, we will have somewhere around \$2.7M in recurring funding to address critical ongoing needs rather than the \$5M for which we had hoped. We will, therefore, revisit all of the priorities which surfaced in last year's budget hearing process and will work to identify those which are most critical, examining each to determine its potential direct impact on future enrollment growth. At least, however, we have some funding to direct toward a few institutional priorities this year
- In 2016-2017, there will be no enrollment growth funding at all. While we anticipate a little funding from a 3% tuition increase enacted by the Board of Governors last year, our resources next year will be modest at best. In order not to lose a year in making progress toward our most important and strategic institutional priorities, one option before us is to undertake internal budget cuts. I have certainly not yet decided to take this course of action, but it is one which any prudent manager would consider. We have time to contemplate our steps for 2016-2017, and I look forward to engaging our university community in related discussions.

- This summer, I charged Provost Alison Morrison-Shetlar and Vice Chancellor Sam Miller with the responsibility of articulating a strategic enrollment plan to ensure optimal student enrollment in the coming years, and I look forward to their leadership in helping us chart a successful course forward.

Fundamentally, growing enrollment at WCU is about recruiting and retaining students, and toward that end, enrollment is everyone's responsibility. Beautiful grounds attract parents and students. A robust IT environment communicates to digital native, prospective students that they will be able to thrive at WCU. A fire-in-the-belly development office will secure endowed scholarships which will ensure financial assistance for students in perpetuity. Rigorous academic experiences that challenge students stimulate hard work, passion, and academic and post-graduate success. A thorough co-curricular experience helps us fulfill our commitment to educating the *whole* student – not just the intellectual, but also the emotional, social, and physical student as well. And a caring community of people works with each student on an individual basis to ensure the necessary support, guidance, advice, and counsel with an ultimate goal of student success.

Western Carolina University is fine. As I noted above, we have experienced an enrollment plateau this year, much as we did between 2010 and 2011. We will quickly return to a course of enrollment growth. And that enrollment growth will result in resources which we will invest to make our university everything it can and should be.

Thank you for what you do every day to help WCU fulfill its mission and vision.

Sincerely yours,
David Belcher
Chancellor